

CHAPTER THREE

HOMEGROWN REVOLUTION

Some would say that it could only have happened in the Valley. Joy Picus, the L.A. city councilmember from the west San Fernando Valley, was under siege day and night from a group called the 'West Hills Open Zone Victims'. They harangued her with petitions and phone calls, haunted her on the stump, and ambushed her outside her field office. They said she was cold-hearted and haughty, unmoved by their extremity. From their agitated tone the innocent observer would have guessed that they had been the victims of some great, uncompensated communal tragedy: a plane crash or gas explosion next to an elementary school, a suddenly revealed Love Canal in their backyards, or, perhaps (as the Rod Sterling or Thomas Pynchon concept of 'open zone' suggests), something stranger, even occult.

In fact no one in the neighborhood had died, the school was intact, the pollution problem was no worse than in any other part of the smog-choked Valley, and there had been no encounters of a third kind. What *had* happened to raise the victims' spleen was that the coldhearted Picus had let them remain, as they had always been, residents of Canoga Park. To fathom the depth of their anger, it is necessary to rehearse a few simple facts of life about Los Angeles's single-family suburbs:

fact one: Los Angeles homeowners, like the Sicilians in *Prizzi's Honor*, love their children, but they love their property values more.

fact two: 'Community' in Los Angeles means homogeneity of race, class and, especially, home values. Community designations – i.e. the street signs across the city identifying areas as 'Canoga Park', 'Holmby Hills', 'Silverlake', and so on – have no legal status. In the last analysis, they are merely favors granted by city councilmembers to well-organized neighborhoods or businessmen's groups seeking to have their areas identified.

fact three: The most powerful 'social movement' in contemporary Southern California is that of affluent homeowners, organized by notional community designations or tract names, engaged in the defense of home values and neighborhood exclusivity.

Thus it was that more than three thousand homeowners in the foothills of western Canoga Park petitioned Picus in early 1987 to redesignate their area as 'West Hills'. The members of the West Hills Property Owners

Association complained that they were forced to look down from the patios of their hilltop \$400,000 homes on mere \$200,000 hovels in the flatlands east of Platt Avenue. Implicitly referring to the pigmentation as well as home values on the other side of the tracks, the secessionists whined that Canoga Park was 'bad . . . very slummish' and that 'our area is more expensive . . . because we paid a heck of a lot more in the first place'.¹ To further fuel West Hills' search for 'community', local realtors spread the rumor that redesignation would raise home values by an instant \$20,000.

Picus, a very moderate Democrat, was in no mood to become a suburban Lincoln saving West Hills for Canoga Park. The power in her district is divided between influential developers (Voit's Warner Center) and anti-development (or 'slow growth') homeowners' associations. Under investigation by the City Attorney for receiving improper campaign contributions from developers, she was particularly eager to mollify homeowners. With a phone call from Picus to the city Department of Transportation, West Hills was born.

For disconsolate homeowners just east of the new non-entity, however, the redesignation was a calamity that cheated them out of a \$20,000 windfall. 'They took out the cream of the crop of the homes and we were not even told. [We] thought everybody had a right to be asked if they wanted to be included.' Months later, after relentlessly dogging Picus, the homeowners from the orphan fringe between Shoup and Platt avenues finally won admittance into the exclusive West Hills club. But Picus might as well have been trying to pass a peace-pipe between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. As a local, unsympathetic observer explained:

This raised the ire of the original West Hills petitioners, who obviously were loath to see their gains diluted; their 'sense of community' carries a 'small is beautiful' qualifier. Not to be confused with Solomon, Picus tried to divide the baby by declaring the newly admitted neighborhoods 'open zones', to be referred to as Canoga Park or as West Hills as each inhabitant might deem appropriate. . . . Unsurprisingly, this satisfied no one – least of all the once-scorned, once-embraced, scorned-again inhabitants of the open zones.²

Sucked waist-deep into the nomenclatural quicksand of West Hills by her revision of the 'community's' imaginary boundaries, Picus only sank further

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THE \$20,000 SIGN

with each attempt at extrication. Caught between those who wanted to pull up the gangplanks around the narrowest construction of the area, and those who wanted to roll back the secession entirely ('thus returning all property owners to their original positions'), Picus floundered hopelessly. Her attempt at a complicated League-of-Nations plebiscite in the three contentious areas (that is, the original West Hills, the 'Open Zone', and much maligned Canoga Park) came off poorly and brought new charges of 'her abhorrence of leadership'. At the end of the day, all sides derided her, political analysts calculated major, perhaps fatal damage to her political career, and the mere mention of 'West Hills' at press conferences was enough to drive the unfortunate councilmember to apoplexy.³

SUNBELT BOLSHEVISM

The slow-growth movement is not a fad, it is a major revolution.

