A Crisp, New $20 Bill/A Nickel Taken
“Revitalization,” Gentrification, and Displacement in Los Angeles’s Skid Row

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Introduction to a Crisis

The phenomena occurring in inner-cities across the world, known as gentrification, is akin to what’s known globally as underdevelopment. Walter Rodney writes in How Europe Underdeveloped Africa that imperial US powers raped the landscape of Africa for profit and then ditched the continent when they no longer had use for it. Now, rapacious, homogenizing multinational corporations are setting up shop in those same spaces that were financially deserted decades ago. They are instituting what we call neo-imperialism – the same devastation, only more subtly enacted. In Uneven Development, Neil Smith demonstrates how the economic and geographical differences between developed and underdeveloped places result from the idea of “development” itself, not to mention the capitalist system as a whole. “Unequal development is social inequality blazoned into the geographical landscape, and it is simultaneously the exploitation of that geographical unevenness for certain socially determined ends” (Smith, Uneven 155). In the case of Los Angeles, for example, we know West LA as being “well-developed” and wealthy, while the popular imagination’s East LA is filled with garages and crack houses.

The process of gentrification differs from Rodney’s analysis only by the more localized level on which it occurs: between the east and west of a city, rather than of the world. Since our national economy has largely gone from one of manufacturing to one of service, the “fluid” inner-city is valued less and less. Having deserted, and left underdeveloped, areas previously used for manufacturing in search of more lucrative forms of investment, the capitalist class has returned to sow and reap anew. As they do this, they exclude or remove any and every obstacle to capitalist accumulation. Mindy Fullilove wrote an excellent book about Root Shock, devastating stress and emotional destruction which results from “urban renewal”. She includes the perspectives of those displaced in Pittsburgh, Newark, and Roanoke, as well as her own perspective in fighting this tragic process. She writes that a city is “fluid, constantly taking new shapes as we clear and build, clear and build. While many forces change the shape of the city, the force most likely to lead to disaster is unmitigated greed” (Fullilove 237). While this sheer game of monopoly is being played, human beings with lower-income and worse luck are also played. They are being forgotten under the construction and the egos. These people are left to live in housing they can barely afford, in structures that are left to decay because they are no longer profitable to maintain. Although the residents’ lives and communities might very well be vital, they are told that they are being revitalized. They are being kicked out because it’s not the right type of vitality.

In her discussion of displacement, Norma Nager writes that “the current urban displacement process, ie, the forced removal of people from their homes in central cities, is part of a much larger continuing process of international capitalist accumulation” (Nager 373). Capital accumulation is based on the buying and selling of objects, and these “objects” do not preclude people. If people need to be “removed” in order for land to be “renewed,” so be it – or so dictates the invisible hand of the market. This system affects all people and all nations. The majority of us are brainwashed to believe that progress, that development, is necessarily a laudable goal. But we are denied the knowledge of what is sacrificed in exchange. Michael Cernea writes in an anthology entitled Understanding Impoverishment: The Consequences of Development-Induced Displacement that “10 million people are displaced annually” (Cernea 18). He outlines
the eight trends in the *impoveryment process* of development-induced displacement. They are: landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, increased morbidity, food insecurity, loss of access to common property, and social disarticulation (Cernea 21-2). I can’t help but notice a pattern, even within just the experiences I’ve had personally. I spent time with “os trabalhadores,” “os lutadores,” of the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (Movimento Sem Terra). Needing to survive, but not belonging to the landowning class, these people occupy deserted land until the government awards it to them. I spent a week fasting so that I could better know the suffering people go through today and tomorrow in Darfur. They have been displaced from their homes, and subject to genocide by the Sudanese government and the paramilitary Janjaweed. I used to think that these intense tragedies only happened in other countries. That was until last summer.

For three months, I worked with the Los Angeles Community Action Network, a community organization fighting for affordable housing in Central City East, also known as Skid Row. Skid Row, known all too vaguely by most Angelenos, is the 50 block space bordered by 3rd St. and 7th St., Main and Alameda. I spent a lot of time in the area known to locals as the “Bottoms”. I got to see the vitality in this community, as well as its challenges. I’m not going to say that it’s a great place to be. If there was a contest of where to put Hell, where people whose bad deeds outweigh the good would undergo the most torment, Skid Row would have a pretty fair shot. A few blocks west are the high-up high-rises, which I call the “Tops” – the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Walt Disney Concert Hall, and a plethora of financial institutions in the area known as Bunker Hill. Not any heaven that I’d like to exist, but a heaven for the consumerists, capitalists, i-dollar-ers. Referring to the transformation of Bunker Hill in the late 1980s, Mike Davis writes that “as part of the city’s policy of subsidizing white-collar residential colonization in Downtown, it has spent, or plans to spend, tens of millions of dollars of diverted tax revenue on enticing, ‘soft’ environments in these areas” (Davis, City, 232). “In stark contrast, a few blocks away,” he continues, “the city is engaged in a merciless struggle to make public facilities and spaces as ‘unlivable’ as possible for the homeless and the poor. The persistence of thousands of street people on the fringes of Bunker Hill and the Civic Center sours the image of designer Downtown living and betrays the laboriously constructed illusion of a Downtown ‘renaissance’” (Davis City 232). The difference between these two areas is striking. One almost feels wrong to talk about the huge gaps between rich and poor in other countries when we have a perfect example right down the street. Wealth and poverty in the same zip code – that’s capitalism.

The way downtown is situated, it’s very easy for those on the Bottom to see the Top, but the opposite is almost impossible. It’s also really difficult to traverse this divide. If one were to walk West on 5th Street – known by locals as “The Nickel” - from the Bottoms, hoping to reach the MOCA, for instance, one would most likely pass through a tunnel and wind up on the other side of the museum. Bunker Hill is physically above the rest of Downtown. This collusion between architecture and class prevents “any spatial interaction between old and new, poor and rich, except in the framework of gentrification or recolonization” (Davis City 230-1). During the time I worked on 456 S. Main St., I witnessed a massive amount of gentrification and recolonization. New stores promoting “new Downtown” values open on a daily basis.

People have been pushed further east, as developers chase profit. People have been removed in order to make room for new downtown residents – those with higher
incomes. As the “East” shrinks, the “West” prospers. A transformation, which some call “revitalization” or “redevelopment”, is taking place. As if it were the dead fetus conjoined to a live baby, displacement is a both a permanent cause and a permanent result of this process. And those whose reality is close to being “East”, who live on the brink of homelessness but manage with a couple hundred dollars a month going to “residential hotels”, teeter right on a fault line. As it becomes a matter of survival, these fault lines become frontlines. Pete White, Co-Director of the Los Angeles Community Action Network, says that the current situation in Downtown is “truly the classic example of the haves and have-nots. It’s really like drawing a line in the sand. The last bastion of hope [for affordable housing] is Spring Street” (Piccalo Style). Main Street is just east of Spring, an entrance to Skid Row, the largest collection of low-income housing in the city. If the developers and the political apparatus occupy Main and Spring, we can say goodbye to an entire community, just as we have done so many times in the past. Chavez Ravine will be cleared for Dodger Stadium over and over again for all eternity. Everyone that lives in this country tramples on “ancient Indian burial grounds”.

The majority of people in Los Angeles believe that they are living moral lives despite the fact that they are built on the oppression and impoverishment of others. Indeed, if current trends continue, many will live in lofts built literally on the oppression and impoverishment of others. When young professionals buy a loft, they will be living in a building that once housed – and displaced – an elderly black man whose leg was blown off in Vietnam. After so many years, that man will go the way of “Indians” killed by lawless pioneers, of little children playing on Chavez Ravine. Main and Spring become White’s line in the sand. They are the frontlines in the fight against a development/displacement machine. This paper seeks to dissect and expose this machine, to understand how it operates so that we may better fight it. Its pages situate the phenomenon of recolonization temporally and spatially within capital’s tendency to devour, meanwhile disregarding those being eaten. I document those who benefit and give voice to those who suffer at the hands of this machine.
As a cautionary note before I continue, I want to apologize for my intrusiveness in writing this paper. I don’t mean this in the way one might think. I don’t believe I was intrusive as an ethnographer, that I disrupted the Skid Row community I write about. I always try to put extra care into thinking about my power and privilege as a college student, who appears white and male. [A quick note on my use of “appears”. I am not “white”. I am a Jew and my ancestors made the decision (not too long ago) to adopt whiteness so that they could be on the side of power, wealth, and acceptance rather than that of marginalization and struggle. Therefore, while I acknowledge that many see me as “white”, I can not in good conscience adopt this title for myself. And while I generally consider myself to be biologically male, after reading Judith Butler’s Bodies That Matter, I can’t be 100% sure of this fact. So:] Who appears young, “white”, male, and college-educated in a community where this generally connotes power and privilege. I have tried to be cognizant of the role my existence plays (both positive and negative) in a community into which I was not born, but would like to think of myself as adopted into. I hope that those I’ve grown close to in this community think of me not as “white” or “male”, but as a human being, an equal – as I have thought of them – and a participant in the same struggle. Of course, this relation is always problematic, so I make note of it. But it is not what I want to apologize for.

What I am, in fact, sorry for is the intrusiveness that my people – other Jews, in the name of OTHER JEWS – are guilty of over the past 60 years. The intrusiveness I’m referring to is the occupation of a land called Palestine, now renamed “Israel”. I’m sorry for the arrogance of people who call themselves the CHOSEN and take it upon themselves to take land that belongs to no one, is occupied by some, and claim themselves to both own and occupy it, in the name of one “Ha’Shem”. I’m sorry for the precedent this sets for others, closer to home, to occupy and claim to own a land which is not theirs. This time, people who call themselves WHITE or CIVILIZED or REVITALIZING – insert your hegemonic, colonizing phrase here – in the name of one “Capital”. Don’t take my apology here as a sign of guilt. I, myself, did not choose to occupy any land and I don’t identify with the occupiers of Palestine any more than having the common name of “Jew”. While not directly participating in such “collective memory crimes” (those crimes which span generations and affect a people) is usually not enough to be free of culpability, I believe that my lifelong actions and my eternal words in fighting these crimes approach warranting a clear conscience. My apology, then, is meant as a sign of protest rather than guilt. I protest the possibility of denouncing one form of oppression and not another – more specifically, one colonization and not another. I cannot in good conscience write against oppression in Los Angeles’s Skid Row and remain complicit in similar oppressions across the globe. In order to have a clear political consciousness, I must be deliberate in denouncing all forms of injustice where they exist, no matter how close. I announce justice in their place. That is the aim of this paper.
Demographic Considerations

In order to discuss the problems afflicting the Skid Row community of Downtown Los Angeles, we must first define homelessness and displacement, and their relationship to each other. Is someone who lives in a single-room occupancy (SRO) hotel, without a kitchen and possibly without a bathroom, considered homeless, or do we reserve this category for only those who sleep outside on a regular basis? In answering this question, a 1989 study commissioned by the Community Redevelopment Agency reserves the term “homeless” for the latter group, while the authors assert that they don’t intend to “imply that the plight of the regular hotel or charitable shelter dweller is morally acceptable to an enlightened society” (Community I-24). I agree that there is a great difference in quality of life between having a roof over one’s head and not, and appreciate the study’s caveat that neither option is acceptable.

Chester Hartman defines a “displacee” as someone who has been “engineered out of their traditional neighborhoods, to make way for new occupants deemed more ‘desirable’ because of the color of their skins, the taxes they will pay, or the ‘life style’ they lead” (Hartman 3). This definition would include both those people who have been paid to leave or evicted from their building, in order for the owner to convert to higher-income housing. It would also include those who live on the streets and have been arrested or forced to move in order to “revitalize”. Many of the people on the street had been victims of the first situation in the past, and are now experiencing the second.

For purposes of this study, I chose to consider those with “irregular” living situations, roof or no roof, as “homeless”. I also subsume the category of “homeless” under the larger “displaced”. I expand “displaced” to include those currently living in for-profit SROs, who haven’t been displaced, but constantly live under the fear of this possibility; and those living in non-profit SROs, whose housing in these buildings is more or less guaranteed. Both of these groups are made up in large part by those receiving federal help, such as General Relief and Social Security, and possibly housing vouchers. At any time, they could lose this economic assistance and be out on the street. The Inter-University Consortium Against Homelessness refers to a “churning” of the homeless population: “many people have recurrent experiences of being uprooted and dispossessed as their luck changes and they find themselves back on the street again and again, in a cycle called ‘chronic’ homelessness” (Blasi 12). In an even broader sense, all of these groups have been “displaced” from mainstream society. They are seen as inferior, and in need of “revitalization”. They constitute the whole of Skid Row. Skid Row is located within the 90013 Zip Code area and any census data in this study is taken using this zip code (Appendix A).

There is, unfortunately, no perfect data on those who have been, and are being, displaced. The Census Bureau probably does a decent job of capturing the demographics of long-term SRO residents, although it can’t fully document those that go from hotel to hotel, or from hotel to street to hotel. While “homeless counts” are generally representative, they will never capture completely accurate numbers. The Census Bureau’s statistically-sound sample data should be fairly representative of the homeless population as a whole, but is certainly inadequate for obtaining realistic numbers. Only by using and comparing multiple data sources will we arrive at a fair understanding of the Skid Row population. The numbers in this paper come from a variety of sources: 2000 Census Bureau data, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority’s information on
1000 individuals admitted to its two emergency shelters between 2005 and 2006, the Inter-University Consortium Against Homelessness’s Research Report, a study done for the Community Redevelopment Agency in 1989, and data obtained by the Los Angeles Community Action Network.

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)’s 1984 document entitled A Report to the Secretary on the Homeless and Emergency Shelters, Los Angeles is declared the “homeless capital of the United States”, referring to the 15-20,000 homeless people in Skid Row (Community I-29). This is the same number we refer to today. In a society that prides itself on progress and development, we must ask ourselves what it means that we have done nothing to decrease this number. The CRA study claims that most Skid Row residents before 1980 were older men with alcohol addiction. It documents that the average age of Skid Row residents has dropped, and that they are more likely to come from non-white racial groups, to have children, and to have more formal education. (Community I-29). While I normally extol the value of diversity, it says little for the economic and social system that a larger variety of people find themselves on Skid Row today than 30 years ago. The data from the 1989 study follows: while only 28% of the entire Skid Row population is black, black folks make up 69% of those who sleep on the streets, 71% of those in missions or shelters, and 47% of those in SRO hotels. Whites make up 34% of the Skid Row population, and represent 11% of those on the street, 17% in shelters or missions, and 37% in SRO hotels (Community I-45).

I’m aware that the applicability of 20-year-old data to today’s population is questionable. Even at the time it was written, this study was considered inadequate, and acknowledged as such by its author. Nevertheless, I use this information because the demographic research is more extensive than anything done since. I use it to demonstrate that the (slightly less extensive) current data hasn’t changed much. The 2000 Census reports that 26% of residents are white and 38% are black. LAHSA’s 2006 documentation reports the following: blacks make up about 69% of the homeless population, while whites make up only 8% (Blasi 10). The Inter-University Consortium compares the data of the homeless population to the population of Los Angeles at large. Making up 10% of Los Angeles, blacks are over-represented by a factor of 7; white, at 32% of the total, are under-represented by 4 (Blasi 10). The tragic similarity between the data 20 years ago and the data now is striking (Appendix B).

LAHSA’s study of emergency shelter participants shows that 4 out of 5 homeless residents are men, and half are younger than 45 years of age (Blasi 10). 22% report that they are homeless due to loss of dwelling, 18% cite loss of a job, and 12% report lost income (most likely a reduction in welfare benefits) (Blasi 11). 46% respondents had been alcohol-dependent or drug-dependent within the 6 months immediately prior to their shelter residence (Blasi 11). 37% are legally disabled, with a quarter to a third of these suffering from mental disabilities (Blasi 11). 85% of the Skid Row homeless population receive some sort of public assistance, while 10% are veterans (Blasi 12).

The Area Median Income (AMI) for Los Angeles County, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is $61,300 (Results). 50% of the AMI is $30,650 and 25% of the AMI is $15,300. According to the 2000 Census, 64% of whites in Skid Row make less than $15,000/year, 10% make between $15,000 and $30,000, 13% make between $30,000 and $60,000, and 13% make over $60,000. The
statistics are even harsher for Skid Row’s black population: 79% make less than $15,000, 14% make between $15,000 and $30,000, 4% make between $30,000 and $60,000, and 2% make over $60,000 (Appendix C). The Census data confounds a study of Skid Row. The 90013 Zip Code area outside of Skid Row demarcates Bunker Hill, the area just west of Skid Row, where income levels are much higher. While we can’t be completely sure that no one in Skid Row proper – that is, in SRO hotels – earns within those upper income ranges, we can safely assume that those residents live on Bunker Hill.

The Los Angeles Community Action Network surveyed 55 tenants from 6 for-profit residential hotels (Alexandria, Baltimore, Continental, Ford, Frontier, and Hayward) and 27 tenants from 11 non-profit residential hotels (properties owned by the Skid Row Housing Trust, SRO Housing, and Volunteers of America). Although the small sample size of this survey prevents it from being comprehensive, it is telling when looked at in conjunction with the other demographic data. Among for-profit SRO tenants, 18% are female and 82% male; 61% are black and 25% white; 42% are over the age of 55 and 58% are below; 15% live with their children; average income is $11,500/year; average rent is $312/month; and 50% receive SSI (Sample Tenant Data). As for tenants of non-profit SROs: 44% are female and 56% male; 67% are black, while 25% are white; 44% are over the age of 55, with 56% below; none had children, since it’s not allowed in non-profit hotels; average income is $7300/year; average rent is $200/month; 42% receive SSI and 35% receive GR (Sample Tenant Data).

There is one major flaw in the racial characterization of this research that must be mentioned before we move on. That is, the simple black-and-white binary that race is forced into. This is done both because of the real racial dynamics in the area, as well of the confusion that other identities present. The 1989 CRA study documents “Hispanics” as accounting for 36% of the Skid Row population, but only a small percentage living on the streets, in missions/shelters, or in SRO hotels (16%, 6%, and 13%, respectively) (Community I-45). The Inter-University Consortium shows that “Latinos” make up 23% of the entire Skid Row population, and 20% of the homeless population (under-represented by a factor of 2, as 46% of Los Angeles). These numbers and this terminology present multiple problems. First, if “Hispanics” made up 36% of the Skid Row population in 1989, but such comparatively small numbers on the streets, in the missions, and in the SROs, we are left to wonder where they did live. Second, if we conflate “Latino” and “Hispanic” as the 2000 Census does, we see that this population has dropped 13% in the last 20 years. Why is this? If the population of this group hasn’t dropped, then we are forced to acknowledge that the Census Bureau categorizes “Hispanic” and “Latino” irresponsibly. The 2000 Census documents “Latino” as overlapping with, rather than being separate from, “white” and “black”. While this designation is sometimes appropriate, it also further complicates a thorough understanding of the neighborhood’s racial dynamics.

Asians are shown by the 2000 Census as constituting 13% of the Skid Row population. According to LAHSA, they’re under-represented by a factor of 6, at 2% of the homeless population and 12% of the overall Los Angeles population. From my own personal experience, Asians are certainly not 13% of Skid Row. A possible reason for the Census capturing this number is that the 90013 Skid Row zip code also occupies a small section of Little Tokyo. Native-Americans make up less than 1% of the Skid Row population. The Asian and Native-American residents in the 90013 zip code are,
therefore, negligible to a study of Skid Row’s racial characteristics. Although Latinos/(Hispanics) make up a somewhat significant portion of this neighborhood, their representation in Skid Row is much less than that of black residents. I doubt that many in Skid Row would argue against the notion that Skid Row’s cultural, if not numerical, hegemony is undeniably black. I also doubt those asked would argue against the notion that the cultural, if not numerical, hegemony of the gentrifiers is undeniably white. The Inter-University Consortium writes that Skid Row’s homeless population is overwhelmingly composed of African-American men, and they mark the problem of homelessness as indistinguishable from the problem of racism.

Finally, I suggest we proceed with the following racial-geographical understanding (I apologize for this simplification and essentialization of racial groups, which are always fluid, but it is necessary for the subject at hand):

1. The majority of downtown from Figueroa to Main is white and upper-class.
2. The majority of Main to Alameda is black and poor/homeless.
3. Latinos and Asians generally fall outside of this dichotomy, both geographically and economically. They are likely to live outside of the downtown area - Chinatown and Little Tokyo to the North, South Los Angeles to the South, East Los Angeles/Boyle Heights to the East, or Pico Union to the West – but to work in retail or electronic shops on Broadway, which is 2 blocks West of Main, and in wholesale shops on Los Angeles, which is 1 block East of Main.
4. These two streets – Broadway and Los Angeles – present a complication for the theoretical framework in this paper. An analysis of gentrification’s effects on these two streets would be both difficult and fascinating, as they are somewhat of an economic stronghold. It is much easier to occupy areas of “blight” and blackness, than those with a thriving immigrant consumer base.
5. These two streets – Broadway and Los Angeles - cut through the otherwise clear racial distinctions divided by Main.
6. The geographic racial distinctions divided by Main are becoming less and less clear, less and less divided by Main, as the gentrifiers take over.
Capitalism, Culture, and Colonization: A Theoretical Blueprint

In July 2006, Tom Slater, Professor of Urban Studies at the University of Bristol, wrote an article in the Los Angeles Times entitled “GENTRIFICATION: The downside of upscale; The battle over skid row is part of a long war between the poor and those who would displace them”. He cautions Angelenos about participating in the dangerous business of displacement for profit. He foregrounds his account of our situation with a short history of gentrification. According to Slater, sociologist Ruth Glass coined the term in 1964 in an effort to describe the pattern of middle class Brits “invading the shabby, modest mews and cottages” (her words) and Victorian lodging houses of inner London, thereby displacing the original working-class residents (Slater Gentrification). In a separate essay, “The Eviction of Critical Perspectives from Gentrification Research”, Slater documents a new trend in the research on gentrification to discuss the process from the side of the “middle-class” gentrifiers. Scholars and analysts meanwhile ignore the lives and opinions and practices of those that have been gentrified. This is rightfully so, when we think about the terms themselves. The gentrifiers, those that gentrify – those that do unto, are talked about as subjects. Those that have been gentrified, both the land and the people, have had something done to them. They are without agency, merely objects. “As the municipal rush to endorse Richard Florida’s celebration and promotion of a new ‘creative class’ in urban centres”, writes Slater, “the image of hip, bohemian, cool arty tribes who occupy the cafes, galleries, and cycle paths of formerly disinvested neighborhoods once lacking in ‘creativity’, is increasingly seen as a sign of a healthy economic present and future for cities across the globe” (Slater Eviction 738). The dominance of the “creative class”-type theories in the discourse on gentrification has supplanted more structural theories which emphasize rent increases, landlord harassment, and displacement.

