

MI BARRIO NO SE VENDE: SOCIAL MOBILIZATION IN A SUNBELT CITY

by

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Abstract

The thesis, “Mi Barrio No Se Vende: Social Mobilization in a Sunbelt City,” is an ethnographic study documenting a soup kitchen’s efforts to combat gentrification in the city of South Tucson, Arizona. This paper examines the genealogy of urban renewal in Tucson, arguing that settler colonial logics continue to structure patterns of state intervention, property investment, and urban development. Time and time again, local government has used the concentration of Mexican American, indigenous, and nonwhite residents as the basis of establishing “blighted” areas, justifying the ongoing racialized dispossession of land. First, via urban renewal, consisting of the complete demolition of entire communities and violent removal of nonwhite residents to “modernize” the city center and currently via private-public partnerships to increase tax revenue and outside investment. Revitalization has slowly begun to take root in the barrios south of downtown Tucson. Local government continues to facilitate redevelopment efforts which are taking place under the veil of “sustainable” development—one which promises to deconcentrate poverty, increase equality, and leave the local milieu intact. Although redevelopment of South Tucson is still in its early stages, it is already apparent that it prioritizes the tastes and lifestyles of new residents and tourists over those of longtime residents. In addition to mounting displacement pressures within the barrio, community members face expulsion from the larger metropolitan area due to a severe lack of affordable housing stock produced through an ongoing process of neoliberal restructuring of subsidized housing in combination with stagnating wages nationwide. In response, the thesis offers recommendations to further community preservation strategies and policy recommendations.

CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION

The Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as the backdrop of this research in which I explore gentrification and housing affordability in South Tucson, Arizona. Residents of this small, working-class neighborhood face physical and cultural displacement by capital investment facilitated by local government. Although the effects of gentrification have only started to become visible, this project has been underway for the better part of a decade, starting with the relocation of the two largest shelters in Pima County.¹ From 2020-2021, I followed the workers at Casa Maria, a local soup kitchen participating in a movement to stop gentrification processes in South Tucson. As the pandemic proceeded, the focus of organizing changed trajectories. When I began volunteering in the soup kitchen and attending meetings in August 2020, the primary concern was centered on the gentrification occurring in and around South Tucson. As the federal eviction moratorium came to an end in summer of 2021, the workers at Casa Maria were being told of increasing evictions and receiving mounting past due utility bill assistance request, the conversation began to gravitate toward topics of affordability and sustainable development. With South Tucson being historically one of the most affordable neighborhoods in the Tucson area, it raised the question of where people would go when they can no longer afford to live in the neighborhood and how to increase affordable housing stock in the area.

¹ The Salvation Army Hospitality House was moved north of downtown in 2015 after serving the community for over 50 years. Three years later, a fire code enforcement which would require the Gospel Rescue Mission to go from 140 beds to 55 beds, forced the shelter to relocate to its current location on South Palo Verde Road in 2019.

South Tucson: A Pueblo Within A City

South Tucson is a small, one square mile city encircled by the City of Tucson. The city is located 70 miles north of the Arizona-Mexican border, on the ancestral lands of the Tohono O’odham. The city’s 5,692 residents fondly refer to it as “Barrio Libre” or the free neighborhood.² This close-knit community is comprised largely of Latinx immigrant and Mexican American families who have lived in South Tucson for generations, many of whom have ancestral roots in Arizona prior to the state’s establishment in 1912. This community has a long history of in-migration and exploitation. Logan (1995) and Sheridan (1986) document the rise of manufacturing in the southwest in the later part of the 19th century, which drew an agrarian labor force to Tucson’s urban barrios in search of employment.³ These migrants, alongside families escaping political instability and economic exploitation in Mexico, contributed significantly to the growth of contemporary Mexican communities in the Tucson area. In the 1860s, the city began to segregate into White and Mexican neighborhoods, by 1881, the area contemporarily referred to the “South Side” was predominantly comprised of working-class, Mexican households in an area south of Tucson city limits.⁴ Through residential, commercial, and public segregation, Mexican American, O’odham, Yaqui, Chinese, and African American residents were relegated into multiethnic barrios in and around what is now considered downtown Tucson. Over the years, the City of Tucson repeatedly attempted to annex the area of South Tucson as a part of its growth strategy, however, after years of resistance, the City of

² Data USA. South Tucson, AZ. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/south-tucson-az#about>

³ Logan, Michael F. *Fighting Sprawl and City Hall: Resistance to Urban Growth in the Southwest*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995.; Sheridan, Thomas E. *Los Tucsonenses: The Mexican Community in Tucson, 1854-1941*. 1986.

⁴ Sheridan, *Los Tucsonenses: The Mexican Community in Tucson, 1854-1941*, 239. Oretsky, Nicole. “Shelter Injustice and the Endurance of Housing Poverty in South Tucson, Arizona,” 32.

South Tucson was officially incorporated in 1940. South Tucson experienced a growth spurt from its inception until 1970, which can be largely attributed to economic border policies designed to attract flexible labor to the United States such as the Bracero Program and subsequent “laissez-faire” policies.⁵ Despite periods of urban renewal in areas surrounding the city, South Tucson has persisted as a community for transient populations to come to find shelter and work.

Today, South Tucson has retained much of its original character. According to the 2020 American Community Survey, there were 2.74 times more Latinx residents in South Tucson than any other ethnicity.⁶ South Tucson is most widely known for its legacy restaurants that have been in operation for generations such as Ni Nidito, made famous for hosting distinguished guests such as President Bill Clinton and Willie Nelson. Constructed in 1918, the Santa Cruz Church remains a central fixture in South Tucson; every year the church organizes a procession which draws participation from the entire community.⁷ Banda and Mariachi can often be heard late into the night as families celebrate quinceañeras, holidays and frequent get-togethers. On weekend evenings, lowriders cruise the neighborhood with their tricked-out muscle cars, an enduring expression of Chicax cultural identity. Roxanna Valenzuela, a South Tucson resident who works at the local soup kitchen, fondly describes life in the barrio:

⁵ The Bracero Program is a guest worker program that subsidized labor shortages resulting from World War II in the Southwest United States, it operated from 1942-1964. Over the course of the program, over 200,000 Mexican agrarian workers immigrated to the United States to work each year. After the war, US farmers lobbied the government to extend the program through the early 1960s, but unions managed to pressure the US government to have it disbanded in 1964. Durand, Jorge. “From Traitors to Heroes: 100 Years of Mexican Migration Policies,” *Migration Information Source*, Immigration Policy Institute, 2004. www.migrationinformation.org.; Orreniou, Pia M. "Illegal Immigration and Enforcement Along the U.S.-Mexico Border: An Overview." *Economic & Financial Review* (Dallas, Tex.) 2001, no. 1 (2001): 2.

⁶ Data USA. South Tucson, AZ. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/south-tucson-az#about>

⁷ Portillo, Ernesto. “Neto’s Tucson: Tucson’s Historic Santa Cruz Church Nears Centenary Celebration.” *Arizona Daily Star*, November 30, 2018. https://tucson.com/news/local/netos-tucson-tucson-historic-santa-cruz-church-nears-centenary-celebration/article_8d02dac1-d501-55b6-a919-f5e55ffde9b1.html

It's like Mexico. Every time I walk the streets of South Tucson, I feel at home. Everyone is so unique. They have been here for so long, everyone knows each other. The houses are uniquely decorated. The folklorico and mariachi. If I had to think of a few words to describe South Tucson it would be familia, faith, food, and community. People are always helping each other. On the downside the poverty. You can see how disinvested the community is. Peoples' roofs falling in, they can't afford to fix them.⁸

In her 2007 study of shelter injustice in South Tucson, Nicole Oretsky commented that, "the unequal relations of production between Mexico and the United States are played out in this small place," highlighting the economic disparity between the white, affluent inhabitants of Tucson's Catalina Foothills and the "crime-ridden", predominately Latinx south side.⁹ This notion was echoed by a local gang leader, Alex Villa, when he stated that "the *real* Mexican-US border runs between South and North Tucson."¹⁰ Economic opportunity has been in short supply for the majority of residents, who have been historically relegated to construction, food service, accommodation and cleaning industries. More than a third of households live below the poverty line.¹¹ In 2020, the median household income in South Tucson was \$28,704, nearly half that of the City of Tucson.¹² The poverty witnessed in Tucson's working-class barrios is a result of institutionalized inequalities based on the historical exploitation of Mexican labor by both Anglo Tucsonans and the Mexican American elite. While the Mexican middle class began to assimilate into the political and financial power structure in the late 1800s, other Mexicans remained in working class barrios, becoming a flexible labor pool for both White and Mexican business

⁸ Roxanna Valenzuela (Casa Maria employee), in a discussion with the author, July 2021.

⁹ Oretsky, Nicole. "Shelter Injustice and the Endurance of Housing Poverty in South Tucson, Arizona, 2.

¹⁰. Kaplan, Robert D. "Travels into America's Future." *The Atlantic Monthly* (1993) 282, no. 1 (1998): 61.

¹¹ 38.6 percent of families in South Tucson live below the poverty line. Data USA. South Tucson, AZ. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/south-tucson-az#about>.

¹² The median household income of the City of Tucson was \$55,023 in 2020. Ibid.

owners.¹³ These economic relations have persisted, and as Roxy illustrates, are physically visible in housing conditions and infrastructure in South Tucson.

Up until recently, South Tucson had remained physically segregated from white communities and largely excluded from capital investment. Public perceptions of South Tucson as a crime-ridden, dangerous city with a corrupt government have repeatedly deterred investment from reaching the community. Despite the city's poor reputation, things have been slowly changing as new businesses open within the city. In a conversation with Brian Flagg, the director of the local soup kitchen, he noted recent changes in the barrio,

Around then, I think it was the 2010, census, the average family income was \$15,000.00. By the next census it had gone up to \$18,000.00. In my experience—paying people's bills and feeding them—that's how I've always thought about it, that's how poor people are. I've always thought about how it is like walking in Mexico. Are there as many immigrant families as there used to be? Now it doesn't feel like it.¹⁴

Catholic Worker Movement

The Catholic Worker Movement was founded in New York City during the Great Depression by Dorothy Day at the instigation of Peter Maurin, a French theologian and activist. In her early years, Day was a journalist and active member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW); she often wrote about labor struggles and participated in demonstrations revolving around workers' rights and the abuses of capitalism. Over the course of her life, Day became an Anarchist, a Socialist, and a Christian, all of which shaped the growth of the Catholic Worker Movement. The movement began with the premier issue of *The Catholic Worker*

¹³Sheridan, *Los Tucsonenses: The Mexican Community in Tucson, 1854-1941*. Oretsky, Nicole. "Shelter Injustice and the Endurance of Housing Poverty in South Tucson, Arizona, 2.

¹⁴Brian Flagg (Casa Maria employee), in a discussion with the author, October 2021.

newspaper on May Day of 1933, tackling a variety of social issues of the time.¹⁵ Through her writings, Day emphasized the value of community, social action, nonviolence, and mutual aid. Day's roots in leftist movements helped shape her later writings, as Volanth (2015) notes, "*The Catholic Worker* encouraged recognition of shared struggle and equally, shared resistance."¹⁶ From its inception, the movement was rooted in pacifism, opposing war and nuclear arms through fasts, picketing, and protests that landed Day in jail on more than one occasion.¹⁷ Following Day's lead, over the years, many of those active in the Catholic Worker movement have been jailed for acts of protest against racism, unfair labor practices, social injustice, and war.

It has been argued that Maurin's greatest influence on Day was imparting the notion that poverty is more than a cause for protest, it is a means to perform works of mercy, such as feeding, clothing, and sheltering the poor.¹⁸ After *The Catholic Worker* was established, Maurin and Day opened the first two "Houses of Hospitality" in Manhattan in 1933, as places to supply material aid to the poor and provide industrial workers a space to discuss Christian principles of organization.¹⁹ Houses were intended to, "emphasize personal action, personal responsibility as opposed to political action and state responsibility," and to, "care for the unemployed and teach cooperation and mutual aid."²⁰ After Day's death in 1980, there was speculation that the

¹⁵ *The Catholic Worker* has had a variety of contributors ranging from volunteers to notable figures such as Daniel Berrigan, Thomas Merton, and Jacques Maritain. Today, many contemporary Catholic Worker communities publish their own newsletters and blogs for local distribution.

¹⁶ Volanth, Arthur. "Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement: Social Transformation and Feminist Legacies," 2015.

¹⁷ The Dorothy Day Guild. "A Woman of Conscience, A Saint for Our Time."
<http://dorothydayguild.org/about-her-life/the-catholic-worker-movement/>

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Day, Dorothy. "Houses of Hospitality." *The Catholic Worker*, December 1936.
www.catholicworker.org.

²⁰ Ibid

movement would begin to decline. While there has not been a central leader since Day, there are over 245 self-proclaimed Catholic Worker communities active worldwide, the majority include Houses of Hospitality.²¹ Catholic Workers continue to lead lives of voluntary poverty, committing themselves to works of mercy. Brian Flagg, the director of Casa Maria, describes the contemporary movement:

If the Catholic Worker is anything, it is living out the Gospel communally. The base is works of mercy. It is our lifestyle; the Catholic Worker is more of something that you do than what you say... There is no separation between works of mercy and works of justice. Jesus isn't into separating between works of mercy and justice. You have to have the local culture too. The culture now is that charity is cool. Feeding people is like an alternate high. It really is! I once had this lady tell me that social justice is about feeding people. No, it's not! There was this Brazilian Archbishop, Dom Helder Pessoa Camara, he once said, "When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor are hungry, they call me a communist." You have to ask questions about why they are hungry, be confrontational like how Jesus was... My problem with the Catholic Worker is that they don't do the justice thing enough.²²

Flagg's assertion that the current movement has moved away from its radical roots and focus on social justice, can perhaps be seen in recent efforts surrounding urban revitalization. Despite the movement's rich history of activism, there has not been much resistance to a common phenomenon plaguing many Catholic Worker communities—gentrification. As Houses of Hospitality are traditionally located in areas that were once considered "down and out", houses across the nation are now experiencing the pressures of neighborhood change, even some longstanding houses have been forced to close operations.²³ Despite the dependence of the communities they serve, Catholic Worker communities have not made much of a stir, in fact,

²¹ Smith, Sarah. "Houses of Hospitality." Teaching American History. <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/houses-of-hospitality/>

²² Brian Flagg (Casa Maria employee), in a discussion with the author, August 2021.

²³ Atlanta's Open Door Community closed in 2017, after 35 years of operation due to gentrification. Houses in New York, Los Angeles, Denver, Detroit, and Cleveland are also facing challenges. Abrams, Amanda. "The Catholic Worker Movement Finds New Life in Rural America." *Sojourners*. March 19, 2020. <https://sojo.net/articles/catholic-worker-movement-finds-new-life-rural-america>

many are packing up shop and moving to rural parts of the country.²⁴ While this seems a reasonable solution to some, where will all of the people who once depended on their mercy now go to meet their basic needs?

History of Casa Maria

Casa Maria, colloquially known as Guadalupe's, is a small soup kitchen located on South 3rd Avenue and East 25th Street, on the northern border of South Tucson. Casa Maria was established in 1981, by Father David Innocenti, a Carmelite priest, with the help of Bishop Francis Green and Ron Cruz, a local Tucsonan and prominent Catholic. According to the current director, Brian Flagg, Casa Maria was formed largely in response to the Regan Revolution, which was marked by welfare retrenchment and a mounting homeless crisis. Innocenti had worked for seven years at a Catholic Worker in Montreal prior to coming to Tucson. Casa Maria originally functioned as a House of Hospitality for the homeless, providing a space for people to work and save in order to get back on their feet. As more community members came to the door of the House to ask for food, Innocenti made the decision to open the soup kitchen in 1983. About three months after the kitchen opened, Brian Flagg came to Casa Maria from the Catholic Worker in Sacramento in March 1983; initially, Flagg organized anti-war protests in Tucson and volunteered at Casa Maria. After traveling around the country visiting different Catholic Workers, Innocenti asked Flagg to take over the soup kitchen in 1985, with the promise to provide direct service to the homeless. Flagg continued to run the soup kitchen, which grew to feed up to 500 individuals and 200 families per day. Casa Maria has been a pillar, not just of the unhoused community members, but of the wider community.

²⁴ Ibid.

Under Flagg's leadership, Casa Maria has become perhaps the most proactive Catholic Worker organization to mobilize the wider community. In the early years, Casa Maria was focused on organizing the unhoused community, establishing the fourth chapter of the National Union of the Homeless.²⁵ Every Christmas Flagg would host a raffle for the unhoused, giving away items such as sleeping bags, while they set up camp outside of government buildings downtown. Casa Maria even went as far as bringing a suit against the city concerning police harassment of the unhoused community. However, in the early 90s, the workers at Casa Maria noticed an increase in local families frequenting the food line. Flagg became increasingly interested in community organizing, applying the knowledge he gained from his time with Interfaith to the community of South Tucson. The workers at Casa Maria have focused on community issues such as immigration, maintaining low bus fares through the establishment of a bus riders union, instituting a minimum wage ordinance in city, and fighting to keep schools open within the community. Casa Mara is working to bring all their knowledge gleaned from years of organizing to new issues they face as the community is experiencing the beginning waves of redevelopment.

The Workers of Casa Maria

Brian Flagg was born and raised in Whittier, California. He graduated from Biola College with a degree in sociology. Interested in social justice, he became inspired by the Catholic Agitator and volunteered at the Hippie Kitchen. Brian lived and worked at the Sacramento

²⁵ The National Union of the Homeless (NUH) formed in the late 1980s in response to shifting economic conditions that resulted in a sharp increase in the unhoused population. At its height, the NUH had 25 chapters across US cities. Although the NUH began to decline in the 1990s, it was revived in 2020, and has established multiple locals across 11 states. National Union of the Homeless. "History (Who We Are)." <https://nationalunionofthehomeless.org>

Catholic Worker from 1981 to 1983, prior to coming to Tucson and beginning work at Casa Maria in March of 1983.

Roxy Valenzuela was born in Tucson and lived in Nogales, Sonora until her family received residency in 1989. For the past thirty years her family has lived in South Park, a neighborhood directly east of South Tucson. For over three years, she owned Glamour Hair Salon, a small business in South Tucson. Prior to joining the team at Casa Maria, she managed teams in the wellness industry.

Glenda Avalos was born in Guatemala, her family immigrated to Tucson in 1981. Glenda grew up around the corner from Casa Maria, where her parents ministered at the Salvation Army Youth Center, her mother served as the director of the center for many years. For 15 years Glenda served the South Tucson community through youth prevention ministry at the center, prior to coming to work at Casa Maria.

Tanya Núñez was born in Douglas, Arizona after her family had immigrated from Agua Prieta, Sonora, she was raised between the two neighboring towns. She moved to Tucson in 2012, to attend the University of Arizona where she graduated from with a degree in Film & Television. She is a member of the Party for Socialism and Liberation, she met workers at Casa Maria through organizing around common issues. Tanya has a special fondness for South Tucson as it reminds her of her hometown of Douglas, she became dedicated to the preservation of the community and began working directly with Casa Maria in 2021.²⁶

²⁶ It is important to note that Cesar Aguirre has been a central worker at Casa Maria, practicing the works of mercy and justice for over seven years. He was taking a break over the course of this research and has since returned to Casa Maria.

Research Methodology and Ethical Considerations

This qualitative ethnographic research project was conducted over the course of 14 months in 2020-2021. Project approval from the University of Arizona Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained in February 2021 and amended in July 2021. The exploratory phase of research consisted of informal, semi-structured background interviews with the workers at Casa Maria based on snowball sampling techniques in addition to extensive research into affordable housing organizations. The interview guide was designed to draw out information on the history of the barrio, the conditions of daily life for South Tucson residents, and the impact of structural vulnerabilities in residents' lives. This exploratory research helped to identify the focus of this research project.

I then conducted participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews with the workers and volunteers at Casa Maria, the research site. Due to pandemic procedures, study participants were consented verbally in lieu of signing a written statement. I recorded interviews by taking copious hand-written notes. I employed a fixed interview guide, which included a brief demographic section. The majority of the interviews addressed the structural challenges facing residents in South Tucson, neighborhood change, and local government mediated development. The interviews ranged in length from 1 to 3 hours. In addition, I conducted participant observation by volunteering in the soup kitchen, attending weekly organizing meetings, demonstrations, and public events hosted by Casa Maria. With the consent of all who participated in this study, I use their names throughout this paper.

Data analysis was an iterative process that oscillated back and forth between data collection and examination over the course of the project. I coded the interviews using pattern coding methods to identify emergent themes in barrio life. I then coded the interviews according to selective coding methods, highlighting the links between categories of codes addressing barrio

and government relations to define the relationship between economic restructuring and the tenuous place of residents in the barrio.

As this study was conducted over the course of the pandemic, precautions were taken to limit the spread of COVID-19. Per Casa Maria, the Center for Disease Control, and local health organizations the following mitigation plan and guidelines were used: 1. Prior to IRB approval of in-person interviewing, all interviews were conducted online via Zoom. 2. Once in-person interviewing commenced, no one exhibiting COVID-19-like symptoms was allowed to participate in this study while they were symptomatic. 3. Each participant used face covers during the entire interview process. 4. All scheduling was conducted via text or email to limit contact between participants and myself. 5. Interviews were limited to one participant per interview to limit contact among participants. 6. Hand washing facilities and hand sanitizer were available on-site for all participants. Information to local health resources was available to all participants.

Research Problem

The residents of South Tucson face expulsion in a multitude of ways. Firstly, this community is under threat of direct displacement due to mounting gentrification pressures orchestrated by local governments and private capital. Through intragovernmental agreements, qualified opportunity zoning, commercial revitalization, and federal transportation grants, public and private capital threatens to displace families that reside in the historic barrios south of downtown Tucson. Unlike previous instances of revitalization in working class neighborhoods surrounding downtown, this community faces expulsion from the metropolitan area due to a severe lack of affordable housing stock that has been produced through an ongoing retrenchment of governmental provision of economic assistance and the rising cost of housing, in combination

with stagnating wages. During past revitalization efforts, residents had been forced to relocate from neighborhoods such as Armory Park and Barrio Viejo; most of the residents were able to remain in Tucson, finding housing in other parts of the city. Today, residents in South Tucson are being forced out to remote areas beyond the city core away from essential resources and support networks. For those community members who can remain in their homes, they face an inevitable cultural displacement as different demographics move into the neighborhood and reconfigure the social landscape of this community.

This research has three main objectives: Firstly, to demonstrate how the revitalization of South Tucson is very much an attempt for local government to capture outside investment. The City is using sustainable development rhetoric to justify the displacement of families and the disarticulation of support networks that this community has relied on for survival. Secondly, to illustrate how expulsion is inherent to a capitalist system; however, this local iteration of expulsion is different than those previous in that there is nowhere for people to go within the city due to unprecedented affordability issues in both the housing and rental markets. Lastly, to illuminate how expulsion in the borderlands has unique dimensions due to the specific sociohistorical context of place. The expulsion being witnessed in South Tucson shares certain dimensions of that of settler colonial logic. The profit to be made from the revitalization of the barrio seems to be of greater value to the local elites, than the exploitable pool of unskilled labor in South Tucson. Many of the inhabitants have ancestral ties to the land, some of them whose families inhabited the land prior to the Gadsden Purchase, while others have been pushed northward due the effects of neoliberal imperialism in their home countries. The inhabitants of South Tucson have built expansive support networks and a strong sense of shared identity. While

the revitalization of the barrio will certainly dispossess people of place, it stands to dispossess the inhabitants of their sense of self.

Literature Review

NEOLIBERALISM

When studying uneven access to housing and other resources in modern capitalist societies, critical theorists have often focused on the emergence of neoliberal ideology and practice as a driver of uneven development. David Harvey (2007) describes neoliberalism as, “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.”²⁷ Harvey traces the genealogy of neoliberalism back to the mid-1970s, focusing on policy reforms made in response to New York City’s financial crisis. Policymakers viewed the crisis as rooted in welfare spending and bureaucratic inefficiency, and thus, began to emphasize the city’s business climate instead of its citizens quality of life and promoted the image of the city as an “entrepreneurial, business-like entity” in competition for private investment.²⁸ Harvey identified contradictions within neoliberal policy such as, “the tendency for economic competition to produce monopolies that maximize efficiency but work to prevent free market competition,” and, “differential access to market information among actors, which although equal in theory, is rarely accomplished in practice and can trigger unfair advantages in absence of government regulation.”²⁹ Brenner and

²⁷ Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. OUP Catalogue. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2007, 2.

²⁸ Stanley, Benjamin. *Sustainable Urban Development and the Political Economy of Growth in Phoenix, Arizona*. Dissertation, Arizona State University 2013, 82.

²⁹Ibid, 83. Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Brenner, N. and N. Theodore. *Cities and the Geographies of "Actually Existing Neoliberalism."* *Antipode* 34, no.3 (2002):349-79.

Theodore (2002) coined the term “actually existing neoliberalism” to describe the paradox in which governments often intervene in specific economies in order to facilitate new sources of capital and further the interests of local elites.³⁰ Thus, modern neoliberal ideology has “functioned more as a rhetorical smokescreen to obscure actual interventionist policies benefitting specific actors and less as an actual framework for policymaking.”³¹

Hackworth (2013) traces the transition from egalitarian liberalism (i.e., Keynesian welfare state) to new modes of neoliberal managerialism, illustrating how neoliberal ideology has shaped contemporary models of urban governance in U.S. cities. Following David Harvey (1989), Hackworth asserts that the recent shift to more entrepreneurial forms of urban governance is largely the result of an “institutionally regulated (and policed) disciplining of localities.”³² State power has been simultaneously “upscaled” to international institutions (e.g. IMF, WTO, bond rating agencies) and “downscaled” to local institutions (e.g. cities, towns, regulatory districts), a process which he refers to as “glocalization”.³³ Glocalization has not been an even process, cities are increasingly constrained by international institutions which promote neoliberal practices and ideas. Over the past four decades, bond rating agencies have imposed strict standards of action on cities, whose leadership have since restructured, adopting neoliberal policies and rolling back social provisions to obtain a positive rating and draw finance capital to their cities.³⁴ Hackworth notes the growing importance of public-private partnerships, these “urban regimes” now function to absorb power of the declining federal state and effectuate

³⁰ Brenner, N. and N. Theodore. Cities and the Geographies of "Actually Existing Neoliberalism."