L.A. Councilmember Marvin Braude⁴

The Frankenstein of West Hills is a familiar kind of terror to suburban politicians in the Los Angeles area. Many of them live in fear of being ground to bits – as Joy Picus nearly was – by the incessant conflict of microscopically parochial interests. It is, I suppose, another example of how Southern California stands simplistic social theory on its head. Elsewhere affluent homeowners are imagined to be the contented bulwark of the status quo. But south of the Tehachapis they act like *sans culottes*, wielding the parish pump as a guillotine. Indeed it was precisely Valley homeowners like the West Hills group who were the shock troops of Howard Jarvis's tax revolt in 1978: an epochal event that helped end the New Deal era and pave the way for Reaganomics.

Now, more than a decade later, angry homeowners are engaged in a more diffuse, but no less significant struggle over the politics of growth. With roots in literally hundreds of homeowners' associations, a so-called 'slow-growth movement' has emerged out of the Brownian motion of local landuse grievances (like the Canoga Park redesignation) to challenge the most powerful economic interest in California today: the land development industry. Like Proposition 13 earlier, the new revolt seemed to erupt out of the crabgrass with little prior warning.

The first rumble was in January 1985 when a coalition of homeowners won a court order stopping the City of Los Angeles from allowing highrise development flagrantly in excess of its own General Plan. Their precedent planted the seed for the success of Proposition U in November of 1986. Heralded by the *Times* as the 'first major challenge to Los Angeles's growth ethic in a hundred years', Proposition U reduced developable commercial density in the city by half and imposed a ten-point growth management plan.⁵ A year later, Councilmember Pat Russell, the key strategist of Mayor Bradley's 'pro-growth' majority on the Council, was dramatically upset by a darkhorse slow-growth advocate.

In the meantime homeowner-backed slow-growth insurgencies dominated the 1987–8 local elections in scores of Los Angeles suburbs and outlying cities.⁶ In spite of the absence of a county-wide growth control initiative, these local skirmishes yielded an impressive balance-sheet of new building restrictions and development moratoria. Already superheated real-estate markets reacted with hysteria. Anticipating that the slow-growth movement would further constrict the limited supply of developable land, hordes of house-hungry buyers rushed into the market: a self-fulfilling prophecy that led to Tokyo-type escalations in median home values in Los Angeles and Orange counties during 1987.

Land inflation only fanned the flames of growth protest throughout the suburbanizing, 'pro-growth' frontiers of Southern California. In the Reaganite fastnesses of southern Orange County (where only semi-liberal Irvine breaks the mold) the traditional conservative consensus was splintered by a bitter struggle between latifundian developers and wealthy homeowners. The initially commanding lead of the 'Sensible Growth Initiative', with its stringent 'quality of life' standards for new development, was barely surmounted in the June 1988 election by the unprecedented scare campaign (stressing higher taxes and job flight) mounted by Donald Bren and his fellow *haciendados*. Chastened by the close-call in Orange County, developers in neighboring Riverside County, home of two of the fastest growing suburban fringes in the country (Moreno Valley and Elsinore–Temecula), spared no expense in vilifying their own fledgling slow-growth movement. Measure B (November 1988) which would have restricted future development in the county's unincorporated areas was beaten three to two after pro-growth forces outspent slow-growth fifty-five

to one. A similar developer-financed, pro-growth *blitzkrieg* edged out popular growth-control initiatives in San Diego County.

Having portrayed the slow-growth movement as virtually invincible in 1986, the press now claimed that the 1988 developers' counter-offensive had left the movement in shambles.⁷ In fact, the struggle, which had begun as largely unreported guerrilla skirmishes, was changing from a war of maneuver – with dramatic results at the polls – to an increasingly complex war of position, involving the courts, the state legislature, and various regulatory bodies, as well as local government. And, whatever the immediate balance of forces, there is no question that growth controversies continue to polarize and reshape the Southern California political landscape. But what interpretation do we give to that vague cipher known as 'slow growth'? And where on a traditional spectrum of political and social forces can we locate a 'movement' composed of strange molecules like the West Hills homeowners?