The focus on gentrifiers, however, is nothing new. Since the word gentrification came into being, there have been competing theories, mostly fighting between production-side and consumption-side causes, also known as economic and cultural explanations. The production-side argument is mostly made by Marxist political economists who address the role of capital and the structural factors in gentrification. Neil Smith’s rent gap theory, developed from his work on the Lower East Side, but applied to gentrification as a whole, is foundational to this school. The consumption-side argument, on the other hand, mainly associated with David Ley’s work on Canadian cities, is more interested in the preferences of the gentrifiers, and judges them as being more important to gentrification. While “Neil Smith and David Ley became treated by almost every researcher as the de facto representatives of the ‘economic’ and ‘cultural’ explanations of the process,” an analysis of their work will undoubtedly show that “both analysts were committed to searching for an explanation of gentrification that took into account both economic (production) and cultural (consumption) factors” (Slater Eviction 746). If we are to understand gentrification, specifically the process currently occurring in Downtown Los Angeles, we can’t rely on one or the other theoretical basis. We must adopt some from both, as well as from those that build on and bridge both approaches.

Robert Beauregard, whose essay title - “The Chaos and Complexity of Gentrification” – hints at an emphasis on displacement, settles for a depiction of the gentrifiers. He writes, for instance, about how gentrifiers “search for inner-city locations near central business districts, with amenities and with an architecturally interesting
housing stock” due to a “desire to be close to their places of employment, their peculiar consumption needs, and the derivative desire to treat ‘housing’ as both an investment item and as a statement of the image of affluence and taste which these individuals are trying to project (Beauregard 47). But gentrification doesn’t occur due to the “cultural” choices of affluent individuals. In response to this claim, Neil Smith writes that individual preferences only have secondary relevance to gentrification: “the primary actors behind gentrification are not the romantic exsuburban couple returning for a taste of the urban highlife, but are in fact such major social institutions as the state or the larger financial institutions, or else some other agent with control over substantial proportions of the neighborhood” (LeFaivre 50-1). He continues: “Only when the process has taken root do individuals have a role in spearheading its advance, but even then, they are totally dependent on the state and financial institutions for sources of finance” (LeFaivre 50-1).

In the chicken-egg paradox between individuals and institutions, Smith puts his money on social institutions.

As a Marxist, Neil Smith chooses to see gentrification not as various isolated instances, as is more common to the culturalists, but as “integral to the broader rhythm of capital accumulation” - a “cyclical process consisting of boom periods and crises” (Smith Gentrification 30). As a historical materialist he, of course, follows the historical location of capital. The first half of the 20th Century saw the suburbs being built up at the expense of the inner-city. “Where the price of suburban land rises with the spread of new construction, the relative price of inner-city land falls. Smaller and smaller quantities of capital are funneled into the maintenance of repair of the inner-city building stock. This results in what we have called a rent gap in the inner city between the actual ground rent capitalized from the present (depressed) land use and the potential rent that could be capitalized from the ‘highest and best’ use (or at least a ‘higher and better’ use), given the central location” (Smith Gentrification 23). “Where the market is declining or even just falling behind the market elsewhere, there is an inherently ‘rational’ reason for undermaintaining a property. This leads in turn to the physical deterioration of the neighborhood, and to frequent changes of ownership. Ultimately, this downward spiral of physical deterioration and devalorization leads financial institutions to stop investing in an area” (LeFaivre 49-50). As the inner-city deteriorates more and more, and less capital is invested into it, the less it is worth. But its potential worth is much greater. The rent gap presents an “economic opportunity for restructuring the central and inner cities. The devalorization of capital in the center creates the opportunity for the revalorization of this ‘underdeveloped’ section of urban space” (Smith Gentrification 24). Capitalism depends on the capitalist class seizing these opportunities, capitalizing on the possibility of making money. When capital is accumulated, it needs a place to go. So money is transferred to the most lucrative business venture. It ebbs and flows, as is meant to happen under the “neutral” laws of the capitalist system. As the system does its thing, however, people are thrown around. When money is divested and invested, there is always a human cost.

Smith tells us that there has been a systematic return of capital to the inner city since the late 1950s. As the rate of profit in the industrial sector began to decrease, substantial quantities of capital were put into real estate, where higher profits could be made (LeFaivre 53). Over the past few decades, the urban economy has faced a much more intense deindustrialization. With this ebb, has come the flow of the service sector.
This expanded service sector means both an enlarged white collar professional class, as well as a low-income service class. One question that is always asked is why, with the possibility of investing in many underdeveloped locations, is it typically the inner-city that is the focus of gentrification. Smith claims it is a result of this new, post-industrial economy. The professional class’s “anarchic time regime of financial decision-making”, need for increased efficiency, and ability to respond rapidly to financial crises, demand “a certain spatial centralization” (Smith Gentrification 29). Not only is gentrification wrapped up in the capitalist system due to the demand on capital accumulation, but the tendency of capital to subsume time and space is also a factor.

In his attempt to create a pedagogy for black urban struggle, Stephen Haymes critiques Smith, as well as fellow Marxists David M. Gordon and David Harvey, as relying on structural causes so much that they relegate culture to a secondary status. According to Haymes, much of Marxism has adopted a positivist ideology, whereby simple models of cause and effect based on supposedly scientific understanding of material reality take over the possibility of multiple causalities (Haymes 82-3). In explaining the whole of urban space by referring to Capitalism, the Marxists are blind to the social production of place, especially in its relationship to race. The Marxists argue that “urban designers and architects have been responsible for the creation of status distinctions, by establishing a new criteria of taste in art as well as in urban living”, not only to encourage consumption, but to signify social distinction (Haymes 94). They believe that this cultural element is not the root cause of gentrification, but an ideological maneuver to hide the true cause: structural elements of advanced capitalism.

Haymes juxtaposes this viewpoint with that of Sharon Zukin, who maintains that gentrification creates space out of cultural, rather than economic, forces. Because the gentrifiers are interested in downtown as historical preservation and as a space for the consumption of art, their claim to the city is stronger than the original residents who aren’t interested in these things. These “locals” would supposedly be just as happy somewhere else, where there isn’t the same cultural value. Zukin depicts the original gentrifiers as “urban pioneers” who want to preserve the city. The developers followed to capitalize on the demand created by the initial cultural interest. Although Zukin succeeds in explaining the role of culture in gentrification, in the end she falls back on capital accumulation as its primary cause. After reviewing these theorists, Haymes concludes that none of them adequately address culture – that they foreground economic structures, seeing the forest for the trees.

Stephen Haymes’s desire to privilege culture over economics, and his insistence in discussing the relationship of culture to place, are strategies of maintaining that race plays a fundamental role. He cites whiteness scholars Richard Dyer and Winthrop Jordan in illuminating the binary Western tradition and Western metaphysics imposes on “white” and “black”: where one has always been beauty cleanliness, and even God, the other has been ugliness, dirtiness, and the Devil. Haymes writes that social constructions of race are produced within an urban hierarchy of “high” and “low”. This is all too clear in Los Angeles, with the “high” of the MoCA/Disney Hall complex and the “low” of the “Bottoms”. “High” white supremacist hegemony, however, is written into the discourse as “normal”, rather than “superior”. “The symbolic representation of the living spaces of whites as ‘normal’ is always constructed around a politics and language of difference. That is, the textual and visual representation of white living spaces as normal assumes
that black living spaces are not normal” (Haymes 104). Haymes claims that whites have historically “colonized” definitions of normativity, and continue to do so in the context of the city. A “normalizing of difference in a white supremacist urban culture means that the racializing of black living spaces gets constructed around a notion of irrationality, disordered and uncivilized behavior, and white living spaces around rationality and ordered and civilized behavior” (Haymes 104). This rift is blatant when we look at the downtown discourse of the “homeless” (irrational, disordered, uncivilized) being a nuisance for the “average people” moving in.

A universal tactic in the process of colonization is to depict the colonized as the Other, the savage without its own culture or intellect. We have no choice but to give it our culture and understanding of the world, to ‘develop’ it. In colonization of the city, “blackness is the urban Other, the disordered and the dangerous. This portrayal of blackness in urban mythology is central to the social construction of the city as a representation of the id and the superego,” the primitive and the civilized (Haymes 4). The Other must be controlled and regulated, lest it resort back to its primitive state, and disrupt the civility and order of a white-colonial hegemony. “The white supremacist thinking and attitudes that undergird urban mythologies about blacks have resulted in their spatial regulation and control in cities” (Haymes 5). Norma Nager writes that “African-Americans were concentrated in central city areas as a means of social control and as a means of labor supply. Now that it appears that control is not possible through concentration in cities and black peoples’ labor is no longer necessary in the central city, official policy has designated ‘deconcentration’ schemes,” as well as, I would add, “redevelopment” schemes (Nager 381). Gentrifying is the re-regulation of racial difference in terms of space. “The racializing of urban space around white supremacist notions of blackness,” adds Haymes, “has provided white urban political and economic elites and urban policy makers with an ideological alibi to dismantle black settlements and replace them with mainly white “gentrified” neighborhoods” (Haymes 21).

Robert Blauner concurs that ghettos are not a result of supposedly neutral market forces, as is often claimed, but are a conscious tactic for racial control. They allow whites to be protected from racial hostility and allow the white middle class to go about their daily lives completely ignorant to the reality of poverty and powerlessness that many people of color suffer. In Racial Oppression in America, Blauner connects the local reality of the city to the international reality of “colonialism [which] depends on conquest, control, and the imposition of new institutions and ways of thought” (Blauner 67). He links the ideology of and practice of colonialism with that of racism. He writes: “The expansion of Europe and European peoples (including white Americans) over the world was motored by economic forces and by deeply held convictions that Christianity and other core Western values were superior to non-Western ways of life […] The depth of white race feeling is intimately connected with this Western cultural arrogance” (Blauner 31). While I would argue that blatant religious arguments have less force today, other Western values like progress, development, and civility are still the ideological maneuvers used to rationalize cultural dominance. They are the “alibis” (to borrow Haymes’s term) for entering a community and displacing residents.

According to Blauner, we are not in an unusual period in history where control and displacement are peculiarly accepted. Our nation was founded on an unjust treatment of people of color and their land: “Our own development proceeded on the basis of
Indian conquests and land seizures, on the enslavement of African peoples, and in terms of a westward expansion that involved war with Mexico and the incorporation of half that nation’s territory” (Blauner 12). The main theory of Racial Oppression is that the United States is guilty of “internal colonialism”. Where most world powers have mostly invaded and colonized other peoples on other lands, our colonial domination has mostly taken place on US (formerly “Native/Mexican”) soil. By this term, Blauner refers to the racial and ethnic ghettos meant to control those thought by a white power structure to be “uncivilized” and dangerous to the dominant structure; to the economic exploitation exacted from bodies thought by that structure to exist solely for capital accumulation; to the underdevelopment and poverty enforced on communities ripped from their societies in order to build a new, “more civilized”, society.

In the case of Indigenous Americans, we not only displaced them, but we continued to displace them over and over again. The US Government made a very conscious effort to push these peoples further west, as we followed our “manifest destiny”. This was especially manifest in the quasi-genocidal Trail of Tears, as well as the final destiny of concentration camps called “reservations”. We obviously don’t learn from our mistakes in this country. That is the same thing we’re doing with gentrification. People were initially forced off of Bunker Hill; then Chavez Ravine; the last couple of decades have seen the push to remove folks from the Skid Row area, a sort of reservation for the racially and economically marginalized. As capital moves from location to location, as middle-class white people decide they’d rather live in the inner-city, and as manufacturing jobs are outsourced, designating African-Americans as expendable surplus labor, we relive the same injustices. Gentrification adds some new complexities to Blauner’s theory. It is almost always an “internal colony” that is being colonized. That would make gentrification a re-colonization, an “internal neo-colonialism”.

The project of re-colonization is as much an issue of capital accumulation in a changing economy, as it is a manifestation of the “cultural arrogance” Blauner mentions. It is equally an attempt by developers to make a profit as it is a racist and classist obsession with domination and an assertion of a particular culture. Each is enacted at the expense of others. Molotch and Logan argue that many theorists “ignore that markets themselves are the result of cultures; markets are bound up with human interests in wealth, power, and affection” (Logan 9). I agree with this, but would probably take the claim one step further: markets are not only tied to “wealth, power, and affection”, but are based even deeper in domination and brutality. While one of the aims of this paper is to utilize Smith’s analysis of structural changes, I don’t believe that it is correct to say that structural changes are primary. Culture always informs our economic choices, and economic factors influence the way culture is played out. Both are a type of feedback loop. We can look at the “hip downtown culture” in terms of both economic and cultural “supply and demand” – the more a certain group of people adopts certain cultural characteristics, the more those characteristics attract certain people; the more someone can profit off of those cultural aspects, the more people will attempt to do so. The task at hand is an archaeological one, where we must excavate these underlying causes underneath the rhetoric of “revitalization” and the reality of “recolonization”.
A Brief History of Skid Row: 1875-2007

During the late 19th Century, downtown areas became the natural place for a person new to the city to begin looking for work (Community I-3). The year 1875 brought the first transcontinental train to Los Angeles, which in turn brought a migratory labor force looking for work (Blasi 3). Distinctive subcommunities typically developed and consisted predominantly of single males, and included a symbiotic mix of inexpensive lodgings, cheap restaurants, second-hand clothing stores, employment offices and saloons. The hotels built around this period still account for the majority of housing today. The 1920s brought a decline in temporary work and, therefore, in temporary employees. Most of the residents at this time became permanent. The Great Depression led to a large increase in people coming to Skid Row, in search of services (Community I-3). The term “Skid Row,” Tom Slater informs us, goes back further to Skid Road of Seattle in the 1880s, where logs were skidded toward water on a greased corduroy track of saplings. “As logging gave way to urbanization, Skid Road came to refer the area of a town where out-of-work loggers congregated. Arrival there signified that one was sliding downward in society, or ‘going on the skids’” (Slater Gentrification). During the Depression, the phrase moved south and east to denote the run-down section of any city where homeless and unemployed people clustered; by 1940, the name had changed to "skid row" (Slater Gentrification). Los Angeles’s Skid Row is bordered by 3rd Street to the North, 7th Street to the South, Main Street to the West, and Alameda on the East. Locals have named it “The Nickel” because 5th Street runs all the way down the middle.

After World War II, families sought “large houses on spacious lots in areas with good schools and plenty of room for supervised play, conditions that were most easily met by constructing new homes on inexpensive land located outside of central cities” (Massey 44). There began the suburbanization process, and the white middle class migrated out of the inner city. The federal government supported this transition. Both the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Veterans Administration (VA) made it much easier to acquire a loan. Coupled with new construction techniques, it became much cheaper to “buy new suburban homes than to rent comparable older dwellings in the central city. As a result, the FHA and VA contributed significantly to the decline of the inner city by encouraging the selective out-migration of middle-class whites to the suburbs” (Massey 53).

FHA loan criteria was centered on the recommendation of “racially restrictive covenants as a means of ensuring the security of neighborhoods” (Massey 54). As a result, most new mortgages went to middle class whites. Banks followed suit and, similarly, refused loans to black communities. High-paying union jobs followed the white flight into the suburbs, leaving the inner city without jobs. The lack of capital flowing into the inner city, which resulted from these trends, lead to “steep declines in property values and a pattern of disrepair, deterioration, vacancy, and abandonment” (Massey 55). At the same time, Skid Row became “less a place for commercial hotel operations serving transient workers, and more a concentration of affordable rooms and social services” (Fullilove 59). Skid Row offered a large number of “low-rent residential hotels, often called SROs (for Single-Room Occupancy) [...] for people who don’t have the money or the family support to live anywhere else, especially the single pension-dependent elderly” (Hartman 54). The concentration of affordable rooms and services
also meant the concentration of low-income residents and people in need of services – in other words, those left out of mainstream, middle-class and able white society. A vicious cycle was formed: racist capital fearful of this deterioration left the inner city for the new and prosperous suburbs, perpetuating the trend of disinvestment and decline.

Worried that the decline of inner city property values and infrastructure would harm adjacent white business districts and elite institutions, local white urban elites “manipulated housing and urban renewal legislation to carry out widespread slum clearance in growing black neighborhoods” (Massey 56). The Housing Act of 1949 allowed cities to declare areas “blighted” if they wanted them redone. The city would develop a plan for those areas, submit it to regional urban renewal offices and the federal government, and then the “designated areas could be seized using the government’s power of eminent domain. The people and businesses that occupied the site were given a minimal amount of compensation and were sent away” (Fullilove 59). It was common for critics to refer to the process of “urban renewal” as “Negro removal” (Massey 56).

Massey and Denton argue that racial prejudice and discrimination in the second half of the 20th century led to today’s patterns of residential segregation. They write that “federally sponsored mortgage programs systematically channeled funds away from minority communities,” leading to disinvestment in black communities (Massey 58). They describe how this pattern systematically left black communities in poverty, as white ones flourished. Massey and Denton look at “urban renewal” as a historical mistake with continuing effects. They don’t acknowledge that it is still occurring. What we are seeing today is the same “Negro removal” as yesterday, still described as “urban renewal”. The same government and non-government institutions, the same rhetoric, the same people gentrifying, and the same people displaced.

Los Angeles’s Community Redevelopment Agency was established by the Los Angeles City Council in 1948, in order to remove “physical and economic blight and provide a vision, goals, and timetables for generating growth and new opportunities” (About CRA/LA, Who We Are). It was “pursuant to the Community Redevelopment Law of the State of California”, which “mandates that redevelopment agencies act to retain and expand the affordable housing stock. The law requires 20% of the revenues accruing to a redevelopment agency be set aside for affordable housing” (About CRA/LA). The CRA/LA demarcates “redevelopment areas,” so as to “foster job creation and establish an environment that will attract and sustain private investment; to maintain and increase the supply of housing for low-and moderate income households; to renovate, remove or replace deteriorated or dilapidated structures” within these areas (About CRA/LA, Who We Are).

The Bunker Hill area was chosen for slum clearance in 1955. The Bunker Hill Redevelopment Project was created in order to “renew” this hillside area, just west of Hill St. In the name of “redevelopment,” the city moved the “corporate headquarters and financial district […] from the old Broadway-Spring corridor six blocks west to the Greenfield site created by destroying the Bunker Hill residential neighborhood” (Davis City 230). During the 1800s, Bunker Hill was a “well-to-do community, dotted with mansions of the city’s doctors, lawyers, and merchants” but after World War I, it had become an area of “rooming houses for transients, pensioners, and derelicts” (Gottlieb 266-7). Gottlieb describes the area at this time as the “most attractive of Los Angeles’s poor neighborhoods,” characterized by “a feeling of neighborliness [which] existed
throughout the community” (Gottlieb 267). While the Housing Authority wanted to “develop large-scale low-cost integrated public housing” in Bunker Hill and “keep its current population intact,” Los Angeles’s business and anti-public housing forces saw the area as an “obstacle to development” (Gottlieb 267). They wanted to “clear the land and the current population to make way for high income housing, upper-class cultural institutions, and skyscraper office buildings” (Gottlieb 267). The latter’s interests won out.

Edward Helfeld, CRA Administrator at the time, refers to Bunker Hill as a “total clearance project, begun in an era when total clearance was considered the primary and, perhaps, only way in which to bring about urban revitalization” (Helfeld 127). Encompassing 136 acres, the Bunker Hill project at the “heart of the ‘new’ Los Angeles” has become not only the “nerve center of Los Angeles in terms of economy, new lifestyle, imposing buildings, and unusual urban planning,” but a “prestigious corporate and financial headquarters location in the western United States” (Helfeld 127). (Helfeld 127). The City of Los Angeles used a lack of “acceptable” housing units and exorbitant arrest rate as an excuse to tear down the whole area. The “CRA purchased 285 properties, helped to relocate 5617 residents and 442 businesses, removed 393 structures, carried out massive regarding work to reduce the steep grades on Bunker Hill, and directed the installation of 21 million dollars worth of public improvements” (Helfeld 128).

A new loft resident, Eric, explained to me that Bunker Hill used to be a “shantytown”. He said that it burned down sometime in the early 1900s, and had heard rumors that city fathers destroyed it as an “act of charity”. He said that this was less about financial motives than it was about removing blight (Eric). Dogon, an SRO resident, remembers when Bunker Hill was a black community. He told me that at one point The Northern Hotel was used as transitional housing for convicts. Six months later, “they turned it around and said the community is out of control. The city did eminent domain and tore down everything to make way for the Financial District. I saw them rebuilding it into those skyscrapers. This is the first part of gentrification” (Dogon).

The first acquisition and demolition began in 1961, leveling both the historical L.A. mansions and the newer shantytowns began. Mike Davis writes that the Music Center on top of Bunker Hill opened in 1964, the same year as the final evictions (Davis City 72). The Bunker Hill Towers were completed in 1969. The 55-story world headquarters of the Security Pacific National Bank, completed in the early 1970s, became the second tallest building in the city (Helfeld 128). Over the following decades, the Union Bank, the World Trade Center, and the Bonaventure Hotel, among many others, were built on the land that formerly housed low-income residents. The Museum of Contemporary Art was completed in 1986 (Davis City 74).

During “urban renewal,” new businesses, cultural institutions, and residences for middle- and upper-income people were built, at the expense of inner-city housing for blacks. This caused them to live in very overcrowded housing conditions. “The land-use practices of city planners, real estate developers, and financiers contributed to the creation of overcrowded and deteriorated housing conditions, inflated rents, landlord neglect, abandonment of buildings, and the curtailment of municipal services” in the inner-city (Haymes 80). Although SRO hotel rooms were one of few housing options for people downtown at the time, their number dropped from 15,000 to 7500 (Blasi 3). David Theo Goldberg writes that “in the 1950s and 1960s, slum administration replaced
colonial administration. Exclusion and exclusivity were internalized within the structures of city planning” (Goldberg 46-7). In Los Angeles, the people excluded were internalized within the city itself – they were concentrated downtown. Massey and Denton write that by 1970, public housing projects became “black reservations, highly segregated from the rest of society and characterized by extreme social isolation” (Massey 57). In many cities across the country, “black reservations” were created through housing projects. In Los Angeles, the SROs were used as a reservation for low-income black residents.