³¹ Stanley, Benjamin. Sustainable Urban Development and the Political Economy of Growth in Phoenix, Arizona, 84.

³² Hackworth, Jason. *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism* (1 ed.). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007, 17.

³³ Ibid, 41.

³⁴ Ibid, 39.

capital's exclusion-expansion dialectic.³⁵ Since the 1970s, neoliberal ideology "has become hegemonic as a mode of discourse," attributing economic success to the retrenchment of government intervention in market activity through privatization and deregulation.³⁶ The shift from "government-as-manager" to "government-as-entrepreneur" represents a modern resurgence of laissez fair ideology that persisted during the Enlightenment through the Industrial Revolution.³⁷ Neoliberalism provides a theoretical foundation for understanding recent economic restructuring initiatives on the local, national, and global level.

GENTRIFICATION

The term 'gentrification' was first used by Ruth Glass (1964) to describe the moving of gentry into working class neighborhoods in London.³⁸ Since Glass's initial observation, scholars have redefined and operationalized the term in many ways, the lack of cohesion reflects "the expanding epistemological horizon over how the urban is defined and what trends of urbanization have emerged."³⁹ Despite the contestation between qualitative and quantitative approaches to neighborhood change research, a group of prominent urban scholars have identified five distinct waves that mark the progression of gentrification.⁴⁰ The first wave, prior to 1973, was mainly isolated in small neighborhoods primarily located in the northeast United States in large metropolitan areas such as New York. By taking advantage of the downturn in

³⁵ Ibid, 68.

³⁶ Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 3.

³⁷ Stanley, Benjamin. Sustainable Urban Development and the Political Economy of Growth in Phoenix, Arizona, 82.

³⁸ Glass, Ruth (Editor) "London: Aspects of Change" (Book Review). *New Statesman* 67 (1964): 258.

³⁹ Lees, Loretta, Hyun Bang Shin and Ernesto López-Morales. *Planetary Gentrification*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, 28. Hyra, Derek, Mindy Fullilove, Dominic Moulden, and Katharine Silva. "Contextualizing Gentrification Chaos: The Rise of the Fifth Wave." Working paper, Washington DC: The Metropolitan Policy Center (2020): 1-29.

⁴⁰ The concept of waves has been contested by some scholars who argued that waves is simply an extension of social evolutionary thinking.

property values to consume tracts of devalorized housing in working class neighborhoods, investors and developers set the stage for the second wave of gentrification in the 1980s.⁴¹ During the 1980s, gentrification spreads into central city neighborhoods in smaller cities. In larger cities, the presence of art communities was often an indicator of impending residential gentrification during this period. Local real estate development firms became active in the gentrifying process, turning homes became a profit-seeking venture. The recession of the early 1990s slowed the process by restricting the flow of capital into gentrifying neighborhoods, however, post-recession gentrification grew in scale as large developers, with state support, began to buy out entire neighborhoods within inner-city neighborhoods previously affected by earlier waves and in remote neighborhoods beyond the city core.⁴²

The nature of gentrification began to change with the integration of property and financial markets, deregulation in finance, expansion of credit, and a reorientation of previous manufacturing economies towards the real estate industry.⁴³ No longer are individual renovators entering gentrifying neighborhoods to flip houses; the corporatization of gentrification spread around the globe as transnational developers merged with real estate investment trusts, mortgage brokers, and smaller firms to consolidate real estate capital and further integrate the real estate trade with finance capital.⁴⁴ As a part of the rollback of Keynesian urban policy, the federal government adopted new deregulated urban policy, while simultaneously, in response to pressure being put on local government by speculators (i.e. developers, banks, landlords), cities adopted

⁴¹Aalbers, Manuel B. "Introduction to the Forum: From Third to Fifth-Wave Gentrification." *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 110, no. 1 (2019): 3.

⁴² *Ibid*, 3.

⁴³ Hackworth, Jason. *The Neoliberal City*, 127.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 128.

neoliberal policies such as the creation of special districts and rezoning efforts, both of which have benefited corporate real estate investment and aided in facilitating gentrification.⁴⁵

Gentrification is an expression of neoliberalism, transforming space into what is most useful for capital. Harvey (2012) cites the city as the engine for capital accumulation and the remaking of the built environment as a principal place for the use of surplus profit.⁴⁶

Redeveloping the urban landscape allows for both a way to facilitate accumulation, as well as temporarily address crises of overaccumulation.⁴⁷ Smith (1987) proposed the rent gap theory, introducing a new way to think about gentrification as a movement of capital and not of people. Whenever the gap from the profit that could be obtained from developing an impoverished neighborhood was enough to justify renewal, then gentrification would happen.⁴⁸

Lees et al. (2008) identified a fourth wave of gentrification that combines, “an intensified financialization of housing...with the consolidation of pro-gentrification politics and polarized urban policies,” or as Aalbers put it, “third-wave gentrification plus the ‘financialization of home.’”⁴⁹ The lowering of the US federal interest rate in the early 2000s and the rise of subprime mortgage lending prompted the turn to the fourth wave, driving, “gentrification deeper into the heart of disinvested city neighborhoods.”⁵⁰ During this period, inner city areas that were previously redlined by banking institutions saw an influx of capital as, “minority communities shifted from being seen as a pool of borrowers to be avoided to being perceived as an attractive

⁴⁵ Ibid, 130.

⁴⁶ Harvey, David. *Spaces of Capital*. Taylor and Francis, 2012.

⁴⁷ Harvey, David. *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*. Baltimore, Md.: John Hopkins University Press, 1985.

⁴⁸ Smith, Neil. "Gentrification and the Rent Gap." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77, no. 3 (1987): 462-65.

⁴⁹ Lees, Loretta, Tom Slater, and Evalyn Wyly. *Gentrification*. New York: Routledge, 2008, 179. Aalbers, Manuel. "Introduction to the Forum", 5.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 181. Hyra, Derek, Mindy Fullilove, Dominic Moulden, and Katharine Silva. "Contextualizing Gentrification Chaos, 12.

market for loan sales that might expand the number of mortgages available for securitization.”⁵¹ Real estate investment trusts (REITs) began significantly investing in affordable housing stock and purchasing multifamily developments to upgrade and sell, resulting in increased rents and greater gentrification pressures.⁵² Simultaneously, the federal government allocated Housing Choice Vouchers (i.e. Section 8) to the poor residents, drawing them out of the gentrifying city center to marginal areas. State-led housing programs, REIT activity in affordable housing, and the subprime mortgage lending combined to drive dramatic economic change within once disinvested inner city areas across the nation.⁵³

The fifth wave of gentrification has its origins in the fallout of the Great Recession created by the collapse of the national housing market bubble in 2007. Although the recession temporarily slowed the pace of gentrification, it did not stop; the process quickly transformed as millions of people foreclosed on their homes and entered the rental market, bringing financialization with them. Capitalizing on the economic downturn, institutional investors began to buy single-family homes to convert into rental properties, as well as larger multifamily properties to renovate. The Joint Center for Housing (2020) notes, “Ownership of rental housing shifted noticeably between 2001 and 2015, with institutional owners such as LLCs, LLPs, and REITs accounting for a growing share of the stock.”⁵⁴ Increased institutional investment led to a

⁵¹ Massey, Douglas S., Jacob S. Rugh, Justin P. Steil, and Len Albright. "Riding the Stagecoach to Hell: A Qualitative Analysis of Racial Discrimination in Mortgage Lending." *City & Community* 15, no. 2 (2016): 122. Hyra, Derek, Mindy Fullilove, Dominic Moulden, and Katharine Silva. "Contextualizing Gentrification Chaos, 12.

⁵² Hyra, Derek, Mindy Fullilove, Dominic Moulden, and Katharine Silva. "Contextualizing Gentrification Chaos, 14.

⁵³ Ibid, 14. Martin, Ron. "The Local Geographies of the Financial Crisis: From the Housing Bubble to Economic Recession and beyond." *Journal of Economic Geography* 11, no. 4 (2011): 587-618. Owens, Ann. "Neighborhoods on the Rise: A Typology of Neighborhoods Experiencing Socioeconomic Ascent." *City & Community* 11, no. 4 (2012): 345-69.

⁵⁴ Joint Center for Housing, *The State of the Nation's Housing 2020*. Harvard University, 2020, 4.

steep escalation in rental prices, “between 2012 and 2017, the number of low-cost units renting for \$1,000 or more in real terms shot up by 5.0 million, while the number of low-cost units renting for under \$600 fell by 3.1 million”.⁵⁵ The affordable rental crisis has spread across the nation, affecting low-income communities the hardest. Baum-Snow and Hartley (2020) demonstrate how increases in housing costs have led individuals to purchase housing in minority communities near central business districts, causing subsequent displacement of community residents.⁵⁶

The gentrification literature has long engaged with colonial dynamics and frontier imaginaries, often used as a metaphor for predatory property speculation and development.⁵⁷ Recent scholarship has demanded that we move beyond the metaphor to shed light on colonial and racial foundations of gentrifying working-class spaces.⁵⁸ Wolfe (2006) argued that the settler colonial “invasion” should be understood as a “structure” rather than an “event”, the foundational structures remain operative in the economy and normal, everyday life.⁵⁹ Colonial logic becomes operationalized through what Bhandar (2018) describes as the “ideology of improvement,” through which, “[t]he English common law of property [becomes] the sine qua non of civilized life and society.”⁶⁰ Simultaneously, “[a]bstracted from the actual lives of non-

⁵⁵ Ibid, 2. Hyra, Derek, Mindy Fullilove, Dominic Moulden, and Katharine Silva. “Contextualizing Gentrification Chaos,” 17.

⁵⁶ Baum-Snow, Nathaniel, and Daniel Hartley. "Accounting for Central Neighborhood Change, 1980–2010." *Journal of Urban Economics* 117 (2020): 103228.

⁵⁷ Smith, Neil. *The Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

⁵⁸ Launius, Sarah, and Geoffrey Alan Boyce. "More than Metaphor: Settler Colonialism, Frontier Logic, and the Continuities of Racialized Dispossession in a Southwest U.S. City." *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 111, no. 1 (2021): 157-74. Kent-Stoll, Peter. "The Racial and Colonial Dimensions of Gentrification." *Sociology Compass* 14, no. 12 (2020): 1-17.

⁵⁹ Wolfe, Patrick. “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no.4 (2006): 388.

⁶⁰ Bhandar, Brenna. *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership*. Global and Insurgent Legalities. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, 4. Launius, Sarah, and Geoffrey Alan

European peoples, blackness and indigeneity [come] to signify a lesser value not only in relation to white European settlers but with the respect to [the] relations of ownership.”⁶¹ So long as the structure remains intact, it is imperative to reflect on the ways in which colonial logics continuously structure patterns of state intervention, property investment, and redevelopment.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 2, “A History of Dispossession and Displacement,” is an overview of the City of Tucson’s attempts at urban renewal in downtown Tucson. The genealogy of the city’s use of blight designation is presented, beginning with urban renewal in the 1960s. Chapter 3, “South Tucson and the New Urbanism,” is a review of recent redevelopment efforts in the City of South Tucson. Chapter 4, “¡La Vivienda es un Derecho Humano!” examines the affordable housing crisis stemming from decades of neoliberal restructuring and stagnating wages. Chapter 5, “From Social Servants to Politicians,” concludes the thesis. It is a unifying discussion of the findings presented in Chapters 2 through 4, as well as the recent work done by the workers at Casa Maria. Research conclusions are presented and corresponding recommendations are extended.

Boyce. "More than Metaphor: Settler Colonialism, Frontier Logic, and the Continuities of Racialized Dispossession in a Southwest U.S. City," 159.

⁶¹Ibid, 106.

CHAPTER 2: A HISTORY OF DISPOSSESSION AND DISPLACEMENT

Introduction

We have learned that in virtually all cities, the monied interests that benefit from gentrification are aided and supported by local jurisdictions. From the destruction of Barrio Viejo in the '60s until the present, the City of Tucson has fomented gentrification through GPLETs, the streetcar, the purple shirt security guys from the Downtown Partnership and all at the expense of low-income communities and local small businesses. The city has been and is the gentrifier, so why don't we, concerned people of Tucson, deal with this reality? ⁶²

This quote taken from an op-ed written by Brian Flagg that was published in the Arizona Daily Star in July of 2020, shortly before I began volunteering at Casa Maria. The article was a call to action, in which Flagg demands that both the cities of Tucson and South Tucson place a moratorium on the use of Government Property Lease Excise Tax (GPLET).⁶³ The narrative that the workers at Casa Maria have promoted has gravitated around the role that GPLETs and the Central Business District (CBD) play in local urban restructuring. In the article, Flagg highlights the local government's role in the gentrification process, in fact, the City of Tucson has a history of facilitating gentrification that results in the displacement of working-class, minority communities. It is important to review past renewal efforts to understand the framework by which the workers at Casa Maria understand the revitalization efforts within South Tucson and the

⁶² Flagg, Brian. "Time to Stall Tucson GPLETs," Sect. 1.

⁶³ Established in Arizona in 1996, the GPLET is a tax incentive agreement negotiated between a private party and a local government. GPLETs are promoted by local government as a way to stimulate development in commercial districts by temporarily replacing a building's property tax with an excise tax. If a project is located within a central business district, the government may abate the GPLET for an eight-year period.

surrounding area. The objective of this section is to demonstrate how local government has historically facilitated revitalization in and around downtown Tucson and how the process has changed shape over time; their involvement and culpability for displacing poor communities of color is not a new phenomenon. Understanding the genealogy of dispossession and displacement situates the revitalization in Tucson barrios as not a new racialized, capitalist project but a continuation of the original settler colonial endeavor and furthers our understanding of how gentrification-driven displacement in South Tucson was set into motion during urban renewal in the 1960s.⁶⁴

Urban Renewal and the Pueblo Center

In October 2021, Casa Maria produced a short documentary tracing city-facilitated urban renewal from the 1960s to today. In the documentary, long-time Barrio Viejo resident and activist Pedro Gonzalez recalls the displacement his family faced as the City of Tucson sought to construct the Tucson Convention Center:

During that time, two men in ties, two white men in ties came and talked to all the families who lived on Meyer since we were real close to 14th Street. They approached us and they were telling people, you know, that eventually you are going to have to move, and we said, “Why?” He said, “We are knocking all this down, and if you don’t want to sell, we’re going to go under eminent domain,” and this is in 1965. By 1996, most of us had already moved from that area... We were displaced, that’s the real reason why they did urban renewal because they said it was blighted. They called us a disease, a cancer. That’s why the federal government could give them monies, so they can move us all out and displace us.⁶⁵

The experience Gonzalez describes is common to many families that lived in and around

downtown Tucson prior to the 1960s. The urban renewal affecting the downtown area was

carried out by the City of Tucson and Pima County as a part of a national redevelopment project

⁶⁴ Launius, Sarah, and Geoffrey Alan Boyce. "More than Metaphor: Settler Colonialism, Frontier Logic, and the Continuities of Racialized Dispossession in a Southwest U.S. City." *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 111, no. 1 (2021): 157-74.

⁶⁵ Nunez, “Tucson Displacement: Urban Renewal of the 1960s to Today,” 3:43-5:19.

that resulted in the wholesale destruction of historic city cores nationwide—the political objective was to create the “modern city” through urban renewal.⁶⁶ Federal grants began to fill city coffers while developers were offered tax incentives with the hope of ushering business back to the city center. Local governments wielded eminent domain, forcing families and business owners out of their residences, erasing entire communities.

Prior to the 1960s, in what is now considered downtown Tucson, stood a vibrant, diverse barrio with roots going back to the 18th century. El Barrio was the exclusive residential and business district, home to Mexican-American residents who had been relegated to the space over time by the white elite.⁶⁷ Since the 1930s, the community had been fighting a growing pressure to redevelop the area from organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and Sunshine Climate Club, who wanted to make way for new business.⁶⁸ Developers and local government

⁶⁶ Mid-twentieth century beliefs based on modernist theories of, “large single-use buildings and car-dominated city blocks and streets; that a system of free-flow highways slicing through cities would provide both massive accessibility to downtown areas and come to symbolize the presence of the new machine-based civilization.” Urban redevelopment began with the passage of the Housing Act of 1949. The central tenant was to generate economic growth in central cities and attract middle-class residents to city centers. It is estimated that the program demolished 2,500 neighborhoods in 993 cities across the nation, affecting about 400,000 housing units. Gomez-Novy, Juan, and Stefanos Polyzoides. "A Tale of Two Cities: The Failed Urban Renewal of Downtown Tucson in the Twentieth Century." *Journal of the Southwest* 45, no. 1/2 (2003): 87-119. Fullilove, Mindy Thompson. *Root Shock: How Tearing up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do about It*. New Village Press Edition, [second ed.] 2016.

⁶⁷ Although the historic Barrio Libre was predominantly Latinx, it was also home to O’odham, Yaqui, Chinese, and African American residents.

⁶⁸ The Sunshine Climate Club was established in 1922. The premise was to have an organization separate from the Chamber of Commerce, whose sole purpose would be the promotion of the tourist industry. The Club funded a host of advertising projects, including submitting to the *American Medical Association Journal*. As the club grew, it became the premier to bring new business to Tucson. The organization was funded in part by both the City of Tucson and Pima County, however, as the Chamber of Commerce grew, local government quite funding the Club. In 1962, the Tucson Sunshine Club merged with the Chamber of Commerce Industrial Development Board. Lininger, Schuy and Stub Ashcraft. *Our History. Caballeros del Sol*. <https://cabalerosdelosol.com/about-us/our-history/>

officials argued that the neighborhood was a “nexus for crime, poverty, and all manner of social ills” and that redevelopment was necessary for the advancement of the city.⁶⁹

As the volume of in-migration of Anglo-Americans in Tucson increased, the historic neighborhoods became increasingly disinvested. By the 1940s, many of the adobe buildings in the Barrio and Presidio neighborhoods had begun to deteriorate. With renewal looming in the background, the city denied most permit applications, and similarly, banks denied homeowner loans out of fear that the improvements would be demolished prior to the loans being paid off.⁷⁰ Without the city’s authorization and the banks’ finance, residents were unable to make the necessary repairs on their homes and businesses. Through neglect and exclusion, local institutions created the conditions that they would later use to justify the renewal project and subsequent usurpation of private property. The Tucson Regional Plan published a study in 1942, titled, “Rehabilitation of Blighted Areas: Conservation of Sounds Neighborhoods,” asserting that the neighborhood was a hindrance to modernity and growth, attributing the “intermixture of racial or ethnic groups” as a contributing factor to its “blighted” condition.⁷¹ The city’s Urban Renewal Director and Assistant City Manager Lenwood Schorr issued the “Urban Renewal: For Slum Clarence and Redevelopment of the Old Pueblo District,” in 1961, further painting the barrio as crime infested ghetto in need of intervention.⁷² Although the city’s plans to redevelop

⁶⁹ Prezelski, Tom. “The Way We Were: Loss of Neighborhood Paved the Way for Local Government’s Transformation.” Pima County Newsletter, Sept. 28, 2018, 3, no. 9.

<https://webcms.pima.gov/cms/One.aspx?portalId=169&pageId=450189%20>

⁷⁰ Gomez-Novy, Juan, and Stefanos Polyzoides. “A Tale of Two Cities: The Failed Urban Renewal of Downtown Tucson in the Twentieth Century.”

⁷¹ Otero, Lydia R. *La Calle: Spatial Conflicts and Urban Renewal in a Southwest City*.

⁷² In 1961, the city introduced an urban renewal plan that proposed the demolition of nearly all the buildings in a 416-acre area of downtown which would have resulted in the displacement of 5,000 people. Opposition to the city’s initial plan came in large part from fiscal conservatives who were opposed to the use of federal money to benefit private property owners, which resulted in it being squashed by the City Council in 1962. Devine, Dave. “Barrio Viejo, Barrio Nuevo.” *Tucson Weekly*, May 23, 2002.

<https://www.tucsonweekly.com/tucson/barrio-viejo-barrio-nuevo/Content?oid=1070273>

the area was met with some opposition, the city government began to actively pursue the initiative in the mid-1960s, referring to the project as the “Pueblo Center.” On March 1, 1966, voters approved the Pueblo Center Redevelopment Project, condemning an entire neighborhood and its residents. By the time the project came to completion, the city erased 80 acres of homes, shops, restaurants, and venues, destroying over 100 years of historically significant buildings.⁷³ In total, 319 homes were demolished, displacing more than a thousand working class residents, predominantly Latinx families.⁷⁴

Prior to the project’s commencement, the county government was spending over \$78,000 a year to rent space in the surrounding neighborhood due to rapid expansion that occurred following the region’s rapid post-war growth. To cut costs, the county agreed to join the Pueblo Center Redevelopment Project in 1965, planning to build a \$10 million “Government Center” to house a courthouse, social service center, and an administration building.⁷⁵ The Board of Supervisors included the new construction in a \$11.8 million bond package scheduled for election in 1966, the Government Center was completed in 1968. To make way for the Government Center, the county demolished Ruben Gold’s Furniture Store, a local landmark, and the headquarters of Alianza Hispano-Americana, a local social-welfare organization. Then Tucson City Councilman Kirk Storch commented on the orchestration between local government, stating that, “this was the first time that he could remember the city and the county working together and predicted ‘greater harmony ahead.’”⁷⁶

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Gomez-Novy, Juan, and Stefanos Polyzoides. "A Tale of Two Cities: The Failed Urban Renewal of Downtown Tucson in the Twentieth Century."

⁷⁵ Prezelski, Tom. “The Way We Were.”

⁷⁶ Ibid.

It is estimated that the city spent \$66 million in public and private costs upon completion of the Pueblo Center.⁷⁷ Some of the notable changes erected by the city were the widening of Congress Street, the formation of Veinte de Agosto Park, and the construction of Tucson Hotel, Symphony Hall, Tucson Convention Center, and La Placita—the former Plaza de la Mesilla. The city placed a plaque in La Placita to commemorate the renewal which read, “La Placita is dedicated to the memory of those who founded Tucson and whose love of life made them willing to...build a hospitable city on the foundation of old.”⁷⁸ The city razed the old city square to construct a new face of urban modernity on its ruins, erasing its cultural identity and displacing its residents. According to an article published in the *Tucson Citizen* in 1970, of the families displaced due to urban renewal, about 40 families ended up in public housing, another 40 or so purchased a home in an outside neighborhood, and the rest clambered to find rentals in barrios west and south of downtown, many doubling up with family.⁷⁹ Considering that the downtown center is virtually devoid of all vestiges of those who founded Tucson, the message of the plaque feels satirical at best. Moreover, the assertion that those displaced went willingly is absurd and attempts to render community activism invisible.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Regan, Margaret. “There Goes the Neighborhood.” *Tucson Weekly*, March 6, 1997. <https://www.tucsonweekly.com/tw/03-06-97/cover.htm>

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ In 1969, a Superior Court judge reproached the city for its low assessments and inadequate compensation of displaced residents, asserting that the city should have taken the future appreciation of the developed land. Urban renewal projects in this period were abound in scandal, leading to the establishment of federal programs like Model Cities (albeit a component of the War on Poverty) that require those displaced be paid the equivalent replacement costs for their homes. When Tucson received Model Cities funding, the Pueblo Center was excluded from the plan area which covered from Grant Road on the north to 39th Street on the South, and Silverbell Road on the west to Cherry Street on the east. Williams, James A. “TO TRANSFORM THE INNER CITY: Tucson’s Model Cities Program, 1969-1975.” *The Journal of Arizona History* 52, no. 2 (2011): 143–68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41697354>.

⁸⁰ At the time of the renewal project, community members mobilized to stop the destruction of their communities. Notable among them was La Placita Committee, originally a women’s prayer group led by Alva Bustamante Torres. Although activists failed to stop the redevelopment project, their efforts created a legacy of community activism within the Tucson barrios that exists to this day.

Contemporary City Facilitated Gentrification

Despite local governments efforts to bring “modernity” (i.e., affluent, white residents) to downtown Tucson, many regard the Pueblo Center a complete failure. While the city procured initial funds for the demolition, sufficient funding was harder to obtain for the reconstruction of downtown. In a scathing 2003 review, architects Juan Gomez-Novy and Stefanos Polyzoides reflect on the renewal project commenting,

A profoundly important historic place has been replaced by an incoherent and confused collection of new buildings. What is found there now is so uninspiring that mourning the memory of what was erased is amplified by the mediocrity of what replaced it. Thirty-five years after the promise of urban renewal, downtown has yet to be reborn. Tucsonans routinely shun the undistinguished center of their city because it is not essential to their quality of life or their identity. Most tourists avoid it all together.⁸¹

The economic downturn of Tucson’s downtown area lasted over 40 years, reaching a low point in the 1990s and early 2000s.⁸² The city would attempt several renewal projects before achieving their goal of revitalization in the mid 2000s, through the employment of public-private partnerships.⁸³ The families who were forced into the barrios west and south of downtown would slowly face displacement as new waves of redevelopment crash over their communities. In a conversation with Brian Flagg, he described when he first became aware of impending gentrification in the barrios surrounding the city center,

I think that I’ve known that South Tucson would be gentrified for a long time. In 2007, I wrote an article about Gentrification. Jody [Gibbs] and Corky Poster wrote about gentrification, what they called the Design Center, this was in the mid-to-late 80s. Before Rio Nuevo there was a Rio Nuevo type building and La Entrada. They got government money and had to say that the area was blighted. That was the first time that I heard about

⁸¹ Gomez-Novy, Juan, and Stefanos Polyzoides. "A Tale of Two Cities: The Failed Urban Renewal of Downtown Tucson in the Twentieth Century."