To some analysts the Southern California slow-growth rebellion of the late 1980s merely seemed a recapitulation of the experience of affluent Bay Area counties in the previous decade. Beginning with Petaluma's famous 1973 experiment in growth management, more than two dozen cities, along with the designer counties of Marin and Napa, had imposed some kind of moratorium or cap on residential development. The Bay Area has achieved a degree of growth limitation unequalled in any other metropolitan region in the country – evoking envy as well as criticism for the resulting 'suburban squeeze', land inflation, and chronic job/housing disjunctions. From this perspective, Southern California has only been catching up with the Bay Area precedent of how to protect and regulate the good life.

But, without denying important overlaps, crucial differences distinguish the Bay Area and Southland versions of growth protest. In the first place, the slow-growth movement in the south has been overwhelmingly a movement of *homeowners*, with some environmentalists serving as organic intellectuals and apologists. Although the movement invokes the populist rhetoric of 'community control' and 'neighborhood power', tenants, with few exceptions, play no role nor are their interests usually addressed (except in opposition). The singularity of the 'People's Republic of Santa Monica' aside, there is no counterpart to the inclusive parochialism, say, of the recent Agnos coalition in San Francisco, which, while dominated by

wealthy homeowners, included a significant representation of renters and urban have-nots.

Secondly, land-use politics in Southern California have tended to generate sharper contradictions and entrenched opposition than in the North. As David Dowall and other students of the Bay Area experience have discovered, large developers in Petaluma-type milieux have often monopolized lucrative positions within growth-controlled local residential markets.⁸ Although such accommodations can be found on a case-by-case basis in the south, growth issues are more commonly perceived as a zero-sum game, sowing virulent economic conflict and electoral upheaval. And the stakes are often immense, as homeowners have sought to slow down or stop billion-dollar, multi-phase projects. Indeed the assault on the development process – and, by implication, upon the rights of corporate land ownership and laissez-faire urbanization – has been sufficiently subversive at times to warrant George Will's warning of 'Sunbelt Bolshevism'.⁹

Finally, an important ideological difference. Growth control politics in the Bay Area have been incubated in a specific regional tradition of patrician conservationism represented by the Sierra Club, the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, and California Tomorrow. 'Responsible environmentalism' constitutes a hegemonic discourse in which all sides, developers and their community opponents, must formulate their arguments. The tap-root of slow growth in the South, however, is an exceptionalistic local history of middle-class interest formation around home ownership. Environmentalism is a congenial discourse to the extent that it is congruent with a vision of eternally rising property values in secure bastions of white privilege. The master discourse here – exemplified by the West Hills secessionists – is homestead exclusivism, whether the immediate issue is apartment construction, commercial encroachment, school busing, crime, taxes or simply community designation.¹⁰

Slow growth, in other words, is about homeowner control of land use and much more. Seen in the context of the suburban sociology of Southern California, it is merely the latest incarnation of a middle-class political subjectivity that fitfully constitutes and reconstitutes itself every few years around the defense of household equity and residential privilege. These diverse 'movements' have been notoriously volatile, but their cumulative

impact upon the shaping of the socio-spatial structure of the Los Angeles region has been enormous.

Any serious analysis, therefore, of Southern California's current 'growth wars' must take careful account of this ramified heritage of homeowner mobilization in all of its guises. But the reader must be warned that this means entering a labyrinth of micro-history – a dark chronicle of the tractlands – whose perplexing passageways sometimes lead to places even stranger than West Hills or the 'Open Zone'. Like Orson Welles's *Lady from Shanghai*, the slow-growth movement has a checkered past that conceals ominous clues about how it will behave in the future. The starting-point is to reconstruct the white-supremacist genealogy of its essential infrastructure: the *homeowners' association*.