In using the term “black reservation,” Massey and Denton illustrate the similarity between the plight of Native Americans and African-Americans in this country. Just as the former has been forced from one place to another due to the ever-changing needs of capitalism, so has the latter. City planning has been constantly restructured due to the interests and desires of the (white) middle- and upper-classes, oblivious to the resulting displacement of (black) poor and working-class. The late 1970s is marked by a return of whites to the inner-city. Goldberg writes that “young professionals entering the job market no longer wanted to live an hour from the workplace in the central business district, or from the sites of fashionable recreation in the inner city. Personal preference schemes are hardly maximized by time-consuming, crowded commutes. What followed was a reversal of the pattern of white flight: the postmodern inner city may be defined in terms of urban renewal and gentrification” (Goldberg 47-8).

In other words, colonial administration again became the ruling mode. Although Goldberg is wholly critical of gentrification in his essay, he fails to analyze the structural forces behind it, instead falling back on the actions of individuals who would rather live closer to work.

People currently involved in Los Angeles’s gentrification process also cite individual preferences as the impetus for the “reversal of white flight”. Carol Schatz of the Central City Association, claims that "L.A. is experiencing the trend that every other great downtown has - a move back from suburbia” because “people are tired of the commute.” (Lindell As). Times writers Roger Vincent and Marla Dickerson echo Schatz, writing in 2003 that those “reclaiming” neighborhoods in the core are “weary of long commutes” (Vincent State). According to them, the reason for an increase in market-rate units downtown is simply supply and demand. They claim that so few housing options exist in Los Angeles that white suburbanians are forced to move to, and develop, the inner-city. Real estate consultant Larry Kosmont of Kosmont Companies offers a slightly more structural explanation for downtown gentrification, but still retreats to “inevitability” as the main cause. Dickerson and Vincent write: "You've got mounting opposition to almost any kind of development in many outlying suburban areas and a glut of space in the city center from all the corporate downsizing. The path of least resistance leads downtown” (Vincent State). And the path of least resistance for understanding complex economic, political, and social phenomena like gentrification leads to explanations which ignore these phenomena.

In reality, cities exert a great deal of effort to attract young professionals and new developments. Don Mitchell notes that “when capital is seen to have no need for any particular place, then cities do what they can to make themselves so attractive that capital – in the form of new businesses, more tourists, or a greater percentage of suburban spending – will want to locate there (Mitchell 166). Fullilove writes that leaders in the downtown business district thought it necessary to rebuild downtown “in a glossy and modern fashion” and “sprucing up the décor” in order to “convert the downtown to a
shopping mall for the rich” (Fullilove 63). One avenue for attracting capital is through pro-business, pro-development organizations.

The Central City Association (CCA) was established in 1924 as “LA’s premier” business advocacy organization. According to its website, the CCA is the “leading architect of the Downtown Renaissance” and the “Voice of Business in City Hall” (CCA Home). In the 1970’s the CCA proposed a rehabilitation plan. City Council included much of this plan in their Central Business District Redevelopment Plan in 1975. The aim was to include a university complex, a metropolitan police facility, and a middle income residential community, despite a CRA study in 1968-69 which cautioned developments that would disperse the area’s existing population. Since then, only the police complex was built. (Community I-6). This plan also adopted a policy with three priorities: maintain low-income housing (mostly through the acquisition, rehabilitation and management of the remaining SRO hotels); expand the district’s industrial base; and consolidate social services for the population they served, a policy referred to as “containment” (Blasi 3).

The CRA fulfilled the first priority in the 1980s with the creation of the Single Room Occupancy Housing Corporation. The SRO Housing Corporation was meant to acquire, rehabilitate and manage SRO hotels in Skid Row. There was, however, no increase in supplemental, yet necessary, services like permanent affordable housing, job training, or employment opportunities (Blasi 4). A group of business leaders and community activists concerned with the increasing demolition of SRO hotels created a similar entity, albeit non-governmental, in 1989 – the Skid Row Housing Trust (The Trust). According to Laura Loh, The Skid Row Housing Trust and SRO Housing Corporation “gradually bought and rehabilitated 42 rundown single-room-occupancy hotels, creating a supply of decent housing for the very poor, many of whom pay only a third of their monthly income--income that consists of a $220 general relief check--in rent” (Loh Plans).

Today, these two nonprofits operate roughly 2,800 rooms, or about a third of the total number of affordable rental units in the downtown area. (Loh Plans). As of October 2005, the number of available units had fallen by more than 1,200 -- nearly 8% of the total (diMassa Crowded). “For nearly two decades,” Linda Loh writes, regarding Skid Row SROs, “nonprofit housing providers have had little competition for properties in this stretch of the city dotted with missions and services for the poor, disabled and drug-addicted. (Loh Plans). Recently, however, the demand for these properties has risen, in the hopes of converting them to luxury lofts. When Cara diMassa wrote “Crowded Out by Luxury Lofts” in mid-2005, 2,000 units were under consideration for conversion (diMassa Crowded).

While the number of “affordable” units is decreasing, market-rate units are certainly on the rise downtown. According to the Downtown Center Business Improvement District, there are nearly 7500 market-rate units downtown, with an additional eight thousand under construction (Gelt Cover). Of the 50 historic buildings preservationists and developers identified five years ago as candidates for housing, 44 either have been converted or are near completion (diMassa Crossroads). “Among future projects in the works, just 4.8% are planned as affordable, stats show. The vast majority of units - about 13,900 - are market-rate condos, which usually start around $350,000” (Coates Fear). In June 2005, Cara diMassa documents 24,000 downtown residents, a
6,000-person increase over the previous few years (diMassa Crossroads). Only 18 months later, Jessica Gelt writes that the rough population downtown is 30,000, and an official projection is that it will double by 2013 (Gelt Cover). Laura Loh writes in August 2002 that “the success of the luxury residential project has raised concerns about where to house low-income people who may be displaced, and rekindled the debate about the acceptable costs of an urban renaissance” (Loh Plans). Becky Dennison, Co-Director of LA CAN, for example, exclaims: “You can’t just uproot an entire community and push people out... We're all for building more housing. But not at the expense of what we have” (diMassa Crowded).

While we should be appalled that affordable units are being exchanged for lofts, we shouldn’t be surprised. A study commissioned by the CRA, which I emphasize was done in 1987, claims that “speculative investment activity on Spring and Main Street, Skid Row’s western edge, has been occurring for years in response to various plans for upgrading these formerly prominent, but more recently deteriorated downtown commercial corridors. This area contains 12 hotels (including seven of the largest in the Skid Row area) with 2,275 units. Four of these structures are subject to seismic rehabilitation. The gradual conversion of the Cecil, Rosslyn, Pacific Grand and Frontier Hotels to more tourist oriented clientele […] are examples of the pressures on the traditional use of SROs in this part of the Skid Row area” (Community III-31). The Pacific Grand is already undergoing loft conversion. The Frontier, Rosslyn, and Cecil seem to be in the preparation process.

Other looks at the past can similarly foreshadow the future. Penelope McMillan writes in October of 1989 that crack cocaine has been introduced into Skid Row, exchanging a population of alcoholic white males for a “disconnected group of younger black men, and more and more women,” and making the area an “angrier, more violent place” (McMillan Uncertainty). During this time, the Los Angeles Mission was building a large, 700-person shelter at 5th and Wall Streets (McMillan Uncertainty). Just a week later, McMillan writes that the Community Redevelopment Agency paid the Union Rescue Mission $6.5 million to move to the same area (McMillan Mission). This move is compatible with City Council’s decision in the 1970s to “contain” poor and ill individuals in Skid Row. Director of the California Homeless Coalition, Toni Reinis, worried that building both missions in Skid Row would force more homeless “into an over-concentrated area that is plagued with drugs and crime” (McMillan Mission). The Union Rescue Mission was moved because its location at 2nd and Main “threatened efforts to ‘upgrade’ the downtown corridor between City Hall and the Ronald Reagan State Office Building under construction at 3rd and Main streets” (McMillan Uncertainty). Mike Davis informs us in “note 8” of City of Quartz that the CRA spent $20 million in building the Ronald Reagan Office Building, intending the civil servants from the building as “shock troops to gentrify the strategic corner”(Davis City 261, note 8). Alice Callaghan of Las Familias del Pueblo worried that a simultaneous, and scary, effect of these actions would be to “attract more upscale development on the rest of Main, and jeopardize the largest concentration of these cheap hotels” (McMillan Uncertainty). The relationship between the concentration of drugs, crime, and homelessness in Skid Row, on the one hand, and gentrification of Main and Spring, on the other, has been increasingly salient for much longer than is readily acknowledged by Los Angeles’s power structure.
Landscape of a Frontline

It is against the background of these gentrification artifacts that we embark on a tour of Main and Spring, the fragile frontlines that will determine the life of a community. Let’s start with the Ronald Reagan building – 3rd and Spring. Going South on Spring, we hit the Banco Popular building, which houses the Community Redevelopment Agency. Banco Popular is at least partially owned by Saeed Farkhondepour. He’s turning a parking lot a block east at 4th and Main into the $125 million Medallion project. According to the Downtown News, this will be two six-story structures with 375 market-rate units and ground-floor retail. On the west side of Spring are some high-rises, which house a Wells Fargo branch, and a connection to Broadway and the Grand Central Market. As we pass 4th, we come across mostly office buildings on the west side of Spring, some of which appear to be used for filming. On the east side of Spring, between 4th and 5th, is the western part of both the Continental Building and the Hellman, but we’ll address those later. Next to these is the El Dorado, which is being converted by Tom Gilmore, along with the Rowan at the corner northeast corner of Spring and 5th. There is heavy construction going on between them. This construction project takes up the entire block.

The Security Lofts are on the southeast corner of 5th and Spring. The bottom floor features “Weeneez”, which offers the “Best Chili in L.A.,” a post office, and an art gallery. The LA Theatre Center is next to Security Lofts. Gilmore tried to acquire this building but was rejected because of his loan history (Krikorian Developers). There is a small market, and then the headquarters for the Downtown Center Business Improvement District. I will come back to them later in this paper. There’s a parking lot, and on the northeast corner of Spring and 6th, a new loft building called SB Lofts. The ground floor contains an art gallery. The art, a statue of Elvis, the alien from the movie Alien, and a cowboy posed to shoot, is all made out of bike chains, nuts, and bolts. The Alexandria Hotel is on the northwest corner of Spring and 5th. This building serves low-income downtown residents. Amerland Group recently bought the hotel, and will be turning the 463 hotel rooms into rental units. The Community Redevelopment Agency gave the developer $35 million in tax-exempt bonds to maintain the hotel's affordability standards and provide 130 units to residents who make 30%-35% of the area's median income (Flynn). There is a bar, Charlie O’s, at the bottom of the Alexandria. The hotel recently started holding the Downtown Comedy Club. This club is a new effort, possibly to make the hotel seem “friendlier” and “revitalized”. There’s also a dry cleaners and a mariscos (seafood) restaurant occupying the ground space of the Alexandria hotel. There is a parking lot, and then a building with a tunnel. The tunnel features discount electronics and garments, and leads to Broadway. There is a flag on a lamp post here with advertises the Historic Downtown Retail Project. Next to the building with the tunnel, there are two vacant buildings. These seem to be next for conversion.

When one passes 6th and Spring, one sees a city sign sponsoring the “Gallery Row”. On the northwest side of Spring and 6th is the Hayward Hotel International (yes, it’s written in italics on the awning). Below says Hayward Manor. On the ground floor are stores which sell musical instruments and electronics. Next to the Hayward are the Premiere Towers. There’s a small parking lot, and then Spring Towers Lofts. Below Spring Towers is the Jimpy Juice Ice Cream and La Café. On the northeast corner of 6th and Spring is a large building, which used to have a check-cashing business that closed
down recently. According to two separate anonymous sources, Tom Gilmore owns this building. He also possibly owns the two buildings previously mentioned as being possible conversions, as well as SB Lofts. Gilmore never mentions owning any of these properties, but supposedly he comes by everyday to work in them. When I asked one source if he knew who owned the Hayward, he said that Tom Gilmore probably would if it was for sale.

Next to the building with the former check-cashing store is the Los Angeles Stock Exchange. The front is chained up, as if locked out of its former glory. The Stock Exchange currently houses a nightclub called Margarita Jones, with an entrance through the back. City Lofts is next to the Stock Exchange. Its ground floor shows paintings and books. It also has the Reserve Wine Bar. The next building, the Banks Huntley Building, is owned by the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund. It is typically rented out to non-profits. There is the Department of Public Works, Bureau of Engineering, and one more building that is possibly used for filming.

At 7th Street, we see signs marking the Fashion District. On the southeast corner of Spring and 7th, we see the following stores: “Vero’s Blankets”, “SET Trading”, “J & J Kids Outlet”, “Narfra Sports”. Directly above is most certainly a sweatshop. As we walk east on 7th towards Main, we see a two-story building. The top advertises a dental practice called “Dr. White”. The bottom has a Chinese restaurant, a Mexican restaurant, and a sandwich shop. There’s another Mexican restaurant on the northeast corner; there’s a large sign that says “Tortas” and points downward. Further north is Craby Joe’s bar, a restaurant called Fish Fish, and LA Tailor Shop. Then there’s the Cecil Hotel. The Cecil Hotel is a residential hotel, but appears to be preparing to convert. The ground floor has SoMa Art Gallery, Downtown Mini Mart, and the Main Street Grille. None of these facades, which have been around for about 9 months, actually have anything in them. They were probably installed for three reasons: (1) Because a hotel is considered a tourist hotel, rather than residential, if it has a restaurant on the bottom; (2) Because the owners wanted to make the hotel look nicer, either to dispel the myth of being a residential slum, or so as to blend into the hip neighborhood; or (3) because the owners saw Gilmore’s successful restaurants below his buildings, and planned to do the same, but never had the funds.

Along Main Street, we see “The Lens Shoppe” and some “for lease” spaces. There’s an empty building, most likely part of Pacific Electric. The Pacific Electric is next. This building of 314 apartments is owned by the ICO Investment Group (Vincent At the End). The Pacific Electric advertises with a sign that reads: “More Than a Loft, Rent a Landmark”, capitalizing on peoples’ interest in historical buildings. A parking lot takes up the entire west side of Main. On the corner opposite the Pacific Electric on the east side of Main stand the Santa Fe Lofts. These are owned by the Monarch Group and Kor Development. After the Santa Fe, there are some smaller buildings on the way to Main and 5th. There’s Queens Elephant Blanket, which was formerly a department store some years back and an SRO called the SANBORN. There are 3 closed up storefronts. They’re painted with “OK Jewelry Loan Co”, “OK Loans”, and “Wholesale Handbag Casa de Bolsas,” hinting at these stores’ heyday. There is also Mai Tacos, which used to serve “Authentic MEXICAN FOOD” but is being renovated, and the Leonide Hotel SRO. Chrysalis, a non-profit organization which helps people find jobs, is housed in the Leonide. There are some closed storefronts, Pershing SRO, and a corner store called
King’s Market. The entire west side of Main between 5th and 6th has a parking lot and parking garage, which are often used for filming.

There is another parking garage on the west side of Main between 4th and 5th. On the west side of Main and 5th are the Frontier and Rosslyn hotels. These will be covered later in more detail. On the southeast corner of Main and 5th, there used to be a porn store. Around December 2006, construction started to turn it into a restaurant. The construction travels a block down 5th to Los Angeles St. There’s a small parking lot between this restaurant and the Genesis SRO, owned by the Skid Row Housing Trust. The office for the Los Angeles Community Action Network (LA CAN) is housed in this building. Next door is the Regent Theatre. It’s currently the Regent Gallery. Next is a small loft building known as the Canadian Building and owned by Linda Lea Distribution. On the ground floor, there are stores that appear much more successful than those a block away. They are proof that the gentrification process has already taken over this street, albeit for LA CAN and the Genesis, resisting a complete takeover. There’s Metropolis Books, whose selection is somehow reminiscent of New York. Then LA Crafts, which carries craft and party supplies for Weddings Quinceaneras, Baby Showers, Baptisms, and Communions. Stella Dottir is a “boutique” offering a strange selection of eccentric designer clothing. Blossom, a Vietnamese restaurant on the corner of Main and Winston, is currently expanding.

It’s fundamental to acknowledge that the crafts store has been here 4 years and the others not even 1. All these places are new, taking on roles within the gentrification machine. There is a spoken agreement that these places are for certain people, most likely the new residents, and not for others. The existence of these businesses means the inexistence of other businesses, possibly preferred by the original residents. A few more steps across Winston, and we’re at the place where this all started: the Old Bank District, brainchild of “maverick” developer Tom Gilmore.
Displacement: How To Do It
Part I: Tom Gilmore

Initial gentrifiers, sometimes referred to as “urban pioneers,” aren’t that far off from adventurers of the Wild West. They are in pursuit of a new, possibly more rugged (for the elite), life. They want to settle land that has unused potential – fertile land in the past, the rent-gap in the present. Neil Smith demonstrates the connection between frontier ideology and gentrification in “Gentrification, the Frontier, and the Restructuring of Urban Space”: “as with the original frontier, the mythology has it that gentrification is a process led by individual pioneers and homesteaders whose sweat equity, daring and vision are paving the way for those among us who are more timid […]” It is apparent that where the ‘urban pioneers’ venture, the banks, real-estate companies, the state or other collective economic actors have generally gone before” (Smith, Gentrification 18-19). In the case of Los Angeles, however, the mythology combines the rugged individualism of the frontier with the structural reality of the urban environment. Tom Gilmore began the process of gentrification downtown, only with the support and help of city agencies and financial institutions. Echoing Smith’s analysis of the frontier ideology, Gilmore claims that Los Angeles is “like the Wild West. You can stake your claim and leave a mark on the city that people will remember for a long time, if you’re lucky” (Jones Once More). However much Gilmore’s success has to do with luck, it is equally due to the deliberate actions of institutions. In order to talk about the gentrification of Central City East, we must start with Gilmore.

He becomes a mainstay in local media on December 31, 1997. As the new year started, Gilmore began to be featured in the newspaper more and more, and to date has been mentioned or quoted 130 times. Times writers continuously refer to Gilmore as the developer whose efforts are credited with starting the “revitalization” trend downtown. Mitchell Landsberg, for example, insists on August 13, 2000 that the “the old historical core of downtown is considered ripe for a residential real estate boom thanks largely to the efforts of a single developer, Tom Gilmore” (Landsberg Special). Margaret Wappler called him the “unofficial mayor of downtown” in a more recent article. The Downtown News is even worse. Pete White, Co-Director of the Los Angeles Community Action Network, says that they talk to “Mr. Gilmore about anything that he is remotely involved in,” thereby centering him in all discussions of downtown events (email: 3/6/2007). I’m aware that by portraying Gilmore as the “lone gentrifier”, I am recentering him and continuing the ego-inflation that all manner of news media partakes in. I would rather look at it thus: when we interrogate whiteness, we are in a sense returning it to the center. But the interrogation itself makes visible the process of whitening or gentrifying, thereby displacing it.

Before he becomes known as renegade developer, Gilmore is President of the Hertz Group, a group he and condo developer Judah Hertz formed in 1996 when they acquired the International Jewelry Center (Fulmer Small). Melinda Fulmer writes in the Times that the two would “often rely on a network of government and civic association connections” to promote their buildings (Fulmer Small). They also spent $4.5 million on the Banco Popular Building located at 4th and Spring, which houses the city's Community Redevelopment Agency (Fulmer California). This article cites Gilmore saying he hopes to “have four more buildings in downtown by the end of 1998” (Fulmer Small). It also cites Los Angeles Conservancy Director Linda Dishman: “In order to fully revitalize
downtown, we need more people to live there,” she says, hoping that historical buildings would be converted to residential lofts, which would then bring restaurants and retailers (Fulmer Small). At this time, the Conservancy had “been arranging tax credits through government redevelopment programs” to “help developers get residential and commercial redevelopments off the ground” (Fulmer Small).

Tom Gilmore is first transformed into savior of downtown in Robert A Jones’s article “The Distant Sound of a Miracle”, in December of 1998. The “miracle”, of course, is Gilmore’s “amazing” project creating the “tipping point” for a chain reaction: “a few pioneers arrive first, then a few more. The process finally blooms into a movement. Abandoned office buildings get converted to apartments. A thousand boarded-up storefronts blossom into cafes and shops” (Jones Distant). At the end of the piece, Jones assures us that he will be praying for this miracle. If all of us had fans as supportive and faithful as Mr. Jones, we might be as successful as Tom Gilmore. Jones follows up on the miracle with an article in October of 1999. He notes that Gilmore planned to open the Old Bank District project, which would transform three deserted office buildings into lofts. The project encompasses the east side of 4th Street between Main and Spring, as well as some of Main and Spring. The Farmers and Merchants Bank Building, on the corner of 4th and Main, was “one of the city’s dominant financial institutions” at the turn of the century, and the Continental Building was supposedly the “first skyscraper in the city”, claims Jones. The Hellman and San Fernando Buildings are also part of the project. Gilmore bought the 4 buildings for a total of $6.3 million (Howard Commercial). He was joined in this project – dubbed the “Old Bank District” – by Jerri Perrone and Charles Loveman.

When I interviewed Tom Gilmore, he said that the decision to buy and convert these properties was a matter of common sense. He said that “Nothing happened for 15 years. It was all empty and for sale. I felt like Bugsy Segal when he developed Vegas”. He claims that he does it not for the money, but because he “loves cities”. “They’re more dynamic; there’s opportunities for the random. If you put enough things in proximity of each other, they’ll bounce off faster” (Gilmore). He differentiates himself from other developers, saying that he offers something different. He said: “People kept asking ‘Is it time yet? Is it time yet?’ And they said no. I was the one that said OK – it’s time. Well, we had a need. And they were looking for an answer. I guess because our story was better. It’s the one that had the best of urbanism. It’s not about Marquees, like the Disney or the Staples Center, although those places are nice to have. It’s not about tourism or pre-packaged existences. This is messy urban. Rough and raw. The Grove is anti-thetical. It’s a TV dinner to my homecooked meal” (Gilmore). I beg to differ. Along 4th St, in between Spring and Main, the landscape is so contrived that it is reminiscent of a theme park. The facades of old banks lend it the “historical” feel that so many people move downtown for. I spoke with an officer for the LA County Sheriff Department, who had just given a ticket to an old, handicapped man for parking his car in a loading zone. Justin, who’s bald and brawny, gave a description of what Gilmore’s trying to go for: “revitalizing downtown. People like the urban landscape. It’s like New York” (Justin).