⁸² Nevárez Martínez, Deyanira. “Downtown Revitalization in Tucson, Arizona: A Historical Case Study of Menlo Park Barrio—A Case Study for New Realities,” in *Gentrification, Displacement, and Alternative Futures*, ed. Erualdo González Romero (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 33.

⁸³ Heralded in with the arrival of the city’s “modern” streetcar, Sun Link, in July of 2014. The project is a part of the city’s \$2.1 billion Regional Transportation Plan. The project, which spans 3.9 miles of the downtown area, connecting it to the University of Arizona campus, cost \$196 million to complete. The project was highly contested by residents and activist groups. Real estate development in Menlo Park, which is on the last two stops, noticeably increased after the streetcar’s completion.

gentrification. Next time I heard about gentrification was in 85 or 87, there was St. Martin's [Center for the unhoused] in Armory Park. The Armory Park neighborhood hated St. Martin's. They had artists put on art shows and raised money to pay lawyer fees to get it kicked out of the neighborhood. It went through appeals, but it eventually went all the way to the State Supreme Court. It got shut down.⁸⁴

The concept for the La Entrada Redevelopment Plan was conceived in 1976, what would turn out as yet another one of the city's failed attempts to encourage revitalization in the downtown area under Article 3 of Chapter 12 of Title 36, A.R.S. § 36-1471 et seq. "Slum Clearance and Redevelopment."⁸⁵ On October 23, 1978, the mayor and council approved the project, planning to build a residential complex on land the city had acquired downtown through the federal community block grant program, an area once commonly known as "Snob Hollow". The city's vision for La Entrada was "high-density housing, designed for middle to upper income, young married couples, and single persons."⁸⁶ Once again the city proclaimed the area blighted and established a redevelopment plan to bring affluent, white residents into the downtown area, even though no evidence of the alleged blighted condition was presented to the mayor or council in the ordinance prepared by the planner. The project was met with resistance from a few residents and the Design Center, a nonprofit dedicated to low-income housing, who, in 1981, filed a petition for special action in superior court seeking a declaratory judgement and injunctive relief on two grounds: 1) federal block grant funds should be used for housing low- and moderate-income residents 2) La Entrada may involve the expenditure of tax revenues in the future 3) the city's designation of the La Entrada area as blighted was an erroneous claim. The court determined that the residents' first two concerns did not confer standing, however, the court

⁸⁴ Flagg, Brian. (Casa Maria Director) in discussion with the author, October 2021

⁸⁵ Tucson Community Development & Design Center, Inc. v. City of Tucson, 131 Ariz. 454, 641 P.2d 1298. Caselaw Access Project. Harvard Law School. Dec. 28, 1981. <https://cite.case.law/ariz/131/454/>

⁸⁶ Ibid.

declared that since the council did not receive evidence of blight at the initial meeting when the ordinance was adopted, the city's actions were arbitrary and illegal.⁸⁷

While the La Entrada Redevelopment Plan was unsuccessful, the city would continue to its efforts to draw investment and revenue back into downtown. Local officials began planning for a multipurpose facility district that would encompass the downtown area.⁸⁸ The Rio Nuevo Multipurpose Facilities District is a tax increment financing (TIF) funding mechanism that was formed in 1999 through an Inter-Governmental Agreement between Tucson, Sahuarita, and South Tucson.⁸⁹ The city proclaimed that the district would enhance cultural and ecological sites, promising the construction of a museum district including the Mission Gardens, and what is known as the Convento, and the Carrillo sites. The City of Tucson established appointed four individuals to the first Rio Nuevo Board, who proceeded to mismanage \$250 million, three times what it was allocated, within the first ten years of operation, raising serious public concern about misuse of public funds.⁹⁰ In response to the controversy, the state stepped in and seized control of the Rio Nuevo District, passing Senate Bill 1003 in November of 2009, reconstituting the board and removing management from the city's oversight. Since 2010, nine board members

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ In 1981, the Downtown Development Corporation of Tucson submitted an environmental impact statement for a prototype of what would later become Rio Nuevo. Within the document, the Corporation discusses the "involuntary movement of a household from a dwelling unit caused or stimulated by area upgrading," identifying the impacts that gentrification would have on the local communities.⁸⁸ Although the Corporation deemed displacement not a concern due to high home ownership rates, the document demonstrates the city's awareness of this issue for over 40 years and has decided to pursue development at the expense of the most vulnerable residents. Ibid, 39. Downtown Development Corporation of Tucson. Rio Nuevo Redevelopment Project CDBG: Environmental Impact, 1981.

⁸⁹ TIF is a public financing method used as a subsidy for economic development. Through TIF, cities divert future property tax revenue increases from a defined district toward a development project. Rio Nuevo receives an incremental portion of state-shared funds derived from Transaction Privilege Tax (i.e., sales tax), which are collected within district boundaries to be invested in public projects. This has been met with opposition by fiscal conservatives who call for a "free market" approach to development, arguing that state funding should not be diverted to local projects. Ibid.

⁹⁰ Zeigler, Zachary. "Downtown Redevelopment: A Look at Rio Nuevo's Past and Future."

have been appointed by the Governor, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House of Representatives.⁹¹

Ultimately, the board reneged on early promises of cultural and ecological enhancement, making the redevelopment of downtown its primary focus. In line with the city's prior attempts at renewal, the board's mission is to, "strategically invest in public and public/private projects towards a shared vision for a vibrant Tucson city center by leveraging downtown Tucson's unique competitive advantage as the region's urban and cultural center."⁹² According to the board, the project is intended to increase the desirability of downtown to compete in the tourism arena with cities such as Austin, Portland, and San Diego. In a 2018 interview, Fletcher McCusker, the Rio Nuevo Chair, boasted that the board has, "launched 21 projects since 2013 and created \$300 million of construction downtown."⁹³ Rio Nuevo has facilitated a variety of large construction projects including the AC Hotel by Marriott, Caterpillar headquarters, Mercado San Agustin Annex, Greyhound terminal, and dedicated themselves to a \$65 million renovation of the Tucson Convention Center.⁹⁴ Partnering with local developers like Peach Properties, Rio Nuevo has invested in many smaller projects downtown, funding expansions and renovations of popular restaurants and businesses such as Hotel Congress, Empire Pizza, and the Fox Theatre.⁹⁵ The public-private partnership between Rio Nuevo and developers, as well as the

⁹¹ Nevárez Martínez, Deyanira. "Downtown Revitalization in Tucson, Arizona: A Historical Case Study of Menlo Park Barrio—A Case Study for New Realities."

⁹² Rio Nuevo. What is Rio Nuevo? <https://rionuevo.org/about/what-is-rio-neuvo/>

⁹³ Ibid. Zeigler, Zachary. "Downtown Redevelopment: A Look at Rio Nuevo's Past and Future."

⁹⁴ The Caterpillar construction, a GPLET project, has been at the center of allegations of displacement from many Menlo Park residents.

⁹⁵ Peach Properties has been a local developer for decades. It currently manages more than 20 properties from South Tucson up to 6th Street and downtown. Peach Properties is a leading driver of downtown redevelopment, having renovated properties like the Manning House and the Chicago Music Store. Brocius, Ariana. "Downtown Development Renews Scrutiny of Economic Incentives and Community Preservation." *Arizona Public Media*, Nov. 20, 2020. <https://news.azpm.org/s/82011-balancing-economic-development-with-gentrification-fears-in-downtown-development/>.

economic incentives and subsidies between the two, has stirred a lot of criticism from local communities.⁹⁶

Just Another “Taxpayer Giveaway”

Following David Harvey (1989), Jason Hackworth (2013) traces the transition from egalitarian liberalism to new modes of neoliberal managerialism, arguing that neoliberal logic has increasingly shaped contemporary models of urban governance.⁹⁷ Hackworth points to the growing the growing importance of public-private partnerships as an indication of the strengthening relationship between capital and city government, he argues that these “urban regimes” function to absorb power of the declining federal state and effectuate capital’s exclusion-expansion dialectic. Using the redevelopment of New Brunswick’s central business district in example, Hackworth demonstrates how the city government worked with Jonson & Johnson via public-private coalitions to exclude residents from the central business district through a HOPE VI grant, facilitating the expansion of real estate investment in the area. Hackworth’s observations can be extended to local urban governance and the tax abatement partnerships being currently contested by Casa Maria, who continue to protest the city’s use of Government Property Lease Excise Tax (GPLETs), which they believe will “raise property values in South Tucson, leading to higher property taxes and rents and will negatively change or even destroy South Tucson and its culture.”⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Hackworth, Jason. *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism* (1 ed.). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007. Harvey, David. “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism – The Transformation in Urban Governance in Later Capitalism. *Geografiska Annaler Series B- Human Geography* 71, no. 1 (1989): 3-17.

⁹⁸ Flagg, Brian. Bilingual Discussion on How Tax Incentives Cause Gentrification of Barrios. March 1, 2020.

GPLETs were first introduced in 1996, as Arizona counties and cities sought to redress the departure of businesses in failing downtown areas and increase tax revenue. The excise tax is often described as an “economic tool” that allows a city to take temporary ownership of a property and lease it back to the prior owner for a nominal fee each year, relieving developers of the cost ad valorem property tax; lease terms may be as long as 25 years. The agreement requires the developer to either construct a sizeable improvement on vacant land, spurring economic activity in the area, or to renovate an existing building.⁹⁹ After the construction or renovation is complete, the title is transferred to the city or county and the property is leased back to the developer for some commercial use. The developer can terminate the lease at any point by paying the city or county a nominal sum. Upon termination of the lease, the property taxes are imposed on the property as usual. Unlike property tax, which is based on value, excise tax is based on square footage improvements and the tax rate varies by improvement usage. Moreover, tax rates decrease by 20 percent every 10 years, meaning that projects 50 years or older are no longer subject to taxation. If a property is located within a designated Central Business District (CBD) and meets other specific criteria such as the expectation that the improvements will result in at least a 100 percent increase in property value, the city can abate property tax for up to eight years. After the proliferation of GPLET-eligible projects, Arizona amended the GPLET tax rate statute in 2010, increasing tax rates for all transactions after May 2010 and indexing rates for inflation. Arizona further restricted GPLET benefits in 2017, shifting GPLET tax form completion requirements to the city or county, whereas before, developers were required to submit, often inaccurate, forms to the county treasurer. A key change, however, was the imposition of an eight-year lease limit for properties that receive an abatement. The new statute

⁹⁹ Arizona state statute requires the city designate areas where it offers GPLETs as blighted, which has drawn some scrutiny concerning the city’s use of the designation status.

gives developers the option of either an eight-year abatement or a lease term exceeding eight years, the two can no longer be implemented within a single agreement.¹⁰⁰

The city's CBD designation has enabled the use of GPLET sponsored development. The City of Tucson first adopted the CBD in April of 2012 by Resolution 21883, allowing the City to facilitate infill development and redevelopment in and around downtown. Within every revitalization effort there is a desire to increase property values and tax revenues, the city's goal behind creating the CBD has always been to increase market probability for both private and public investors. Without the city having provided developers a significant financial incentive through property tax abatement, the revitalization of downtown would likely not have been successful. Through three central papers, Sarah Launius (2018) demonstrates how the city and county shaped the scale and content of redevelopment in downtown Tucson. State intervention in the property market was instrumental to producing the conditions for development and drawing investment downtown. Launius found that Tucson's real estate market was too small to draw institutional investors, creating new opportunities for local developers who were already familiar with the local market and had preexisting relationships with financial institutions. However, many of the development projects downtown encountered challenges due to a lack of access to credit; in addition to their own equity, public subsidies from the Rio Nuevo and City of Tucson were essential in filling the gap that allowed developers to access construction loans.¹⁰¹

Since the city's adoption of the redevelopment tool in 2012, the city has entered 24 GPLET agreements, including Rio Nuevo's projects in the downtown area. According to a city report, 90% of Tucson's GPLET projects have gone to local developers. They have generated

¹⁰⁰ Susa," Arizona Revises Tax Incentive Program," Sect. 3.

¹⁰¹ Launius, "*The Streetcar Effect: Capital, Revitalization, and the Battle over Gentrification in a Sunbelt City.*"

over \$300 million of capital investment, and as a result, have contributed to the rising cost of the downtown market.¹⁰² In addition to hotel construction and mixed-use retail space, GPLETS have been utilized in the construction of several luxury apartment complexes, including the Herbert, which converted an apartment complex for the elderly into market rate housing. In 2013, the Cadence, a mixed-use student housing development, opened, charging student residents upwards of \$1,500 monthly.¹⁰³ The Cadence has since been replaced by Agave 350, increasing the prices to \$1,300 to \$2,168 a month.¹⁰⁴ A more recent project, Union on 6th, was completed in 2021, opening a few blocks west of the University of Arizona. The luxury complex is currently leasing, with rents starting at \$1,450 to as much as \$2,830, well above median rent in Tucson.¹⁰⁵ Later that year, HSL properties opened its luxury project, The Flin, on the ruins of the former La Placita Village—bringing urban renewal full circle. This rates at this new complex can run you anywhere from \$1,350 to \$3,025 a month.¹⁰⁶

Nearby neighborhoods have begun to feel the pressure of rising housing costs in the surrounding downtown area. Residents in Armory Park, Menlo Park, and South Tucson have been especially vocal with their concerns as once affordable barrios started transitioning to market-rate housing. As students and young professionals started moving into the neighborhood, median rent in Menlo Park rose by \$689 from 2021 to 2022.¹⁰⁷ In 2023, the median rent in

¹⁰² Brocious, Ariana. “Downtown Development Renews Scrutiny of Economic Incentives and Community Preservation.”

¹⁰³ Ludden, Nicole. “Trash, no water, dead birds—Tucson Apartment Residents Complaints Bring City Action.” *Arizona Daily Star*, July 24, 2021. https://tucson.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/trash-no-water-dead-birds-tucson-apartment-residents-complaints-bring-city-action/article_afdf737a-ebfe-11eb-8a1f-0bd681880c09.html

¹⁰⁴ Prices as of February 26, 2023. Agave 350. <https://www.agave350.com/tucson-az/floorplans>

¹⁰⁵ Prices as of February 26, 2023. Union on 6th. <https://www.unionon6th.com/tucson/union-on-6th/student>

¹⁰⁶ Prices as of February 26, 2023. HSL. <https://theflin.com/floorplans/>

¹⁰⁷ Muñoz Murguía, Brenda. “Rent Hikes, Downtown Boom Spur Gentrification of Older Tucson Neighborhoods.” *Cronkite News*, June 28, 2022. <https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/2022/06/28/tucson-gentrification-threat-downtown-neighborhoods-rent/>.

Menlo Park is \$1,224 a month, the same as South Tucson. In Armory Park, the median rent has risen to \$1,793, 42% higher than the Tucson average.¹⁰⁸ While more affluent residents may be able to weather recent rent hikes, low-income residents are struggling to remain in their communities.

There has been some disagreement regarding the role that recent development has played in the rising costs in the downtown area. Certain officials like Betty Villegas, executive director of the South Tucson Housing Authority, have been vocal about gentrification-driven inflation and its community impacts. In a 2022 interview, Villegas commented, “It’s been happening for a few years now. That’s when we saw the most people moving out of their neighborhoods. And we saw it over and over again, people were priced out of natural occurring rentals. And the rents...were starting to rise,” referring to the supply affordable housing stock in the older neighborhoods around downtown.¹⁰⁹ Several associations have formed in response to redevelopment such as the Barrio Neighborhood Coalition and the Tucson Tenant’s Union, who “work together to fight gentrification and displacement.”¹¹⁰ However, there has been a lot of pushback from developers and city officials alike, who claim the development has brought in outside investment and created employment opportunities for residents.

The city’s use of tax abatement incentives has only added to the contention with residents and local activist groups, who assert that GPLETS have been instrumental to gentrification downtown.¹¹¹ However, many officials continue to call into question the impact that GPLETS

¹⁰⁸ These figures were gathered using a real estate tool on RentCafe on February 28, 2023. Rental Market Trends: Tucson, AZ. <https://www.rentcafe.com/average-rent-market-trends/us/az/tucson/>

¹⁰⁹ Muñoz Murguía, Brenda. “Once-affordable Tucson Neighborhoods Changing as Rents Rise.” *Arizona Daily Star*, July 5, 2022. https://tucson.com/news/local/once-affordable-tucson-neighborhoods-changing-as-rents-rise/article_15a4559e-f7c6-11ec-af12-0bfb20ba29fa.html

¹¹⁰ Barrio Neighborhood Coalition. Who We Are. <https://bntucson.org/about-us>

¹¹¹ Although developers have had great success revitalizing Tucson’s downtown area using GPLET incentives, this tool has yet to make an impact in the redevelopment of South Tucson. During a community meeting at Casa Maria

have had. Vice Mayor Paul Cunningham, stated, “GPLET does, to some extent, contribute to gentrification. But it’s also a red herring.” Cunningham’s assertion was echoed in a study conducted by Gary Pivo, a professor of Real Estate Development and Urban Planning at the University of Arizona. Pivo’s study ran from 2012-2018, assessing the impact of GPLETS on increasing displacement pressures in the downtown barrios. Pivo concluded that while, “GPLET has certainly helped foster downtown vitality,” the program only constituted a small portion of downtown development, and thus, could not be considered a primary contributor of displacement.¹¹² Pivo did observe that the decline of longtime residents was more significant in historically Latinx neighborhoods, including Barrio Viejo, Barrio Hollywood, Santa Rosa, and Menlo Park.¹¹³ Moreover, Pivo noted that small businesses are struggling in the CBD, likely due to losing patrons who have been displaced by the increase in housing costs. Following the rationale of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) model, Pivo concludes that GPLETS may serve as a critical tool in the creation of affordable housing stock.¹¹⁴ However, as the vice president of the Menlo Park Neighborhood Association, Raul Ramirez, noted to the *Daily Star*, “Given all those incentives, you would think that they would be in a prime position to subsidize some low-income housing, but they don’t, it’s all market rate.”¹¹⁵

in August of 2021, Dan Eckstrom explained that, although available to developers, the reason GPLETs have not yet been utilized in South Tucson is due to low property tax.¹¹¹ In the 2017-2018 fiscal year, South Tucson adopted a primary property tax rate at 25 cents per \$100 in valuation, one of the lowest in the state and nearly half that of the City of Tucson. Depending on the valuation, size of a project, and whether a developer opted for the eight-year abatement, paying the ad valorem property tax outright could be more affordable than the GPLET amount over time.
¹¹² Pivo, Gary. “Equity and Sustainability Assessment of Tucson’s Property Lease Excise Tax (GPLET) Program.” University of Arizona, Feb. 12, 2021, 19.

¹¹³ Ibid, 9.

¹¹⁴ The LIHTC Program, subsidizes the acquisition, rehabilitation, or new construction of rental housing targeted to low-income households. Generally, LIHTC participating properties have a certain quantity of units dedicated to low-income households.

¹¹⁵ Muñoz Murguía, Brenda. “Once-affordable Tucson Neighborhoods Changing as Rents Rise.”

The CBD was set to expire in the latter half of 2020. In the week leading up to the City Council vote to renew and expand its boundaries, the workers at Casa Maria, in conjunction with the Barrio Neighborhood Coalition, Pima Area Labor Federation, and other supporting organizations, coordinated a series of demonstrations at each of the City Council Ward offices across the city. At these demonstrations, groups voiced their concerns regarding impending gentrification and displacement surrounding the CBD, demanding the end to the CBD and GPLET program. Despite public opposition, city government voted to renew the CBD on September 22, 2020, extending the program for an additional ten years. In response to the city's unwavering support, McCusker, commented, "We are pleased to see a very important tool maintained and have faith that the city will address the concerns regarding the GPLET to create a better-balanced program with both economic and community benefit," however, what benefits and to which members of the community remains unclear.¹¹⁶ Leading up to the vote Tucson Mayor, Regina Romero, declined to respond to comment regarding the concerns voiced from surrounding communities regarding the potential expansion; however, she weighed in, during the council meeting, stating, "Development that encourages urban density, that is well thought-out, that has input and feedback from the neighborhoods that surround it, that takes into consideration the values of the area and what type of businesses are in the area, that's good development."¹¹⁷ Considering the absence of community involvement in recent downtown revitalization projects, is it not fair to say, by the mayor's own standards, that the redevelopment has not been *good* development?

¹¹⁶ McNeil, "City Approves Central Business District for Another Decade."

¹¹⁷ Ruiz, "Tucson Residents Call for End to Tax Incentive Program," sec. 3.

Conclusion

In response to emerging scholarship, Anne McClintock (1992), wrote, “The term ‘post colonialism’ is, in many cases, prematurely celebratory...organized around a binary axis of time rather than power, and which, in its premature celebration of the pastness of colonialism, runs the risk of obscuring the continuities and discontinuities of colonial and imperial power.”¹¹⁸ This notion is especially relevant to understanding the nuances of contemporary power relations within settler colonial nations such as the United States. Throughout the genealogy of urban revitalization in downtown Tucson, the concentration of Mexican American, indigenous, and nonwhite residents has been used as the basis of establishing “blight”, and therefore, justifying the ongoing racial dispossession of land. So long as racial and colonial logics continue to structure patterns of state intervention, property investment, and development, as well as other areas of everyday life, the colonial project persists. First, via urban renewal, consisting of the complete demolition of entire communities and violent removal of nonwhite residents to “modernize” the city center and later via private-public partnerships to increase tax revenue and outside investment. After multiple attempts, the city effectively erased the Mexican heritage of downtown Tucson and replaced it with a sanitized nostalgia. The next chapter discusses the continuation of local governments dispossession efforts as they turn their attention south of downtown.

¹¹⁸ McClintock, Anne. “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term “Post-Colonialism.” *Social Text*, 31, no. 32 (1992): 87-88.

CHAPTER 3: SOUTH TUCSON AND THE NEW URBANISM

Introduction

Downtown revitalization that continues to drive low-income families out of historic barrios, has begun to seep southward to the City of South Tucson. Over the past few years, the workers at Casa Mara organized a series of community discussions centering around topics of development incentives and gentrification. The soup kitchen's concern was spurred by the appearance of new businesses that have slowly begun to replace local mom-and-pop shops within the community and have drawn outside residents into the barrio. As developers and new business owners move into the city, fear of displacement has increased amongst residents and business owners. Local government continues to facilitate redevelopment efforts that are taking place under the veil of "sustainable" development, one which promises to deconcentrate poverty, increase equality, and leave the local milieu intact. However, not all the residents share local government's zeal concerning recent redevelopment projects in the neighborhood.

Local Governmental Intervention and Infill Development

On August 6, 2019, the Pima County Board of Supervisors approved an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with the City of South Tucson to aid in "economic development matters". The IGA provides the technical assistance with the redevelopment of "blighted" areas of the city, as well as the expansion of the City's GPLET zone at the I-10 and 6th Avenue. The County could also assist in creating special improvement districts within the City of South Tucson. "Pima County has an interest in the economic viability and prosperity of all county residents," said John Moffat,

Director of Pima County Economic Development. “In partnering with the City of South Tucson we see an opportunity to help drive investment to the city and revitalize underutilized areas.”¹¹⁹

In August of 2021, two years after the establishment of the IGA, the workers at Casa Maria began to discuss a series of county-sponsored workshops that had taken place earlier that year. After reviewing the reports and workshop recordings, it became clear that the gentrification occurring in South Tucson was “more David and Goliath” than the workers had previously thought.¹²⁰ In April of 2021, the City of South Tucson, along with the Community Development Planner of Pima County, Ryan Stephenson, met with Sharon Woods, the CEO of LandUse USA and supporting faculty member of the Incremental Development Alliance (Inc Dev), to discuss potential development strategies for South Tucson. LandUse USA is a real estate consulting firm that specializes in place-based Target Market Analysis (TMA), Downtown Market Strategies, and Land Use Economics; their client base consists of state agencies, urban and town planners, and private developers and planning firms. LandUse USA was retained by the Pima County Planning Department to conduct a residential TMA of South Tucson and to identify obstacles to real estate development in the city.¹²¹ LandUse USA’s approach focuses on:

...identifying the magnitude of potential for adding missing housing formats and shopping choices within counties, cities, and urban places of all sizes. It involves rigorous data analysis and modeling and is generally based on in-migration into each county and city; internal migration within those places; movership rates by tenure and lifestyle cluster; and housing preferences among households that are on the move.¹²²

The TMA is a systemic review that analyzes demographic, behavioral, and other relevant data concerning potential consumers. In this instance, data generated by the analysis, may aid developers to build residential and commercial structures that are more likely to attract their

¹¹⁹ Pima County, “County Agrees to Assist South Tucson in Economic Development Deals.”

¹²⁰ Brian Flagg, in a discussion with the author, July 2021

¹²¹ Incremental Development Alliance. Small Group Summary & Next Steps. South Tucson Clinic & Diagnostic. April 13, 2021.

¹²² Woods, “The City of South Tucson, Arizona: Residential Target Market Analysis,” 2.

target audience. The TMA measures the market potential for one year, however, the results can generally forecast market potential over the next five years. The study found that there are just as many existing households moving within South Tucson as there are households moving into the city, highlighting the highly mobile nature of a large segment of the city's population. This finding supports previous studies that have found a significant portion of the population in South Tucson to be stuck in cycles of displacement and relocation within the city.¹²³

Study results estimate that up to 80 new and existing buyers could potentially migrate into and within South Tucson each year and that up to 360 new and existing renters could potentially migrate into and within the city each year for the next five years; authors attributed half of each of those figures to inward migration and half to internal migration. The projected renter base primarily consisted of working-class households that can afford to pay between \$400 to \$1,400 each month in rent. On the other hand, owners new to South Tucson are predicted to buy homes in the range of \$150,000 up to about \$400,000; however, authors warn against building new houses of higher value on speculation alone, suggesting developers consider custom-built or build-to-suit homes.¹²⁴ Considering that over the course of 2020, homes in South Tucson were routinely sold at two to three times the appraised full cash value (FVC), this seems a reasonable suggestion. Authors further warn that if the city's market potential is not met with sufficient new-builds in any given year, those migrating households will settle for existing housing choices in other areas of Pima County; although, authors provide reassurance that whether the market potential is served in a given year, it is replenished with new households in

¹²³ Oretsky, Nicole Tamar. *Shelter Injustice and the Endurance of Housing Poverty in South Tucson, Arizona*, 2008. A previous survey found two-thirds of the city's population mobile, with over half of the population having lived at their current residence for fewer than five years. In her ethnography of housing injustice, Oretsky found two distinct populations living in South Tucson, long-term residents and serial transient renters.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 8.

subsequent years. Thus, authors provided several timelines, projecting the potential for the population of South Tucson to increase by a fifth of its size in the next five years alone.¹²⁵ To accommodate the influx of families, it will be necessary to build new housing complexes throughout the city. Authors suggest that each year 220 new units of various build-types are required to meet the needs of inward migrating households; however, authors indicate that these numbers can only be realized once impediments to development in South Tucson are removed.