THE WHITE WALL

If we can't enforce restrictive covenants in this area then pretty soon the whole Westside will be gone and be worth nothing for people of our class. *1940s homeowners' leader*¹¹

For most of the twentieth century, homeowners' associations (HAs) have been the 'trade unions' of an important section of the middle class. Yet they remain largely a *terra incognita*, neglected by urban historians and sociologists alike. The sparse academic literature on the subject focuses almost entirely on the recent proliferation (over 16,000 in California alone) of so-called 'common interest' homeowners' associations (CIHAs) mandatorily tied to condominium and planned unit developments.¹² The traditional HA – organizing owners of detached, single-family homes (usually without the common property component of CIHAs) – has a bibliography only in land law case studies. However familiar a feature on the landscape of Los Angeles (and the suburban fringes of other American cities), it remains an invisible object in social science.

Before meeting the earliest local examples of this neglected species, it is useful to make some primitive taxonomic distinctions. Some homeowners' associations are entirely voluntary coalescences of perceived common interest; many others are mandatory enrolments (*preorganized* by developers) of all

residents of a tract or planned unit development. Amongst the former, HAs banded together against an external threat tend to be more cohesive than those organized merely for self-improvement. Amongst the latter it is important to distinguish the new-fangled CIHAs – with their quotidian, quasi-governmental responsibilities for common property – from older HAs organized around the enforcement of legally binding subdivision deed restrictions.

The first HAs in Los Angeles, beginning with the Los Felix Improvement Association in 1916, were the children of deed restrictions in a new kind of planned subdivision.¹³ As Marc Weiss has pointed out in *The Rise of Community Builders*, early-twentieth-century Los Angeles established the national legal precedent for zoning districts exclusively for upscale, single-family residences. Moreover, the local real-estate industry, dominated by ‘highend’ builders exploiting economies of scale, specialized in the creation of large planned subdivisions on the urban fringe. Together with exclusionary zoning and stringent subdivision regulation, deed restrictions, that ‘both mandated and prohibited certain types of behavior on the part of the present and future property owner’, constituted ‘the main method by which community builders implemented their planning and design vision’. Although deed restrictions also specified details of lot and home design, their overriding purpose was to ensure social and racial homogeneity. ‘Private restrictions, for example, normally included such provisions as minimum required costs for home construction, and exclusion of all non-Caucasians [and sometimes non-Christians as well] from occupancy, except as domestic servants.’¹⁴

By World War One, deed restrictions (or restrictive covenants), enforced by tract HAs, were helping to define the insulated, middle-class world of Los Angeles’s Westside. At the same time, acting as private Jim Crow legislation, deed restrictions were also building a ‘white wall’ around the Black community on Central Avenue. Homeowners’ associations first appeared on the *political* scene in the 1920s as instruments of white mobilization against attempts by Blacks to buy homes outside the ghetto. Where tracts were not already legally bound by subdivision deeds, white homeowners banded together as ‘protective associations’ to create racially specified ‘block restrictions’. Some neighborhoods carried both deed and block racial restrictions. In this fashion 95 per cent of the city’s housing stock in the 1920s was effectively put off limits to Blacks and Asians.¹⁵

In her 1929 study of the 'University Addition' neighborhood near the University of Southern California, sociologist Bessie McClenahan described how the arrival of a single Black family east of Budlong Avenue in the summer of 1922 sowed panic that home values would collapse in the wake of an imminent 'Negro Invasion'. Whites quickly formed the 'Anti-African Housing Association' (limited to homeowners) to campaign for a restrictive agreement to exclude non-whites (Japanese as well as Blacks) from the neighborhood. Although the Anti-African Association (later renamed the University District Property Owners Association) also sponsored street paving and school construction, its main purpose continued to be the defense of the white *laager* between Vermont and Budlong avenues.¹⁶

As industrial conversion in the 1930s consumed hundreds of Black homes in the Central Avenue corridor, overcrowding became critical. But every foray by Black homebuyers into an outside residential area was met by the immediate wrath of white homeowners. Sometimes, as in the case of the White Homeowners Association, formed under the auspices of the Broadway Business Association, local chamber of commerce elements played a key instigating role. In other cases, homeowner protective groups overlapped with Ku Klux Klan vigilantism, for example in beach communities where Blacks were harassed and driven out in a series of incidents in the 1920s and 1930s. (Los Angeles's satellite suburbs in the 1920s have been described by one historian as a 'happy hunting ground of the Klan'.)¹⁷ White homeowners' associations were also frequently used as springboards for demagogic political ambitions. Thus Harry Burkner, the erstwhile president of the White Home Owners Protective Association (covering a vast residential area bounded by Santa Barbara, Main, Manchester and Vermont) ran for various municipal offices on a platform of Black and Mexican exclusion.¹⁸