Envisioning a renaissance, Jones writes: “One by one, these will be converted to 240 loft apartments with the high ceilings and big windows favored by the young and restless. This appeal to the young coincides with what Gilmore believes is a new urban spirit blowing across the land, fueling revivals of downtowns in city after city” (Jones
Once More). Apparently, downtown Los Angeles was a “dead zone populated by the deranged and besotted” until Gilmore came with his defibrillation scheme (Jones Once More). Gilmore also planned, according to the article, to “fill the street level with the modern touchstones of city life: bookstores, cafes, a dry cleaner on the corner, a small bar tucked into an alley” in order to “re-create the fabric of urban life” (Jones Once More). In figuring out how to “engineer street life”, Gilmore asked some young adults what they would want. They answered: “a ‘good’ coffee shop, a bookstore, a dry cleaner, a bar. Not a big bar, mind you, but one where the neighborhood regulars know each other” (Jones Once More). There was definitely street life on 4th in between Main and Spring before Gilmore stepped in, and it’s likely that neighborhood regulars knew each other. It’s just that these regulars aren’t the type Gilmore, or subsequent pioneers, would want in a neighborhood for the rich.

Developers usually rehabilitate individual buildings, but Gilmore’s going after an entire block. Because smaller loft rehabilitation projects are more likely to fail, “Gilmore decided he would need more, a project with enough bulk to develop a critical mass, a whole row of buildings that amounted to something more than a tiny island in a sea of squalor,” Jones writes, “You can almost imagine the 240 units operating as a small community on their own” (Jones Once More). The finished project actually looks like a small community, an island of fantasy taking up a full city block. And it seems like residents are happy with that. While they leave to go to work, they can basically find their favorite restaurants and bars, a book store, DVD rental store, small market, and friends within a few feet.

The Hellman is a beautiful structure, mostly on 4th St., but it extends to part of Spring. The ground floor has the perfect mix of yuppie locales. There is The Rocket Pizza Lounge, a restaurant styled from a classic New York-Italian pizza parlor. Lost Souls Café is located through an alley accessible by the Hellman. The café connects to the El Dorado building, as well as the Frontier Hotel. Next to the alley we see the Situation Normal Clothing Boutique. Across the street, on the North side of 4th Street, are similar stores. Orange22, whose door reads: “Furniture.Environment.Objects.”, offers a selection of modernist art/furniture. Advertised on its website as an “innovation-driven design studio providing solutions for winning retail, product and brand experiences”, Orange22 until now belonged on Rodeo, not W 4th. Next door to it is Blends, selling all manner of hip “urban” clothing, including a wide selection of Air Nikes and Vans. Next to Blends is Bar 107, a fashionable joint, and one of LA’s best-kept secret. These three storefronts are below an old hotel, now-SRO, the Hotel Barclay. While it is still occupied by mostly senior citizens and others with supplemented rent, one resident told me that “white people have been moving in with their dogs”.

Back on the South side, on the other side of Situation Normal, is Warung, a “pan-Asian” restaurant, which serves Chinese-Japanese-Thai-Indonesian-Vietnamese-nouvelle-cuisine. It manages to simultaneously encompass all of “Asian-ness”, as well as absolutely none. The décor inside is ambiguously Asian, and decidedly postmodern. If this gives any hint of the superficiality of the restaurant’s culture, the green tea is Bigelow brand. I don’t mean to disparage the restaurant. I’m just pointing out the lac of authenticity of a place meant to give people a taste of the exotic, regardless of its claim to authenticity. One can get a meal here for $10, not bad for wealthy Angelenos’ standards, but still a lot of money for the typical Skid Row resident. Ivan, the manager of Warung,
told me that loft residents are encouraged to eat here 4-5 times a week. They should also probably eat at Rocket Pizza 4-5 times a week. And Gilmore can supplement his meager profit from the lofts with income from his restaurants. Although Gilmore certainly profits from this exchange, the tenants are the ones that truly benefit. With two restaurants right below, they can be babysat by Gilmore, told where to eat, and not have to worry about leaving their comfortable abodes. It’s almost as if they live on a cruise ship, with food available 24-7, and the “exotic experience” always at their fingertips. If, for some reason, the tenants get tired of Italian or “Asian”, they can always go across the street to Pete’s Café and Bar for some good ol’ American food.

Pete’s, Gilmore’s first foray into combining housing with food, is on the corner of Main and 4th. It’s part of the San Fernando Building, at 400 S. Main St. While this building isn’t as glamorous from the outside as the others, it has its value in being the first building Gilmore bought and turned into loft homes. At the bottom, to the right of Pete’s, is another hip restaurant for downtown’s elite, the Banquette Café. Next to this is a DVD rental place, called the Old Bank DVD. Apparently, even the DVD store must be marked with Gilmore’s approval, and be named after his project. One of the store’s owners, Eric, told me that downtown is now too expensive for him to live in. To the south of the Old Bank DVD, we have a corner store-type place that sells organic fruit, called Parks Market. After this, and before Winston cuts into Main St., is the result of many failed attempts at a restaurant, with a sign mutually advertising “Tony’s Burger/Taco Teriyaki Chicken/most recently Sushi”. The awning used to say “Burgers n’ Shit” but that was taken down. Places like “Tony’s”/“Sushi” prevent a wholesale gentrification, but beg the question of why they haven’t yet been taken over (which could be answered by further research into the individual storefronts of Central City East).

Although various dollar amounts were cited in the Los Angeles Times at different points in time, the final cost for the Old Bank District was a total of $37 million (Krikorian Judgment). Gilmore’s financial success with the District has been questionable. McGreevy and Krikorian wrote in January 2004 that to date, not only had the Old Bank District not turned a profit, it had an operating deficit of more than $1.4 million (McGreevy Developer’s). Whether or not he’s profited much in the past, Gilmore is in the process of developing more. He’s currently in the middle of converting the Rowan Building and the El Dorado/Pacific Grand with the help of “rising Downtown developer Goodwin Gaw, whose own properties include the Bradbury Building and the 818 Building” (Mandell Gilmore’s). The Rowan and the El Dorado/Pacific Grand occupy all of the West side of Spring between 4th and 5th, and together offer 209 lofts and 66 condos. When I called the Rowan, I was told that a 976 sq. ft. place would sell for $526,000. I had heard that some of the units might be reserved as “affordable”1. When I asked the receptionist if any of the rooms in the Rowan were affordable, she said “that IS affordable”. Gilmore responded: “I couldn’t make the tax credits work for the Rowan. I’m a proponent of mixed-income housing, but it’s the least profitable. The tax system is either/or. If you want to do mixed, then you’re f**ked” (Gilmore). He’s turning the former St. Vibiana’s Cathedral at 2nd and Main into Vibiana’s Place. St. Vibiana’s Cathedral was the cathedral parish of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles until the Cathedral of Our Lady of Angels was constructed at Bunker Hill under Roger

1 “Affordable” means that one should only spend 30% of income on housing. Units that are “affordable” for people in Skid Row, earning $15,000/year, would cost $400/month.
Cardinal Mahony. Gilmore is joined in the Vibiana’s Place project by Robert A. Jones, the former Times writer who spoke so highly of Gilmore nearly 10 years earlier. One of his architects said that St. Vibiana’s would be “the tallest residential tower this side of the Mississippi”. I hear that “St. Vibiana’s is $10,000/a day to rent. The idea of restoring it was to make it super-available. He didn’t do restoration. It’s a shady deal, it’s questionable” (Eric). And the Regent Theatre, also Gilmore’s, will now become a venue for live music.

Whether or not Gilmore profits financially is almost beside the point. He profits infinitely from the reputation he gained from his “ability to get his project online [which] has ushered in a tidal wave of housing developments”, writes Jason Mandell in the Downtown News in 2003, and “many developers say it was Gilmore’s success in creating the Old Bank District that gave them faith in a Downtown housing market” (Mandell Gilmore’s). Gilmore told me: “I think a decade or two into the future. But I’ll tell you what I always say: after we planted the seeds, we wait. The momentum of redevelopment is in place. These are long term trends” (Gilmore). Margaret Wappler wrote in December of 2006 that the corner of 4th and Main, which houses the San Fernando Building and Pete’s Café and Bar, is “widely considered the birthplace of the downtown ‘renaissance’” (Wappler $50). It was Gilmore’s speculation and vision, and utilization of the rent-gap, that set off a whole process of gentrification in the downtown area. Mandell describes the Old Bank District in the 2003 article as a focal point and a test case for “Downtown's emerging residential community. If the Old Bank District is a sign of what’s to come, the area has a lot to look forward to. Already the streets are cleaner, the panhandlers who once clogged the building fronts are all but gone, and the sidewalks are full of residents walking their dogs” (Mandell Gilmore’s). Like arteries after a meal at McDonalds, panhandlers apparently “clogged” the streets. It’s good that downtown streets are free of that pesky clogging that comes with a lack of affordable housing and social services.

Mandell’s right about the dogs. There has been a huge increase of people walking dogs downtown over the past couple of years. Cara diMassa argues in the Times that the presence of dogs downtown is a sign of gentrification and a “cultural and political force,” citing estimates that half of downtown’s new residents are dog owners (diMassa State). The Old Bank District’s 240 units themselves hold roughly 150 dogs. diMassa quotes a new downtown resident named Joseph Cornish, who said that someone told him his dog was the sign that “things are starting to change. We are visible out there,” he says, ”walking the streets, claiming the territory block by block as we walk with our dogs (diMassa State). While the first pioneers would claim territory with horses and guns, these new pioneers only need lattes and dogs. While they may not work nearby, the loft-dwellers “come home to skid row and walk their dogs on the gritty streets in order to live in dramatic spaces on the urban edge” (Roderick Alternative). According to Roderick, developing Downtown “means putting more people on the street, people with jobs and cash in the bank. Encouraging them to keep dogs helps. Urban hipsters walking their dogs makes skid row feel less threatening” (Roderick Alternative). We must ask: less threatening for whom? Earl Louis, who lives in a tent in Skid Row, said: “That’s why they cleanin up. So they can walk they dogs n’ things. I was on Main and some white guy said to me “Why don’t you get up? Me and my dog are coming by” (Louis). Most of the time, homeless folks are probably more intimidated by yuppies, than the other way around. They’re the ones taking over the streets.
I had the pleasure of meeting an old friend and loft resident, Eric, age 31, and his friend Helene, at Pete’s Café for a drink. At one point, Helene shrieked “Oh my god, look how cute that dog is! It looks like a pitbull mixed with a Chihuahua!” There was another tiny dog at the next table, that barked at passersby. We talked about Whole Foods, organic mattresses, and a Snoop Dogg impersonator that gets paid to show up at parties and take pictures with people. Eric and Helene live in a mixed-use building, with 6 lofts on 4 floors. Eric describes it as much more working-class than some of the others. He told me: “I always wanted to live downtown. I remember the Bonaventure and Central Library. Just corridors and corridors of tall buildings and you feel like it’s never-ending. If there weren’t 50 stories, then they’re 25. I would go, at age 12, to the Temporary Contemporary art museum. I just have a lot of memories of downtown. Two-and-a-half years ago, some friends moved into the Pacific Electric. I got to know the buildings, the restaurants, the area. I saw this place and I really really really liked it. I love the windows. I wanted to focus on my art, so about 6 months ago, I got a bug in my butt – and I wouldn’t do it until I had a space. I met the manager through a friend, bought it and so far, it’s been the happiest match for me and the neighborhood. Living in Skid Row is awesome. The Nickel is somewhere I wouldn’t go day or night before. I feared it. But now I actually enjoy it. I’ve had almost nothing but positive experiences with the people on the streets or in the SROs. Within the first week, I’ve felt very comfortable. It’s pretty clear I’m not a yuppie” (Eric). It’s true: Eric’s not a yuppie. He’s an enthusiast of urbanism who frequents the “yuppie” downtown scene, yet has also adapted to those that lived in the area before the gentrification. He’s one of the working class loft residents who happened to find a place to live that suits his needs in the midst of massive displacement.

I can almost picture him getting a beer with Dogon, a resident of the Sanborn SRO. Dogon says: “I’m not mad at the loft-dwellers. People get shit twisted. They pitch the old residents against the new residents. I go to bars around and I be in there with the yuppies. I talk and chill with them like the homies in the hood. When he finds out I live in an SRO and I find out he lives in a loft, we laugh and keep on drinking. It’s not the yuppies that are the problem – it’s the people behind the yuppies, the developers. They want the area cleaned up. The loft-dwellers are just down here looking for housing” (Dogon). “I’m not against redevelopment. I love downtown. I was born and raised here. I worked in the Toy District when I was 11 or 12 years old. But if they’re putting money into new development, they should put an equal amount in the part of the community that needs to be built up” (Dogon).

For Eric, Downtown presents an anomaly for gentrification. “The thing about gentrification,” he said, “is its usually an artist community because the only affordable rates are in industrial areas. And then the gays come because they want a creative space and they make it fancy. Then, the yuppies come.” (Eric). Eric believes that cultural institutions like the Disney and the MOCA aren’t changing peoples’ minds: “The nightlife is. People say how cool it is one night and people think it’s always cool. It’s not the programming. But it looks cool and people want something to talk about. Downtown is far more yuppie than I’d like to admit. I ask myself if it’s cool to live here because it’s cool to live here, or because there’s something here I attach importance to. For most people, it’s the hype” (Eric). Lynell George explains this hype in The Los Angeles Times, writing that the lofts are a “new marketing niche”, advertised as being “edgy,
New York-style, light and airy, and most of all hip,” with “evocative billboards” and “enticing soft-focus ads” showing “a beaming couple arranged on a love seat surrounded by their upscale, up-to-the-moment trappings--CDs, DVDs, a plasma TV and a city view spilling out like jewels on velvet” (Lynell New Faces). He continues: “No wonder so many of these places are being snapped up by thirtysomething investment bankers and trust-fund kids. For them, an ‘artist's loft’ may very well be the latest fashionable accessory, like ‘an iPod or a BMW or a Chinese baby,’ as one exasperated real estate agent puts it” (Lynell New Faces).

Roderick describes these lofts as having the sort of “Raymond Chandler period details that appeal to the educated and fashionable: high ceilings, polished concrete floors, gargantuan windows, and updated with modern amenities such as granite counter tops, slate-clad showers and stainless-steel appliances” (Roderick Alternative). Carol Lynn Mithers describes the lofts as being “crammed with lurid art and neon, overseen by profoundly young, hip men and women, all black glasses, faux leopard and tattoos”. The residents are “students from the Southern California Institute of Architecture (also newly based downtown) and USC, and grown-ups who worked as chefs and Web consultants, or in the clothing, music, entertainment and fiber-optic industries. Average age: 25 to 35” (Mithers). She cites Trish Keefer, general manager of the Old Bank District and Tom Gilmore’s wife, saying that the residents “think living downtown is ‘so cool’” (Mithers). Mithers lists art galleries, clothing stores, and restaurants “set against a colorful urban backdrop and given added intensity by the sense of being on the cutting edge” (Mithers).

The “cutting edge” “colorful backdrop” begs the question of race’s role in Downtown gentrification. In a sense, we could even call the new Downtown culture post-racial. Although most of the loft residents are white, their “edgy,” “hip,” and “urban” Downtown culture is a mix of the Other. bell hooks explains that “it is within the commercial realm of advertising that the drama of Otherness finds expression. Encounters with Otherness are clearly marked as more exciting, more intense, and more threatening. The lure is the combination of pleasure and danger” (hooks 26). “The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (hooks 21). For new downtown residents, this “mainstream white culture” is represented by the suburbs of their youth, in opposition to their new exotic lofts. Flusty writes that “interdicted spaces and precincts,” like the Old Bank District restaurants which automatically exclude certain groups, “redefine people as ‘Other’ and work to exclude that otherness (Flusty 659). Those deemed appropriate to downtown are deemed so because of their consumption patterns and lifestyle choices. The interesting thing is that those that are deemed acceptable are in search of the “Other”, as part of their consumption patterns and lifestyle choices. So the “Other” must be manufactured. Gilmore has been successful in part by installing Warung, Rocket Pizza, and soon Spanish and Indian restaurants. He gives people a taste of the Other, gives them something edgy and urban.
Ideological Production of Gentrification and the Booster Machine

Downtown resident and community sage Bart explains Gilmore’s immense success and the phenomenon of the Old Bank District: “I have a portfolio, the ‘Bart stocks,’ say. Well, I have a big nose and pimples so the stock’s not worth too much. But if I think I’m a big shot, you might believe it. If the stock’s cheap, people would say that it’s a good buy. People will jump in. Next thing you know, the portfolio is $5 a share, and I’m a millionaire” (Bart). Bart unknowingly explained the way developers like Tom Gilmore utilize and profit from the rent-gap. He continues to expound on the structural sources of Skid Row’s capitalist ontology: “Who allowed Skid Row to take place all these years? City Council, the Mayor, the Police, the State. Cops should protect people in rehab from dealers. They should stand in between. But they don’t. They let it go to hell, destroyed the property values. It’s the banks. Just like they cure cancer, but then your peepee falls off and your eyes fall out. So they can give you more medicine” (Bart). It’s an eccentric metaphor, but Bart’s an eccentric man. His point nevertheless makes sense. The banks follow rent-gaps and changes in the economy so that they can profit in the end. Bart traces Gilmore’s success to deliberate efforts by institutions to disinvest in an area so that the reinvestment allows some people to become very wealthy.

Tom Gilmore is mostly successful because of the assistance he received from multiple entities. In fact, the success of Downtown’s entire revitalization project is due in part to a whole network of boosters which have made gentrification all but imminent. Robert Beuregard accurately assesses the role of institutions in supporting the gentrification machine: “The thinnest and outermost layer of our comprehension of the gentrification process is that of journalistic and public-relations hyperbole fostered by its ‘boosters’: redevelopment bodies, local newspapers, ‘city’ magazines, mayors’ offices, real-estate organizations, financial institutions, historic preservationists and neighborhood organizations” (Beuregard 36). While the general consensus around gentrification is that it is a result of the economic and cultural preferences of individuals, it is these institutions which really make it happen.

Beuregard defines the actions of local governments as part of the larger “booster” phenomenon. As a force for gentrification, they do all of the following: “advertising the potential for gentrification in certain of their neighborhoods; providing tax abatements for rehabilitation […] ; devoting community development funds to rehabilitation and to improving public services in these neighborhoods; using code enforcement to force landlords and homeowners to rehabilitate or to sell their properties; actively engaging in the designation of historic districts or the labeling of ‘neighborhoods’” (Beuregard 51-52). All of these forces have been strongly influential in the creation of a “revitalized” downtown, starting with the Old Bank District. It “actively engaged in the designation and labeling of a historic district” by putting city signs all around Gilmore’s project, declaring it the “Old Bank District,” and giving its seal of approval. When I asked Gilmore about his relationship with the city, he said: “city policy had supported us. But it’s like a pendulum and it’s swinging the other way. In a failure or absence of policy – like there was here – you have the freedom to create. I have the unmitigated gall to be successful, but the city lays bureaucracy on top. Now we have to deal with the give and take of bureaucracy. It’s a vast amoral swamp. When it fails, it becomes dry, you can intervene. But when you replenish the swamp, all the creatures
want their part, they all want to benefit” (Gilmore). He appeared annoyed that now he has to worry about all those other creatures.

But Gilmore doesn’t really have the right to be annoyed. He was given a $29 million loan by the federal Housing and Urban Development Department, as well as a $3.8 million Section 108 loan from Los Angeles City’s Community Development Department (Jones Once More). According to McGreevy and Krikorian’s Times article, the latter loan was given to Gilmore with the understanding that he would only have to pay interest until the Old Bank District project turned a profit (McGreevy Developer’s). By January of 2004, he not only hadn’t paid the loan back, but took out an additional $1.2 million loan from the city in order to pay off interest from the first. Angela Estell, Communications and Public Affairs Officer at the Community Development Department, claims that “In accordance to the contract, the project is now current with the City” (Estell).

Estell explains that her department assisted the Old Bank District in “repositioning the obsolescent commercial buildings into residential units” “as part of the City's efforts to revitalize and rejuvenate the historic downtown core” (Estell email). Gloria Stevenson-Clark, assistant general manager of the city Community Development Department, told the authors that this loan was made with the “recognition that the city was investing in a risky proposal that had public benefits beyond the cash repaid” (McGreevy Developer’s). Former city Planning Commissioner Robert Scott disagreed with Stevenson-Clark’s logic. He made it clear that if businesses and banks have already decided Gilmore’s plan is too risky, then the city shouldn’t subject public funds to this risk (McGreevy Developer’s). Stevenson-Clark says, “To the extent it is paid back, it will help others” (McGreevy Developer’s). Well, of course. “To the extent it is paid back”, the city will have more money for a multitude of important civic causes. But to the extent that it is not paid back – the strong likelihood that the project does not profit – the city will have given away nearly $4 million tax dollars. When McGreevy and Krikorian interviewed Councilwoman Jan Perry, whose district houses the Old Bank District, she seemed to not care if the loan was paid back. She said that the positive effect of the project – that it "is rapidly becoming a vibrant residential and commercial center" – “in and of itself, is worth it” (McGreevy Developer’s).

Robert Jones explains in the Times that Gilmore allied himself with the Executive Director of the Los Angeles Conservancy, Linda Dishman, “whose powerful organization can promote or condemn projects in the historic core” and that he accepted the “chairman's position on the board of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, the local government organization providing $50 million per year for the homeless” (Jones Once More). Jones opines that LAHSA could eventually conflict with Gilmore's revival plans. He never suggests that maybe Gilmore took this position to insure that downtown homeless advocacy wouldn’t conflict with his plans for revival. Gilmore also allied with the Central City Association, the president of which, Carol Schatz, exclaimed: "The Old Bank District is just crucial to downtown” (Jones Once More). Attesting to Schatz’s feelings for the district, the CCA was essential in getting the city to pass the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance.

In 1999, City Council, under Mayor Richard Riordan, adopted the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance. This ordinance reduces the time it takes a developer to acquire a building permit in order to convert an industrial or commercial building into a residential
building. A pamphlet released by the Mayor’s Office of Economic Development, meant to explain the ordinance, purports that the advantage of the ordinance has been “significant, enabling the City to leverage an extraordinary amount of private sector investment with a minimum of public subsidy” (Adaptive 2). Its “mission” is to “attract residents and visitors who would bring vitality to the urban core, while addressing the City’s housing crisis. Restaurants, stores, and nighttime venues would follow” (Adaptive 2). The first project to take advantage of the new ordinance was Gilmore’s Old Bank District. The pamphlet even remarks that this project “jump-started the downtown residential boom” (Adaptive 3). Robert Jones writes that the OBD was a “favorite of the mayor’s office”, at that time under Richard Riordan (Jones Once More).