In addition to the TMA, the Planning Department retained Inc Dev to diagnose and identify obstacles to small-scale and incremental real estate development in South Tucson. Inc Dev is a not-for-profit organization who “train small developers” and “coach civic leaders how to cultivate patient, healthy real estate development at scale accessible to locals” by providing small developer workshops and boot-camps across the United States (Incremental Development Alliance, What We Do). In late 2020 and early 2021, Inc Dev held small meetings and gave presentations on topics related to incremental development to public and private stakeholders in South Tucson. Faculty spoke to more than 20 individuals including members of the local development review boards, real estate developers, and both for-profit and non-profit housing providers. Topics included current zoning standards, permitting fees, property tax structure, and current market trends. Through these conversations Inc Dev identified zoning as a primary obstacle to development in South Tucson.

South Tucson’s SR1 zone is its largest zone, spanning a quarter of the city and making up 75% of its residential zone. Most of these lots are between 6,000 and 8,000 square feet in size, current minimum lot size standard for redevelopment for SR1 is 6,500 square feet. Current minimum lot size requirements limit redevelopment as it confines building types to single-family

¹²⁵ Ibid, 11.

homes, eliminating the possibility for the construction of new multi-family units. Similarly, 73 percent of South Tucson's SR2 zone, the primary location for multi-unit buildings, are the same average size of SR1 zoned lots. In the SR2 zone, 3,000 square feet of a lot area is needed for every unit of housing allowed to be built on a property. In the SR2 zone, 14 percent of these lots are smaller than 6,000 square feet, essentially making them single family lots. Setback standards (i.e., the distance a building must be from the side of the property line) pose an obstacle to SR2 redevelopment, as they are twice as far for multi-unit buildings than single-family buildings of the same height. Almost all the residentially zoned land in South Tucson has lots whose size would allow for a variety of residential building types; however, the minimum lot size requirements and setback standards constrain what is possible to build there, regardless of what would fit. Moreover, a fifth of the SR1 lots are nonconforming, meaning that it is no longer legal to build what was built when South Tucson was founded. Nonconforming lots pose a large constraint to redevelopment of the local housing stock due to the lack of adherence to local building codes.

There has been much discussion surrounding zoning in South Tucson, questioning whether it would be beneficial in the fight against gentrification to maintain current SR1 zoning. Although urban scholars often consider diversified housing types and inclusionary zoning beneficial for supporting affordable housing units in mixed income areas, the workers at Casa Maria determined that the potential for the construction of exclusionary residential complexes is too great.¹²⁶ Casa Maria hosted a community event in November 2021, inviting city council members, county supervisors, and community members to discuss their initiative. A key point of the initiative demanded that City Council maintain the current SR1 zoning for the City of South

¹²⁶ Inclusionary zoning refers to local governmental ordinances that require a given portion of new construction to be affordable to moderate-to-low-income households.

Tucson in hopes that the current zoning will stave off development. The worker's efforts appear moot when one considers that zoning policy is administered at the city level and, as Sharon Woods states in the report, "city officials are helpful [to developers] ...the people enforcing the rules are willing to look at alternative options to get the result."¹²⁷

Incremental development or in-fill development is an urban redevelopment strategy being used in disinvested neighborhoods across the nation. This strategy seeks to bridge the gap between detached single-family homes and large apartment buildings, creating opportunities for real estate investors and small developers to build wealth. It is lauded as aiding the communities in addressing the gap between the available housing supply, affordability and need—one housing project at a time. Inc Dev is based on the premise that incremental real estate development can contribute to economic resiliency among households and local businesses, as is reflected in the clinic and diagnostic when authors state, with incremental development, "local wealth building and economic opportunity are also possible, as are increased housing choice, housing configurations and diversity of changing neighborhoods and places in South Tucson."¹²⁸

Eric Kronberg, a key member of Inc Dev, stated in an interview with the editor of Public Square, a journal powered by the Congress for the New Urbanism, incremental development is sold as a development strategy to improve disinvested communities while preventing the displacement of current residents. Kronberg explains

...incremental development is a much better way to keep people in place. It helps lift up communities with what's there, as opposed to wholesale clearing of a site in order to replace it with a big lumpy project. One of my historic beefs in my younger days of New Urbanism involved infrastructure. If you have to build all the infrastructure from scratch, you have to sell your product at a premium price because it costs so much to build it all.

¹²⁷ Woods, "The City of South Tucson, Arizona: Residential Target Market Analysis."

¹²⁸ Reilly and Heller, "South Tucson Clinic & Diagnostic: Small Group Summary & Next Steps," 2.

But if you can help provide great urbanism in places where the infrastructure exists, you've got a much better shot at an inclusive community.¹²⁹¹³⁰ Despite LandUse USA and Inc Dev's claims of local benefits and opportunity raise the question of opportunity for who? Urban scholars have promoted the different roles that space and place play in the formation of community identity. Davidson and Lees (2010) argue that by conceptualizing the built environment as simply space, it allows for the reduction of neighborhoods to spatial commodities, this understanding, as they point out, underlies neoliberal urban policies.¹³¹ To reduce displacement to 'the moment of spatial dislocation' is to deny that places are imbued with lived experiences and symbolic meaning.¹³² Stabrowski (2014) demonstrates how rezoning and incremental development in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, a Polish immigrant neighborhood, resulted in "everyday displacement", the, "lived experience of ongoing loss—of security, agency, and freedom to "make place".¹³³ The damage wrought by gradual neighborhood change is akin to Rob Nixon's (2011) notion of slow violence, which he describes as "a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales."¹³⁴ While not every family may be physically displaced, the loss of community identity that occurs alongside the displacement from sense of self, threatens every member regardless of socioeconomic status. Kern (2016) found that incremental development in Toronto's gentrifying Junction

¹²⁹ The Congress for New Urbanism (CNU) is the leading organization promoting mixed-use neighborhood development and the "restoration" of existing urban centers. The CNU works with governmental agencies to shape federal, state, and local policy to promote place-specific investments and physical design.

¹³⁰ Stueteville, "Great idea: Incremental development," paragraph 4.

¹³¹ Davidson, Mark, and Loretta Lees. "New-build Gentrification: Its Histories, Trajectories, and Critical Geographies." *Population, Space and Place* 16, no. 5 (2010): 403.

¹³² Davidson, Mark. Displacement, Space/Place and Dwelling: Placing Gentrification Debate. *Ethics, Environment and Place*, 12 (2009): 402.

¹³³ Stabrowski, Filip. "New-Build Gentrification and the Everyday Displacement of Polish Immigrant Tenants in Greenpoint, Brooklyn." *Antipode* 46, no. 3 (2014): 794-815.

¹³⁴ Nixon, "Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor," 7.

neighborhood, produced a sort of temporal displacement of long-time residents as disruptions in everyday life began to produce new exclusionary social spaces and rhythms in the neighborhood.¹³⁵ Over time, small displacements occurred such as the removal of a bench from outside a café which eliminated a space where nearby shelter inhabitants would sit and smoke, or the raising of coffee prices in all the local shops where residents once met to socialize. When taken together, these small displacements redefine everyday life in the neighborhood by excluding symbolic practices of long-time residents. Kern argues that the gradual displacements act as “a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all,” and thus, is rendered invisible.¹³⁶

Sustainable Development and the New Urbanism

The impetus for incremental development emerges out of the “New Urbanist” planning movement which has stemmed out of the larger push for sustainable development. A preoccupation with sustainable development was brought to the forefront of development discourse in the latter half of the 20th century, advanced by the works of Jane Jacobs (1961) who proposed urban designs that fostered dense urban environments that supported “architectural diversity, land rent diversity, and density that could support and promote economic complexity.”¹³⁷ Jacobs promoted the idea that cities need to grow and diversify to persevere, stating, “lively, diverse, intense cities contain the seeds of their own regeneration, with energy to carry over for problems and needs outside of themselves.”¹³⁸ A central pillar of sustainable

¹³⁵ Kern, Leslie. “Rhythms of Gentrification.” *Cultural Geographies*, 23 (3), 2016: 441-457.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26168744>

¹³⁶ Ibid, 453. Nixon, “*Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*,” 2.

¹³⁷ Stanley, “Sustainable Urban Development and the Political Economy of Growth in Phoenix, Arizona,” 30.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 585.

development has been the notion of built resilience through economic and cultural diversity, as Norton (1999) argues “any community that intends to act sustainably must fund a path toward development that, over time, protects and expands, rather than contracts, option of intertemporal social importance”.¹³⁹¹⁴⁰ Sustainable development strategies are thought to decrease social inequality by providing increased options for all residents, as Talen (2006) summarizes, “the social equity dimension of place diversity involves two notions. First is the idea that social mixing in one place is more equitable because it ensures better access to resources for all social groups—it nurtures what is known as the “geography of opportunity”. In the second sense, diversity is seen as an utopian ideal—that mixing population groups is the ultimate basis of a better, more creative, more tolerant, more peaceful and stable world.”¹⁴¹ This relational notion served as the logic behind scattered-site housing and other social-mixing programs in the 1990s and continues to influence affordable housing initiatives today, despite the fact “that a deterministic relationship between physical and social capital is hard to prove and extremely difficult to promote when redeveloping communities already divided along class and ethnic lines.”¹⁴² Moreover, studies have shown that increased variety of housing choice does not guarantee social equity, especially among lower income groups.¹⁴³

¹³⁹Norton, “Ecology and opportunity: Intergenerational equity and sustainable options,” 141.

¹⁴⁰ Stanley, “Sustainable Urban Development and the Political Economy of Growth in Phoenix, Arizona.”

¹⁴¹Talen, “New urbanism and American planning: The conflict of cultures. New York: Routledge,” 2005: 239.

¹⁴² Stanley, “Sustainable Urban Development and the Political Economy of Growth in Phoenix, Arizona,” 40.

¹⁴³ Jeongseob and Larsen, “Can New Urbanism Infill Development Contribute to Social Sustainability? The Case of Orlando, Florida.”; Day, “New Urbanism and the Challenges if Designing for Diversity.”; Grant, “*Planning the Good Community: New Urbanism in Theory and Practice.*”; Grant and Perrott, “Producing Diversity in a New Urbanism Community: Policy and Practice.” Authors found that few developers were successful in leveraging government programs and engaging nonprofit organizations in integrating affordable housing into their projects. Additionally, new urbanism’s outcomes are mixed, often resulting in increased housing values that exclude lower income markets.

The sustainable development movement emerged alongside a larger shift in the growth paradigm which has historically served as the impetus of capitalist urban planning and development. In their highly influential book, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*, Logan and Molotch (1987) introduce the concept of the “growth machine” to critique post-Fordist urbanization, arguing that a nexus of elites and institutions have collaborated to promote a growth agenda in cities across the nation, resulting in the urban sprawl that we see today.¹⁴⁴ Investor and entrepreneurial focus on land commodification and profiteering from rising property values has spurred the desire for further acquisition and growth. Pro-growth ideology posits that economic growth and urban development are central to the success and future wellbeing of the city. However, as the authors illustrate, this perspective pits cities in perpetual competition in ways that negatively impact their environments, displace residents, and destroy communities.

While proponents of sustainable development have not abandoned the growth paradigm altogether, they are purportedly concerned with the quality and equality of new smart growth. The New Urbanism is an effort to combat urban sprawl, advocating for dense, infill development.¹⁴⁵ New urbanists argue that “the first step of effective long-term planning is to admit that growth will occur, and the second step is to focus on its quality.”¹⁴⁶ While new urbanist development was initially implemented in greenfield developments, the founding of the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU), the movement’s primary advocacy organization, in 1993, alongside the organization’s subsequent partnership with the US federal government in the

¹⁴⁴ Logan and Molotch, “*Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*.”

¹⁴⁵ Smart Growth and New Urbanism are two political movements within urban development that have a lot of overlap, promoting compact built form. New urbanism does not necessarily concern itself with regional growth plans or land economics as does smart growth policies.

¹⁴⁶ Duany et al. “*The smart growth manual*,” sec. 1.1; Stanley, “Sustainable Urban Development and the Political Economy of Growth in Phoenix, Arizona.”

following year, shifted focus to affordability and infill development strategies. This focus is reflected in the 1996 Charter of the New Urbanism: ‘Infill development within existing urban areas conserves environmental resources, economic investment, and social fabric, while reclaiming marginal and abandoned areas’; Jeongseob and Larsen (2017) illustrate how these principles place new urbanism within “a framework of community development and public policy that extend beyond physical design into more intangible sustainability goals” (3844).¹⁴⁷¹⁴⁸ The reality has been that New Urbanism has served as the “complementary architecture” to government-sponsored gentrification, selling an imagined, remade sustainability to attract people who consume more, pay higher taxes, and desire to live close to downtown areas.¹⁴⁹

Critique of New Urbanism

Scholars have demonstrated how urban policies instituted in the latter half of the 20th century, characterized a “new revanchist urbanism”, which provided a hegemonic framework to determine *who* and *what* can stay and that which needs to be removed.¹⁵⁰ Examining New York City’s anticrime campaigns in the 1990s, Neil Smith (1999) illustrated how “urban decline, street crime, and ‘signs of disorder’ are galvanized into a single malady,” an issue for which New Urbanism poses a solution.¹⁵¹ Following Giuliani’s directive, New York City assumed a “zero tolerance” policing strategy, largely targeting the unhoused population and minor crimes, as a result, incarceration rates boomed. Smith argues that through the sanitization of the city via the

¹⁴⁷ Talen, “*Charter for the New Urbanism*,” 47.

¹⁴⁸ Jeongseob and Larsen, “Can New Urbanism Infill Development Contribute to Social Sustainability? The Case of Orlando, Florida,” 3844.

¹⁴⁹ Busch, Andrew. “Crossing Over: Sustainability, New Urbanism, and Gentrification in Austin, Texas.” *Southern Spaces*, 2015, Sec. VI.

¹⁵⁰ Smith, Neil. “New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy.” *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 427-50.

¹⁵¹ Smith, Neil. “Which New Urbanism? The Revanchist '90s.” *Perspecta* 30 (1999), 100.

removal of ‘undesirable’ people, the world was “made safe for a self-conscious liberalism.”¹⁵²

This logic was further used by local government and developers across the country to “reclaim” purportedly “blighted” areas through federal programs such as the HOPE VI and Choice Neighborhoods programs which promoted “mixed-income” rhetoric while obliterating affordable housing complexes and gentrifying low-income neighborhoods throughout the nation.¹⁵³

Despite the CNU’s claim that New Urbanism “promotes the end of segregation between the rich and poor”, scholars have questioned the movement’s ability to create inclusive spaces.¹⁵⁴ Much of the literature surrounding New Urbanism has focused on diversity, arguing that New Urbanist neighborhoods are primarily white, affluent enclaves inaccessible to low-income households, some going as far to claim that “New Urbanist developments increase social segregation.”¹⁵⁵ Critical studies have shown how New Urbanism is used in redevelopment to culturally displace minority groups while creating spaces that normalize Whiteness.¹⁵⁶ Some scholars attribute this lack of accessibility to a disinterest in including affordable housing mechanisms in New Urbanist developments (Day 2003; Grant and Perrott 2009; Hayden 2003; Knox 2008).¹⁵⁷ Talen (2010) examined the price of the least expensive unit available for purchase across 152 New Urbanist neighborhoods built without public subsidies or inclusionary

¹⁵² Ibid, 104

¹⁵³ In fact, the Congress for New Urbanism helped write the guidelines for HOPE VI Program.

¹⁵⁴ Day, “New Urbanism and the Challenges if Designing for Diversity,” 84; Trudeau and Kaplan, “Is There Diversity in the New Urbanism? Analyzing the Demographic Characteristics of New Urbanist Neighborhoods in the United States,” 260.

¹⁵⁵ Irazábal, “Beyond ‘Latino new urbanism’: Advocating ethnourbanisms,” 244.

¹⁵⁶ Trudeau and Kaplan, “Is There Diversity in the New Urbanism? Analyzing the Demographic Characteristics of New Urbanist Neighborhoods in the United States.”; Chaskin and Joseph, “Social interaction in mixed-income developments: Relational expectations and emerging reality.”; Gonzalez and Lejano, “New Urbanism and the Barrio.”; Hanlon, Success by Design: HOPE VI, New Urbanism, and the Neoliberal Transformation of Public Housing in the United States.”

¹⁵⁷ Day, “New Urbanism and the Challenges if Designing for Diversity.”; Grant and Perrott, “Producing Diversity in a New Urbanism Community: Policy and Practice.”; Hayden, “*Building suburbia*,”; Knox, “*Metroburbia*.”

zoning requirements and found that the vast majority were inaccessible to middle and low-income households.¹⁵⁸ Other studies of inner-city redevelopment have linked New Urbanism with advancing gentrification in minority neighborhoods.¹⁵⁹ Andrew Busch examined how NU redevelopment in Austin, Texas was used in municipally-sponsored gentrification efforts resulting in the rise in real estate prices and the subsequent physical displacement of longtime Black and Latinx residents. Busch likened New Urbanist development in East Austin to “a third type of segregation”, one that is that is characterized by “displacement rather than containment” and “accumulation through dispossession” rather than previous iterations of social and institutional discrimination.¹⁶⁰

Instances such as East Austin raise the question what happens to the portion of the inner-city neighborhood that is displaced to create a more diverse, mixed-income neighborhood? What happens to the residents of public housing projects where high-rises are destroyed and fewer units are replaced by low-rise development? New Urbanism does not provide solutions for these and other problems spawned by inner-city revitalization strategies. While the different types of housing espoused by New Urbanism might present better options for inner-city households, many will be excluded from these options without housing assistance and some type of fair share or inclusionary measures, density bonuses, and other incentives.¹⁶¹

Identity and Belonging

¹⁵⁸ Talen, “Affordability in New Urbanist Development: Principle, Practice, and Strategy.”

¹⁵⁹ Fraser et al., “HOPE VI, colonization and the production of difference.”; Kennedy and Zimmerman, “Constructing the ‘Genuine American City’: Neo traditionalism, New Urbanism and neo-liberalism in the remaking of downtown Milwaukee.”; Pyatok “Comment on Charles C. Bohl’s “New Urbanism and the city: potential applications and implications for distressed inner-city neighborhoods”—the politics of design: The New Urbanists vs. the grassroots.”

¹⁶⁰ Busch, Andrew. "Crossing Over: Sustainability, New Urbanism, and Gentrification in Austin, Texas." Southern Spaces, 2015, Southern Spaces, 2015-08-19.

¹⁶¹ Bohl, “New Urbanism and the City.”

While the most vulnerable community members, the unhoused and poorest residents, are subject to erasure via physical displacement, the entire community is in danger of alienation. In an interview with Casa Maria worker and filmmaker, Tanya Núñez explained that

South Tucson is under the threat of displacement from sense of self, to lose culture and community. There are two ends of a pole, trying to survive and trying to make money. In a lot of ways, we are brainwashed to believe that we had to assent to whiteness. Here it is very different. People aren't trying to be rich. There is a resistance to the American Dream. The American Dream is kind of an illusion. I see that here more, the rejection of Rich America, it doesn't exist anymore.¹⁶²

The 'displacement from sense of self' that Núñez describes has been regarded as a "in-situ marginalization", urban scholars have defined cultural displacement as, "a kind of symbolic or indirect displacement where residents experience a gradual change of their neighborhood and growing sense of exclusion that ultimately leads to their physical displacement."¹⁶³ Identity of place is a fundamental element in the formation of self-identity, "questions of 'who we are' are often intimately related to questions of 'where we are.'"¹⁶⁴ The racialization and stigmatization experienced by generations in South Tucson has inarguably shaped the identity of the barrio and those who inhabit it. Territorial stigmatization was coined by Loïc Wacquant (2007) to describe how spatial, social, and symbolic processes intersect to create urban inequality in neoliberal cities. Through territorial stigmatization places and their residents become marked as inferior via

¹⁶² Tanya Núñez (Casa Maria employee), in a discussion with the author, September 2021.

¹⁶³ Kredell, Matthew. "Oakland Cultural Affairs Manager Sheds Light on Creative Placemaking, Placekeeping," USC Price, 2017. <https://priceschool.usc.edu/oakland-cultural-affairs-manager-sheds-light-on-creative-placemaking-placekeeping/>. Pivo, Gary. "Equity and Sustainability of Tucson's Government Property Lease Excise Tax (GPLET) Program. University of Arizona, February 12, 2021. <https://capla.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/Gary%20Pivo%20-%20GPLET%20Equity%20Study%20-%20February%202021.pdf>, 8.

¹⁶⁴ Valli, Chiara. "A Sense of Displacement: Long-time Residents' Feelings of Displacement in Gentrifying Bushwick, New York." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39, no. 6 (2015): 16. Dixon, John, and Kevin Durrheim. "Displacing Place-identity: A Discursive Approach to Locating Self and Other." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 39, no. 1 (2000): 27-44. Proshansky, Harold M. "The City and Self-Identity." *Environment and Behavior* 10, no. 2 (1978): 147-69.

discursive practices in the media, state policy, policing, social service delivery, and everyday conversation.¹⁶⁵ Hegemonic discourse and practice ascribed disorder and criminality onto particular spaces, “territorial stigma associates residents with damaging characteristics such as criminality, littering, and danger, which become the dominant cultural representation of a place through a process of moving from individual to populations and then finally onto spaces.”¹⁶⁶ Although Wacquant links his concept of territorial stigmatization to wider practices of advanced marginality, the social “taint” in South Tucson has a lengthier history with roots in settler colonialism.¹⁶⁷ Aside from the negative image South Tucson has long endured, the community has a strong sense of collective identity and pride despite discrimination, neglect, and lack of opportunity. In her exploration of an erased barrio in downtown Tucson, Lydia Otero noted how the barrio allowed a space for the building of oppositional knowledge and solidarity around marginalized identities.¹⁶⁸ Through solidarity, people have come to rely on one another to survive, building strong social networks both within the community and neighboring social services. With impending physical displacement, the social networks which people have come to rely on for survival will be unavoidably disarticulated. As Roxy Valenzuela informed me, with the rising cost of housing, families that have long patronized the soup kitchen have already

¹⁶⁵ Wacquant, Loïc. "Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality." *Thesis Eleven* 91, no. 1 (2007): 66-77.

¹⁶⁶ Kornberg, Dana. "The Structural Origins of Territorial Stigma: Water and Racial Politics in Metropolitan Detroit, 1950s-2010s." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40, no. 2 (2016): 267.

¹⁶⁷ Barrioization occurred from the period of American occupation until the Mexican Revolution. In his text, *Los Tucsonenses*, Thomas Sheridan (1986), notes that by the early 1880s, Barrio Libre had gained a negative reputation associated with poverty and illegality, a notion that was perpetuated by both English and Spanish press. University of Arizona Press, 80.

¹⁶⁸ Otero, Lydia R. *La Calle: Spatial Conflicts and Urban Renewal in a Southwest City*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010.

started to relocate to rural areas outside of the city—areas that lack essential resources and employment opportunities.

The power that excluded and contained the “social contamination” in South Tucson, is the same power that now seek to create spaces for hegemonic groups within the barrio. As others have noted, gentrification occurring in marginalized communities in place such as South Tucson should be viewed as another iteration of racialized subjugation inherent to capitalism.¹⁶⁹ Since identity is relational and highly tied to place, the psychological and emotional components of displacement in place deserve attention. The long-time residents who can withstand the rise in property values will inevitably witness a dramatic change in the neighborhood as friends move out, support services are driven out of the area, new establishments marketed toward different clientele replace those they’ve patronized for decades, challenging their sense of belonging and individual identity.

In fall of 2021, I walked the city of South Tucson with the workers of Casa Maria, knocking on doors and engaging the community members in conversations surrounding the topics of housing insecurity and affordability. I was naively surprised to find that many of the more affluent community members expressed apathy towards local development projects and openly shared their disinterest in participating in community efforts to ward off gentrification. Some members openly shared vexation with the conditions of the barrio, welcoming a change in demographics. At the time, I could not understand how these older residents, who proclaimed to live in the barrio for the entire lives, could not be concerned about the potential impacts of newcomers moving into the neighborhood. Upon reflection, I came to the realization that the

¹⁶⁹ Valli, Chiara. "A Sense of Displacement: Long-time Residents' Feelings of Displacement in Gentrifying Bushwick, New York."

apathy and outright disgruntlement that I encountered is most likely the product of internalized dominant class values—values that are beginning to shape changes taking place within the barrio.