Until the US Supreme Court finally ruled against restrictive covenants in 1948, white homeowner groups in Los Angeles had ample sanction in the law. The California Supreme Court first established the doctrine in the Gary case of 1919, extended it to *post facto* 'block' restrictions in *Wayt versus Patee* (1928), and continued to reaffirm it as late as 1947. As a result white homeowners were able to file more than a hundred suits against non-white homebuyers (including even Hollywood celebrities like Hattie McDaniel and Louis Beavers), while a compliant Superior Court regularly found

Blacks as well as Filipinos and Native Americans in contempt for occupying homes within restricted subdivisions or blocks. Lest Blacks cling to any illusion about the benevolence of the New Deal, Roosevelt's Federal Housing Authority not only sanctioned restrictions, but developed a recommended formula for inclusion in subdivision contracts.¹⁹

Restrictionism, moreover, was a lucrative business. It has been estimated that \$17 out of every \$20 subscribed by white homeowners to join a 'protective association' ended up as profit in the hands of organizers and allied title companies.²⁰ Thus the upscale Southwest Wilshire Protective Association generated handsome commissions for its founder, Charles Shattuck (brother of Republican leader Ed Shattuck), and its president, W.W. Powell, whose Title Insurance and Trust Company processed 90 per cent of Los Angeles's restrictive covenant agreements. Los Angeles's largest and most prestigious law firm – Gibson, Dunn and Crutcher – also reaped generous rewards from its long service fighting open housing on behalf of realtors' groups.²¹

The wartime housing shortage only exacerbated racial conflict. The immigration of tens of thousands of Black war workers from the Southwest imposed intolerable strains on the confined housing stock of the Los Angeles ghetto. As Blacks tried to jump over the 'white wall' to buy shelter in outlying suburban or rural fringes, they were met by a new wave of homeowner hostility. As Lawrence de Graaf observes, the San Gabriel Valley was a particularly notorious citadel of restrictionism:

Residential segregation was steadily tightened during the early 1940s as white property owners secured the limited supply of housing outside existing Negro areas for white occupancy only by attaching race restrictive covenants to the titles. In several areas . . . 'home improvement' associations led vigorous campaigns to cover all standing residential structures with covenants. Much of the San Gabriel Valley and Pasadena was thus closed to Negroes in 1941.²²

In the immediate postwar period, local chambers of commerce and homeowners' groups, supported by developers, attempted to restrict the entire western half of the San Fernando Valley to Black immigration. The Huntington Park Homeowners Association became the model for a comparable effort to keep Blacks out of the white industrial suburbs east of

Alameda Avenue's 'Cotton Curtain'. On the Westside, Black entry was blocked by powerful middle-class housing associations with ironclad covenants.²³ The only conceivable *lebensraum* was south and southwest, where lower-middle-class white homeowners bitterly contested housing integration, block by block.²⁴

Veteran Black newspaper publisher Charlotta Bass recalled some of these now forgotten battles in her memoirs. On the eve of Pearl Harbor, for example, whites in the West Jefferson area sued to evict five Black homeowners, while the local Klan burnt 'Keep Slauon White!' crosses a few blocks away. The gradually increasing Black presence in the old railroad town of Watts was contested by the virulent South Los Angeles Home Owners Association, whose spores later became the core of white resistance in Willowbrook and Compton further south. A Black home was blown up (presumably by the Klan) on 30th Street, crosses were burnt in Crenshaw and on the USC campus, and white homeowners rioted against sales to Blacks on East 71st Street.²⁵ Finally, just before Christmas 1945, Southland residential racism reached its gruesome climax with the Fontana *auto da fe* discussed in chapter seven below.