Laura Loh claims in the Times the Old Bank District, “new neighbors” to the SROs “was the first completed under a city program designed to promote downtown housing by relaxing building requirements” (Loh Plans). Gelt writes similarly that Gilmore’s “decision to be the first to convert downtown office space into residences - shortly after the 1999 adaptive reuse ordinance proposed by the Central City Assn. made the endeavor possible – was,” in Gilmore’s words, “a no-brainer” (Gelt Cover). These authors imply that Gilmore only decided to develop downtown after the ordinance was enacted. Considering his plan in 1998 to “have four more buildings in downtown” by the end of that year, and his friendship with Linda Dishman, who at that time was encouraging adaptive reuse, it is likely that Gilmore actually bought the buildings before the ordinance was enacted (Fulmer Small). Cara diMassa writes that Gilmore - and a few other developers – “saw potential in the ornate but dilapidated buildings near skid row” in the “mid-1990s”, bought them “for as little as a few dollars per square foot”, and renovated them (diMassa Crossroads). She writes that the “fledging” Old Bank District received a “major boost” in the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance, rather than an impetus. This angle of history begs the question of how much influence Gilmore and a few others that benefited from the ordinance had in its creation. Gilmore, himself, claims that he not only had started developing before the ordinance, but that he helped write it. (Gilmore interview).

The Community Redevelopment Agency was equally “instrumental in getting the City to adopt the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance” and in modifying “the Mills Act ordinance so that developers seeking approval of adaptive reuse projects could get property tax relief, both of which helped make the OBD development possible” (Neubecker). According to Dave Neubecker, the CRA’s Assistant Planner for the Downtown Region, the agency also “forgave up to $300,000 in past due property tax increment owed by the previous owner of the Continental Building” (Neubecker). Despite the CRA’s kindness to Gilmore, the developer says that he’d “rather eat broken glass” than deal with the CRA (Gilmore).

The CRA has done much more to support “revitalization” than just forgive tax increments on the OBD. Howard Fine writes in December of 2001 about its decision to split the downtown redevelopment area in two: City Center, which encompasses the Historic Core, Garment District, and Toy District; and the Central Industrial area, which is the light industrial area further east towards Alameda (Fine Splitting). The area is being divided so as to avoid a $750 million spending cap imposed on the entire Central Business District redevelopment project in the 1970s. The cap was the result of a lawsuit brought against city actions which subsidized wealthy developers in Bunker Hill at the
expense of other possible needs. Bunker Hill and the Financial District are thought to be developed enough, as well as Staples Center and Civic Center. The two new zones will remain within the official redevelopment boundaries of the Central Business District, but the city will now be able to finance these areas regardless of the spending cap. Fine writes that “a new redevelopment area would allow the CRA to use its powers of eminent domain to assemble large blocks of land” for developers among an “aging and unsafe building stock and a burgeoning homeless population” (Fine Splitting). Starting up two new project areas would supposedly demand hundreds of thousands in city funds. The “development” of these areas would require “several hundred thousand dollars in city funds a year during the first three to four years before they would approach self-sufficiency” (Fine Splitting). The logic is that the city will eventually benefit financially from the taxes generated by new projects in this area. Fine quotes Councilwoman Perry saying that the “only way new development is going to be brought into these areas is with some government assistance” (Fine Splitting).

Various institutions have also come together as the Historic Downtown LA Retail Project in order to bring retail businesses to Historic Downtown, designated by 3rd and 9th, Main and Hill streets. This project focuses, of course, on Main and Spring. In addition to the Old Bank District, with “a majority of Downtown LA’s new loft residences,” these streets contain Gallery Row, designated by the LA City Council in 2003, in order to “lure” dozens of galleries to Historic Downtown (Historic). The Historic Downtown LA Retail Project was created by the Community Development Department as part of its Los Angeles Business Assistance Program, in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Economic Development, the Los Angeles Conservancy, and the Community Redevelopment Agency (Historic). The project is administered by the Valley Economic Development Center, a “non-profit business development corporation” which, according to its website, “revitalize[s] communities” as “the leading provider of consulting, training, financing, and workforce solutions to local businesses” (Valley).

The Historic Downtown Retail Project provides “FREE retail consulting services” such as “business location/site selection; loan packaging and placement; market assessment; and business consulting and training” (Historic). Businesses in Historic Downtown also receive federal benefits, as part of a Federal Empowerment Zone meant to encourage economic development. Federal incentives include: a 20% tax credit an employer can take from the wages of an employee working and living within this zone; 35% subsidy from the Department of Water and Power; business tax waivers; long-term, low-interest bond programs; and community development bank financing (Historic).

For me to say, however, that federal and local government is invariably supportive of unbridled gentrification would be wrong. Once in a while, they go against their aim of gentrification and take steps to preserve affordable housing. City Council, for instance, passed the Interim Control Ordinance (ICO) on May 10, 2006. This ordinance bans demolishing residential hotels or converting units into market-rate condominiums or apartments for one year, with the possibility of two six-month extensions (Coates Fear). It is meant not as a permanent solution, but to “give the city enough time to create a comprehensive and permanent plan to preserve or improve existing low-income units” (Coates Fear). On June 15, 2006, a month after the passage of the ICO, the Community Redevelopment Agency adopted the “Development Guidelines and Controls for Residential Hotels in the City Center and Central Industrial Redevelopment Areas”
(Development Controls). The Development Controls required the construction of replacement units on a one-for-one basis for any residential hotel units serving low-income residents removed as a result of a conversion to market rate units or demolition” (CRA Dec 7). While these two actions are nowhere near a promise to provide housing, they at least prevent the loss of more affordable units.

It would also be incorrect to claim that any action from city officials is monolithic. There have been times when various city departments and forces disagree. In December 2006, for instance, the Planning Department and the Community Redevelopment Agency “unveiled their Industrial Development Policy Initiative,” which “calls for saving more than 80% of Downtown's industrial land from encroaching residential development” (George Industrial). The remaining percent could be used for mixed-use and housing developments. The planners argue that this step would “keep industrial businesses, blue-collar jobs and tax revenue from leaving Los Angeles” (George Industrial). In March 2007, the Central City Association released a report strongly opposing the proposal on the grounds that “more mixed-use loft developments would mean better jobs, better neighborhoods and more city tax revenue” (George Industrial). Councilmembers Huizar and Perry joined the CCA in criticizing the plan. In response to Huizar and Perry’s stance, Eric says: “I want it to stay industrial. Huizar thinks mixed-use will support redevelopment of the industrial. I don’t know why he thinks that. City Council has historically given away the bank. (As if talking to Huizar and Perry) Someone else is paying you!” (Eric).

Some would argue that it’s the business community, of which the CCA is at the helm. In 1998, the CCA formed the Downtown Center Business Improvement District (DCBID), which works with the CCA to “market and revitalize Downtown L.A. CCA’s strong policy leadership, combined with the DCBID’s economic development and marketing resources” have been extremely influential in the Downtown scene (CCA Home). According to the CCA’s website, it has “taken the lead on issues from development reform to affordable housing to homelessness”. It probably has taken the lead as far as influencing politics. But that doesn’t mean they’ve taken any leads in the right direction. The DCBID is a “coalition of nearly 480 property owners united in their commitment to enhance the quality of life in Downtown Los Angeles. The organization helps the 65-block central business district achieve its full potential as a great place to live, work and play” (CCA About Us). “Live, work and play” is the CCA’s mantra. It has greatly influenced Downtown’s marketability as a place where Los Angeles’s elite can have all their needs met. The DCBID controls the way downtown is represented: their website offers walking tours, bus tours, and interactive maps, so that an outside perception of downtown is almost invariably constricted by their interests. When I tried to get a comment from Hal Bastian, Senior Vice President of the organization and Director of Economic Development, his boss Carol Schatz supposedly prevented it. Bastian was once the leasing director of the Old Bank District (Roderick Alternative).

The CCA represents business interests west of Main Street. Its eastern counterpart is the CCEA – Central City East Association. Formed in 1985, their goal is “to provide a voice and advocacy for the issues and concerns of property owners located on the east side of Downtown Los Angeles” (About CCEA). In 1998, the CCEA formed two Business Improvement Districts (BID): the Los Angeles Downtown Industrial District (LADID) and the Toy District. Supposedly, the BIDs “work to create a safer, more secure
and cleaner environment for area residents, employees and visitors” (About CCEA). The Toy District, which contains a “diverse selection of toys, silk flowers, electronics, DVD's and videos, incense/oils, craft supplies or luggage, as well as traditional toys such as dolls, die cast cars, action figures, character figures and video games” is contained by a twelve block area between Third and Fifth, Los Angeles and San Pedro” (Toy District). The “Los Angeles Downtown Industrial District (LADID) covers 44 blocks” between Third and Eighth, San Pedro and Alameda, and is “comprised of mostly seafood, fresh and frozen produce, cold storage and other food related” manufacturing and wholesale services (Industrial District).

One of the most important gears of the booster machine is the media. Molotch and Logan write that, through the media, the elite keep growth issues, like gentrification, on the symbolic level, where they can talk about “revitalization” and “redevelopment”, processes that the critique of which leads to McCarthy-esque attacks by elites themselves. These symbolic terms are part of a larger discourse of progress and economic growth, the golden calves of capitalist society. The Los Angeles Times, for instance, constantly refers to Downtown’s change as “revitalization,” “redevelopment,” and “urban renewal”. Every once in a while, the term “gentrification” is used. To explain the role of media, Molotch and Logan borrow Edelman’s distinction between the “symbolic” politics that typically make news headlines and occupy the mainstream discourse of “politics” – war, abortion, child pornography – and the politics which involve “government actions that affect the distribution of important goods and services. Much less visible to publics, often relegated to back rooms or negotiations within insulated authorities and agencies” (Molotch 64). Even writers that do expose institutional actions and seek to question their results, like Cara diMassa, use terms like “revitalization” without the slightest interrogation.

Molotch and Logan suggest that the local media’s support of “growth politics” is due to increased circulation and profits from ads. While I’m sure this is a concern of the Los Angeles Times, I believe that a larger reason for the paper’s boosterism is that its editors and publishers are victims of the same pro-development (at the expense of people) ideology as the rest of our society. Senior Vice President and CFO of the Times, Robert Bellock, for instance, is on the Board of Directors of the DCBID. The Times, however, offers a fair amount of critique, and could rarely be described as a major cheerleader for downtown gentrification.

The Los Angeles Downtown News, on the other hand, could be described as such a cheerleader. Almost all of the ads they receive are from local developers. More importantly, the Downtown News controls much of the debate around Downtown’s “revitalization” and is prone to those McCarthy-esque attacks towards critics. The following example is telling: Tom Slater, a well-respected scholar of urban studies, wrote an Op-Ed in The Times on July 30, 2006. In the article, he claims that “the Central City East Assn.’s efforts to sweep and hose the streets of skid row showed [that] gentrifying a neighborhood often means displacing those who are already there” (Slater Gentrification). Within a month, Slater was attacked by Jon Regardie of the Downtown News: “The CCEA never ‘literally swept and hosed’ anyone out of an encampment” but has simply “been working with the LAPD and other entities to clean the streets” in “an ongoing and carefully controlled process” (Regardie Errant). After distributing notices to homeless residents, the CCEA supposedly “help move the homeless campers' possessions,” who “often return to the sidewalks after the washing is completed”
Regardie Errant) (italics added). Regardie spends most of his August 21st article lamenting how Slater and The Times could commit such an egregious error. He printed Slater’s outrage at the Times for misleading him (from an email CCEA’s Estela Lopez sent the Downtown News without Slater’s consent) and the Times’s apology for making this mistake. The misunderstanding comes from an article Cara diMassa wrote on July 12 – “As revitalization efforts for downtown move forward, advocacy groups say the homeless are being swept away”. A quick look at the article will show that Slater had every right to infer that people were “literally” removed. Nevertheless, Downtown News attacked Slater and The Times so fiercely, that they had to renege their claims and apologize.

Regardie makes no attempt to actually address the issue of removal-through-cleaning. I imagine most of the people removed didn't get a flyer, and were told at the last minute that they had to move. Even if you're told a day before that you have to move your entire set of belongings for a couple hours, it's still one more thing to deal with, on top of a possible addiction or disability, not to mention the constant burden of finding a place to get food or relieve yourself. If you have to move every couple of days, you'd most likely want to go somewhere where you're not being harassed. Semantics aside, the CCEA’s/LAPD’s sweeping and hosing have led to the desertion of encampments in Central City East. The removal forces argue that they're ensuring better health conditions. If they really cared, they'd work to get people supportive housing and healthcare, not push them away. The cleaning is also an excuse to confiscate and destroy peoples' property - as diMassa DID write in her initial piece. The confiscation and destruction of property steals any hope people have left, and gives them even more reason to leave in search of a safer place for their dignity. At the end of Regardie’s article, CCEA CEO Estela Lopez “remains disturbed by the error” and has “acknowledged that the misinformation about her life's work hurts” “even with the retraction and her printed letter” (Regardie Errant). Regarding the retraction, she asks: “Is it ever going to erase the feeling I had that morning? Will it ever erase the images of the memory it conjured up?” (Regardie Errant). I would ask instead about the disturbances people face when they have to live up to the fact that they’re living on the streets. Could you ever erase the memory that you’re forced to move all your belongings so that the sidewalk can be cleaned? While I have the final word here, Lopez, the CCEA, and the Downtown News have the final word where it counts – in the public discourse. For Tom Slater, “the sad thing is [that] the error got in the way of the argument I was making,” despite “hundreds of e-mails I received from people who agreed with me about gentrification in Skid Row” (Slater email). It may as well have been no one agreeing with him, since the media can decide what gets publicized and what doesn’t. Along with business advocacy organizations like the CCA and CCEA and local government, the media dictates what people think about revitalization and displacement.
Displacement: How to Do It
Part II: Rob Frontiera

Most people don’t think developments downtown cause displacement. They’re typically converted vacant office buildings and, therefore, don’t rely on evictions. While they’re not directly displacing anyone, the critical support Gilmore and others have received from the boosters does lead to massive displacement. The one development that has caused direct and real displacement of people from their homes is the Rosslyn Lofts. In Gilmore’s Wild West of luck, some must be unlucky. Indians must be forced off their land. Kathryn Maese writes in a Downtown News piece in February 2006 that the Frontiera brothers “are turning the blighted hotel rooms [of the Frontier] into some of the most stunning loft apartments in Downtown” (Maese Creating). According to Maese, Joseph Frontiera noted that his properties are in the "crossfire of a rough area" (Maese Creating). The crossfire is between those that want to develop the area and those that need affordable housing. Maese writes that “the two buildings stand at what locals consider an important bridge in the corridor, one that will create an even bigger residential presence once the Rosslyn Hotel is redeveloped” (Maese Creating). Joseph Frontiera calls the building “a crucial link between the Pacific Electric and the Santa Fe. The two ownerships of those buildings, outside of sending their own crews to help us, they just can't wait for that gap to be mended. Then you have the Security and Rowan that are in the midst of their construction [next door]. We're envisioning another corner like Fourth and Main” (Maese Creating). The Frontier Hotel is the last piece of a complete takeover of Spring between 4th and 5th.

The Frontier Hotel, consisting of 450 rooms, is located at 111 W. 5th St. Originally named the New Hotel Rosslyn, the hotel was constructed simultaneously with the Hotel Rosslyn Annex, located on the other side of 5th St. Both buildings, designed by “well-known architects Parkinson & Bergstrom,” were completed in 1924 (CRA Dec. 7). According to a CRA document, the Frontier Hotel was “originally constructed as a first-class hotel for its time,” but has “served as housing of ‘last-resort’ for low and very low-income households” since 1975, when it was placed under the Central Business District Redevelopment Plan (CRA Dec. 7). Michael Frontiera bought the hotel for his sons Robert and Joseph in 1979, who reopened it for the first time in 22 years (Woodward Safety). The brothers bought the Rosslyn Hotel, 503 S. Main St., in 2003 from Ban Yen Wang.

Over the years, the Frontieras gained a reputation as slumlords. They were charged in 1994 with 23 fire, health and building and safety code violations (Woodward Safety). Writer Susan Woodward quotes Frontiera asking for more time to make the changes – and then-Spokesman for the City Attorney’s Office Ted Goldstein’s response: “There's exposed live electrical wiring, an over-fused electrical panel, defective electrical and plumbing fixtures. . . . It’s not as though we're asking for luxury” (Woodward Safety). The brothers’ corporation, Zuma Corp., was fined $9,082 on 10 criminal slum charges and Rob (the city only holds one person responsible for these things) was placed on probation for two years (Woodward Long).

In 2002, Frontiera was issued permits by the Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety to convert the building to market-rate housing. Permit requests for floors 3-9 weren’t referred to the CRA as is required by law, and of 10-12, the CRA only approved 12. The rehab of the building was supposed to cost $12 million (Maese Creating). In
2003, City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo denounced Frontiera as a "slumlord," and ordered him to clean up his hotel, which the Downtown News refers to as a “notorious drug den” (Maese Creating). The suit resulted in a $250,000 fine. Frontiera cleaned up the hotel, but soon began to convert the rooms into lofts.

Delgadillo sued the Frontieras again in 2006 for enforcing what’s known as the “28-day shuffle”. The “28-day shuffle” makes it seem as though no one stays in the hotel for over 28 days (a 30-day stay legally makes one a “tenant”), and is therefore not a permanent tenant. It is much easier to convince the city to allow conversion of a “tourist” hotel than of a “residential” hotel. It also means that the owners and managers can avoid providing tenants’ rights while they’re there. In her coverage of the 28-day shuffle, Krista Walton quotes Pete White of LA CAN: “Back in the day, the shuffle was used to maximize profits, but now they’re utilizing it to create the illusion of transience on these floors” (Walton Even). This strategy works, as illustrated by Maese’s article: “As hotel residents check out, available rooms are consolidated to lower levels and another floor is converted” (Maese Creating). But “hotel residents” don’t typically “check out” of the hotel. Most of the people there are long-term residents, using the hotel as permanent housing. The Frontier is their home. She continues, saying that “a new entrance has been created on Main Street, and a banner advertises the Rosslyn Lofts. The Beaux Art lobby has been painted, moldings restored and upscale furniture added” (Maese Creating). The problem is that at this time, the building was still occupied by low-income residents, who entered through the entrance on 5th St., which did not have new paint, molding, or upscale furniture. Krista Walton writes in City Beat two months later that the “top two floors of the Frontier Hotel are now being renovated into loft apartments, and a separate (and much improved) entrance has been created exclusively for the top levels of the hotel, with the elevator avoiding the floors with lower-income residents” (Walton Even). She quotes Pete White of LA CAN, who says that “[The hotel] is really practicing segregation” (Walton Even).

Norma Nager writes that owners and managers “convince tenants that they have no alternatives, that their neighborhood will soon be unaffordable to them” (Nager 384). When that doesn’t work, they resort to “harassment techniques, eg, broken locks, thus no security, consequent frequent burglaries, urine and/or vomit frequently appearing in hallways and elevators, lack of repairs to apartments and building, intermittent heat and hot water and suspicious fires frequently injuring and/or killing tenants” (Nager 384). An inspection at 111 W. 5th St. (Frontier Hotel) by the Los Angeles Housing Department, Code Enforcement, on March 15, 2005, found: 19 Damaged or missing switch/receptacle plates or covers; 3 exposed electrical wiring; 25 defective receptacles; 27defective or improperly installed light fixtures; 6 double-keyed locks on exit doors; over 260 inadequate fire doors; over 75 inoperable or missing smoke alarms; 230 inoperable or missing heating appliances; 140 worn or torn floor coverings; over 160 damaged walls; 13 blocked plumbing which causes flooding; 27 defective, damaged/leaking faucets or fixtures; damaged stairway with missing decking; 60 defective, damaged, inoperative windows or doors; over 140 damaged or defective shower/baths; declared unsanitary; damp or moldy; at least 20 sitings of vermin, rodents, or insects; defective or missing window and door screens; 15 broken glass or missing glazing on windows (City Notice). Over the summer of 2006, one resident named Donna was killed in the hotel. Some tenants say that security, who is paid not to let people into the hotel unless invited in by a
tenant, let it happen. When I entered the hotel around the time of Donna’s murder, I was intimidated and handcuffed in the basement for an hour. Some LA CAN organizers asked a tenant to invite them into the hotel so that they could inspect the building and speak with other tenants. This tenant initially agreed to but, after speaking with hotel manager LaFoe, denied them entry. He appeared shaken up and intimidated after his interaction with LaFoe.

Nager continues: “When all else fails, the owner, or interested party, will pay tenants off to move out” (Nager 384). In April 2006, Aubrey White documents in the LA Alternative that rooms in the Frontier were being emptied to clear the way for lofts. She interviews a former tenant of the Frontier, Barbara Planek, who was given two months free rent for moving down from the 7th to the 5th floor. White analyzes Frontiera’s policy: “Two months free rent totals approximately $800. Legally, this type of relocation requires at least $3,300 in relocation money and 120 days notice to move” (White Exile). White continues: “There are currently four tenants left on the 6th floor of the building, waiting to receive a notice of eviction or an offer of relocation from management” (White Exile). When there were no more rooms in the Frontier to move people to, Frontiera started moving them to the Rosslyn across the street. As people started holding out and Frontiera got more and more desperate, he started offering more incentives for people to move out. The last person to leave supposedly received $20,000. That’s how bad Frontiera wanted the place empty.

I spoke to one woman who was at the Frontier for 8 years. She moved out a year ago with 4 months free rent (Donna). When I asked why she moved, she said because the building was undergoing loft conversion. Donald Watson, a 66-yr-old former chef, left in April with 3 months free rent. He said that “that ain’t nothing compared to the $8500 I should have got. They screwed everybody” (Watson). As Bart explains it: “The owner and management decided to divorce tenants, just like a husband and wife. But if you were the wife, you’d want alimony, right? I got $8500 because I was one of the last they had to force out of there” (Bart). He suggested I research “18USC1951” in order to understand what happened. This civil code law is in regard to extortion.

As of April 2006, Frontiera had rehabbed 100% of the 12th floor, 95% of the 11th, and 40% of the 10th. On April 10, he renewed permits for floors 3-9. The permits were renewed, again without permission from the CRA. In June, Frontiera was notified that the property was covered by the Interim Control Ordinance. The CRA decided that, based on both the ICO and the Development Controls, Frontiera could not proceed with conversion of floors 3 through 9. On March 1, 2007, the CRA and Frontiera reached an agreement that includes the following: renovation of floors 3-8 subject to the Development Guidelines; renovation of floors 9-12 not subject to the Development Guidelines; Frontiera could set initial rents for the units on 3-8, but annual increases in rent are limited under the Rent Stabilization Ordinance; the CRA will monitor and enforce rental rates for units on floors 3-8 (CRA March 1).