Commercial Development

Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of neighborhood change within South Tucson is the commercial revitalization occurring throughout the city. The city shops along main hubs such as South 4th and 6th Avenues have long remained vacant, a testament to the city's depressed economy. However, over the past few years, the city has begun to witness pocketed reinvestment of capital within the barrio as new restaurants and bars have begun to attract outside consumers to South Tucson. Roxy Valenzuela speaks to the neighborhood change taking place in South Tucson

The houses look different, what some people would say they are being beautified, flipping houses. I am seeing friends and family being displaced. They are going to Three Points, the outskirts of Sahuarita, Douglas. They are being pushed away further south. We are seeing restaurants coming in the locals can't afford to eat in. People who live here can't afford an eight-dollar burrito. We also see a lot of bars pushing south like St. Charles. We see legacy restaurants like Rigo's closing. You know, they have been here for something like thirty years and now they are gone... Displacement doesn't always have to be physical; it can be cultural. It can be class. We are fighting class, economic warfare.¹⁷⁰

Roxy's statement concerning unaffordable burritos alludes to American Eat Co., a Latinx owned food court that opened a block west of the soup kitchen in April 2018. American Eat Co. proudly features seven restaurants, two bars, an arcade, a coffee shop, and raspados. The food court describes themselves as an “evolving space that combines culture, community, progress with a twist of drinks, food, and entertainment.”¹⁷¹ The complex emphasizes locality and has worked

¹⁷⁰ Roxanna Valenzuela (Casa Maria employee), in a discussion with the author, July 2021.

¹⁷¹ American Eat Co. Who We Are. <https://www.americaneatco.com>

with nonprofit organizations such as the Sunnyside Foundation and Angel Heart Pajama Project to facilitate donation drives for families in Tucson. However, despite the self-proclaimed inclusivity, the complex has not drawn in as many members from the local community as their branding would suggest. Places such as American Eat Co. undeniably compete with the multigenerational legacy restaurants that have long inhabited South Tucson.¹⁷² Unlike legacy restaurants which have served to support local culture and provide gathering spots for the community, new businesses such as American Eat Co. employ aspects of local culture in a manner to “convey a sense of inclusion and the illusion of representation in ways that veil the overall upscaling of spaces and institutions and the social exclusions” that result from development.¹⁷³ Similarly, in November 2022, a young couple announced the opening of a new café in the building previously occupied by Balloon Land, a locally owned party supply store. According to the owners, the Luna y Sol Café will “offer not only a quality product, but also a great neighborhood feeling.” The owners claim that the café will provide “a hub for the community” where everyone is welcome.¹⁷⁴ In response to the opening, Betty Villegas, the city’s Executive Housing Director, commented, “This is a great opportunity for the residents to have a place to meet with neighbors and organizations...This coffee shop is more than just a business for Selina. It is a way to build community.”¹⁷⁵ Villegas’s commentary is representative of the

¹⁷² Legacy businesses are defined as, “a type of established business (minimum of 10 years in operation) that is small (typically less than ten employees), accessible (i.e., pedestrian-oriented, contributes to the ground-level streetscape), retail or food service sector oriented, and independently owned. However, the primary defining attribute is that these businesses serve some community function that goes above and beyond the simple sale of goods and services.” City of Seattle, Legacy Business Study, September 2017 https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/economicDevelopment/22820_Legacy_Report_2017-09-25.pdf. Pivo, “Tucson’s Government Property Lease Excise Tax (GLPET) Program, 25.

¹⁷³ Dávila, Arlene. *Culture Works*. New York: NYU Press, 2012, 189. Zapatka, Kasey Michael. *Not Just a Bookstore: La Casa Azul Against Neoliberal Habitus and Gentrification*, 2014.

¹⁷⁴ Popat, Mamta. “A Coffee Shop is Coming to South Tucson, but it’s so Much More Than That.” *Arizona Daily Star*, Nov 27, 2022.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

promotion developers have received from local government, which has historically favored industry and private interests over residents. Moreover, it ignores the history and current erasure of legacy restaurants that have long served as community gathering spots, supporting local culture within the barrio.

The upscaling of local establishments by middle-class Latinx owners is reminiscent of the gentefication movement—a phenomenon most associated with the working class, Latinx community in Boyle Heights. The term “gentefication” describes a bottom-up approach to improve neighborhood conditions from within by upwardly mobile Latinx entrepreneurs, in hopes of maintaining the neighborhood’s character and avoiding displacement of its residents.¹⁷⁶ In the process of gentefication, entrepreneurs seek to positively recodify race and replace the negative reputation of the disinvested neighborhood through the production and marketing of nostalgic conceptions of ethnicity. Ironically, as more bars and restaurants sporting colorful murals sprout up across the city, local development increases the potential of attracting large-scale development to the area. While gentefication may appear to be a valid strategy in opposition to large-scale, corporate-led gentefication on the surface, scholars have noted that as the upwardly mobile community members climb the social structure, downward pressure increases on low-income residents, and class differences within the community become more pronounced.¹⁷⁷ As ethnic tensions increase along class line, those lowest on the socioeconomic ladder inevitably become physically displaced. While new establishments replace familiar landmarks, their goods may appeal to the tastes of the “old” residents, however, the cost, unaffordable to many, prevents them

¹⁷⁶ Ahrens, Mareike. “Gentrify? No! Gentefy? Sí!”: Urban Redevelopment and Ethnic Gentrification in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles.” *Aspeers* 8 (2015): 9-26.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid,17. Avila-Hernandez, Lydia. “The Boyle Heights Landscape: The Pressures of Gentrification and the Need for Grassroots Community Action and Accountable Development.” MA Thesis. Occidental College. Los Angeles, n.d. Fortin, Kris. “Boyle Heights Residents Document Housing Concerns for Future Mayor. *Streetsblog Los Angeles*. n.p. 1 Nov. 2012.

from frequenting these businesses. As the consumption patterns of “new” residents are institutionalized in the local economy, the “old” residents are barred access to community spaces. While this form of bottom-up development cannot be conflated with classic gentrification, for the most vulnerable residents, it has yielded similar results.¹⁷⁸

Outside developers have begun moving into the barrio, drawing in new customers from outside of the community. While residents from across Tucson have frequented certain spaces within the community, primarily legacy restaurants, those spaces have been representative of local tastes and preferences. Unlike redevelopment by middle-class Latinx entrepreneurs that draws upon the idea of community and local culture, these new spaces differ in that they clearly appeal to target audiences outside of the local community. Classic gentrification associated with an “younger”, “artsy” crowd is beginning to take root in South Tucson, particular cultural expressions are being used to generate wealth by prioritizing the preferences, practices, and lifestyles of new and outside residents.

After a long day at the soup kitchen, Roxy asked me to meet her at Saint Charles Tavern on South 4th Avenue, two blocks southwest of Casa Maria. The bar is unlike any other establishment that I had visited within South Tucson. The patrons were primarily young, white, and what many would describe as “hipster”. It was an interesting juxtaposition listening to Roxy’s hopes of preserving the barrio, while simultaneously observing the patrons slamming back \$12-dollar rum punches and Jell-O shots. Saint Charles Tavern opened in 2015, by Elizabeth Menke and Churchill Brauninger, who helped transform the popular downtown restaurant La Cocina, offering live music, craft beer, and cocktails. As Menke stated to *Tucson Weekly*, Saint Charles Tavern was the first new bar to open in South Tucson in years, she noted that, “There’s a growing

¹⁷⁸ Ahrens, Mareike. “Gentrify? No! Gentefy? Sí!”: Urban Redevelopment and Ethnic Gentrification in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles.”

bohemian vibe in this neighborhood and we're hoping others follow suit."¹⁷⁹ The news outlet described the bar as the "perfect spot for those displaced by the big development downtown," asking, "Why lament the loss of the old weird Tucson vibe when that same spirit lives on barely a mile away?"¹⁸⁰ Menke reported to *Tucson Foodie*, that the owners had to propose a business plan to the City of South Tucson's board to convince local leaders that the bar would improve the barrio, Menke boasted that the bar has "transcended the reputation of violence" associated with South Tucson.¹⁸¹ The news outlet claims that the owners are proud to be a part of South Tucson's "flourishing revitalization, 'without gentrifying it', Menke stated that the bar is "providing revenue and enjoying mutual support with the longtime residents." Despite Menke's positive claims, of inclusion and prosperity, it remains unclear how the local community is benefitting from the bar's presence. At the time of my and Roxy's interview, the bar was already quite busy at 5:00pm on a Wednesday, Roxy commented that she did not recognize anyone from the community, aside from perhaps the bartender. In fact, she reported that the residents do not frequent the bar, and most could not afford to do so. While the owners claim that the chosen name is an attempt to preserve the Catholic character of the neighborhood, it is evident that the bar stands out from the local milieu.

In October 2021, during one of the weekly meetings that I attended at Casa Maria, Ron Schwabe, the owner of Peach Properties, a key developer in the revitalization of downtown Tucson, came to discuss current redevelopment occurring in South Tucson.¹⁸² During the meeting,

¹⁷⁹ Holch, Heather. "Saint Charles Tavern Brings Neighborhood Bar Vibe to the South Side." Sept. 9, 2015. <https://www.tucsonweekly.com/TheRange/archives/2015/09/09/saint-charles-tavern-brings-neighborhood-bar-vibe-to-the-south-side>

¹⁸⁰ "Staff Pick: Best New Bar." *Tucson Weekly*, 2016. <https://www.tucsonweekly.com/tucson/staff-pick-best-new-bar/BestOf?oid=7319169>

¹⁸¹ Orlando, Angela. "Saint Charles Tavern Sits in South Tucson's Sweet Spot." *Tucson Foodie*, December 24, 2018. <https://tucsonfoodie.com/2018/12/24/saint-charles-tavern-south-tucson/>

¹⁸² Schwabe owns 21 properties in South Tucson.

Schwabe disclosed that he bought the old Beach Furniture and Appliance property on the corner of East 32nd Street and South Sixth Avenue, originally constructed in 1953. He shared his plans to transform the old property into an art gallery and coffee roaster, something new to the barrio. The project resulted in South Beach, a New Urbanist, “mixed-use” project featuring seven remodeled live/work studios and more than 11,000 square feet of commercial space—presumably where Schwabe will eventually open the gallery and roaster. Although, Schwabe does not list the rental price on the Peach Properties website, I imagine that it is safe to assume it is well over market rate. Schwabe’s interest in South Tucson is indicative of the recognition the barrio is gaining from local developers, with the neighborhood’s close proximity to downtown, it was only time until they turned their attention southward. This notion is further evidenced by Equilibrium Real Estate Investments, an investment management firm specializing in developing commercial and residential properties, acquisition of an entire block on the corner of 4th Avenue and East 29th Street; the property surrounds the legacy restaurant Mi Nidito. Although, the firm has not publicly announced what they will do with the property, it has been speculated that they may build a mixed-use residential complex, encouraging immigration to the neighborhood.

Conclusion

Gentrification occurring in South Tucson is not an unintended product of local developers, revitalization has been a goal of local officials for some time. In 2017, the City of South Tucson forced the Gospel Rescue Mission, who had previously served the unhoused community in South Tucson for over sixty years, to relocate outside of the city—this would be one of the city’s first steps in sanitizing the barrio.¹⁸³ Local government has begun to work with

¹⁸³ The GRM had moved to the corner of 9th Avenue and 28th Street in 1956 where it operated for 63 years. A fire at the Men’s Center in 2017, prompted the city to conduct an external review of the fire

local developers to bring the vibrancy and increased tax revenue that new urbanist design offers to the city. Tax incentives and public-private partnerships can be understood as the state engaging in ‘accumulation by dispossession’ at the urban scale.¹⁸⁴ Different than previous racialized iterations, accumulation by dispossession is based on the expulsion of the dispossessed rather than incorporation as the labor power. From those already displaced to rural areas outside of Tucson, we can see that this iteration seeks to expel the undesirable residents entirely outside of the Tucson Metropolitan Area. Although redevelopment has not been fully realized, it is already apparent that recent projects in South Tucson prioritize the tastes and lifestyles of new residents and tourists over those of longtime residents, while simultaneously, appealing to a sanitized imaginary of Mexican culture. Acknowledging that development has already taken hold in South Tucson, Casa Maria has shifted their focus from fighting development to fighting displacement. The next chapter discusses the issue of housing affordability in South Tucson and the larger metropolitan area and the approach that Casa Maria has taken to tackle the affordability crisis.

code. The shelter was forced to reduce the number of beds from 110 to 55 beds, causing them to find an alternative location.

¹⁸⁴ Harvey, David. *The New Imperialism*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

CHAPTER 4: ¡LA VIVIENDA ES UN DERECHO HUMANO!

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for rental and utility assistance reached new heights as rents across the nation soared. The federal government passed several relief packages, starting with the CARES Act in late March of 2020.¹⁸⁵ Later that August, the Community Investment Corporation (CIC) contracted with Pima County and the City of Tucson to develop an online platform to distribute \$56 million in federal funding to prevent evictions during the pandemic. The program could provide up to 12 months of back rent and 3 months of future rent, or a total of \$30,000 in assistance. The Eviction Prevention Program was distributing about \$1 million in assistance every week; however, the funding was drying up quickly. Just as they thought they may see the end of the program, in March 2021, Tucson and Pima County received an additional \$22 million to fund eviction prevention. Mayor Regina Romero commented, “Tucsonans are still feeling the lingering effects of the pandemic on an already strained housing market. Working families, individuals on fixed incomes and those on the brink of homelessness are facing obscene rent hikes and a statewide housing shortage. These resources will help those urgently trying to get back on their feet.”¹⁸⁶ During this time, the county set up the Eviction

¹⁸⁵ Later that year, the Emergency Rental Assistance Program was established with a \$25 billion allocation and was expanded in 2021 with another \$21 billion as part of the American Rescue Plan. The city received \$61.5 million of those funds, while the county received about \$44.2 million. Ludden, Nicole. “Pima County Oversees Eviction Prevention Program After City Withdrawals.” *Arizona Daily Star*, July 4, 2022. https://tucson.com/news/local/pima-county-oversees-eviction-prevention-program-after-city-withdraws/article_c919c91e-f7cc-11ec-b1f6-1f8ec309cca2.html

¹⁸⁶ Kmack, Sam. “Pima County, Tucson Receive Extra \$22M to Help Prevent Evictions, Could Get More.” *Arizona Daily Star*, March 20, 2022. <https://tucson.com/news/local/pima-county-tucson-receive->

Prevention/Rental Assistance and Utility Relief Program, just months before the city and CIC dropped out of the joint program in June of 2021. The county inherited over 5,000 of the city's backlogged applications, it would take the county months to complete, and thousands of people would lose their housing once the moratorium on evictions came to an end on August 26, 2021.¹⁸⁷

Despite the city and county's efforts, many families found themselves in difficult situations. As one Tucson resident tells *AP News*, "I didn't think I was going to be evicted because I applied for rental assistance money. But they didn't want to wait the four to six weeks. So now we're homeless—me, my 16-year-old son, my daughter and my grandchild, a toddler."¹⁸⁸ Many tenants found that their landlords did not want to participate in the program, opting to evict tenants, while others encountered barriers to navigating the online platform due to technological illiteracy, missing documents, and not meeting federal eligibility requirements. Encountering challenges with assisting families in the South Tucson community in the application process led the workers at Casa Maria to demand policy change. In a 2022 interview with the *Tucson Sentinel*, Roxy Valenzuela commented, "We need different options, not just putting a band-aid on this, and not just putting in funds to keep people in their houses but

extra-22m-to-help-prevent-evictions-could-get-more/article_54d882a2-98bd-11ec-8a44-37011bd29bc4.html

¹⁸⁷ In March 2020, Congress passed the CARES Act, including a moratorium on the evictions of tenants in rental properties that receive federal funding or have federal-backed mortgages. In January 2021, President Biden signed an executive order extending the moratorium through March 2021. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) extended the moratorium several times until the Supreme Court struck down the moratorium on August 26, 2021. North Carolina Housing Finance Agency. "US Supreme Court Ends Federal Eviction Moratorium." August 27, 2021. <https://www.nchfa.com/news/news/us-supreme-court-ends-federal-eviction-moratorium>

¹⁸⁸ Snow, Anita. "Eviction Confusion, Again: End of US Ban Doesn't Cause Spike." *AP News*, October 2, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/evictions-begin-coronavirus-pandemic-16f69ac351e52c05e7a08ca6b8dea61f>

building more housing and looking at policies that will secure affordable housing.”¹⁸⁹ Roxy was highlighting the fact that temporarily halting evictions does nothing to address the structural underpinnings of the affordability crisis, and in doing so, guarantees that the city and county’s efforts will come up short.

As the initial moratorium ended, on December 10, 2020, Casa Maria held a rally on the steps of the Consolidated Justice Court in downtown, demanding that officials stop evictions and utility shutoffs. At the time, an estimated 365,000 families were under threat of eviction in Arizona; in Pima County alone, up to 26,606 households were at risk of displacement.¹⁹⁰ On March 15, 2021, Casa Maria held a public demonstration at Veinte de Agosto Park, receiving media coverage. They demanded that Governor Doug Ducey expand moratoria for all evictions, cancel rent and utility debt, and expunge eviction records during the pandemic.¹⁹¹ Casa Maria began exploring alternative strategies, promoting the “cancel the rent” movement locally. Campaigns to cancel the rent arose from more than pandemic heightened insecurity, as Susan Bennett (2020) notes, “Cancel the rent” means cancel the contract: justice requires society's acknowledgment that housing is too foundational to be left as “the product of a private contract about private property.”¹⁹² Cancel the rent is more than just a slogan, it is a policy that

¹⁸⁹ Kelty, Bennito. “As Pandemic Ends, So Does Rent Aid, Leaving Uncertain Future for Pima County Tenants.” *Tucson Sentinel*, Mar. 11, 2022.

https://www.tucson sentinel.com/local/report/031122_pima_housing_aid/as-pandemic-ends-so-does-rent-aid-leaving-uncertain-future-pima-county-tenants/

¹⁹⁰ Ludden, Nicole. “Pima County Oversees Eviction Prevention Program After City Withdrawals.”

¹⁹¹ Only evictions filed for nonpayment of rent were prohibited under the CDC moratorium. Landlords could seek eviction for other breaches of the lease, like criminal activity, property damage or health code violations. Additionally, during the moratorium, landlords could file for eviction for nonpayment of rent and ask a judge to order an eviction judgment — they just couldn’t enforce the judgment and make their renters leave until after the moratorium ended. However, during a weekly meeting at Casa Maria in June 2021, Constable Kristen Randall informed us that she saw a rise in illegal evictions, landlords collecting a portion of past due and continuing to pursue eviction, and judges not permitting unrepresented tenants to speak during their hearings during the pandemic.

¹⁹² Bennett, Susan D. "Making the Second Pandemic: The Eviction Tsunami, Small Landlords, and the Preservation of "Naturally Occurring" Affordable Housing." *Journal of Affordable Housing &*

“recognizes the straight line between commodification of housing and housing insecurity.” Pre-pandemic increases in housing costs combined with stagnating and insecure wages have left many vulnerable to physical displacement. Low-wage workers were hit doubly hard by the layoffs that proceeded the onset of the pandemic. Kathryn Edin and Luke Shaefer (2016) documented a sociology of work that illustrated how the fragmentation of the labor market has resulted in unpredictable fluctuations in hours, preventing many low-income and middle-class workers from setting aside emergency funds for when crises like the pandemic arise.¹⁹³ The wave of evictions following the lift on the COVID-19 eviction moratorium shed light on the severe shortage of affordable housing stock across the nation.

The objective of this chapter is to further demonstrate how this iteration of expulsion is different than previous iterations in that the affordability crisis has created a situation in which once affordable enclaves such as South Tucson are no longer affordable for their inhabitants. The ongoing housing crisis has been produced through its commodification, stagnating and fragmented wages, and neoliberal restructuring of social housing, including the underproduction of affordable units. The city’s approach to affordable housing has supported its urban renewal endeavors and, thus, the displacement of working-class families of color. Local government continues to seek market-based solutions to the severe affordable housing shortage in Pima County, resulting in the displacement of its most vulnerable citizens. This chapter raises the question of where people go when there is nowhere else to go.

The Rise in Rental Housing

Community Development Law 29, no. 2 (2020), 172. Akbar, Amna. “The Left is Remaking the World.” *New York Times*, July 11, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/2020/07/11/opinion/sunday/defund-police-cancel-rent.html>.

¹⁹³ The concept of market fragmentation describes a labor market that is characterized by an accumulation of insecurities, in which workers combine non-standard employment with low wages. These non-standard forms of employment differ from full-time wage and salary work with permanent contract. Edin, Kathryn and Luke Shaefer. *\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2016.

Tucson has long been considered one of the most affordable cities for renters, and at one time the city was ranked as the third cheapest city to rent in the nation.¹⁹⁴ Pima County has experienced a moderate but steady rise in rental prices over the past decade, with median rents increasing approximately 18% from 2010 to 2019.¹⁹⁵¹⁹⁶ In 2019, the median rent was \$622 for a studio, \$725 for a one-bedroom unit, and \$947 for a two-bedroom unit—less than the national average. Between 2019 and 2021, median rent increased by over 25 percent; although Tucson had the third-lowest rent prices among 12 western metropolitan areas in April 2020, it had the third-highest rent price growth rate, only surpassed by Phoenix and Colorado Springs.¹⁹⁷ From January 2021 to January 2022, however, rents in Tucson increased an average of 18.3% for one- and two-bedroom apartments, surpassing the national average of 14.1%.¹⁹⁸ Overall, between 2017 and 2021, median rent rose by 40 percent, far outpacing wage increases, which rose by a meager 4 percent over the same period.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Kurtz, Lisa, Katie Gentry, Erica Quintana, Ashlee Tizganuk, Alison Cook-Davis. *Shoestring Away from Nothing: Experiences of Housing Insecurity in Pima County*. Arizona Community Foundation, May 2022.

https://morrisoninstitute.asu.edu/sites/default/files/experiences_of_housing_insecurity_in_pima_county.pdf

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 2.

¹⁹⁶ Home values in the Tucson Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) fell substantially after the market crash in 2008, bottoming out in 2011, decreasing 45.1 percent from the peak in 2006. Since hitting bottom, home values had risen 77.6 percent by the end of 2019. Tucson was one of the slowest regions to recover home values from the 2008 crash, in fact, at the end of 2019, it was one out of two comparable metro areas that had not regained pre-recession median home prices. In 2020, Tucson surpassed the 2006 median home value, with a median price of \$265,100 for a single-family home, a 9.8 percent increase from the previous year. Overall, between 2017 and 2021, median home values in the Tucson MSA rose by 60 percent. In the last year, Arizona saw the second highest home price appreciation in the country at 28.6% in February 2022. Pullen, Jennifer, “Tucson’s Home Prices Continue to Increase but Lag Peers.” Making Action Possible, “Trends in Home Values in the City of Tucson and Pima County.” City of Tucson, “Housing Affordability Strategy for Tucson,” 17. Boesel, Molly, “Annual U.S. Home Price Hits New Record in November.”

¹⁹⁷ Making Action Possible, “Trends in the Tucson and Pima County Rental Market.”

¹⁹⁸ Kurtz et al., “Shoestring Away from Nothing: Experiences of Housing Insecurity in Pima County,” 2.

¹⁹⁹ City of Tucson, Housing Affordability Strategy for Tucson, 19.

According to the 2018 5-year American Community Survey, 37.6 percent of households in the Tucson metropolitan statistical area (MSA) are renters, and of these households, 33,000 are considered extremely low-income. These families earn 30 percent of the area median income or less per year, which for the City of Tucson was \$43,425 in 2021, nearly \$10,000 less than the County’s area median income last year. In total, there are over 75,000 households in Tucson that are housing cost burdened, spending over 30 percent of their income on rent alone.²⁰⁰ The housing price-income divergence started in the 1970s but has progressively worsened, as Eylul Tekin, a research associate for Clever Real Estate, explained, “Median home prices increased 121 percent nationwide since 1960, but median household income only increased 29 percent...Median gross rent increased by 72 percent since the 1960s, more than twice the growth seen by adjusted incomes, making renting costlier than ever and saving for a future home difficult”.²⁰¹ Arizona home prices have risen by 195 percent over the last decade, and home prices in the state have appreciated by 28.5 percent over the course of 2021 to 2022; Arizona wages are not rising fast enough to keep pace with the real estate market.²⁰² Using data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) released a report in July of 2020, outlining the hourly wage a full-time worker must earn to afford modest rental housing nationally and for every state, county, and metro area in the United States. The report found that in 2020, the 2-bedroom national housing wage was \$23.96 an hour, meaning a full-time worker would need to earn \$23.96 an hour to afford a two-bedroom apartment without spending 30 percent of their income. The housing wage in Arizona that year was \$22.30 an hour,

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 18.

²⁰¹ Tekin, Eylul. “A Timeline of Affordability: How Have Home Prices and Household Incomes Changed Since 1960?” sec.1.

²⁰² Santarelli, Marco. “Phoenix Arizona Housing Market: Prices, Trends, Forecast 2022.”

the 19th highest housing wage in the country.²⁰³ The pandemic and subsequent economic fallout brought the issue of housing affordability to the forefront; however, it began long before the 2020 crisis.

The Commodification of Housing: ‘Neoliberal Answers to Neoliberal Crises’

To understand the current housing affordability crisis and investment craze in single-family housing, we need to look back at the housing market over the past 70 years. In the United States, housing values have been on the rise since the 1950s; for example, between 1950 and 1970, the median value of housing increased from \$45,000 to \$65,000, an increase of about 44 percent.²⁰⁴ The rise in housing costs during this time can be attributed to rising housing quality and construction costs. Housing affordability did not begin to emerge as a national issue until the 1970s, as wages and housing costs began to diverge. As baby boomers entered the housing market, they drove up demand home and home prices, alongside rising inflation, soaring mortgage interest rates, and a harsh recession. Between 1970 and 2000, the median value of housing increased from \$65,000 to \$120,000, an increase of 85 percent.²⁰⁵ Beginning in the 1980s, the government began to loosen lending practices and artificially lower interest rates, creating a large expansion in access to housing credit. Subprime mortgages were offered by lenders and then repackaged into securities; as more people were able to access credit, increased demand drove up housing prices nationwide. Mortgage debt of US households rose from 61 percent of the GDP in 1998 to 97 percent in 2006.²⁰⁶ Ultimately, housing prices fell, resulting in

²⁰³ National Low Income Housing Coalition. “Let’s Talk Housing Wage: Understanding ‘Out of Reach’ 2020”

²⁰⁴ Taylor, Henry. “The Historic Roots of the Crisis in Housing Affordability: The Case of Buffalo, New York, 1920-1950.”