Organizations involved downtown had a hard time figuring out what exactly was decided for the Frontier. I spoke with Rob Frontiera to see if I could find out. He said that, for now, there was one room left in the building, going for 1600/mo. for just over 900 sq. ft. That would be about $1.75/sq. ft. When I asked about the rumor that there were “drug addicts” in the building, he said that it used to be a hotel, but “they have been moved out”. The remainder of the rooms, he said, would be rehabilitated at market-rate
within the next year” (Frontiera). I contacted Dave Neubecker, Assistant Planner, at the CRA to make sure that I understood the CRA’s March 1 agreement, and that Rob was correct. He wrote me: “What Rob Frontiera told you is consistent; the units will be reopend as market-rate, with those units on floors 3-8 being subject to the rent stabilization ordinance going forward. The agreement on the Frontier covers the future; it was not retroactive. Without TI funds, the CRA had very little leverage in the negotiations” (Neubecker). Frontiera recently sold the Rosslyn across the street to John Gates of Triumph Mortgage Co., the same man who did the mortgage for this building during the original sale.

For now, the door that used to lead to the low-income units is chained. The businesses that occupied the ground floor are no longer there. Just 9 months ago, the ground floor had a barbershop where people would come for community. The barbershop was pushed out when the last residents were. Now, there’s two high-tech, hifalutin art galleries: LA Center for Digital Art and Pharmaka – Wallworks – The Art of Wall Batterton. There’s also an art gallery, Bert Green Fine Art, in the bottom of the Rosslyn. The loft entrance on Main St. still works, and there are flags on this side of the building welcoming people to the Rosslyn Lofts. The people moved from the Frontier to the Rosslyn are still there. It’s currently displaying Carl Ramsey’s “Vanishing Downtown Los Angeles”, a series on Main St. The paintings in the front of the gallery demonstrate a more vacant, more industrial, landscape. The Regent Theatre is boarded up, with someone kneeling in front. The trash outnumbers the people. Further back in the gallery, however, the streets are filled with a vibrant, diverse population; diverse enough so that it markets the edginess new loft dwellers crave.

I spoke with Green about his relationship to what’s going on with the Frontier, not to mention Downtown more generally. He said, “I knocked on Frontiera’s door until he answered – the space where this gallery is was empty – and I said if he let me display art here, I could help revitalize the neighborhood. 3 years ago, there were only 3 galleries. Now, there’s 31. This area used to be an abandoned crack hell. Now we’re transforming it.” He claimed that the city is corrupt in giving Frontiera such strict guidelines and telling him what tenants he can have. When I asked what he sees happening, he said: “I don’t know, but it should be cool” (Green).

I received further insight at INMO Art Gallery hidden in the Rosslyn Hotel’s “Billy’s Coffee Shop”. Patrick, an architecture student who currently lives at the Pacific Electric lofts, said he would move into the loft-converted Rosslyn Hotel but “not at the expense of disabled people”. He said that people are currently being “cycled out” in order to begin the conversion process. I asked Donald Watson what he thought about this. He said he didn’t think they’d try to evict people from the Rosslyn “right away,” but maybe “8 or 10 years down the road. They can make more money then. I don’t like LaFoe or Rob either. Everything he said is 100% lie. I don’t like him. He tried to have me evicted – said my room was filthy. We took pictures and my room was clean. It always is. I think they’re trying to get all the old tenants out. The new tenants don’t stay as long. I think that’s what they’re doing. I don’t think that’s cool because it’s just pushing the poor people out. A lot will end up homeless – they ain’t gonna be able to afford an apartment. That’s a shame. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer” (Watson).
Grand Avenue Redevelopment: Tying It All Together

City, developer, and business advocacy forces have converged most recently around the Grand Avenue Redevelopment Project\(^2\). The Project refocuses attention on Bunker Hill, in an attempt to make the area an urban hub for Los Angeles. Eli Broad, real estate magnate of Kaufman and Broad, began the effort to “turn Los Angeles’ Grand Avenue into a truly ‘grand avenue,’ to rival the main boulevards of the world’s greatest cities” (Broad Foundation). Broad accompanied Mayor Richard Riordan in raising funds for the Walt Disney Concert Hall, is the founding chairman of the Museum of Contemporary Art, and helped build the California Transit Authority building (Broad Foundation). In essence, the Grand Ave. Project would connect the first two of Broad’s accomplishments, on Grand Avenue, to the third, on Main and 2\(^{nd}\).

The Grand Avenue Committee, a public/private partnership that was formed in the year 2000, initiated the project. In addition to Eli Broad, the Committee consists of Nelson Rising, Chairman and CEO of Catellus Development Corp., one of California’s largest private landowners; Antonia Hernández, President of the California Community Foundation, a philanthropic organization which supports non-profits; Ayahlushim Hammond, Regional Manager of the CRA; David Riccitiello, Regional Administrator of the CRA; and Gerry Hertzberg, Deputy Chief of Staff for Supervisor Gloria Molina (Grand Ave. Overview). In 2003, the Committee initiated the Los Angeles Grand Avenue Authority, a new governmental entity forging of the County of Los Angeles and the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles. Its sole purpose is to support the project. The Authority includes Gloria Molina, Los Angeles County Supervisor; Jan Perry, Councilwoman of the 9\(^{th}\) District; David Janssen, Chief Administrative Officer of Los Angeles County; Cecilia V. Estolano, CEO of the city’s Community Redevelopment Agency; and Dale Bonner, Secretary of the State of California’s Business, Transportation and Housing Agency (Grand Ave Overview). The majority of the property on which the new uses will be located is owned either by the CRA/LA or the County.

Related Companies has been chosen to “revitalize Grand Avenue by developing 3.2 million square feet of housing, stores and restaurants, offices, entertainment venues and a hotel” by 2017 (O’Malley Commentary). The majority will be developed between Grand and Spring, and 2\(^{nd}\) and Temple Streets, but “improvements” will extend along Grand Ave. from Cesar Chavez to 5\(^{th}\) Street. Cara diMassa describes the Project as “part of a major renaissance in downtown Los Angeles,” which was sparked in part by the Walt Disney Concert Hall in 2003. City and county officials see it as a way of tying together many of the cultural monuments that line Grand Avenue, including the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Music Center and the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels (diMassa Grand April). As of April 2007, the estimated cost for the project is $2.05 billion, although the estimate has been growing steadily for the past few years (Grand Ave Overview). We can probably expect it to keep rising.

\(^2\) While the Grand Avenue Redevelopment Project and LA Live are similar projects and will lead to similar results, I choose to only document the former. Since my case study focuses on the northern part of Central City and the effects of gentrification on Skid Row, in the north(east)ern part of Central City, (and since it would be somewhat redundant to document the realities of both mega-projects) this paper consciously ignores LA Live.
According to Cara diMassa, “this project is larger in size, subsidy and government involvement than any other project in Los Angeles” (diMassa Grand Nov). She explains the debate over public money spent on this project: “Related Cos. is making a $50-million payment to the city and county, representing the prepaid, 99-year lease of the property in the project's first phase and a deposit on the land to be used for the second phase. That $50 million would be poured back into the development, to fund a 16-acre park that would be part of the project's first phase” (diMassa Grand Nov). This park, County Mall, is supposed to become Los Angeles’s “Central Park” (Grand Ave Overview). About $19 million in other public investments “would be used to fund traffic, streetscape and public space improvements. That money is expected to come from city and county property tax revenue generated by the project -- or perhaps from a loan against expected tax revenue” (diMassa Grand Nov). Early estimates put the tax rebates for parking and hotel tax at $40 million over 20 years, but the legislative analyst estimated the rebates could cost as much as $66 million (diMassa Grand Feb). The Grand Avenue Committee already spent $4.2 million in public money just to get the project started (diMassa Grand Feb).

Cara diMassa and Roger Vincent write in April 2006 that the Project’s backers face “formidable hurdles in creating an upscale 24-hour vibe in downtown Los Angeles” (diMassa Retailers). Warren Cooley, project director of the Historic Downtown Retail Project cautions that “there's not enough population and critical mass. There are still challenges. The homeless issue on the street is a concern when real estate investigators from big chains look. That's sometimes something that concerns them” (diMassa Retailers). Many agree with Cooley that there’s not enough residents downtown to gain the attention of big-name fashion boutiques and furniture stores. Carol Schatz is quoted, as a downtown booster, encouraging residential developments as key to solidifying the Grand Ave. Project’s success. A grand vision of this project follows thus: the Grand Avenue Redevelopment Project starts at Grand Ave., and continues to Spring and 2nd. At Spring and 2nd, we have not only the California Transit building, but a new municipal police headquarters, and Vibiana’s Place. Vibiana’s Place and Grand Ave. will compete to be the tallest building in Los Angeles. They form a link, bringing Skid Row into Bunker Hill, and destroying any of Skid Row that doesn’t make the cut. Vibiana’s Place will form a chain reaction, affecting Medallion, the Old Bank District, and all the other loft buildings on Main and Spring. It’s likely that all the developers came together to figure this out.

From this angle, it becomes pretty clear how (re)vital all this is and how much is riding on it. DiMassa and Vincent write that the “plan depends heavily on downtown's revitalization continuing unabated. Critics point out that the Grand Avenue business model would seem dubious if the downtown real estate market were to soften or if crime and the city center's homeless problems were to worsen” (diMassa Retailers). A few months later, diMassa documents Los Angeles business and political leaders going to Manhattan to “pitch” downtown to outside investors. They’re supposedly leery of investment, questioning whether “the city can improve the area's homeless situation and rais[ing] concerns that many of downtown's streets still seem dead despite the boom in lofts and condos” (DiMassa Pitching). Eli Broad, claims that the Grand Avenue project is “part of a ‘tipping point’ that would transform the long-moribund zone into a vibrant, ‘24/7 area’” (DiMassa Pitching). He sees it as the final catalyst to make Downtown LA a
city center rivaling New York City. The question we have to ask, therefore, is: what will downtown developers do to reach that “tipping point”? How much are capitalists willing to do - how much proverbial blood will they spill in exchange for capital accumulation?
Monique Skidmore on Rangoon’s “politics of fear”: Through the renaming, rebuilding, and relocating of familiar landmarks and the heavy presence of the army and weaponry, the military council imposes a new spatial configuration [.] suppressing potential democratic neighborhoods, demolishing the inner city, and creating new urban centers that immortalize the principle of authoritarianism.

(Davis Planet 107-8)

Referring specifically to the Old Bank District, but nonetheless telling within the context of Downtown’s colonial possibilities, Carol Schatz of the CCA says: "We would do anything-- and I repeat, anything--to make it succeed" (Jones Once More). This brings us to Skid Row. When one takes the “Nickel” east and hits Los Angeles Street, one comes to the Toy District, filled with wholesalers. The Toy District makes up Los Angeles to Wall. A police station occupies four square blocks within the Toy District, from Maple to Wall and 5th to 6th. The Los Angeles Mission is at Wall and 5th. The Union Rescue Mission is on San Julian between 5th and 6th. The southeast corner of 6th and San Julian holds the Midnight Mission. As one passes San Pedro, and enters a forest of warehouses, the smell of seafood is unbearable. This is the Industrial District. One building, across from City Sea Foods, reads: “No Person Shall Sit, Lie, or Sleep In or Upon Any Street, Sidewalk, or Other Public Way LAMC Sec 41.18D”. I got the eerie feeling that it might as well have said “No Jews Allowed” in Germany or “No Coloreds Allowed” in Alabama.

Having been down here 9 months earlier and seen the sidewalks full of people and tents, I sense the emptiness. Skid Row has become a ghost town. You can almost feel the lost souls. When you hit Alameda, it’s like a breath of fresh air. Now matter how many times you come down there, it’s always a relief to hit the end, turn around, and glimpse the Reagan Building – regardless of how much you hated Reagan. I feel as if I’ve journeyed to Hell and I’m gasping for air as I return to Earth. But this Hell on Earth is reality for a lot of people. Peoples’ eyes look empty. It might be what my eyes would look like if I was beaten and worn. Imagine 2 years out here; I get exhausted and depressed being here 2 hours! They say that drugs and mental illness are the cause of people coming down here. I think they’re equally the result. Gina, who lives in the Rosslyn, but used to live in St. Mark’s SRO on Crocker St. agrees: “If people didn’t smoke crack before, they end up doing it. The crackheads are down there and they feel your vibrations if you don’t smoke. If they don’t have mental problems, they will after. Standing out there, in line for food every meal, people fight for it. I’ve got a lot of those stories – I’m as serious as I’m alive – one man stabbed another for chicken. I could make a book with the things I’ve seen. Once, I had to get groceries. I had to call the police and say ‘There’s a guy out here with a gun’. Then the cops put everyone in the area against the wall. I saw one man beat another with a pipe until his nose was broken and bleeding. Three men were shot in the head in two months” (Gina).

In writing about Skid Row in this way, I don’t mean to say that these people are naturally savage and brutal. On the contrary, I think it’s a reflection of our society that we’ve forced people to resort to their brute animal instincts. That’s what happens when food is scarce and crack is plentiful. Media depictions, however, tend to elide the societal causes of this situation. They portray the homeless population as animals. David Ferrell

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3 Two hard places, actually: industrial-area cement or a jail cell floor
writes in The Times in December 2003 about a “society that is raw, scavenging”, about people “who sleep on the streets of downtown Los Angeles are perpetually in flight - from their families, from the police, from the pain of childhood abuse, bad jobs, poverty and dead loved ones. They scatter and collect like birds, alighting on crates and curbs, sitting in rows on filthy stretches of sidewalk. They ache at night in tents and in cardboard shanties” (Ferrell Skid). The animal analogies are common. Richard Winton, referring to bird-watching government officials, writes that the crackdown on encampments is “producing some unexpected migration patterns among the homeless that has officials puzzled” (Winton Beefed-Up). Winton, who’s written a sizeable amount on Skid Row, describes the corner of 6th and San Pedro as a “drug bazaar nestled amid cardboard boxes, tarps and tents” where “men and women in bedraggled clothes with leathery skin and uncombed hair hung out as a woman in a wheelchair slyly sold heroin to passing motorists” (Winton Beefed-Up). It seems as though these articles are meant to gain sympathy for the homeless population from readers, but they also essentialize and dehumanize people. As I spoke with someone named “Big Man,” some people drove by. A little boy was filming us. When I asked what he thought that was about, he answered: “You’re not naïve. They probably put it on the internet and make lots of money from it: ‘Hey, look at those niggers. Look how they live’. I mean I’m just imagining that, but why else would people film us?” (Big Man). This objectification and harassment attests to our tragic societal treatment of homeless people.

The verbal treatment of homeless people documented above supports two strategies: it helps the city convince citizens that homeless people are in need of saving and that the city can do what it wants; it helps the city convince citizens that homeless people are dangerous subhumans, and that the city can do what it wants. Either way, the city reserves the right to remove a population. The only difference is that the former is more benign than the latter. It’s not just the media that relegates homeless individuals to the status of objects without agency. Jan Perry depicts herself as a savior, taking people “into custody for their own protection from an environment that is dangerous and where the most common crime is transient-on-transient assault” (Perry ACLU). Tom Gilmore, who also sees himself as a savior, having done “lots on affordable housing and shelter care”, “worked with the homeless for 15 years, and [been] on LAHSA for some of that” claims that “most of the homeless have substance abuse, mental illness, more insidious things. The economic homelessness is a relatively small population” (Gilmore). Maybe that viewpoint makes him feel better for not including affordable units in any of his buildings.

Senior Lead Officer over Skid Row Deon Joseph, who supposedly acts as a “liaison” between the police and Skid Row residents, says the same thing. He claims that most people sleeping or sitting on the sidewalk aren’t doing it for “life sustaining reasons”, but “due to them crashing from a four-day cocaine binge, overdosing on heroin, or drunk to the point of incapacitation” (Joseph LADAD). This quote is from the The Los Angeles Downtown Arts District page administered by Qathryn Brehm, Director of Community Relations at the Central City East Association. Police Chief William J. Bratton echoes Joseph, saying that “Many there [Skid Row] don't want help […] they want to live on the streets” (LeDuff). Of course. They’re animals – why would they want to live inside? Vincent and Dickerson quote him at a news conference: “Aggressive panhandling scares the hell out of people,” vowing to curb the “sometimes threatening
behavior” of homeless people (Vincent State). If these men actually spoke to some of the people they’re speaking about, they would know that many don’t do any drugs and are mentally healthy. They’re simply victims of an unforgiving economic system.

Rhetorical methods of exclusion, however, are nothing compared to the city’s very systematic, very institutionalized campaign of “cleaning the streets”. In the time between the referenced news conference and Vincent and Dickerson’s article, police conducted two major sweeps in Skid Row, and “stepped up” arrests of parole and probation violators (Vincent State). “Borrowing a page from his days in New York,” LeDuff writes, Bratton “has instituted sweeps against the so-called quality-of-life criminals who, as the theory goes, will graduate to bigger crimes if left unchecked (LeDuff). LeDuff is referring to the Broken Windows Theory. The Broken Windows Theory was first written in 1982 for The Atlantic Monthly by George Kelling and James Q. Wilson. It poses the following: if a building has a few broken windows, the tendency is for people to have less respect for the building, break more windows, and eventually break into the buildings. Therefore, it is necessary to fix or remove the windows before the situation gets out of hand. The question is: when it’s people that are “broken” instead of windows, does one still fix or remove them? When he initially came to Skid Row in 2002, Bratton would have said “yes”. He called for removing the tent cities, until the American Civil Liberties Union sued on the grounds that it violated homeless people’s civil rights (diMassa LAPD’s). Kelling, Rutgers criminologist and author of the theory, was brought by his protégé Chief Bratton to give advice. He holds that punishing lesser offenses leads to reductions in major crimes. Therefore, “rather than removing homeless people wholesale from the streets,” he advises, “the LAPD should focus on criminals, including drug dealers and prostitutes, who he says create a "culture of lawlessness" in the area (diMassa LAPD’s). It’s when there’s a general “culture of lawlessness”, that the situation in Skid Row gets out of hand.

The LAPD followed Kelling’s advice and only arrests “criminals”. But they still wanted to get rid of those pesky homeless people in the tents. What to do, what to do? According to Randall Amster, “if you want to eliminate a particular social class or subculture or deviant groups, locate some behavior that is largely peculiar to that group and make it illegal” (Amster 200). He’s referring to Los Angeles Municipal Code Section 41.18 (d). Also known as the “anti-sitting ordinance”, 41.18(d) provides that: “No person shall sit, lie or sleep in or upon any street, sidewalk or other public way”, a violation of which is “punishable by a fine of up to $1000 and/or imprisonment of up to six moths” (Jones v. 4427). Of course, since homeless individuals have no place to sleep or sit other than the sidewalk, they are invariably prone to arrest. They are possibly asked to move first. After moving constantly, one is likely to get fed up and leave the area. And if they don’t move, they’re arrested or fined. The court document calls this legislation “one of the most restrictive municipal laws regulating public spaces in the United States,” since similar ordinances in other cities only criminalize sidewalk-sitting when it obstructs pedestrians (Las Vegas) or when it’s between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. (Seattle), to document two examples (Jones 4427-8). Six homeless individuals, unable to obtain shelter, filed an Eighth Amendment challenge – the right to freedom from cruel and unusual punishment – to the enforcement of 41.18 (d). The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed the suit in 2003 on behalf of these individuals. The Court of Appeals ruled in April 2006 that “so long as there is a greater number of homeless individuals in
Los Angeles than the number of available beds, the City may not enforce section 41.18 (d) at all times and places throughout the City” (Jones 4454). The ruling, however, was not meant to “dictate to the City that it must provide sufficient shelter for the homeless” (Jones 4454).

The ACLU was willing to settle with the city on only banning sidewalk-sitting from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Mitchell correctly writes that it is a “perverse” “current urban context” in which “homeless people and their advocates are driven” “to argue for the right to sleep in public, to lie on sidewalks, to beg on the streets, or to shit in alleys. These are pretty mean, pretty shriveled, rights” (Mitchell 209-10). Although Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Police Chief William Bratton pushed for the settlement with the ACLU, the City Council voted 10 to 3 to continue the legal defense of the city’s ordinance (Hymon State). Only two weeks after the settlement was refused, Chief Bratton authorized a crackdown on Skid Row encampments to arrest people for sleeping on the sidewalk. He said that the city attorney’s office issued a legal opinion that arresting people during the day was not in conflict with the court’s opinion (Winton LAPD). Both council members and the ACLU questioned whether this crackdown was legal based on the court’s ruling, and the ACLU advised against it. Bratton decided to make arrests on the sleeping ordinance “because there are more than 100 shelter beds available on skid row this week” and “the city attorney's office gave the go-ahead, concluding that the appeals court ruling applied only to camping at night” (Winton LAPD). In March 2006, diMassa and Winton write, Bratton had “expressed frustration at not being able to deal more aggressively with skid row” (diMassa LAPD’s). Just 6 months later, he was given the green light to get more aggressive. Bratton must have had a field day.

In September 2006, Ashraf Khalil and Richard Winton document that “private security guards working for the business group Central City East Assn. remove apparently abandoned tent encampments” (Khalil No). Estela Lopez could challenge the truth of diMassa’s and Slater’s articles in July, but now there’s more proof. To reiterate: the officers might leave warning tags, but when the property’s still there (because the owner’s at work or in jail), they take everything to their station. Imagine returning from jail on a false charge and all your things are gone. Police officers, let alone private security guards, can’t go into a private residence and just take everything. The Central City East Association claims that this needs to occur in order to keep the streets clean (Khalil No). Lopez is indignant about the city “sanctioning people living on the street” near “food manufacturing businesses with all the threat of disease that follows” (Khalil No). Lopez is probably right about the unsanitary conditions people live in, but her BID guards taking property isn’t going to help them.

Of all people, Estela Lopez should know this. She started the first BID (Business Improvement District) downtown, called Miracle on Broadway, “after the state Legislature passed a law allowing property owners to pay special taxes to fund nonprofit organizations to improve their areas” (Wan Flak). A year later, the Jewelry Building Owner's Association started a private, armed security force, which would work with the police, to patrol the Jewelry District (Jewelry District). Tom Gilmore was involved. Now the CCEA has a similar security force, as does the CCA. The CCEA’s “clean and safe team” wears red, while the CCA’s wears purple. William Wan and Erin Ailworth write that in addition to luxury lofts and trendy restaurants, “the much-touted revitalization of downtown Los Angeles has brought” “a growing cadre of private security guards”
“armed with pepper spray, batons and sometimes handguns” “who do everything from patrol the streets to clean up trash” (Wan Flak). According to their article, merchants and property owners pay a total of $12 million a year for downtown’s eight business improvement districts (Wan Flak). According to the CCA’s website, “crew members are recruited from Chrysalis, a non-profit program offering employment opportunities to economically disadvantaged and formerly homeless individuals” (CCA About Us). 90% of the BID’s 55 street cleaners and 10-15% of the 65 guards live in Skid Row (Nakano). Street cleaners typically earn about $8 an hour, while guards make a little more.

In his discussion of interdictory space, Stephen Flusty writes that surveillance and physical control, as well as social peripheralization of “undesirables”, function on two levels: “The first component of this process is naturalization, in which surveillant control becomes so deeply embedded in our daily lives that we simply fail to notice it. The second component is ‘quaintification,’ by which forms of surveillant control that are too harsh to fade into the background are symbolically rehabilitated as both unthreatening and even laudatory” (Flusty 660). The BID guards are constantly riding around on their bikes, blending in to the downtown background, yet nevertheless always watching. They’re like a mobile, multi-armed panopticon, always asking people for their ID. They’re “quaintified” by convincing the majority of downtown visitors and residents that they’re there for our protection. The Downtown Center BID has the “Safety Matters: A Visitor’s Common Sense Guide to Safety” on its website This guide tells tourists to: “Pay attention, stay alert and be aware of your surroundings; Carry your purse in front, close to your body, and try not to carry more than you can handle; Never flash your cash or credit cards; Remove your convention badges outside the meeting site; Walk in well-traveled and well-lit places, especially at night; Always lock your car and store all items out of sight, including spare change and cell phones; Report suspicious behavior to the Purple Patrol or LAPD” (CCA Safety). This list is common-sensical to the point of absurdity. Downtown Los Angeles isn’t any different than other cities. But the BID treats it as a zoo, almost cautioning “Don’t feed the homeless”. Because the BID makes Central City seem so dangerous as to warrant a caution, people assume that the BID’s private team of security guards must be there to protect us from those criminals/homeless residents.

In reality, however, the homeless residents need to be protected from the BID officers. Wan writes in 2004 that the guards have been accused of harassing homeless residents, as well as extorting money from street vendors. According to him, the “American Civil Liberties Union and private lawyers filed a class-action lawsuit in 1999 against four downtown improvement districts alleging that district guards had beaten up and falsely imprisoned the homeless in an orchestrated effort to chase them from downtown” (Wan Flak). When I spoke with Kenneth Nakano, Supervisor of Safety Services for the DCBID, I asked him about claims that his guards beat up people or take property. He said that there’s not a high complaint rate and that no officers have been arrested for wrongdoings. Nakano explains the BID as “the way the private sector maintains a clean and safe atmosphere. Our job is to provide deterrence, to observe and report, and to keep up the appearance that the area is safe and clean (italics added). The businesses are our boss. We want to make this an area where people can walk down the street and not be accosted. Where they don’t have to worry about crime. Where they can work, live, and play” (Nakano). He’s obviously trained well, using the BID’s mantra of
“work, live, and play”. This reinforces Flusty’s claim that the BIDs “quaintify” their role in the community.

Nakano also said that he has a “good relationship” with the police. This makes sense since they often work together. In his analysis of the BIDs, Amster cites “Broken Windows” theorists Kelling and Coles, who note that the BIDs have a “uniformed presence that often serves as the eyes and ears of the police, and they are in ‘radio contact with the police, and are trained to report suspicious behavior’” (Amster 210). Christian Parenti (also cited by Amster) asserts that such “private security forces [have] surpassed the cops as the main violators of street peoples’ rights,” yielding a “private security matrix…where rent-a-cops are imbricated into the larger policing project through a delicate division of labor: private forces control interior spaces, aid the police in holding pacified streetscapes, and even launch offenses against nonviolent undesireables” (Amster 210-1). Cara diMassa documented the steam-cleaning efforts of the BIDs and LAPD on July 12, 2006 (the article that Slater cited and Lopez refuted) and wrote that homeless advocates “worry that the effort is a subtle way of pushing the homeless out in favor of additional high-end lofts” (diMassa Shinier). Two such advocates, Jeff Dietrich of the Catholic Worker and Becky Dennison of LA CAN, respond, respectively: "They just don't clean the sidewalks. They take possessions"; "If you see street cleaning in any other neighborhood, you don't see the police presence" (diMassa Shinier). diMassa observes: “The fact that the simple act of cleaning a sidewalk became a political battle underscores just how sensitive the issue of gentrification on skid row has become” (diMassa Shinier). This battle is part of the larger issue of harassment by the LAPD and by private street cleaners and officers.

The American Civil Liberties Union is “seeking to extend a court injunction that would limit the Los Angeles Police Department's ability to search Skid row Residents”, charging that “officers harass and unfairly detain and search homeless people”. (Winton Skid 2007). They argue that the Safer Cities Initiative violates civil rights. The ACLU motion states that police "were engaging in a widespread practice of searching the residents of skid row and ... were arbitrarily stopping, detaining and searching individuals and groups of individuals who appeared to be homeless or to be residents of skid row, without any prior knowledge whether the person was on parole or probation, and without any reasonable suspicion that they were engaged in criminal activity" (Winton Skid 2007). Ramona Ripston, Executive Director of Southern California’s ACLU, wrote in March 2007 that the police are “detaining homeless people for minor infractions such as jaywalking or sitting on the sidewalk, then using those pretexts” for “detaining, handcuffing and going through people's pockets and possessions” (Riptson Police). This type of action by the police strips Skid Row residents of their rights – their status as US citizens, let alone their status as human beings. Don Mitchell refers to sweeps and crackdowns as “pogroms”, while the instigators see themselves as “saviors of cities, saviors of all the ‘ordinary people’ who would like to use urban spaces but simply cannot when they are chockfull of homeless people lying on sidewalks, sleeping in parks, and panhandling them every time they turn a corner” (Mitchell 172). Amster writes that, on the contrary, the homeless “function to preserve public spaces as democratic, spontaneous, and inclusive. They are not the colonizers of public space, but are rather – like the proverbial canary in the coalmine – the immediate victims of its colonization” (Amster 206).
In an effort to wrest public space away from law enforcement and developers and return it to a democratic place – to give a voice to the victims of colonization – I offer Skid Row residents an opportunity to speak. As Skid Row residents are constantly dehumanized, it becomes a political imperative to treat them as humans. The following comments demonstrate how detailed an understanding these people have of the current political situation. They contribute a necessary framework within which to conclude:

I spoke with Damian, black, 40 years old, who’s been homeless for 20 years. His wife had passed a week earlier. When I first asked for his opinion, he said “Don’t matter what my opinion is ‘cause ain’t no one gonna listen”. When I told him that I was going to publish his thoughts, he opened up: “The lofts are cool but they doin it the wrong way. They making us move. That way (as he points East). I know they’re putting millions into it but they should let the homeless move in there too” (Damian).

Earl Louis is 57 years old, but he looks much older. He’s a black veteran and told me that a lot of people in Skid Row are veterans. We spoke at his tent on Towne and 5th, one of the last encampments around. The day before, LAPD had come and kicked his shopping basket over. He says, “We know we homeless, I don’t know why they wanna remind us. You tryna tell us we came from the dirt. And I don’t think that. We ain’t come in this world for anything but give us freedom. It was a rough day yesterday, for the homeless” (Louis). He’s been in Skid Row for 15 years, on the streets for two-and-a-half. His friend William Jefferson comes over – he’s been out there for 4 years. They’ve slept next to each other and watched out for each other this whole time. They buy each other food and offer friendship. William asks: “Why are they doing this? The federal government can make them build houses. We been payin taxes” (Jefferson). Earl: “They putting in expensive lofts. They say LA gotta be cleaned up, to make this a million dollar property. From Main to Alameda [Skid Row]. Everyone down here – they know that” (Louis). William: “How’s this area gonna be a couple years from now? What are they supposed to do with us? I’m on GR and I’m handicapped. I make $221/mo. Can’t buy me no hotel room. They can have that. Fuck the government and fuck the city, that’s bullshit. It’s common sense – they wanna move us out. Givin us money, they spend all they money buyin us lunch every day, but won’t give us nowhere to stay. I don’t want a damn thang to take care of me. How can I get it myself? They want me to rob someone? They ain’t helping nobody. I’m a person. I don’t have a grudge – but I know one damn thang: somebody ain’t doin what they supposed to. They break the law by arresting our ass. There’s no law that says the muthafuckas can do what they do. They can feed us, but they won’t sleep us” (Jefferson). When William said “feed”, I heard “beat”. That’s just as accurate.

James, a black man age 52, who lives at the LA Mission and used to work for Chrysalis says: “Everybody’s not a criminal – that’s bullshit. Not everyone sells dope, uses dope, or commit crimes. They look at those people and take it out on all the rest. Some don’t wanna work and some do. A lot of jobs are out in the suburbs. They mostly hiring Mexicans. They don’t hire no blacks. Gotta be racial or something. They here illegally. We citizens and can’t get jobs. This country’s been racist against blacks. We helped build
the country. We’ve been in the service, fought for the country. The Vietnamese, the Chinese – foreigners, you don’t see them homeless. They get loans – we can’t get no loans. It’s 2007” (James). When I ask about what’s going on Downtown, he asks “Fucked up. Why are they allowin it to happen? They should open up more places. It takes 8 months to a year to get a room in an SRO. It don’t make sense, man. They don’t have enough housing. Everyday, people don’t want to sleep on the street – a lot of people want housing. $100 mil for the homeless – it’s takin a long time for them to decide what they gonna do with it. It’s just talk. They talk to you in any kind of way. Talk down to you cuz you down and out. But you still a man – you not fucked up” (James).

I spoke with a black woman - Linda, age 58, at an outdoor food kitchen. She says: “The police is being hard on people. I think they beside theyselves. Harassin people. The homeless don’t have no rights. They’re not trying to help us. Especially blacks. It’s racism. Rich white folks comin in here and takin over. Trying to move the homeless out. Everything is loft apartments now. The city is taking over. They should be making housing. Pushing people under the 6th St. bridge. The police been telling people they’ll put them in hotels. And then, when they apply, they see they warrants and they put them in jail. You can’t sit down or they run up on you. It’s getting very tiresome. If you go to USC County Hospital, the first thing– when they know you from Skid Row – they think you there because of drugs. That’s insulting, especially for blacks. There are places of sober living, but they take all your money. And they’re not even sober. It’s a rip-off. The hotels are full. If people are down here, it’s not because they want to. The police harass us, but we have nowhere to go. It’s especially hard for women because there’s no places for women to take a shower. In the mission, they treat you like dirt. Like a prisoner. And there’s police brutality – they pushed a man against the wall. He was doing what they were saying but it was uncalled for. They mess with people in a forceful way for no reason” (Linda).

A man who goes by “Big Man” said: “They pushin the people here to other neighborhoods. But the other neighborhoods don’t want crackheads and homeless in they neighborhoods. Then they neighborhoods would be more violent, have more dope. What I think is that here, there’s more rich people and there will be more robberies. Where you see the tents at? They kickin everyone out. Most of them are Anglos coming in. Soon, it’ll be just like it is up on Hill Street. It’ll be that way here” (Big Man). I wonder if the people living on Bunker Hill, when those changes were happening, said the same thing about it becoming like the West Side. He continues, saying that “most of this area is black. And there gon be resentment. What should we do? We could do a panel of the loft people and the people that are already here. Work out some sort of solution” (Big Man).

Maui, a black male downtown resident and artist whom I spoke with on 5th and Gladys told me that “they wiped this street clean. They instituted a policy over the last 5 to 6 months. The corporations, the police, the rich white folks moving down here and the business community, they’ve coalesced” (Maui).
Dogon, a 45-year-old black man and organizer with LA CAN, had the following to say: “If they’re putting money into new development, they should put an equal amount in the part of the community that needs to be built up. Police shouldn’t get rid of people because that’s a slap-ass excuse. The city should do outreach to see what people need done. The police can’t do it – it’s not their job. They’re not social workers; they’re not the Housing Department. When people have an addiction, they put ‘em in jail. I was in jail for a coke addiction. When I got out, I was still addicted and I went back. Then I went to a 90-day treatment program, and I’ve been sober for four-and-a-half years. They just want to clean up the neighborhood so developers see they’re doing a good job and they’ll put money in. They harass you to the point where you’ll leave” (Dogon).
To Make a Solution…

The colonization process has been fairly successful so far. According to a poster sponsored by the Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness entitled “Walk of Shame”, there have been 6113 arrests, 6744 citations, 4208 felony arrests, 1727 misdemeanor arrests between August 2006 and March 2007. There were only 303 referrals to “streets or services”, while 101 people were admitted, and only 7 graduated. 6500 warrants were checked but only 165 arrests were made based on those checks (Tent City poster). That’s a lot of victims. The crackdowns have apparently “increased the number of tents on skid row at night but reduced the district's homeless population during the day, according to interviews and Los Angeles Police Department statistics,” writes Richard Winton in October 2006 (Winton Skid 2006). According to this article, people have been moving further east past San Pedro Street, north near Olvera Street or Chinatown, and as far south as 12th St. (Winton Skid 2006). Venice police apparently claim a modest rise in the homeless population, and many cite the LA River as the encampment site du jour (Winton Skid 2006). Winston claims that it’s unclear whether the crackdown was a factor in former Skid Row residents’ move west (Winton Skid 2006). Almost all of those that used to live in Skid Row are either in other parts of the city or in jail. Los Angeles County Sheriff, Lee Baca, is aware of this tragic paradox, saying that his 20,000-bed jail is the largest homeless shelter and psychiatric hospital in the city” (LeDuff). Councilwoman Jan Perry still has the gall to claim that “the LAPD has never swept the streets of downtown Los Angeles clear of the homeless, nor has it tried. But some attempt to restore order is necessary” (Perry ACLU).

Part of Perry’s attempt to “restore order” has been, according to Carla Rivera, her suggestion that “outlying communities must shoulder more of the burden of caring for homeless people who originate in their neighborhoods but end up downtown (Rivera California). Many forces in the Los Angeles power structure agree that one of the ways to deal with homelessness is to disperse services. Rivera writes that the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) “put a hold on awarding new grants to social service projects downtown to discourage further concentration of such programs” (Rivera CA). Their solution to Skid Row is apparently to dismantle Skid Row, opting instead for spreading social services around the county. Strategies of moving the homeless out of Skid Row seem slightly too in line with the whims of big developers and business advocacy groups. Kate Bartolo, Senior Vice President of Development for Kor Group, who owns the Santa Fe Lofts, said to Cara diMassa that “downtown's rising property values require the city to reexamine where low-income housing should be located”; “she suggested that the city consider building housing for the poor farther east in the warehouse district, where it would be less expensive” (diMassa Crowded). Not only would it be less expensive, but it would allow developers to turn Skid Row into more luxury lofts.

This plan has been affecting not only homeless residents, but business owners as well. I spoke with Yvonne Song, who’s been running a family-owned business in the Toy District since 1989. In September, she had some complaints of homeless people causing problems in front of her store. In April, after massive sweeps supposedly “cleaned” the area, I asked if things have changed. She responded that “There’s less of them, but I’ve been attacked twice in the past month. The homeless people are more violent,” attesting to the fact that the sweeps don’t actually do what they claim to. They don’t make the
streets safer, but only serve to remove unwanted individuals. Song says that the “on-beats are great. It’s the ones upstairs I have a problem with. The Councilwoman’s trying to turn this area into Manhattan. All the business owners are scared. During the holiday season, which accounts for half my year’s income, they put a “No Stopping” sign in front of the store. There’s no displays allowed in our front windows. They’ll convert this all to luxury lofts” (Song). Rather than support the businesses in Council District 9, Perry has been working to evict them. For once, business owners and low-income individuals have something in common. Tracey Lovejoy, Estela López’s predecessor at the Central City East Association hinted at what she would like to see happen when she said that “real estate costs are so high that it’s probably the last time we’ll see a big development devoted to social services. In 50 years, who knows what this community will look like” (Rivera California).

What Skid Row will look like 50 years from now is precisely the question we must ask in order to conclude. In looking to the future in this way, I don’t aim to offer any solid recommendations, but rather a series of musings and considerations. As far as 50 years: Neil Smith and Peter Williams predict a change “toward a new central city dominated by middle-class residential areas, a concentration of professional, administrative and managerial employment, and the upmarket recreational and entertainment facilities that cater to this population (as well as to tourists). Though relatively central enclaves of working-class residents will surely remain, the momentum of the present restructuring points to a more peripheralized working class, in geographical terms” (Williams/Smith 217). Loft-resident Eric has a similar point of view: “There’s no way downtown can contain itself in the way its been. It’s horizontal, sprawled like crazy, left as a black hole. Now they’re realizing that wasn’t the smartest thing to do. We’re gonna take it back. Affordable housing will disappear since it’s been so artificial for the last 20 years. It’s gotta change. Poor people will move to the outskirts. They’re building services in other areas, spreading the community around, so they see this isn’t the only way to live. Skid Row is going to go in 10 years. It will probably still be called Skid Row, but this will go away (he motions around us). Skid Row is in danger because of the Old Bank District. It will be pushed further east, and then will disperse” (Eric).

If those excluded from mainstream society continue to be pushed to the margins of Los Angeles, and “revitalization” spreads throughout Skid Row, Los Angeles will undergo exactly this change. In other words, we’re looking at a future where metropolitan areas in the US greatly resemble those in Europe and South America: the wealthy concentrated in the inner-city, and the poor relegated to the outskirts, what in Brasil we call “os suburbios” (which means something very different from the English “suburbs”). Maybe we’ll even see an increase of “favelas” (“shantytowns”). I’m tempted to see the future not as one of progress as many would like, but as one of cyclical trends. If this is the case, then the United States might soon be known as the Third World (as China, Japan, and India continue to develop as world powers), the result of neglecting the poor for years and allowing the rich to push through this classist geographical change.

There’s a few different ways we can approach this theory. One is to see it as inevitable, allowing the wealthy to occupy the center and the poor to reside in the suburbs. If we take this option, however, allowing the homeless to remain so is not a choice – for that would be too close to a fascist survival of the fittest where the poor die off. If we support, or at least are complicit in, an economic-spatial transformation, we
must assure that those on the edge of town at least have their needs met. First of all, we’d have to reject the current policy of making jails a form of “affordable housing”. Law enforcement is meant to prevent crime, not take on social services. According to Ramona Ripston of the ACLU, “New York started to reduce homelessness only when it decided that an enforcement-only approach to the problem was inefficient and expensive” (Ripston Police). Steve Lopez writes that although 50 new police officers have been sent to Skid Row, fewer than 10 county mental health outreach workers have been added. “Even if there were more of the latter, however, there’d still be a critical shortage of mental health services and proven, modern drug and alcohol rehab programs” (Lopez Paltry). Not only does a cure-all jailing need to be replaced by “affordable housing,” but it should be replaced by “supportive housing”, as well. That is, housing with mental health services and rehab programs built in. We’d have to be holistic in our solutions.

So far, the City of LA has allocated $100 million for permanent supportive housing over the next two years from the Housing Trust Fund. $50 million of this has already been spent on 5 project totaling 274 units (Osborn). $129 million is allocated for 2000 Section 8 vouchers from the city’s Housing Authority to help homeless individuals and families afford rent (Osborn). Mayor Villaraigosa proposed $1.5 million general fund resources for homelessness, while $4.6 million will be used for shelter and outreach in support of the Safer City Initiative. Another $100 million was allocated by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in April 2006 for the establishment of five centers across the county that would provide temporary shelter and social services for transients, in an effort to reduce the concentration of homeless services in Skid Row (diMassa LA County). State money, resulting from the passage of Propositions 63, will help homeless mentally disabled people, and Proposition IC’s housing and emergency shelter trust fund will slightly add to affordable housing (Blasi 16). While this is a start, Torie Osborn, the Mayor’s Advisor on Homelessness, told Times writer Steve Lopez that “getting the money into the pipeline and building housing and other infrastructure takes about three years” (Lopez Paltry). Lopez responds that “she may be right, but as things stand, there isn't enough money in that pipeline and no permanent source of funding” (Lopez Paltry). More importantly, most of this money is for temporary shelters. While I can’t argue that being on the street is better than staying in a temporary shelter, we could do better than that. It’s not very humane to give people a place to sleep that they don’t know they’ll have the next day.

There is also the Bring LA Home plan written by LAHSA and the LA Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness. The document, which “included over 200 specific recommendations but no consensus around a strategy for action,” “fell victim to service-provider, business-sector, and public-agency politics” (Blasi 15). The plan was encouraged by the Bush Administration which directed localities to develop 10-year plans to end homelessness. The President, of course, wasn’t willing to contribute any money to the estimated 10-year cost of $10 billion (Blasi 15). Osborn told me that Bring LA Home “is not a plan. Real 10-year plans will be developed” across the region (Osborn). She’s already started one for Skid Row.

The Inter-University Consortium Against Homelessness, composed primarily of Jennifer Wolch, Michael Dear, Gary Blasi, Dan Flanig, Paul Tepper, and Paul Koegel with Daniel Warshowsky, released a research report challenging the city’s current homeless care system, which, they write, “amounts to a massive exercise in shuffling
people around the city, as if they were pawns on a chessboard, in a game without end” (Blasi 19). Our current homeless policy treats humans like mice, scurrying to wherever the food is (the only good thing about this is it gives journalists good language for essentializing and dehumanizing the homeless). The Consortium’s aim is to “stop the manufacture of homelessness; close off the flow of homeless people to the streets of Skid Row; and assist those already homeless to get off the streets permanently” (Blasi 19). According to the Research Report, the city will make progress on homelessness “only when aggressive efforts have been made to coordinate income maintenance, human services and affordable housing programs”, none of which has been attempted by the city or county of Los Angeles.