²⁰⁵ Ibid; Mankiw and Weil, “The Baby Boom, the Baby Bust, and the Housing Market.”

²⁰⁶ Weinberg, John. “The Great Recession and Its Aftermath. Federal Reserve History.”

the 2008 crash of the US housing market and the subsequent depression of the global economy. Home prices increased 110 percent between 2000 and 2008; after the crash, home values decreased by 24 percent between 2008 and 2010.²⁰⁷²⁰⁸

In response to the 2008 financial crisis, the Federal Reserve implemented quantitative easing (QE), buying trillions of dollars in government bonds and mortgage-backed securities. Between 2008 and 2015, the federal government's assets skyrocketed from \$900 billion to \$4.5 trillion.²⁰⁹ The federal government has utilized QE when it has already lowered the federal funds rate to near zero and additional monetary stimulus is needed to spur economic growth. Essentially, QE provides additional stimulus by reducing long-term interest rates, increasing lending, and increasing liquidity in financial markets.²¹⁰ While there are many proponents of QE, critics have argued that excess liquidity in the market can lead to higher inflation or stagflation over the long term, devalue currency, and create asset bubbles.²¹¹ Although the government ended QE in 2014, it has kept interest rates artificially low, and as a result, housing prices have

²⁰⁷ Tekin, "A Timeline of Affordability: How Have Home Prices and Household Incomes Changed Since 1960?"

²⁰⁸ People of color were disproportionately affected by home foreclosures during the fallout. Bocian, Li, and Ernst (2010) estimate that Latinx households were dispossessed of \$177 billion and African American households were dispossessed of \$194 billion in accumulated wealth in the 2008 crisis. Bocian, Debbie, Li Wei, and Ernst Keith. "Foreclosures by Race and Ethnicity: The Demographics of a Crisis." *CRL Research Report*. Center for Responsible Lending, 2010. (<http://www.responsiblelending.org/mortgage-lending/research-analysis/foreclosures-by-race-and-ethnicity.pdf>).

²⁰⁹ Schulze, Elizabeth. "The Fed Launched QE Nine Years ago—These Four Charts Show its Impact."

²¹⁰ The opposite strategy, quantitative tightening (QT), functions to reduce the Federal Reserve's balance sheet by either selling treasuries or letting them mature, decreasing liquidity from financial markets as a result. Congressional Budget Office. *How the Federal Reserve's Quantitative Easing Affects the Federal Budget*. Sept. 2022. <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/58457>

²¹¹ Inflation differs from stagflation in the former is the result of the steady increase in the price of goods and services over time, currency devaluation, and higher cost of living, whereas the latter is a combination of high inflation and economic stagnation. Rondini, Laura. "What is Quantitative Easing (QE)? How Does it Affect the Economy?" *The Street*, Feb. 12, 2023. <https://www.thestreet.com/dictionary/q/quantitative-easing>

steadily risen nationwide since 2011. The pandemic sparked another wave of QE in early 2020; once again, the federal government lowered interest rates and spurred lending. According to the National Association of Realtors (NAR), home prices rose in 99 percent of the 183 markets NAR tracked in the second quarter of 2021, with 78 percent seeing double digit spikes in appreciation.²¹² During the pandemic, affluent residents across the nation fled from major cities to tax-friendlier locales such as Phoenix, Salt Lake City, San Antonio, and Boise. The mass exodus resulted in an upsurge in the receiving housing markets. Between 2021 and 2022, Arizona saw the second highest home price appreciation in the country at 28.6%; in June, the median house price in Tucson was \$370,000—a spillover effect from the Phoenix market.²¹³

Nationally, the United States is witnessing historic dips in housing stock, and the resulting appreciation has priced out many would-be homebuyers, further limiting an already low housing inventory.²¹⁴ According to data released by the U.S. Census Bureau, in March 2022, over 95 percent of rentals in the state were occupied.²¹⁵ The housing shortage is a product of over a decade of underproduction. A recent longitudinal study tracked national housing construction by county and metropolitan area, finding that, “nearly 75 percent of US metropolitan areas are experiencing worsening levels of housing underproduction. Experts speculate that it will take at least 10 years and upwards of 5.5 million homes to correct the

²¹²Shamir, Yaron. “The Snowball Effect of Rent Inflation: Some 2022 Predictions.” *Forbes*, Jan. 19, 2022. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2022/01/19/the-snowball-effect-of-rent-inflation-some-2022-predictions/?sh=6f6a0bcf70a8>

²¹³In 2018, the median home value was \$173,500. Confair, Denelle. “Tucson Housing Market Cooling but Goes Down in Affordability.” KGUN, Aug. 16, 2022. <https://www.kgun9.com/news/local-news/tucson-housing-market-cooling-but-goes-down-in-affordability>

²¹⁴ In addition to the millennials who have been priced out of the market, many boomers are opting to rent.

²¹⁵U.S. Census Bureau, Rental Vacancy Rate for Arizona [AZRVAC], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/AZRVAC>, March 6, 2023.

shortage.²¹⁶ According to the study, Arizona went from adequate production in 2012 to having 108,564 or 5.8 percent of total units underproduced in 2019.²¹⁷ The Arizona Department of Housing (ADOH) claims that the state needs an additional 270,000 rental units over the next few years to address increasing demand.²¹⁸ Lagged construction was made worse by supply chain issues that emerged during the pandemic, putting intense upward pressure on the cost of building materials.²¹⁹ With rising home values and demand outpacing construction, landlords have been given the opportunity to raise rents across the board. While some landlords have simply taken advantage of the opportunity, others have been forced to raise rents to offset the cost of increased property tax. This cycle fuels rent inflation, as rises in rent may, in turn, further increase property tax.²²⁰

Perhaps the more controversial criticism of QE has been that it has increased wealth inequality in the country. Keeping interest rates near zero results in very modest yields, especially when the money is stashed in assets like treasury bonds. As a result, investors seek assets that will produce better yields, such as stocks, corporate debt, and real estate, creating

²¹⁶ Campisi, Natalie. “It’s Tough to Buy a New Home—And the Pandemic Isn’t the Only Culprit. Here’s What You Should Know.” *Forbes*, Aug 30, 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/mortgages/buying-a-home-in-tough-housing-market/>

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, 16.

²¹⁸ Seiden, Danny. “How Arizona’s Housing Shortage Puts State’s Red-Hot Economy at Risk.”

²¹⁹ Supply chain issues led to inflation across the board, in addition to federal government spending during the pandemic. Adding to inflation, lawmakers approved \$6 trillion in pandemic relief stimulus, \$4 trillion under former President Donald Trump and about \$2 trillion under President Biden, of which \$5.5 trillion has been spent. Additionally, lawmakers approved another \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill in late 2021, a \$400 billion health bill in fall 2022, and a \$1.7 trillion omnibus budget bill in December of 2022. Some economists believe that recent government spending will keep inflation high for some time and undercut QT. Seven interest rate hikes were approved over the course of 2022, bringing the federal funds rate to the highest level since 2007, yet inflation persists. Henney, Megan. “US Faces Increased Stagflation Threat in 2023 After Wave of Government Spending.” *Fox Business*, Jan. 5, 2023. <https://www.foxbusiness.com/economy/us-faces-increased-stagflation-threat-2023-wave-government-spending>

²²⁰ Housing is the largest component of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), making up about 30 percent of overall inflation. Shamir, Yaron. “The Snowball Effect of Rent Inflation: Some 2022 Predictions.”

asset bubbles that benefit the wealthy far more than they do middle-and low-income earners.²²¹

The last decade has witnessed unprecedented corporate investment in low-income communities of color, a trend that was amplified across the sunbelt throughout the pandemic. Investment bankers capitalized on the low interest rates precipitated by the implementation of QE in March of 2020. The heightened demand caught the attention of investors looking for assets to invest in, consistently outbidding the average consumer and purchasing homes outright in cash. In the third quarter of 2021, investors bought a total of 38.8 percent of homes in Phoenix; 35.1 percent of home sales that year were made to cash buyers (Katz 2021).²²² During Advent 2021, Brian Flagg identified this trend in South Tucson, commenting,

We continue to struggle to defend our barrio, aka, The City of South Tucson, aka, Barrio Libre. Gentrification has morphed into the local and national Housing Crisis. Investors snapping up every available property, turning them into rentals and raising the rents big-time. This is creating massive uncertainty, desperation, and suffering for many families already on the brink of being displaced. A house three blocks to the west of us was heavily fixed up and just sold for \$340,000...Many say that gentrification and social injustice are inevitable...even though it often times feels like David against Goliath, we here at Casa Maria need to intensify our resistance, even though it may make us less popular and make our lives less comfortable and less secure.²²³

The federal government promoted this trend following the 2008 crash, when officials were worried that the housing market would continue to spiral and impair economic recovery. In 2012, the government launched a pilot program that promoted private investment in foreclosed homes purchased from Fannie Mae; the investors would then rent these homes, creating more available housing in areas that were hit heavily by foreclosure. Between 2011 and 2017, large private-equity groups and hedge funds spent \$36 billion on more than 200,000 homes across the nation.

²²¹ Leonard, Christopher. "How Nov. 2, 2010 Made the Rich So Much Richer." *Time*, Nov. 2, 2021. <https://time.com/6112931/federal-reserve-wealth-inequality-recession/>

²²² Katz, Lily. "Shares of Homes Bought with All Cash Hits 30% for First Time Since 2014."

²²³ Flagg, Brian. "Advent 2021." Dec. 9, 2021. <https://casamariatucson.org/advent-2021/>

Demand for single-family homes surged during the pandemic, as many people who now worked remotely could move out of expensive metropolitan cities to more affordable cities such as Phoenix and Las Vegas, where investors have a large presence. During this time, the number of built-to-rent homes surged, rising by 30 percent from 2019 to 2020. According to a report released by real estate brokerage Redfin, institutional investors owned 1 in 7 single-family homes in America’s top metropolitan areas in 2021. During the fourth quarter, real estate investors bought a record of 18.4 percent of the homes sold in the US, spending \$49.9 billion.²²⁴

In 2021, more than three-quarters of investor-purchased homes were paid for with cash, 74.4 percent of which were single-family homes.²²⁵ It began with a few key players who soon monopolized the market. As Alana Semuels explains in *The Atlantic*, that as large real estate investment groups bought up tracts of single-family rental homes,

Investment groups created companies to manage the homes: Blackstone established Invitation Homes; Cerberus created FirstKey Homes; Colony Capital created Colony American Homes. And then those companies started merging. In 2015 alone, Colony American Homes merged with Starwood Waypoint Residential Trust, Cerberus Capital Management acquired more than 4,000 homes from BLT Homes, and American Homes 4 Rent said it was acquiring American Residential Properties in a \$1.5 billion deal. By 2017, two major players, Invitation Homes and American Homes 4 Rent, controlled nearly 60 percent of the market.²²⁶

The birth of the renting class emerged alongside the rise of corporate landlordism. According to census data, between 2007 and 2017, the United States added less than 1 million households in owner-occupied homes but 6.5 million in renter-occupied homes. Moreover, homeownership

²²⁴ Schaul and O’ Connell, “Investors Bought a Record Share of Homes in 2021. See Where.”; Kasakove, “Why the Road Is Getting Even Rockier for First-Time Home Buyers.”

²²⁵ Katz and Bokhari, “Real-Estate Investors Bought a Record 18% of the U.S. Homes That Sold in the Third Quarter.”

²²⁶ Semuels, “When Wall Street is Your Landlord.”

plummeted to 62.9 percent in 2016, down from a high of 69 percent in 2005.²²⁷ In 2016, rental companies began to experiment with rental prices, testing the limits of how high they could raise rent every year. American Homes 4 Rent raised rents by 11 percent between 2016 and 2018.²²⁸ The company owned 70 percent more properties in the first nine months of 2018 than in the same period in 2014, but it collected 150 percent more in rent.²²⁹ In 2017, Fannie Mae provided Invitation Homes with a \$1 billion loan guarantee that allowed the company to benefit from lower interest rates and more favorable loan terms than those it would have received without the government's backing.²³⁰ Despite the recovered housing market, the government continued to support corporate investment, favoring the financial sector over its citizens and further widening inequality in the United States.²³¹

Investors are turning a profit by investing in historically disinvested neighborhoods, particularly in communities of color. According to data analysis conducted by *The Washington Post*, in 2021, 30 percent of home sales in majority Black neighborhoods across the nation were to investors, compared with 12 percent in other Zip codes.²³² Another study found that 40 percent of the average population in the five largest investors' top 20 zip codes are Black communities, even though Black Americans comprise just 13.4 percent of the overall

²²⁷ Ibid, par. 8.

²²⁸ According to Zillow, the average rent in the top 30 markets across the country increased by 6 percent during the same period.

²²⁹ Ibid, par. 45.

²³⁰ Ibid, par. 47.

²³¹ In August 2018, the Federal Housing Finance Agency announced that it was ending its participation in the single-family, however, the federal government and financial institutions continued to facilitate corporate investment by keeping interest rates artificially low.

²³² Whoriskey, Peter and Kevin Schaul. "Corporate Landlords are Gobbling up US Suburbs. These Homeowners are Fighting Back. *The Washington Post*, March 31, 2022.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/03/31/charlotte-rental-homes-landlords/>

population.²³³ Not only are the new landlords consuming the existing affordable housing stock for first-time home buyers, but they are also pricing out renters. A 2016 study published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta found that corporate landlords backed by institutional investors evict tenants at rates far higher than small firms and individual landlords.²³⁴ Some have blamed the members of the community for the displacement of residents, arguing that if people had not sold their homes in the first place, the issue would not exist. However, as Glenda Avalos explained to me, “People [in South Tucson] can’t afford to fix their AC and heaters...People can’t afford to fix up their houses or live in those conditions, and people are offering to buy their homes, so they sell. The City of Tucson isn’t helping with the housing crisis. Families I know, who I have known my whole life, are being displaced.”²³⁵ With disinvestment so entrenched within neighborhoods like South Tucson, it has given families few options.

Not only has corporate ownership created affordability issues for renters, but it has also posed new challenges in employing traditional strategies to preserve affordable housing stock—namely, modes of communal ownership. Community land trusts (CLTs) have been a tried-and-true strategy practiced by neighborhoods to combat gentrification and subsequent affordability issues for preexisting residents. CLTs are a form of shared equity ownership that often uses both public and private funds to acquire land on behalf of a community. Community residents can

²³³ Ockerman, Emma. “Institutional Investors Have Bought Hundreds of Thousands of Homes, Many in Black Communities. Critics Say It’s Creating ‘A Generation of Renters.’” *MarketWatch*, July 5, 2022. <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/institutional-investors-have-bought-hundreds-of-thousands-of-single-family-homes-many-in-black-communities-critics-say-its-creating-a-generation-of-renters-11656514935>

²³⁴ Authors found corporate landlords 19 percent more likely to evict tenants. Raymond, Elora, Richard Duckworth, Ben Miller, Michael Lucas, Shiraj Pokharel. “Corporate Landlords, Institutional Investors, and Displacement: Eviction Rates in Single Family Rentals.” Community & Economic Development Discussion Paper, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, no. 04-16, December 2016. <https://www.atlantafed.org/-/media/documents/community-development/publications/discussion-papers/2016/04-corporate-landlords-institutional-investors-and-displacement-2016-12-21.pdf>

²³⁵ Glenda Avalos (Casa Maria employee), in a discussion with the author, May 2021.

purchase their homes on the land and enter a low-cost, long-term ground lease, however, the CLT owns the land in perpetuity.²³⁶ In preemptive efforts, Casa Maria formed a land trust in 1997, Barrios Unidos and purchased a few homes around the soup kitchen, in which the workers are housed today. In response to mounting gentrification pressures, the workers at Casa Maria have been attempting to expand Barrios Unidos over the last few years. However, the workers have encountered an overwhelming barrier, in part due to the recent corporate investment craze. Brian described the changing demographics that the team has come across during their attempts to purchase additional properties, commenting,

We have been trying to build a community land trust. We own properties that are Casa Maria houses—the houses that the workers live in. We would like to buy houses in South Tucson and make affordable housing and take houses off the speculative market. We haven't been able to find houses. We offer \$200K for a house and a white guy offers \$230k; who are they going to sell to, and why wouldn't they? What does that mean for South Tucson? There are more and more white people, they aren't the ones being evicted. They aren't eating here. I think that it is slowly changing the makeup of the neighborhood.²³⁷

The team has been consistently outbid by cash buyers, who have offered well over the asking price. This enterprise has made it virtually impossible for communities such as South Tucson to preserve affordable housing stock, as investors have begun to purchase entire blocks within neighborhoods. From February 2020 to February 2021, 40 percent of properties sold publicly in South Tucson were purchased by real estate LLCs and out-of-state investors.²³⁸ While corporate investors certainly contribute to increased housing instability in low-income communities, some have argued that investors are merely a symptom of the housing affordability crisis. As Jenny Schuetz, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, stated, "...investors are driven to rental-

²³⁶ Taylor, Kiara. "Community Land Trust." Investopedia, Nov. 30, 2022. <https://www.investopedia.com/community-land-trust-5206374>

²³⁷ Brian Flagg (Casa Maria director), in a discussion with the author, April 2021.

²³⁸ The data was pulled from Realtor.com database and Pima County Assessor Office's records. The median sale price was \$180,622.

family homes because of existing demand and limited supply, while housing cost burdens among low-income people have been rising for decades.”²³⁹

The stock of affordable housing had been shrinking across the country for decades, the issue was further exacerbated by the uneven economic recovery from the 2008 crisis. Housing researchers have documented a steep loss in housing affordable to households with incomes between 30 percent and 50 percent of area median income. The housing economy lost an estimated four million "affordable" units between 1990 and 2017—three of the four million left the affordable market between 2012 and 2017.²⁴⁰ Between 1990 and 2017, units renting for over \$1000 accounted for 95% of the growth in all rental housing stock.²⁴¹ The influx of households into the rental market following the crash pushed middle class renters into more affordable units, crowding out low-income households. As the economy recovered, developers prioritized the construction of high-end, luxury homes and rentals aimed toward high earners. In response to an increase in luxury housing stock, many affluent households reverted to renting in the years between 2010 and 2018.²⁴² The increase in supply has not trickled down to middle-and low-income renters. According to a report released by the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) in March 2021, of the 7.4 million affordable homes available to extremely low-income renters, only 1.1 million of those units are occupied by extremely low-income renters; middle income renters are occupying 400,000, and renters with incomes above the national median are

²³⁹ Ockerman, Emma. “Institutional Investors Have Bought Hundreds of Thousands of Homes, Many in Black Communities. Critics Say It’s Creating ‘A Generation of Renters.’”

²⁴⁰ Affordable units are defined as units renting at under \$600 a month and therefore affordable to households with annual incomes of under \$24,000. Bennet, “Making the Second Pandemic,” 63.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 63.

²⁴² Joint Center for Housing. *America’s Rental Housing 2020*. Harvard Graduate School of Design, 2020. https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Harvard_JCHS_Americas_Rental_Housing_2020.pdf

occupying 900,000.²⁴³ In the 50 largest metropolitan areas, only 37 affordable rental homes are available for every 100 renter households with incomes below the poverty line or less than 30 percent of the median income in their areas.²⁴⁴

Arizona is not exempt from the crisis. According to data released by NLIHC, in 2021, the state has the fifth highest rate of extremely low-income households with severe housing cost burdens, only surpassed by Nevada, Florida, Oregon, and California.²⁴⁵ It is estimated that there are only 26 affordable and available renters per 100 extremely low-income families.²⁴⁶ While still stark, the number of affordable units in Tucson is slightly better than the state average with 29 units available per 100 families.²⁴⁷ The pandemic further restricted access to affordable units for extremely low-income renters as investors redeveloped prior affordable housing units and landlords increasingly began to deny voucher holders and participants in housing assistance programs.²⁴⁸ As a component of the city's latest affordable housing strategy, the city passed a policy in September 2022 barring landlords from denying housing applicants on the basis of their

²⁴³ Aurand et al. The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes. National Low Income Housing Coalition, March 2021, 5.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 2.

²⁴⁵ It is estimated that 75 percent of extremely low-income households are severely housing cost burdened, meaning that they spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent. Ibid,10.

²⁴⁶ It is apparent that historical racial disparities in housing continue to contribute to inequitable outcomes for communities of color. The majority of the extremely low-income renters in Arizona are people of color; only 5 percent of Arizona's extremely low-income renters are white. Black renters make up 16 percent of the state's lowest income tenants, Native American renters account for 14 percent, Latino renters make up 12 percent, and Asian renter 10 percent.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 5.

²⁴⁸ Additionally, the outrageous application fees that households encounter while applying for market rate housing serves as an additional barrier. For example, the Metro Tucson Apartments are often used by housing agencies since units are often rented at or slightly above fair market rate. However, each adult in a household must submit a separate application and pay a \$55 dollar application fee per application. In addition to the application fee, the household must pay a \$150.00 administration fee. This is something I frequently encountered while working in rapid rehousing programs. Nearly all "affordable" housing complexes in Tucson charge unaffordable application, administration, and/or holding fees. These fees make it virtually impossible for low-income households to apply to multiple complexes without receiving some assistance. I have encountered administration and holding fees as high as \$200.

income source, making Tucson the first city in the state to have an income protection policy in place. The ban is intended to protect recipients of governmental rental assistance, Social Security, disability insurance, and veterans' benefits. Some officials have asserted that the policy is a way around state law that prohibits local rent control ordinances, however, the policy has no bearing on landlords' ability to raise rent and price out tenants that rely on assistance. Moreover, the city has not implemented any form of oversight mechanism to ensure that landlords comply with the new policy, relying on potential tenants to navigate local bureaucracy to bring their complaints to the city. While the majority of local officials have lauded the city's efforts as important step in the right direction, Vice Mayor Steve Kozachik admitted to the *Tucson Sentinel*, "This is not going to solve our need for affordable housing," calling for more housing stock.²⁴⁹

While it has been widely acknowledged that there is a severe underproduction issue, there has been contestation regarding the government's role in affordable housing provision and the private market's ability to provide affordable homes to low-income renters. This is evident in the city's lack of involvement in city sponsored affordable housing initiatives over the last fifty years. Prior to the urban renewal movement in the 1960s, the city offered plenty of low-income housing options for the downtown workforce, however, since the inception of Pueblo Center, the city has not focused on building government-subsidized housing.²⁵⁰ Since the 1970s, the government has withdrawn its responsibility for ensuring that its citizens basic needs are met,

²⁴⁹ Kelty, Bennito. "Tucson Bans Landlords From Turning Down Tenants Who Use Housing Vouchers, Gov't Benefits." *Tucson Sentinel*, Sept. 30, 2022. https://www.tucsonsentinel.com/local/report/093022_tucson_income_source/tucson-bans-landlords-from-turning-down-tenants-who-use-housing-vouchers-govt-benefits/

²⁵⁰ Bailey, Brenna. "Downtown Tucson Gentrification Presents Complexities." *Arizona Public Media*, March 13, 2017. <https://news.azpm.org/s/46332-more-than-one-side-to-the-gentrification-of-tucsons-historic-neighborhoods/>

moving towards privatized, market-based housing provision. US affordable housing policy has been constrained by neoliberal ideologies that emphasize market-based approaches to program implementation. Public policy aimed at expanding access to housing markets for minorities and the working class has remained underdeveloped, underfunded, and poorly implemented. Since the beginning of US public housing policy, there has been considerable debate about the correct role for the government in housing provision. A review of the origins of US public housing policy helps us understand the country's ambivalent relationship with housing provision and efforts to shift away from direct government provision. Moreover, examining the implementation of national policy at the local level illustrates the role that housing initiatives played in supporting local governments' urban renewal projects.

A History of Housing Provision

Local government first became involved in housing for the poor during the late 1890s, when the first tenement laws were enacted in response to mounting urban activism. In large urban centers such as Boston and New York City, quality standards were established to regulate overcrowded slum buildings inhabited by working class, immigrant families. Although the push to turn tenement law into federal policy ultimately failed, Smith (2006) points to this period as a turning point in federal housing policy due to the precedents that the legislation set.²⁵¹ Through the introduction of mechanisms such as health and safety minimums and formal building codes, local governments could become involved in the regulation of housing development to protect the lives of their poor citizens; quality standards remain a pillar of all housing policy in the United States. Moreover, this period affirmed the notion that local governments are best suited to

²⁵¹ Smith, Janet. "Public Housing Transformation: Evolving National Policy" in *Where Are Poor People to Live?: Transforming Public Housing Communities*. Cities and Contemporary Society. Taylor and Francis, (2015): 19-40.

respond to concerns of social welfare, giving local governments control over the design and implementation of programs for the poor.

The second turning point in US housing policy is marked by the passage of the National Housing Act of 1934, which created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), allowing more families to purchase homes by allowing the government to underwrite and insure mortgages. The Wagner-Steagall Housing Act of 1937 quickly followed, establishing the United States Housing Authority (USHA) to deal with subsidized housing. The 1937 Public Housing Act brought government directly into the production and ownership of public housing; specifically, the law established “a method for transferring federal money to local authorities, slum clearance as a public function, the principle of using federal subsidies to make up the differential between operating costs and rents paid by low-income tenants, a policy of local tax exemption of property to further subsidize rents, and the principle that planning, building, and managing was the responsibility of local government.”²⁵² The 1937 Public Housing Act is significant in that it created the means to allocate federal funds locally to replace substandard private housing with quality public housing built and operated by the public housing authority (PHA). Housing authorities were established through state legislation and authorized by either the city or county in which they operated, making them dependent on both the federal and local governments. Participation in the public housing program was optional, leading to an uneven development of PHAs. Today, there are around 3,300 PHAs across the United States; however, most of them are quite small, managing somewhere between 50 and 1000 units.²⁵³ Together, the housing acts of

²⁵² Wright, Patricia A, Janet L Smith, and Larry Bennett. *Where Are Poor People to Live?: Transforming Public Housing Communities*. Cities and Contemporary Society. Taylor and Francis, 2015, 22.

²⁵³ Crites, Josh. Top 10 Largest Housing Authorities in the USA. International Observatory on Social Housing, May 4, 2017. <https://internationalsocialhousing.org/2017/05/04/top-10-largest-public-housing-authorities-in-the-usa/>

1934 and 1937 established the modern two-tiered housing system, producing subsidized rental housing for the poor and private, single-family homes for the middle class, effectively segregating the poor from the rest of society.²⁵⁴ Since the Great Depression, federal housing assistance programs have been instrumental in addressing the growing shortage of affordable housing in the United States.

Lawrence Vale (2018) documents how the passage of the 1937 Housing Act raised more excitement about slum clearance than it did about public housing cities across the nation. In Tucson, civic leaders such as Roy Drachman, the head of Tucson's chamber of commerce, promoted the slum clearance effort beginning in 1939.²⁵⁵ In the first wave, the city destroyed 50 dwellings to make way for 160 new apartments at La Reforma.²⁵⁶ Tucson's first foray into public housing was met with criticism and disappointment from leaders at Drachman, who believed that the project's slum clearance fell short of what was needed and insisted that the replacement housing ought to be managed by the private sector.²⁵⁷ Drachman went so far as to publicly denounce the project, calling it a "dangerous source of socialism" and comparing it to public housing in Russia.²⁵⁸ Despite the persistent critics, the city would continue to pursue public and subsidized housing to support slum clearance and urban renewal projects. The second wave began with the Pueblo Center Redevelopment Project in the 1960s. While the downtown Pueblo

²⁵⁴ Smith, "Public Housing Transformation: Evolving National Policy." Radford, Gail. *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

²⁵⁵ Vale, Lawrence. "The Rise of Urban Renewal and the Connie Chambers Project." In *After the Projects*, After the Projects, 2018. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, 235.

²⁵⁶ La Reforma was Tucson's first public housing, opening its doors in 1943. It constituted eight large perimeter blocks of single-story housing. Although it was built with low-income, Mexican American families in mind, it ended up being repurposed for the war workers. By the mid 1950s, nearly all the war workers had moved on from the complex, making way for low-income families; it was also at this time that the previously segregated complex began admitting Black families. La Reforma was demolished in 1983.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 236.

Center was under development, a 200-unit public housing complex, Connie Chambers, was being built near 22nd Street and 10th Avenue in Barrio Santa Rosa, just north of South Tucson—next to La Reforma. Named after the former Tucson Housing Authority executive director, Cornelius Chambers, the complex opened in the late fall of 1967, just as demolition downtown was underway. The THA promised that families who were displaced by the renewal project would be given priority, however, the executive director, Paul McCoy, conceded that “not all families from the urban renewal area will qualify for residence in the housing project.”²⁵⁹ By 1970, only 36 families from the razed barrios moved into either Connie Chambers or La Reforma due to strict qualification standards and personal preference.²⁶⁰

Resistance to public housing persisted, officials asserted that the sites contributed to the “undue concentration of low-income families” and claimed that the complexes were structurally unsound and posed risks to tenants.²⁶¹ In 1975, less than 10 years after its completion, the Tucson Trade Bureau proposed the removal of both Connie Chambers and La Reforma. In 1979, the city applied to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for permission to replace La Reforma with scattered-site housing. In 1983, HUD acquiesced, and the demolition of La Reforma commenced. City worker Emily Nottingham later commented that the city wished to “redevelop it for the private market and bring some more private sector investment in and get rid of the ‘donut hole’ in the neighborhood.”²⁶² Much like the decades that proceeded the Pueblo Center project, La Reforma redevelopment efforts faltered, and the site

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 248.

²⁶⁰ Income requirements mandated that families needed to have incomes lower than \$3,000; rents varied from \$29 to \$78, depending on family size. Tucson’s redevelopment agency released a report which indicated that many larger families failed to meet income requirements, the average monthly income of non-white residents was less than \$100 per month. Additionally, many families opted to relocate into substandard housing to remain closer to their barrios.

²⁶¹ Ibid, 254.

²⁶² Ibid, 255.

remained undeveloped for some time. The city's move to replace public housing with privately developed market housing was part and parcel of a larger policy shift, as public housing across the country was replaced with "affordable" housing.

Since its advent public, housing has been met with some criticism; it has been accused of creating isolated islands for the poor and is frequently cited as a source of surrounding community decline. The high-rise became associated with symptoms of social distress such as the consumption and distribution of drugs, sex work, and crime—an emblem of entrenched poverty.²⁶³ In early 1973, the Nixon Administration sought to revise the housing subsidy system by placing a moratorium on housing and community development, freezing all federal funding for the construction of public housing and other forms of subsidized housing. Later that year, Nixon announced his proposed new housing program aimed at direct cash assistance for qualifying families, asserting that government funded construction of subsidized units simply treated the symptom rather than the cause, which he identified as the lack of adequate family income. The moratorium was an ideologically driven move within a larger effort to decentralize development funds to local and state governments through the creation of block grants; however, it effectively marked the end of the federal government's direct role in the construction of public housing.²⁶⁴ Public housing would be further constrained by the passage of 1999 Faircloth Amendment, which continues to prohibit the use of federal funds in projects that would result in the net increase of units owned, assisted, or operated by public housing agencies; in other words,

²⁶³ Wright et al., *Where Are Poor People to Live?: Transforming Public Housing Communities*.

²⁶⁴ Freemark, Yonah. "Myth #5: Public Housing's Failures Led to Natural Death", in *Public Housing Myths: Perception, Reality, and Social Policy*, edited by Nicholas Dagen Bloom, Fritz Umbach, and Lawrence J. Vale Ithaca: NY: Cornell University Press, (2015):121-128.

housing authorities are prohibited from maintaining more public housing units than they had in 1999.²⁶⁵

The following year, Gerald Ford amended the 1937 Public Housing Act with the passage of the 1974 Housing and Community Development Act, which effectively transitioned the housing system to the tenant-based assistance model that exists in the US today. The 1974 Act consolidated dozens of federal programs, creating the community development block grant (CDBG) program, now distributing federal funds annually to states and cities based on a needs-based formula. The federal government was successful at shifting control over government spending away from federal capital towards local government. The CDBG took a different financing approach, changing the way both private and nonprofit developers accessed government funds. Another significant change came with the implementation of the Section 8 program, which provided tenant-based assistance and funding to aid the private sector in constructing affordable housing. The Section 8 construction subsidy guaranteed the developer enough funds to cover construction costs and enough to keep subsequent rent “affordable” in a designated number of units. Unlike previous forms of project-based subsidy, tenant-based assistance travels with families as they move around for as long as they qualify for the assistance. Tenant-based assistance has the effect of deconcentrating families needing assistance by allowing them to rent in the private market as long as the unit meets basic quality and rent reasonableness standards set by HUD. While funds were shifted to private developers, the rollout of the Section 8 program did not eliminate the role of PHAs, who now assumed the responsibility of assigning families vouchers and maintaining existing public housing stock.

²⁶⁵ Brey, Jared. What is the Faircloth Amendment? Next City on Housing Equity. February 9, 2021. <https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/what-is-the-faircloth-amendment>.

Although public housing construction did not cease entirely, it slowed at a remarkable rate as the private sector became more involved in the production of affordable housing. With these changes in housing provision, the government sought to minimize investment risk and raise quality standards by transferring the responsibility of construction and operating costs to the private sector.²⁶⁶

The 1990s were characterized by housing crises related to the cost of expiring Section 8 contracts and “deteriorating” housing stock.²⁶⁷ In response, the Bush Administration adopted affordable housing as a policy goal, focusing on private market solutions. Affordable housing policy continued to replace public housing, effectively slashing funding for public housing by publicly subsidizing privately owned rental units. One of the most widely criticized housing programs in US history, the Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere program, commonly known as the HOPE VI program, was launched in 1992 in response to the work of the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing. Formed in 1989, the committee was tasked with exploring “the factors contributing to structural, economic, and social distress,” the goal was to, “identify strategies for remediation and propose a notional action plan to eradicate distressed conditions by year 2000.” The committee found that while the majority of the 1.4 million public housing units were well maintained, about 6 percent of the units were in poor condition and mismanaged. HOPE VI was launched to deal with the estimated 6 percent of public housing in need of repair, or around 86,000 units in total. The goal of the HOPE VI

²⁶⁶ Cuomo, Andrew. “Statement of HUD Secretary, Senate Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity,” Washington DC, April 9, 1997. Smith, “Public Housing Transformation: Evolving National Policy,” 32.

²⁶⁷ The Low-Income Housing Preservation and Resident Act of 1990. The policy sought to maintain the supply of affordable housing by offering sizable commitments of federal funding to preserve eligible housing units. The policy encouraged resident-ownership and local control, funding property purchases by nonprofits and tenant associations.

program was to demolish large-scale public housing projects and replace them with small-scale, mixed-income developments and housing vouchers to enable some of the original residents to rent apartments in the private market.²⁶⁸

The launch of HOPE VI marked a new cycle of urban renewal in the Tucson downtown area. The aim was to replace the public housing that was built during earlier urban renewal operations with single family homes. Seeking to demolish the complex, the city painted Connie Chambers in the same negative light received by other public housing complexes across the country, labeling it a drug infested hub for crime. Amidst the crack cocaine epidemic in the late 1980s, police began to target the complex, and drug-related arrests rose from 300 in 1987 to 566 by 1991.²⁶⁹ The city set the stage by seeking funds from the federal Public Housing Drug Elimination Program in 199, claiming, “The neighborhood has become a dangerous area to live in, the tenants will not stay, even if their need for housing is critical.”²⁷⁰ Initially, the city attempted to get funding from HUD’s Major Reconstruction of Obsolete Projects; however, their pleas were denied twice. In 1994, the Community Service Department (CSD), in collaboration with architect-planner Corky Poster, led a community development effort in Barrio Santa Rosa that proposed multiple alternatives for placing housing and community facilities on the vacant remains of the La Reforma site.²⁷¹ The next year, Poster and the CSD successfully applied for a HOPE VI grant, by playing up the deficiencies and structural conditions of the complex. In 1996,

²⁶⁸ Popkin, Susan, Bruce Katz, Mary Cunningham, Karen Brown, Jeremy Gustafson, and Margery Turner. *A Decade of HOPE VI: Research Findings and Policy Changes*. The Urban Institute, May 2004.

<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/411002-A-Decade-of-HOPE-VI.PDF>

²⁶⁹ Vale, Lawrence. “The Fall of Connie Chambers and the Rise of Posadas Sentinel.” In *After the Projects*, After the Projects, 2018. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, 257.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 257.

²⁷¹ Ironically, at this time, Poster was a member of the University of Arizona’s Roy P. Drachman Institute for Land and Regional Development Studies, named after one of the most outspoken critics of public housing.

the city received \$14.6 million to demolish the Connie Chambers; the city hoped to leverage the money to generate an additional \$46 million worth of improvements in Barrio Santa Rosa and the larger community.²⁷² During a public meeting, CSD representatives contrasted their vision of HOPE VI funding to earlier phases of urban renewal, stating, “The plan respects people’s desire to stay in the community and improve their quality of life,” adding that “this plan is not about displacing anyone, [and] in fact it protects against displacement.”²⁷³ The CSD sold the redevelopment plan to residents with the promise of opportunities for affordable homeownership, and construction of the new site was underway.

Poster delivered a low-rise landscape of 120 pastel homes, drawing on a variety of cottage styles and Sonoran influences. The mixed-income project was named Posadas Sentinel. The project was completed in 2022, constructing 60 public housing units and 60 tax-credit subsidized units that were aimed towards higher-earning households that could afford to pay rents at near market rate.²⁷⁴ The Posadas Sentinel Community Policy was implemented, stipulating a zero tolerance for drug-related criminal activity either on or off the premises, prohibiting alcohol abuse, establishing terms for “quiet hours”, regulating behavior of guests, and setting expectations for unit maintenance. The CSD shifted the population towards those who could meet “working preference” and “family self-sufficiency” standards for admission, seeking to replace low-income families with those who could pay market rate rent. As Poster bluntly stated, “They were clearly cherry-picking residents. They were trying to make HOPE VI successful by picking successful residents, as opposed to making housing turn residents into

²⁷² Devine, Dave. “Barrio Viejo, Barrio Nuevo.” *Tucson Weekly*, May 23, 2022.

<https://www.tucsonweekly.com/tucson/barrio-viejo-barrio-nuevo/Content?oid=1070273>

²⁷³ Vale, “The Fall of Connie Chambers and the Rise of Posadas Sentinel,” 265.

²⁷⁴ Additionally, the CSD acquired other units throughout town to convert into scattered-site public housing, once again promising priority to displaced residents.

successes.”²⁷⁵ According to figures supplied by the city in 2002, only 18 families from Connie Chambers remained in the neighborhood.²⁷⁶

Scholars and community activists have long criticized the HOPE VI program, viewing it as a tool to support the gentrification dynamics in urban centers.²⁷⁷ Local critics have noted how replacing half of the units with subsidized tax-credit units that commanded near-market rents and imposing family self-sufficiency standards for admission, the redevelopment of Connie Chambers resulted in the purging of the poorest occupants and facilitated subsequent gentrification in the barrio.²⁷⁸ In a conversation, Brian Flagg noted, “The HOPE VI gentrified nationally, and that is what it was meant to do.”²⁷⁹ Pedro Gonzalez, President of the Barrio Viejo Neighborhood Association, commented, “The city only got HOPE VI money to displace more people. The goal was to improve the lives of families here, but the city moved them, so how did they benefit?”²⁸⁰ Local architect, Jody Gibbs, noted the nuances between waves of renewal, stating, “The difference between urban renewal in the ‘60s and now is then they [local officials] lied to themselves and the poor about moving back in. Now they just say, ‘Get the poor people out.’” Furthermore, Gibbs commented, “HOPE VI was just [government officials] chasing a money source. They think buildings creates jobs, plus the bureaucrats can say, ‘Look what I did.’ They are just pushing poverty further south, and they tore down perfectly serviceable housing

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 284.

²⁷⁶ Devine, Dave. “Barrio Viejo, Barrio Nuevo.”

²⁷⁷ Newman, Kathe. and Ashton, Philip. 2004. “Neoliberal Urban Policy and New Paths of Neighborhood Change in the American Inner City”, *Environment and Planning A*, no. 36, pp. 1151–1172. Wyly, Elvin. and Hammel, Daniel. 1999. “Islands of Decay in Seas of Renewal: Housing Policy and the Resurgence of Gentrification”, *Housing Policy Debate*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 711–771. Hackworth, Jason. *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism* (1 ed.). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007.

²⁷⁸ Vale, "The Rise of Urban Renewal and the Connie Chambers Project," 289.

²⁷⁹ Flagg, conversation with the author, Oct. 2021.

²⁸⁰ Devine, “Barrio Viejo, Barrio Nuevo.”

when they demolished Connie Chambers.”²⁸¹ During an interview, Flagg recounted a meeting with longtime developer Bill Estes, who admitted that the structural integrity of the Connie Chamber complex was sound. Estes had put in a bid for the initial development; however, he had included cheap materials in his building plan, and the plan was rejected. The city’s refusal to update its disinvested public housing stock is merely a reflection of larger policy shift and ongoing development efforts that sought to capture capital and investment in the downtown area.

Current State of Affordable Housing Strategies and Preserving Affordable Housing

Today, the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) serves as Tucson’s Public Housing Authority (PHA) and is responsible for providing direct housing assistance to those in need of supportive services.²⁸² While the city boasts about the 1,900 public housing units it owns and operates across the city, as well as the 5,200 Housing Choice Vouchers (i.e., Section 8) it has administered in the past year, the quantity of assistance offered to the public pales in comparison to the demand for affordable housing.²⁸³²⁸⁴ South Tucson has its own housing authority that operates two housing programs—the Low Rent (Conventional) and Housing Program and the Housing Choice Voucher Program. The former is comprised of 172 apartments, which include studios to 4-bedroom units, and the latter consists of 132 vouchers.²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² The HCD was formerly known as the CSD.

²⁸³ Miller, Alison. June 28, 2021. Jason Thorpe Hired as Community Services Administrator in Department of Housing and Community Development. Press release, City of Tucson. <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/AZTUCSON/bulletins/2e56360?reqfrom=share>

²⁸⁴ The city expected demand for tax-credit subsidized units to exceed that of public housing, however, that has not been the case. When the city’s last waitlist opened 2017, 119 households remained on the waiting list for one of the subsidized units, while 7,000 households awaited one of the sixty public housing units. Vale, “The Rise of Urban Renewal and the Connie Chambers Project,” 286.

²⁸⁵ City of South Tucson. “South Tucson Housing Authority.” Accessed March 20, 2023. <https://www.southtucsonaz.gov/stha>

In January 2023, more than 15,000 pre-applications were submitted for the city’s public housing and voucher waitlist.²⁸⁶ The HCD is estimating that about 2,000 of those pre-applicants will be able to complete their applications this year, leaving 13,000 households to twist in the wind.

In addition to public housing and voucher programs, Tucson and Pima County have partnered with various nonprofit agencies through the Tucson Pima Collaboration to End Homelessness (TPCH), establishing a community-wide Coordinated Entry model oriented toward Housing First.²⁸⁷ TPCH acts as the HUD Continuum of Care (CoC) for Pima County and provides counsel to local planning and funding bodies regarding issues that impact services to the unhoused community. While local officials have touted the purported success of the TPCH model, many are critical of the efficacy of the housing assistance programs within the larger context of the ongoing affordability crisis. In response to the growing unhoused population, Glenda Avalos commented,

With unexpected current and future rent increases many will be added to the demographic of the city’s unsheltered community. We recognize the work of Housing First, along with all the others who are doing their part to shelter or house the city’s unsheltered community; however, it is not enough to address the existing and rapidly growing unhoused community. This is not a one-size fits all solution. We need to have as many options as possible, creating temporary sanctuary camps and stopping sweeps of existing camps are steps in the right direction.²⁸⁸

In response to COVID-19, on March 14, 2021, HUD announced \$2.6 billion was being allocated for rental assistance across the nation, of which Pima County received \$11,194,591 for the 2021 fiscal year.²⁸⁹ These funds were divided between several permanent supportive housing and

²⁸⁶ Kelty, Bennito. “15,000 Sign Up for Tucson Public Housing, Sec.8 Voucher Waitlist.” Jan. 30, 2023. https://www.tucsonsentinel.com/local/report/013023_tucson_housing_waitlist/15000-sign-up-tucson-public-housing-sec-8-voucher-waitlists/

²⁸⁷ Housing First was coined by New York social worker Sam Tsemberis in 1992 and adopted as a solution to homelessness in the 2000s. The premise behind the Housing First model is to end homelessness by creating permanent housing and transitional housing for the unhoused community.

²⁸⁸ Glenda Avalos (Casa Maria employee), July 12, 2022.

²⁸⁹ United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. “HUD Announces \$2.6 Billion in Awards to Help People Experiencing Homelessness.” HUD No. 22-040. March 14, 2022.

rapid rehousing programs throughout the county. During the pandemic, these programs encountered many of the same barriers that those evicted and unhoused faced. As housing programs are constrained by fair market rent (FMR) standards, it became virtually impossible to find available units at the rates set by HUD for Pima County.²⁹⁰ As previously mentioned, many landlords have stopped accepting applicants receiving assistance, and it has become increasingly common for those who will accept housing assistance participants to income qualify on their own, requiring them to make two to three times the rent in monthly income.²⁹¹

Arizona has built over 7,000 permanent homes since 2010, which is enough to house the unhoused population when they begin; however, the number of unhoused Arizonans has increased by 50 percent in recent years.²⁹² Within a discussion regarding local assistance interventions in response to the rising unhoused population and the affordability crisis, Tanya Núñez commented,

...treating housing as a commodity, as a privilege, not as a right. Under capitalism, profits are put before people. Housing should be available for everyone. It is abuse. It is an excuse to exclude people. Housing should not be determined by the market. We need more public housing, and a federal housing plan. We see it in other countries, public housing is normalized, and it is a right.... Our government makes it so all that weight can be put on the NGO. The government tries to get rid of responsibilities so that they don't have to provide services. Private property is the most important thing in the country. The system is not broken; it's working exactly as it's supposed to.²⁹³

In December 2022, HUD released its 2022 Point-in Time Estimates of Homelessness Report, which found that Arizona's unhoused population increased by nearly a quarter between 2020 and

²⁹⁰ Morlock, Blake. "Tucson Needs a lot More Than Ending Housing Discrimination to Address Rising Rents." *Tucson Sentinel*, Sep. 19, 2022. https://www.tucson sentinel.com/opinion/report/091922_section8_tucson_op/tucson-needs-lot-more-than-ending-housing-discrimination-address-rising-rents/

²⁹¹ In September 2022, Tucson had a waiting list of 600 families that had a voucher but could not find a landlord willing to accept them.

²⁹² Glock, Judge. "Housing First is a Failure." Cicero Institute. Jan. 13, 2022. https://ciceroinstitute.org/research/housing-first-is-a-failure/#_ftn6

²⁹³ Tanya Nunez (Casa Maria employee), in discussion with the author, September 2021.

2022.²⁹⁴ On the same day that the report was released, the Biden administration announced a multi-pronged strategy to reduce homelessness by 25 percent by 2025. The plan includes increasing the supply of permanent supportive housing and emergency shelter space, providing additional employment and education opportunities, and expanding federal funding for Native American communities.²⁹⁵ While studies have found that supportive housing with flexibility and intensive wraparound services can increase housing stability for certain demographics within the unhoused community, supportive housing does not address the underlying causes of affordability issues and housing instability, nor do other forms of assistance that rely on market-based solutions²⁹⁶

Conclusion

Persistently low incomes and correspondingly high poverty rates make it nearly impossible for many Tucsonans to afford the heightened cost of living. Locally, there are thousands of jobs that will pay workers far less than what is needed for residents to sufficiently house themselves. While the city uses public money to attract investment, subsidize upscale development, and generate tax revenue, it does not adequately invest to provide affordable housing subsidies for its residents. City officials point to high-density development as a solution to the affordability crisis due to lower construction costs, however, the market alone cannot

²⁹⁴ The unhoused population increased by 1 percent nationally. Arizona was disproportionately impacted due to a severe shortage of affordable housing in combination with population growth over the past few years. Rihl, Juliette. "Arizona Has One of the Worst Homelessness Crises in the Nation, Federal Data Shows." *Arizona Republic*, Jan. 5, 2023. <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona/2023/01/05/federal-report-shows-arizona-has-one-of-the-worst-homelessness-crises/69778359007/>

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Aubry, Tim, Gary Bloch, Vanessa Brcic, Ammar Saad, Olivia Magwood, Tasnim Abdalla, Qasem Alkhateeb, Edward Xie, Christine Mathew, Terry Hannigan, Chris Costello, Kednapa Thavorn, Vicky Stergiopoulos, Peter Tugwell, and Kevin Pottie. "Effectiveness of Permanent Supportive Housing and Income Assistance Interventions for Homeless Individuals in High-income Countries: A Systematic Review." *The Lancet. Public Health* 5, no. 6 (2020): E342-360.

provide affordable homes to low-income renters. High-density development will only help to solve the issue if the city stops prioritizing the production of high-end, luxury housing.

Historically, private developers have failed to meet market demands for low-income housing in Pima County, so local government must incentivize the construction of affordable housing complexes that charge rents that reflect the pay levels of low-income renters. Increasing the housing stock alone will not solve the issue, until wages match the cost of living, people will continue to experience everyday instability.

Modern urban planning, including urban renewal, segregation and slum administration, build on colonial forms of urban housing policy and city planning.²⁹⁷ Neoliberal restructuring of housing provision has continually supported the dispossession and displacement of marginalized peoples. By employing the colonial dichotomy of modernity and disorder as a technique for slum clearance, the City of Tucson justified the construction and later demolition of Connie Chambers. Prior to Posadas Sentinel, the city intensified policing of the people relegated to the space, framing it as a public health hazard of criminality, drug addiction, prostitution, and other “dangers” and paving the way for capital investment. The dispossession of housing throughout the periods of urban renewal in Tucson, as in elsewhere, cannot be understood outside of the legacy of colonial appropriation and the structural inequalities necessary for capital accumulation.

²⁹⁷ Danewid, Ida. "The Fire This Time: Grenfell, Racial Capitalism and the Urbanisation of Empire." *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 1 (2020): 289-313.

CHAPTER 5: FROM SOCIAL SERVANTS TO POLITICIANS

In July 2022, Casa Maria launched an online petition outlining four demands directed toward city and county officials to address local affordability issues and intensifying gentrification in areas surrounding downtown. After hosting several community events, canvassing the barrio, and meeting with local developers, realtors, and service providers, the workers at Casa Maria concluded that “now is the time to act against gentrification with a special emphasis on this scandalous housing crisis. This is a matter of human dignity, including the dignity of the unhoused people of Tucson.”²⁹⁸ The initiative was precipitated by the announcement of a rapid transit line as a component of the city’s Housing Affordability Strategy for Tucson (HAST) plan. The IGA introduced between Pima County and the City of South Tucson in 2019, included assistance in attracting Federal Opportunity Zone Investment opportunities and the use of South Tucson’s Regional Transportation Authority funding to construct transportation infrastructure. In 2020, the city received a \$950,000 Federal Transit Administration grant to support the transit project. The city,

...working in partnership with the City of South Tucson, will use the funds to study a proposed new fixed guide-way bus rapid transit (BRT) 14.5-mile north/south regional corridor. This study is scheduled to begin in early 2021...This joint planning effort will use an equitable TOD approach to identify opportunities in already designated Opportunity Zones that will strengthen multi modal connections and land use policies through the development of denser, mixed-income and mixed-use housing. This equitable

²⁹⁸ Brian Flagg, “Housing Justice & Dignity for All Tucson Barrios & the Unhoused/ No Gentrification!” July 2022. https://www.change.org/p/housing-justice-dignity-for-all-tucson-barrios-the-unhoused-no-gentrification?utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=custom_url&recruited_by_id=34d304b0-f276-11ec-9b69-79e9fcbd4076

TOD approach aims to provide affordable units, stimulate jobs, and create entrepreneurial opportunities within the redevelopment Study Area.²⁹⁹

The proposed transit line comprises two segments. The northern segment will extend from the Tohono T’adai Regional Transit Center to the Ronstadt Regional Transit Center downtown, connecting to the Pima Community College Downtown Campus and the Tucson Mall. The southern segment extends from the airport to downtown along South 6th Avenue, running straight through the heart of South Tucson. Both segments connect to the existing streetcar line and fixed-route bus service along the corridor. The proposed transit line has further heightened people’s fear of displacement in affected communities, spurring the workers at Casa Maria to form a coalition with the People’s Defense Initiative, Tucson Tenant’s Union, Party for Socialism and Liberation Tucson, and other local organizations to put a stop to transit planning. The coalition organized a rally outside of Tucson City Hall on July 12, 2022, stating their demands.