On January 31, 2007, the Inter-University Consortium Against Homelessness released the following 5-point plan based on coordinating income maintenance, human services, and affordable housing:

1. “Create economic opportunities for homeless people. Help homeless people help themselves by generating jobs for them” (Blasi 20). They suggest public works projects such as tree planting and highway construction.
2. “Prevent homelessness through public assistance and affordable housing” (Blasi 20). This includes: providing enough public assistance so that recipients can afford housing; expanding the preservation and development of affordable housing; increased education and job training; strengthening “rent stabilization, enforcing condominium conversion laws, and responding creatively” to provide more housing; inclusionary zoning, which requires that all new housing developments include affordable units; policies which assure there won’t be a net loss in housing; purchasing more SROs; conversion of short-term emergency facilities into permanent supportive housing (Blasi 21). Moreover, they suggest a Skid Row land trust, a homeless housing trust fund for which would be funded and accessed by every community in the region.
3. “Build supportive housing” (Blasi 21). Supportive housing should offer stable living arrangements, where people aren’t under threat of displacement, and individualized care for mental disabilities, substance abuse, and health problems (Blasi 21). The authors demonstrate the cost effectiveness of this type of housing as well: it costs $30/night for supportive housing, while it’s $37 for a shelter, $64 for a jail cell, $85 for a prison cell, $607 for a mental hospital, and $1474 for a general hospital. They insist, however, that more important than cost are “increased quality of life for formerly homeless people, as well as enhanced neighborhood amenities for residents and business now that the homeless are housed” (Blasi 22).
4. “Prevent the influx of homeless people onto the streets of Skid Row” (Blasi 22). This point criticizes the zoning policies of certain municipalities which make it possible for some neighborhoods to keep out low-income housing and essential public services. The authors advocate for “confronting the pervasive NIMBYism that characterizes communities and jurisdictions across the region” through proactive education, and enacting laws and regulations which would prevent neighborhoods from rejecting service centers (Blasi 22).
5. “Take political and social responsibility”. This point encourages those involved in politics to “be willing to spend the political capital necessary to end
homelessness. Long established divisions of political authority can no longer be used as an excuse for inaction” (Blasi 23). This point advises giving LAHSA more power and encouraging “all cities in the county to take a fair share of responsibility,” especially those that would rather talk about “how to keep homeless people out” (Blasi 23). Lastly, residents must demand action.

The Consortium’s recommendations are certainly needed in Los Angeles. Supposedly, they’ve been meeting with various city/county/state officials, and I hope they continue to, in order to give these officials an effective vision.

Despite the usefulness and accuracy of these points, they’re nothing revolutionary. Community activists and homeless advocates have been calling for the city to enact these changes for a long time. The above solutions aren’t even new in an academic context. DiBlasio and Belcher argue in 1990’s Helping the Homeless: Where Do We Go From Here? that “we as a society need to improve everyone’s ability to participate in the economic mainstream of society” through “developing higher incomes as opposed to simply housing the poor” (Belcher 37-8). They combine a strategy for affordable housing with a strategy for homelessness, suggesting to “lower the cost of home ownership, increase home ownership assistance to more Americans through the use of credits and not deductions, and create government-subsidized, low-income housing for those who are unable to purchase a home” (Belcher100). DiBlasio and Belcher argue against any “naïve” attempts at “broad sweeping changes that significantly undermine the structures of capitalism” because, they claim, “capitalism has enabled this nation to prosper and develop a standard of living, for most, that provides comparatively high worldwide standards of employment, housing, and healthcare” (Belcher 37-8). I’ll address this point later.

Although the recent Consortium Report outlines DiBlasio and Belcher’s solutions in more detail, their formulation isn’t that different from past solutions. In fact, Consortium members Wolch and Dear themselves saw these same solutions advocated for 20 years ago. They document the following in Malign Neglect: Prior to 1987, the city of Los Angeles “had frozen Skid Row SRO rents and halted hotel demolitions for six months, and the moratorium on demolitions was extended repeatedly” (Dear 154). That year, the city adopted a policy that “outlined a fifteen-point Homeless Action Plan, which directed administrators to consider the development of a set of ‘regional service centers for the homeless’; supported the expansion of job training for the homeless; urged federal, state, and county governments to develop comprehensive homelessness policies; and suggested that the county increase its commitment to GR” (Dear 154). Obviously, none of this was actually done. Also in 1987, Wolch and Dear write, “Los Angeles began regular sweeps of Skid Row streets to eliminate encampments. The city declared a state of emergency in the downtown, claiming that the growing numbers of homeless people created a threat to local businesses and residents” (Dear 164). I bet they’re living in déjà vu these days. This recurrence of history begs two questions: (1) Can we trace the socio-economic similarities between now and 1987 that could possibly create eerily similar conditions? (2) Can an analysis of these similarities give us any insight into what should be done differently this time around?

For now, I move on with my critique. Both DiBlasio and Belcher’s and Wolch and Dear et al.’s ideas integrate income maintenance, something left out of Villaraigosa’s plan. Cheerleading for the inclusion of homeless folk into the “economic mainstream of
society,” despite its importance, could be quite dangerous. Many say, while discussing affordable housing, that anyone working 40+ hours a week deserves “affordable” housing, i.e. should spend no more than 30% of their income on housing. Of course they do. That should be obvious. But it implies that those not working, not participating in the economy, do not deserve housing. But seeking to integrate people into that economy as a criteria for housing will continue the connection between employment and housing, just no longer for those that were able to attain a job. I don’t mean to say that we shouldn’t encourage and provide jobs for homeless individuals. We just shouldn’t do it so they can “earn their keep”. The main reason for people formerly on the streets to work is to build confidence and hope. We can’t convince ourselves that self-esteem is accomplished solely through participating in the economy. I doubt working for the CCEA, cleaning the streets for $8/hr, is a boost to anyone’s confidence.

The Consortium’s inclusion in its list of “political and social responsibility” is essential. Policy recommendations are useless unless there is an organizing campaign and plan of action to force them through. Skid Row resident and artist Maui told me: “We must enact a comprehensive policy – not based on single issues. We must allow room for everyone to exist together. But policy is just words on a paper – but what are the marching orders?” (Maui). The closest thing to comprehensive marching orders is the recent efforts of the Southern California Association for Non-Profit Housing and Housing LA to organize a regional campaign for housing, including organizations from across the county. This group embarked on City Hall with tents and banners on Thursday, April 12, demanding that the Mayor “put his money where his mouth is”. The demands, written by the Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness consisted of the following:

“Overall: Full implementation and funding of the Bring LA Home framework and create a comprehensive campaign to prevent and end homelessness on a regional basis.

10 Point Plan:
1. LA City immediately declares a human and legal right to housing;
2. Stop criminalizing homeless people;
3. Immediately stop the “Safer Cities Initiative” in the downtown area; stop the LAPD sweeps;
4. Stop displacing homeless people to other parts of town and offer housing and substance abuse and mental health treatment to people in need;
5. Make 500 permanent housing units for people with incomes under $15,000 available in each of the 15 L.A. city council districts by April 2008, for a total of 7,500 units;
6. Fully fund the $100 million housing trust fund immediately with a permanent, dedicated source of revenue to preserve existing housing and expand mixed-income housing;
7. Mayor immediately appoints a Deputy Mayor of Housing & Homelessness whose job is to create an LA City Implementation plan to prevent and end homelessness and work with other cities and county to have this fit into a regional plan;
8. Mayor immediately appoints a “Yes in My Backyard” Siting Coordinator to work with the Neighborhood Councils to site programs and housing for homeless people;
9. Mayor convenes, in conjunction with the LA County Board of Supervisors, an 88 City Summit on our regional homeless crisis by the December 21, 2007, Homeless Memorial Day;
10. Mayor immediately convenes the Mayor’s Business Team and the LA City Workforce Investment Board to create employment opportunities, i.e. career-oriented jobs at living wages, for homeless people with the goal of creating 5,000 jobs for homeless people by April 2008” (Tent City Demands)

Of course, demands made to the Mayor’s Office must be met with rigorous political follow-up by the stakeholders. We can’t expect him to give in immediately, but this is certainly a start.

A human and legal right to housing is essential. Although it’s only one more phrase without a specific action, it’s a necessary starting point, because it morally links us to a proactive stance on housing. This should be the least the Mayor does.

Of course, an end to police sweeps and the criminalization of homelessness should also be done immediately. It is undoubtedly unjust to arrest people for not having a place to sleep other than the streets – especially when it is the government itself that has benefited, or at least been complicit in, these persons’ situation in the first place.

The other points, although imperative, are somewhat more difficult to accomplish. The Mayor claims that there’s not enough funding. According to the Consortium, “the annual cost of sheltering and sustaining every homeless person in Los Angeles County” is “approximately $1.5 billion” compared to our current spending of only $600 million (Con Rep 23). “New York spends $1.7 billion each year on services and housing for its (much smaller) homeless population,” “keeps the city on a pace to build 6,000 supportive housing units annually. The city of Los Angeles has roughly one-third as much money and roughly one-sixth as many supportive housing units in the planning stages” (Lopez Paltry). Part of the problem is that local governments are forced to beg, and fight with other local governments, for money from the federal government. This becomes even more difficult when the federal government, i.e. the Bush Administration has taken a decidedly anti-homeless, anti-affordable housing, anti-social services stance. There isn’t enough money for housing and healthcare when we’ve spent over $400 billion on the Iraq War. Local government must, therefore, search for funding locally. One thing that can’t help our coffers is the tremendous amount of tax breaks and subsidies for massive “redevelopment” and “revitalization” projects. If the city put their priorities in order, they’d make sure to tax those that can afford it to provide services to those that need it. In the current environment of developers flocking towards projects downtown, the city should leverage its “stick-and-carrot” capabilities. While an economic study of possible funding for ending homelessness is beyond the purview of this paper (and beyond the purview of my mental abilities, although I suggest that someone with that knowledge attempts it), I suggest the following: the city should tell large developers and businesses that, if they want the streets “clean” for their projects, they can pay for it. If the power is on the city’s side to give developers the go-ahead, then we can impose higher taxes on those desperate to partake in Downtown development (or development anywhere).

The other question we must address with both the Consortium’s Report and the Tent City Demands is their advocacy of a “Yes In My Backyard” policy, which includes the five regional service centers Villaraigosa promised. Cynthia Cho and Cara diMassa wrote in April 2006 that Los Angeles County was looking at a small homeless service
center in West Covina “as a possible site for building one of five large homeless stabilization facilities to reduce the concentration of the homeless in downtown L.A.’s skid row” (Cho West Covina). A regionalist strategy requires local government to spend an amount of political capital it’s not used to. In response to the possibility of a facility in West Covina, the city’s mayor, Steve Herfert, complained that the county doesn’t “consult the cities at all. There have been no discussions about this site becoming a site for the county” (Cho West Covina). In order pursue any sort of regionalism, all governments involved must commit to communicating with each other – something that hasn’t been done before. Osborn told me that each of the five centers has found a home and that Villaraigosa is supporting Senator Gil Cedillo’s bill which would encourage all cities to develop homeless services (Osborn).

The more important question, however, is how one goes about “reducing the concentration of the homeless” in Skid Row. It, of course, makes sense for people to find whatever services they need in their own neighborhoods, especially in light of the fact that homeless individuals throughout the county are currently sent to Skid Row. More services throughout the county will be good at dealing with homelessness in those cities, and not overburdening Skid Row. The problem with this strategy, however, is that people currently in Skid Row will most likely be sent all over the place. As mentioned in the previous section, this regional strategy will have the effect of dismantling the Skid Row community. And it is a “community” for many, despite the claims and fears of a white supremacist ideology which looks down on this area. Many who have found community and roots in Skid Row will now be forced to go to other areas of the city to obtain the help they want. Becky Dennison says: “You can spread people around all you want and they’ll still be homeless. People aren’t here just because of housing. They’re here for community” (White Main Street).

A regional strategy is particularly scary in how easily it leads to racist policies. Massey and Denton describe that local “redevelopment” authorities in the 1950s and 60s, in order to qualify for federal funding, had to demonstrate that an adequate supply of replacement housing would be built for those displaced (Massey 55). For this replacement housing, planners constructed massive high-density public housing projects. Since white politicians chronically blocked these projects from their neighborhoods, they were typically built within black neighborhoods (Massey 56). My worry is that this will occur in today’s Los Angeles. Massey and Denton write that “urban renewal almost always destroyed more housing than it replaced” – it only “shifted the problems of blight, crime, and instability from areas adjacent to elite white neighborhoods to locations deeper inside the black ghetto” (Massey 56). The CRA seems to have learned from past mistakes, outlining in the “Development Guidelines and Controls for Residential Hotels in the City Center and Central Industrial Redevelopment Project Areas” that replacement units for converted hotels must be built within a certain distance from those hotels. Aside from those immediately displaced from SROs, the city and county are not likely to build housing for people within the current boundaries of Skid Row. This area is in too high demand for developers. It is likely that new housing will be built in areas like South Central, Compton, and Lynwood, where, unlike places like West Covina or Pasadena, political power is too weak to prevent any unwanted housing from coming in. In today’s environment, current trends of urban renewal are likely to repeat past mistakes.
Massey and Denton would reject the policy of moving poor black folks into other poor black communities as being racist. A look at their solution to concentrated poverty among the black population, however, imposes another set of racist policy possibilities. The recommendation they give in American Apartheid for solving racist and classist segregation is simply desegregation. They suggest removing people from a majority “black community” and relocating them as a minority in a mostly “white community”, so the black people can do as well financially (and as well culturally?) as the white people. A regional strategy of dispersing homeless individuals throughout the county, even giving them permanent housing, will certainly accomplish this. Along with their primary solution of increased federal support for investigating and prosecuting discrimination, Massey and Denton call for raising “educational levels,” improving public schools, creating employment, reducing crime, and strengthening the family (Massey 220). These policies would help black citizens conform to “white middle-class American” “values of self-reliance, hard work, sobriety, and sacrifice” and decrease the problems of the ghetto (Massey 166).

In acknowledging critiques of their claim, Massey and Denton quote Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, who write that integration is based on the racist notion that black people must move into a white neighborhood to have decent housing (Massey 215). They present ideas (Francis Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, David Danzig) that indigenous strength and social and political institutions must be built prior to integration so they can claim that these strategies leave “blacks in a position of permanent political dependency and vulnerability to economic dislocation” (Massey 216). In reality, it is exactly the racist notion of integration (integration is a laudable aim eventually, but that is a different paper topic) that leaves blacks in the position of political dependency and economic dislocation. Norma Nager critiques “neighborhood organizations” for demanding housing from “the same institutions which have exacerbated the housing crisis for their own benefit and whose long term interests are best served by transforming the community into a white professional community” (Nager 385). Organizations which depend on a white supremacist, capitalist society for concessions, will undoubtedly settle for 21st Century “housing projects” on the outskirts of town, while allowing communities to be colonized by the white supremacist, capitalist interests of that society.
… Takes Revolution

Until this point, I have been analyzing solely economic solutions to the “housing crisis”. But one of the aims of this paper outlined in the introduction is to equally consider economic and cultural considerations. A critique of the previously outlined possibilities illuminates the fact that a dispersal of poor, black folks throughout the county is tantamount to cultural erasure. Just as the colonizers have a unifying culture and community, so too do the colonized – and I’m not referring to an “underclass” culture of mental illness and substance abuse. Any solutions coming from racist, classist institutions will inevitably ignore any cultural factors. One possible solution to this would be to build up the community from within – in our case, for and by Skid Row residents. Blauner writes that due to the “dehumanization inherent in racial oppression,” “a concern with personal dignity and manhood is central to anticolonial and antiracist movements” (Blauner 42). With a slight adjustment of “manhood” to “personhood”, I argue that concerns of dignity and personhood are essential to an anticolonial/antiracist struggle. This struggle, with an emphasis on cultural considerations, could consist of building up the community from within.

Ideally, wealthier members of the community would pay to build it up. One example of this is presented by Anthony Asadulla Samad in The Sentinel. In February 2003, he describes Leimert Park’s “African centered music, dance, poetry, art, culture shops, festivals and most importantly, businesses owned by people of color (mostly African American)” which provide a “gathering place for entertainment, a rallying place for controversy and empowerment, a growing place for cultural wisdom, a spiritual place for candlelight vigils in time of mourning and prayer, and a place of economic opportunity for those who desire to offer cultural wares to the people” (Samad Political). Lately the park is facing the same “enhancement of property values” and outside “desire for commercial success” as other Los Angeles neighborhoods, writes Samad, “Leimert Park Village is being hijacked ‘from the people’” (Samad Political). He advises that “the people” can save this park through an economic commitment – “the best way to control the block is to buy the block” (Samad Political). Samad writes in another piece that there are at least “four millionaires in the village” – “That's how you save Leimert” (Samad Save). In 2004, for instance, “Tavis Smiley proposed a three story office building that would have not only brought his show taping to Leimert Park everyday (His show intro was going to be "Live from Leimert Park...), it would have brought retail, office space, a roof-top garden restaurant (with jazz and comedy)-and would have brought Eso Won Books to Leimert Park. It would have been totally Black owned” (Samad Save). The funding was already in place, and “okay”s were given from the Mayor’s Office, the CRA and CDD, and most of the merchants. Apparently Councilman Bernard Parks killed the deal because of some petty personal issues (Samad Save).

Unfortunately, this solution doesn’t work too well in Skid Row, where Tom Gilmore (and the others that followed) already discovered that you could control the block by buying it. And while Leimert Park has some millionaires that are possibly interested in supporting black-owned businesses, Skid Row, unfortunately, has none. Because the majority of Skid Row residents are black (I don’t mean to neglect the residents of different backgrounds who are also oppressed, but the issue of race is very important here), I would argue that the wealthy members of the larger black community have an obligation to show solidarity and help out financially. This, however, is too
optimistic. While people of color are by no means free in this white supremacist society, the majority have bought the rhetoric of integration enough to distance themselves from those living in the SROs or on the streets of Skid Row. As Skid Row residents are forced further south, it is not uncommon to hear black people living in South Central or nearby suburbs exclaim: “Well, we don’t want them here!”

One possibility, then, is to inject these cultural considerations into the more economic solutions proposed by government. If the city and county commit to providing supportive housing, this housing should be controlled by the communities affected. Permanent supportive housing for the formerly homeless would have to be done very carefully. It couldn’t be run by government employees with no knowledge of the residents’ culture and community. A culturally responsible program would consist of government turning over housing facilities to organizations like LA CAN (although CAN is nowhere near powerful enough for this responsibility) to find and train members of the community to live and work together in the facilities. This seems to be the only way to develop “personal responsibility and personhood” among those who have been dehumanized and oppressed.

As long as we’re proposing ideal solutions without much possibility of fruition or any strategy of attainment (I’m including the Inter-University Consortium and LACEH&H’s proposals here), I suggest that we dismantle the current economic system. I have mainly addressed homelessness in this conclusion. As we have seen, it is somewhat possible to end homelessness within the capitalist system. What this paper is fundamentally about, however, is gentrification and displacement. If we only focus on “housing the homeless”, we elide the deeper problem of why people are homeless in the first place. It is necessary to radically critique gentrification and displacement, forms of oppression which are inherently tied to a system of capital accumulation and a culture of putting profit and property rights before people and human rights. Peter Williams and Neil Smith assert in their conclusion to Gentrification of the City that the “only defense against gentrification is the ‘decommodification of housing’”, a phrase which they attribute to Achtenburg and Marcuse. They continue: “decent housing and decent neighborhoods ought to be a right, not a privilege. That of course is unlikely to be achieved through a series of reforms; rather, it will take a political restructuring even more dramatic than the social and geographical restructuring we now see. Only then will it be appropriate to talk about social renaissance” (Italics added) (Williams/Smith 222). Social renaissance is much more than turning low-income neighborhoods into “revitalized” wealthy ones. A true renaissance would rob all neighborhoods of a low-income/wealthy distinction, and create vitality out of all that live there.

Hartman writes that “ownership and marketing of real estate is the oldest, most hallowed form of capital accumulation” and that government is too fond of the “private profit system” to institute fundamental reforms (Hartman 12). The problem with reform is that it relies on false notions of progress. Incremental steps do not work in this case. We can’t have a situation where more people have housing, but we do not see it as a human right. We can’t propose a 10-year plan to end homelessness when we’ve been practicing its creation since 1492. When diBlasio and Belcher write that it is “naïve” not to believe that “capitalism has enabled this nation to prosper”, they are the naïve ones. Capitalism has certainly enabled some to prosper – at the expense of others.
In analyzing the fight against internal colonialism, Blauner writes that these “others” (i.e. the women, workers, queer, etc.) who have been “exploited, manipulated, or otherwise controlled in a capitalist society” and even those invested in a racial system (but not necessarily other aspects of the hegemonic power structure) are interested in “a social order with at least a minimum of solidarity and community, and a system of cultural values with a modicum of integrity” (44). The only way to end a system based on racism, colonialism, and capitalist exploitation, the very system that produces gentrification, is to join together and stand against it.

In the current context, where development-induced displacement (DID) is occurring internationally at a rapid rate, we must join together on a worldwide scale. Much of the discourse on DID is focused on the international level. Due to its First-World status, and despite the hideous realities of New Orleans, Skid Row, and the three cities Fullilove documents, displacement within the US is excluded from this discourse. In order to enact radical solidarity with the rest of the world, those writing about and fighting against displacement in the US must include ourselves in the discourse of “development-induced displacement,” as this is exactly what we’re experiencing.

As part of the violence we must reign upon “displacement,” we must also interrogate “development.” Displacement only occurs because of those forms of “development” which put material wealth above human wealth. We must fight for a human wealth definition of development. For Dolores Koenig, who writes specifically about Development-Induced Displacement in the international realm, an alternative definition of development would include: “increasing the availability and utility of economic resources; environmental sustainability, with equitable access across generations; respect for basic human rights; increasing equity between affected groups and other national groups, as well as among the different groups within affected populations; increasing local autonomy and control; improving people’s ability to influence national institutions” (Koenig 105). Fullilove suggests that we view displacement within a “human rights framework [which] would lead us to conclude, without equivocation, that systems that house the rich in splendor at the cost of putting the poor in squalor are unjust systems” (Fullilove 198). In creating a community-oriented version of development, she turns to Michel Cantal-Dupart’s efforts to “link beauty and justice”. She translates his work thusly: (1) We must acknowledge the resources present in any community; (2) respect the history and culture behind a certain community; (3) break the cycle of disinvestment and downward decay; (4) and allow people the freedom of movement (Fullilove 199-209).

In 1966, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) into The International Bill of Human Rights (United Nations). The Covenants were ratified in 1976 by member nations, including the United States, and the Bill “took on the force of international law” (United Nations). These covenants are the two main treaties that deal with general human rights protection. Article 11(1) of the ICESCR provides the following: “The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential
importance of international co-operation based on free consent” (United Nations 20). Article 12(1) of the ICCPR stipulates that: “Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence” (United Nations 39). Neither treaty includes anything about a right to property. Despite the existence of formal laws, our cultures and ideologies, not to mention our economic actions, must follow. Only when we can learn to value human rights over property rights will there be any long-lasting and deep changes to the travesty of displacement. The right of ALL to housing, food, and healthcare ranks far above the right of SOME to “live, work, and play” in a “revitalized” Downtown.
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Data of Skid Row Homeless Population for the year 1987

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(Taken from a document sponsored by the CRA, published in 1987)

Data of Skid Row Homeless Population for the year 2000

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(Taken from the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority’s 2006 Survey and the 2000 Census)

Appendix B
Area Median Income (per the Department of Housing and Urban Development) = $61,300