The workers’ demands are as follows: 1) No bus rapid transit through the City of South Tucson and surrounding neighborhoods unless there is a commitment to build large amounts of affordable housing at the bus stops. 2) Create or preserve 200 housing units in the City of South Tucson that current residents can afford by 2025 with funding from the City of Tucson, Pima County, and other community partners. No luxury, market-rate, or workforce housing. Bring housing units up to code and maintain affordability while offering low-to-no interest loans for low-income residents to renovate and repair their homes. 3) Rent control or rent stabilization. Enlist the City of South Tucson, the City of Tucson, Pima County, the Tucson Association of Realtors, and other entities to get the state of Arizona to allow local jurisdictions to implement rent control. 4) Create one or more temporary camps for unhoused people. Stop all camp sweeps.

²⁹⁹ City of Tucson, “Bus Rapid Transit Corridor Study Grant: City of Tucson Receives \$950,000 Federal Transit Administration Grant.”

During the proceeding panel on gentrification and affordable housing hosted by the Tucson Tenant's Union, Casa Maria publicly stated that if there is no significant response from local government by Labor Day 2022, the workers will enlist the help of local community organizations, along with the unhoused community, to set up a camp in front of the city hall.³⁰⁰

Ongoing Challenges

The city's approach to transit-oriented development (TOD) falls into the paradigm of sustainable development, purporting to decrease automobile dependency, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote modes of active transportation in near-transit communities. Proponents of TOD claim that this approach to transit planning can provide much needed improvements to underserved communities by increasing accessibility and enhancing affordable housing through mixed-use development around transit lines. Despite the alleged benefits of transit corridors, urban scholars have widely documented TOD projects that have resulted in transit-induced gentrification.³⁰¹ Others warn that while TOD can spur gentrification, it is likely that other factors, such as existing policies and built environment attributes, play a larger role in the displacement of near-transit communities and that the neighborhood impacts of TOD may vary

³⁰⁰ The City Council performed a call to the audience in following meetings, allowing organizers to speak their concerns. In the end, no camp was made.

³⁰¹ Romero, Erualdo González, Michelle E Zuñiga, Ashley C Hernandez, and Rodolfo D Torres. "Neighborhood Change in Near-Transit Latinx Communities: Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development." In *Gentrification, Displacement, and Alternative Futures, Gentrification, Displacement, and Alternative Futures*, 2022. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2022. Dawkins, Casey, and Rolf Moeckel. "Transit-Induced Gentrification: Who Will Stay, and Who Will Go?" *Housing Policy Debate* 26, no. 4-5 (2016): 801-18. Checker, Melissa. "Wiped Out by the "Greenwave": Environmental Gentrification and the Paradoxical Politics of Urban Sustainability." *City and Society*, no. 23, no. 2 (2011): 210-229. Loukaitou-Sideris, Anastasia, Silvia Gonzalez, and Paul Ong. "Triangulating Neighborhood Knowledge to Understand Neighborhood Change: Methods to Study Gentrification." *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 39, no. 2 (2019): 227-42. Gould, Kenneth Alan, Tammy L. Lewis, and ProQuest. *Green Gentrification: Urban Sustainability and the Struggle for Environmental Justice*. Routledge, Equity, Justice, and the Sustainable City Series. 2017. Rigolon, Alessandro, and Jeremy Németh. "'We're Not in the Business of Housing:': Environmental Gentrification and the Nonprofitization of Green Infrastructure Projects." *Cities* 81 (2018): 71-80.

locally depending on near-transit development and land-use patterns.³⁰² Considering the development already underway in South Tucson, it is not unreasonable for the community to fear the additional impacts that TOD may bring.

In addition to TOD planning, South Tucson faces potential increased investment based on its recent Qualified Opportunity Zone (QOZ) status. QOZs are economically distressed communities that have been designated by the states and certified by the US Treasury Department. A Qualified Opportunity Fund (QOF) is any investment organized as a corporation or partnership with the purpose of investing in QOZ assets.³⁰³ QOFs are an attractive, alternative investment for high-net investors seeking higher returns, portfolio diversification, and tax benefits. An investor who has actualized a capital gain by selling an asset such as stock or real estate can receive special tax benefits if they roll that gain into an QOZ investment within 180 days of the sale. There are three primary benefits. 1) There is a deferral period until December 31, 2026. 2) There is a 10% reduction after the first 5-year holding period. 3) There is no capital gains tax on Opportunity Zone gains after a 10-year holding period. On April 7, 2022, the bipartisan Opportunity Zones Transparency, Extension, and Improvement Act was introduced into Congress. The Act proposes to extend the deferral period for paying the deferred tax on gains invested in a QOF until December 31, 2028. Additionally, qualifying investments made prior to December 31, 2023, and held for at least 5 years would have a 10% reduction, and investments made by the end of 2022 and held for at least 6 years would have an additional 5% reduction.³⁰⁴ The proposed bill would also establish

³⁰² Padeiro, Miguel, Ana Louro, and Nuno Marques Da Costa. "Transit-oriented Development and Gentrification: A Systematic Review." *Transport Reviews* 39, no. 6 (2019): 733-54. Zuñiga et al. 2022.

³⁰³ Local Initiatives Support Corporation. "Opportunity Zones 101." <https://www.lisc.org/our-resources/resource/opportunity-zones-101/>

³⁰⁴ Cole, Katherine, Katherine Frazer, Alexandra Prati, Jerilyn Reed, Justin Wallace, and Prestin Weidner. "Proposed Updates to Qualified Opportunity Zone (QOZ) Rules." *The National Law Review* 12, no.124 (2022).

new reporting requirements and penalties for investors who failed to make timely, complete, and accurate OZ reports.

A local real estate investment group, Equilibrium, has a special interest in buying and developing projects in underserved neighborhoods that qualify for QOZ tax advantages. Equilibrium has recently taken up an assemblage project along the sixth avenue corridor, the gateway that runs directly between downtown and South Tucson. Equilibrium is currently developing several mixed-use projects in the Five-Points, Barrio Viejo, Armory Park, and Santa Rosa neighborhoods, with plans to develop along the South 6th Avenue corridor southward to 22nd Street. One of the prominent development projects has been dubbed “18W18”, a mixed-use housing development on the northeast corner of 18th Street and 7th Avenue, just to the west of 5 Points Market in downtown Tucson. 18W18 will consist of 16 new single-family homes, 6 apartments, and the restoration of an existing 1920s era historic home on the property. Equilibrium states, “The commercial corridor along South Stone Ave. and South 6th Ave. from Broadway to 22nd Street is growing, and the proximity of market rate residential projects like 18W18 will help ensure quality restaurants and retail establishments thrive here.”³⁰⁵

Much like South Tucson, the neighborhoods located immediately north of the barrio are primarily comprised of single-family residences. Equilibrium has justified the redevelopment of the area by claiming that their “transitional” development will stave off the detrimental effect that high-intensity commercial development would bring. However, the investment firm has raised concern among the local community as they have begun acquiring properties in South Tucson. Over the course of this research, Equilibrium purchased an entire block on South 4th

³⁰⁵ IID-19-04. City of Tucson Zoning Administration, *18 w 18*, by Dale Rush, Infill Incentive District Case # IID-19-04: 17th & 28 West 18th Street, August 1, 2019.

Avenue and West 29th Street for \$2.8 million and the old Greyhound Park for over \$9 million.³⁰⁶

While the investment firm has not publicly announced its plans to redevelop the properties, community members are speculating that they will build apartment housing—housing that, more than likely, will not contribute to the 200 affordable housing units needed to meet the community’s demands.

Community Responses

While intragovernmental agreements, Qualified Opportunity Zoning, federal transportation grants, and public and private capital threaten to displace families that reside in the historic barrios south of downtown, the workers at Casa Maria have effectively mobilized the community, moving beyond the traditional service of the Catholic Worker. Casa Maria has long inserted itself into the neighborhood’s politics. The soup kitchen is invaluable to the community as it fosters a public sphere that provides a framework for conversation and public debate regarding issues plaguing the community. In a conversation with Brian Flagg, he described the direction that the workers would need to take to combat corporate investment in South Tucson, commenting,

We went to a Pima County Interfaith Council meeting and saw how non-white it was. The issues were things that came out of people’s neighborhoods, heavily underserved neighborhoods... We did interfaith for a dozen years. I was one of the co-chairs. We really learned how to do community organizing. What they really stressed is about building power. The whole thing was about how to analyze power, figure out what you can get from power—organized money... George Miller, the mayor, challenged Interfaith. He said if you really want to do power, you are going to have to do electoral power at some point... The only thing that happens now are campaigns. We needed to take everything we learned to bring power to my barrio because it is being gentrified.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Rico, Gabriela. “Former South Tucson Dog Track Sells for \$9 million.” *Arizona Daily Star*, July 14, 2022. https://tucson.com/news/local/subscriber/former-south-tucson-dog-track-sells-for-9-million/article_8a1c48e0-006e-11ed-9693-2bd52bf5ce64.html

³⁰⁷ Flagg, Brian (Casa Maria Director) in conversation with the author, April 2021.

After months of canvassing the neighborhood and hosting several community events centering around development, displacement, and rent control, Casa Maria ran for office. In August 2022, the City of South Tucson voted for three out of a list of six candidates in the primary. Brian Flagg, Roxanna Valenzuela, and Cesar Aguirre defeated the other three incumbents by such a large margin that it left no question of who would be voted into office in the general election later that November. The success of sustaining this grassroots movement has been the result of leadership's ability to generate trust and form alliances among community members, creating a sense of common identity. By linking social capital within the community, these activists have been able to facilitate political mobilization in a neighborhood that has been historically ignored by public institutions and experienced low voter turnout.

Moreover, the workers have continued their mission to preserve affordable housing in South Tucson. In early March 2023, Casa Maria announced its purchase of the El Camino Motel, which sits off the I-10. While inflated housing values have posed a challenge in the group's efforts to purchase residential properties, the old motel presented the perfect opportunity to create affordable housing units. In a recent interview with KOLD, Brian Flagg commented, "We are trying to buy up the places where the poor people now live so they don't get booted out of town. The El Camino is one of a dozen motels in the South Tucson area that serves people who eat at the soup kitchen. Poorer people are being run out and are being replaced by higher-income people."³⁰⁸ The property contains 20 units, which will be rented out monthly to people earning less than 80 percent of the area median income. In addition to the monthly units, a couple of the

³⁰⁸ KOLD. "Casa Maria Soup Kitchen buys South Tucson Motel for Affordable Housing." 13 News, March 1, 2023. <https://www.kold.com/video/2023/03/02/casa-maria-soup-kitchen-buys-south-tucson-motel-affordable-housing/>

units will remain vacant for overnight rentals for the unhoused community. Roxy Valenzuela reported to the *Arizona Daily Star* that Casa Maria plans on purchasing additional motels to expand affordable housing stock in South Tucson.³⁰⁹ The motel is just one of many steps towards the group's goals. Drawing attention to the group's future political aims, Glenda Avalos commented, "For years now we've been in discussion with the community about ways to protect our barrios from gentrification. This year, we put our affordable housing plan into action. Purchasing properties like the El Camino Motel is part of our plan to fight against the real estate predators whose mission is to change our community's makeup. We will also be fighting to push for policies like some form of rent control to counter the forces trying to displace our most vulnerable from South Tucson."³¹⁰

Recommendations

South Tucson is gentrifying, that much is clear. What is unclear is whether the infill development of existing infrastructure will only be realized through gentrification and displacement. The workers at Casa Maria are currently in a unique position to advocate for community involvement and the implementation of community preservation strategies within ongoing development efforts. In response to the city's TOD planning, the group can draw on existing strategies of Latinx, community-based activism employed in the Fruitvale and MacArthur Park neighborhoods.³¹¹ In 1991, the Bay Area Rapid Transit Agency (BART) announced the construction of a large parking garage adjacent to the Fruitvale Station in Oakland. Community activists opposed the project on the grounds that it would divide the

³⁰⁹ Rico, "Former South Tucson Dog Track Sells for \$9 million."

³¹⁰ Avalos, Glenda. "Affordable Housing." *Facebook*. February 28, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/casamariatucson/>

³¹¹ Other successful TOD projects in Latinx barrios include the Mercado Del Barrio Apartments in Barrio Logan, San Diego and Union de Vecinos in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles.

existing community and generate undesirable traffic. The activists demanded a community-driven redevelopment of the site and formed a community redevelopment corporation, the Unity Corporation. The redevelopment effort by the Unity Corporation resulted in the Fruitvale Transit Village, a mixed-use development that includes retail space, mixed-income housing, a public library, a senior center, and a community health clinic.³¹² This bottom-up approach resulted in a conservative expansion of affordable housing, alongside the construction of market rate housing, has aided the community in remaining in their homes. Despite surrounding gentrification and continuous additions to the neighborhood, the Fruitvale community remains largely intact.

Additionally, MacArthur Park serves as an example of how the expansion of affordable housing stock may prevent displacement resulting from TOD. In 2009, a development plan was approved for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (METRO)-owned subway station in MacArthur Park. The MacArthur Park Apartments (TOD) development involved a process where Latinx politicians took over the council district and pressured the city's planning and transportation agencies to work with community organizations to ensure the incorporation of inclusionary spaces and affordable housing in the project. Ultimately, the development was constructed by a firm specializing in affordable and mixed-use development around transit stops. During the first phase of the project, 90 affordable apartments were built, the second phase included 82 additional affordable units. Although the development now has many amenities that draw affluent residents, MacArthur Park largely remains an immigrant

³¹² Sandoval, Gerardo Francisco. "Planning the Barrio: Ethnic Identity and Struggles over Transit-oriented, Development-Induced Gentrification." *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 41, no. 4 (2021): 410-24. Erualdo et al. "Neighborhood Change in Near-Transit Latinx Communities: Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development."

neighborhood and serves as an example of equitable TOD.³¹³ From these two examples, we can see how community involvement and the expansion of low-income housing are key to limiting displacement amidst TOD development.

Although it can be a challenge to get developers to invest in the construction of affordable housing due to land availability, zoning regulations, and profit margins in gentrifying areas, there are strategies for incentivizing the incorporation of affordable units. Inclusionary zoning practices are often cited as a means for increasing affordable housing stock by enacting ordinances that set a minimum requirement of a new development's total units to be designated for low-income households. Inclusionary zoning is often the preferred method, as it requires administrative oversight to ensure that the mandatory units are built.³¹⁴ A common incentive for developers is a density bonus, which allows developers to create more units on a parcel of land that would otherwise be prohibited by zoning regulations. A density bonus may either equal the required number of low-income units or allow developers to build additional market-rate units, thus, increasing the developer's profits.³¹⁵ Other incentives include relaxing zoning restrictions, waiving permit fees, and provisions that allow developers to opt out of affordable housing requirements by paying a fee into a fund designated to building affordable housing offsite. The barrier to implementing inclusionary zoning is that it must be established through legislation and

³¹³ Sandoval, Gerardo Francisco and Roanel Herrera. "Transit-Oriented Development and Equity in Latino Neighborhoods: A Comparative Case Study of MacArthur Park (Los Angeles) and Fruitvale (Oakland). NITC-RR-544. Portland, OR: Transportation Research and Education Center (TREC), 2015.

³¹⁴ Levy, Diane, Jennifer Comey, and Sandra Padilla. *Keeping the Neighborhood Affordable: A Handbook of Housing Strategies for Gentrifying Areas*. Urban Institute, 2006.

³¹⁵ Ray, Anne. Inclusionary Housing: A Discussion of Policy Issues. Paper prepared for Alachua County Department of Planning and Development, Gainesville, Florida. June 15, 2001. Burchell, Robert W., C. Kent Conine, Richard Dubin, David Flanagan, Catherine C. Galley, Eric Larsen, David Rusk, Ann B. Schnare, Bernard Tetreault, and Richard Tustian. "Inclusionary Zoning: Pros and Cons." *New Century Housing*, 1, no. 2 (2000).

often receives opposition from developers. Additionally, the cost of affordable housing production may push small, local developers, who are more likely to take the surrounding community into consideration, out of the market. Moreover, these units are usually mandated to remain affordable for 10 to 20 years, after which they are often converted to market rate.

In addition to development incentives, local government may take advantage of federal programs to create and preserve existing affordable housing stock. Programs such as the Moving to Work (MTW) demonstration program that provides PHAs with the opportunity to design and test local strategies to increase housing choices for low-income families. For example, the King County Housing Authority (KCHA) has used MTW funds to acquire as many as 2,200 additional affordable rental units over a six-year span by providing the PHA with access to lines of credit from lenders to act quickly when the opportunity to acquire a property arises. As of June 2020, KCHA had acquired more than 1,500 units of housing along the region's emerging transit corridors.³¹⁶ Moreover, the city can take advantage of the many vacant and deteriorating properties around South Tucson by partnering with local private and nonprofit developers to rehabilitate existing stock. Places such as New York City, Chicago, Boston, and Washington DC have had great success in preserving affordable housing stock through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP), which provided funds to local and state governments and nonprofit organizations to acquire and rehabilitate vacant properties. By focusing on existing infrastructure, NSP lowered the cost of creating long-term affordable housing and allowed limited subsidy funds to be stretched further. Additionally, it created affordable units far more quickly than new construction, especially in housing markets with restrictive land use

³¹⁶ Ellen, Ingrid, Erin Graves, Katherine O'Regan and Jenny Schuetz. Strategies for Increasing Affordable Housing Amid the COVID-19 Economic Crisis." Brookings Institute, June 8, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/strategies-for-increasing-affordable-housing-amid-the-covid-19-economic-crisis/>

regulations.³¹⁷ Further, South Tucson’s QOZ status may be useful in attracting capital for affordable housing renovation and construction. Although the program is often used to produce luxury apartment developments, some developers in other QOZs have found a way to produce affordable housing by obtaining additional mezzanine debt and combining QOF investments with other federal, state, and municipal tax incentives.³¹⁸

To maintain an affordable housing stock, local government will need to carry out code enforcement. As was discussed with Connie Chambers, affordable rental housing can be lost due to a lack of sufficient maintenance, intentional or not. Moreover, as Casa Maria’s platform suggests, some form of rent control is needed to protect low-income households renting in the private market. Arguments against rent control tend to be based on the notion that such policies restrict the housing supply and are counterproductive to affordability in the long-term by decreasing property values and tax revenue, however, studies suggest that these fears are unfounded.³¹⁹ Moreover, second-generation rent control policies that we see today are more lenient and often include provisions favoring housing production (e.g., exempting new constructions), allow landlords modest rent raises annually and to set rents between tenancies.³²⁰ While rent control is currently illegal in Arizona, other states such as New York, New Jersey, California, and Maryland have successfully implemented rent control policies in certain cities, and the Oregon legislature recently passed a rent control policy placing a cap on rent increases statewide.³²¹ Rent control in states like Arizona, where the state legislature has preempted local

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Cobean, Robert. “Are Apartments Eligible for Qualified Opportunity Zones?” *Realized*, Feb 9, 2021. <https://www.realized1031.com/blog/are-apartments-eligible-for-qualified-opportunity-zones>

³¹⁹ Trumm, Doug. “The Case for Rent Control.” *The Urbanist*, August 5, 2019. <https://www.theurbanist.org/2019/08/05/the-case-for-rent-control/>

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ National Multifamily Housing Council. Rent Control Laws by State. July 19, 2022. <https://www.nmhc.org/research-insight/analysis-and-guidance/rent-control-laws-by-state/>

governments' right to enact rent control policies, is a long-term strategy that will require a broad coalition of community organizations, advocacy groups, and political support to push through the state legislature. Moreover, rent control alone will not fix the affordability crisis, it must be regarded as one component in "a broader framework of effective housing policies that promote inclusion and limit displacement."³²²

Final Remarks

Dispossession has remained as fundamental to economic development as it was to the nation's conception. As long as the coffers are being filled, local government will continue to facilitate the dispossession and displacement of our fellow community members. The devalorization and disposability of Latinx peoples for private property has been a constant feature of the local political economy. From the framing of the Old Pueblo and its inhabitants as a "disease" to Connie Chambers as a "haven for crime", government-facilitated dispossession has repeatedly relied upon the colonial binary between modernity and disorder for its continued justification. Every effort by local government to stimulate investment and increase tax revenue has resulted in additional iterations of racialized displacement. The entrepreneurial development strategies identified in this paper—public-private partnerships, tax abatement incentives, intragovernmental agreements, and revanchist 'discursive mechanisms of enclosure'—can be understood as the state engaging in contemporary 'accumulation by dispossession' at the urban scale.³²³ In the fight to preserve their barrio, the workers at Casa Maria face the latest iteration of racialized dispossession and displacement locally, which seeks to expropriate land historically inhabited by indigenous and marginalized peoples to transform it into an extension of downtown

³²² Trumm, Doug. "The Case for Rent Control."

³²³ Gillespie, Tom. "Accumulation by Urban Dispossession: Struggles over Urban Space in Accra, Ghana." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41, no. 1 (2016): 66-77.

Tucson—a factor of production for capitalist developers and the luxury real estate market. What makes this iteration of accumulation unique is that it does not seek to incorporate the dispossessed into the labor force; rather, it seeks to extract wealth by expelling the undesirables entirely from the urban center.³²⁴

While this study examined the efforts of a small group of community activists at the local level, their struggles are representative of a larger pattern of racialized dispossession. From London to Cape Town, Miami to São Paulo, racialized dispossession and displacement have been part and parcel of city-making on the global scale. Scholars worldwide have documented new patterns of urban restructuring taking place across cities worldwide, resulting in neoliberal urban governance characterized by redevelopment, expansion, and real estate speculation. However, the neoliberal restructuring of cities is less a new type of governance than it is an “extension and reconfiguration of the domestic space of empire.”³²⁵ As Danewid (2020) notes, neoliberal modes of urban governance often build upon colonial practices of urban planning, slum administration, and policing.³²⁶ Thinking of urban renewal within the context of ongoing colonial relations allows us to see how race-making practices are central to the reproduction and governance of urban space. Colonial logic underpins gentrification and revitalization processes that determine who belongs in certain spaces and who does not. How these processes unfold and operate within individual settings varies greatly, begetting the need for scholars and communities to document local redevelopment efforts.

³²⁴ Sassen, Saskia., and Ebrary, Inc. *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2014.

³²⁵ Danewid, Ida. "The Fire This Time: Grenfell, Racial Capitalism and the Urbanisation of Empire." *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 1 (2020): 289-313.

³²⁶ Ibid.

In the face of deeply embedded structural challenges, it often appears, as Brian says, to be David against Goliath. However, the successful efforts of Casa Maria serve as a testament to the power of a small group of people with a shared vision coming together to fight for something they cherish. Though they have not yet achieved all their goals, their story is one that spreads hope for other communities that venture to challenge systems of power. Through restless effort and collaboration, it is possible to make change. The workers' bottom-up approach illustrates the importance of expanding community-based knowledge and collectives. Moreover, it highlights the strength of community ties based on shared place-based identities and experiences and how they act as a resource to build and strengthen community power. The struggles of the workers at Casa Maria deserve further exploration. An area for future research should include the examination of the continued redevelopment and displacement and responses by community activists in South Tucson. Their unique political positioning may place the workers at Casa Maria in a position to accomplish feats and employ tactics that go far beyond those of typical community organizing efforts. Will strong ties of shared identity preserve spaces within the community? Will the community be able to actively engage in the placemaking process? Are there pathways for integrated, equitable communities? Additionally, it is worth further documenting the effects of severed ties to community, where the displaced relocate, and how ingenuity leads them to survive in new places.

Identifying the social ills wrought by capitalism, Dorothy Day located the issue at the personal level, stating, "The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us."³²⁷ The capitalist milieu of individualism, by design, obscures the reality that we, as humans, are interdependent. In a world

³²⁷ Day, Dorothy. *Loaves and Fishes*. 1st Ed.] ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1963, 215.

of growing insecurity, it is increasingly important to come together at the grassroots, get to know and learn from one another, and find confidence to challenge the status quo that is tearing our communities apart. The workers at Casa Maria have contributed to Day's revolution, demonstrating the many ways that we can all be revolutionaries. Through their everyday acts of mercy over decades, the workers at Casa Maria have integrated into the community, building bonds of trust and solidarity. The public sphere at the soup kitchen is robust and active, facilitating diverse community interaction that empowers residents to engage in conversations about the use of public space, identity, and representation in the barrio, thereby challenging contemporary neoliberal development. The community demonstrates their right to the barrio by participating in events and workshops hosted by Casa Maria that reject the tenants of community development. Casa Maria has provided a framework for education and public debate in a way that no other institution in South Tucson has accomplished within the community. Through their continued efforts, Casa Maria serves as a bastion of hope and neighborhood empowerment. Not just a soup kitchen, Casa Maria is working to help South Tucson retain its soul.

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