If white homeowner resistance in Southcentral Los Angeles gradually dissipated after the Korean War, although continuing ferociously along the ghetto's western and eastern edges,²⁶ it was largely because Southside whites were fleeing to the new suburbs in the San Fernando Valley and across the southeastern tier of Los Angeles County. Despite the 1948 Supreme Court ruling against restrictive covenants and the 1950 repeal of California's Alien Land law, suburban developers continued to exclude Blacks, Chicanos and Asians.²⁷ Moreover the growth of the suburban population outside the Los Angeles city limits (a majority of the County's population by 1950) offered a new terrain for homeowner separatism: this time with the aim of putting the more permanent barriers of independent incorporation and exclusive land-use zoning between themselves and non-white, or non-homeowning, populations. The emergence of suburban Southern California as a 'metrosea' of fragmented and insular local sovereignties – often depicted in urbanist literature as an 'accident' of unplanned growth – was in fact the result of deliberate shaping. A second wave of homeowner activists collaborated with realtors and developers to plan postwar racial and class segregation in the *Leave It to Beaver* suburbs.

SUBURBAN SEPARATISM

The municipal incorporation of the Lakewood Plan cities was a revolt
of the rich against the poor . . . *Gary Miller*²⁸

To understand the role of homeowners as potent agents of metropolitan fragmentation, it is first necessary to explain how the ground rules of separatism evolved. Prior to the 1950s, the separate incorporation of small populations had been a game only a handful of special interests could afford to play. On the one hand, aristocratic incorporations like Beverly Hills and San Marino were the first to realize the full potential of zoning law as barbed-wire social fencing around home values. On the other hand, powerful industrial landowners created the 'phantom city' of Vernon to exploit land-use control and hoard their lucrative tax base. But in most cases incorporation-minded homeowners or industrialists were deterred by the tax burdens involved in establishing new municipal services. Many preferred to be 'free-riders' in undertaxed, unincorporated county areas – a situation that maximized fiscal advantage even if it ceded local control over zoning.²⁹

Separate incorporation, however, acquired new momentum after the Korean War. The instigators (whom we met in the last chapter) were the 'merchant builders' who were mass-producing, with the aid of the burgeoning savings-and-loan industry, scores of new suburban communities out of raw farm land. Lakewood, just north of Long Beach, was twice the size of Long Island's more famous Levittown, and contained the nation's pioneer regional shopping center. Threatened with annexation by Long Beach, its developers, Weingart, Boyar and Taper, hired consultants to explore options for incorporation without the traditional cost of creating city government out of whole cloth.

The result was the famous 'Lakewood Plan'. Anxious to avoid shrinkage of their budget and workforce through suburban municipalization, and equally opposed to any form of metropolitan consolidation, the Los Angeles County Supervisors agreed to let Lakewood contract its vital services (fire, police, library, and so on) at cut-rate prices determined by the county's economy of scale (i.e., indirectly subsidized by all county taxpayers). This allowed suburban communities to reclaim control over zoning and land use

without the burden of public expenditures proportionate to those of older cities.

A few years later the Legislature stepped in to sweeten the Lakewood Plan even more. The 1956 Bradley–Burns Act allowed all local governments in the state to collect a uniform 1 per cent sales tax for their own use. This meant that fringe areas with new-fangled shopping centers or other commercial assets could finance city government without resorting to a property tax. In other words, Sacramento licensed suburban governments to pay for their contracted county services with regressive sales revenues rather than progressive property taxes – a direct subsidy to suburban separatism at the expense of the weakened tax bases of primate cities.³⁰

In his brilliant study of the twenty-six new ‘minimal cities’ formed along Lakewood lines in Los Angeles County between 1954 and 1960, Gary Miller has shown that it was not ‘municipal efficiency’ (as claimed by ‘Public Choice’ theorists) but self-seeking economic advantage that impelled incorporation. ‘The reasons for creating or moving to a . . . minimal city was not to signal something unique about one’s demand for public goods, but to insulate one’s property from the burden of supporting public services.’ This ‘exit privilege’ – subsidized by the County and State – was enhanced by the other advantages of local control. Residents of minimal cities could zone out service-demanding low-income and renting populations, eliminate (through service contracting) homegrown union or bureaucratic pressures for service expansion, and, perhaps most importantly, safeguard their property from potential utilization as a resource for government expansion or fiscal redistribution.³¹ Needless to say, by providing such an attractive escape hatch from ordinary municipal citizenship, the Lakewood Plan fueled white flight from Los Angeles, while at the same time reducing the city’s capacity to deal with the needs of increasing low-income and renter populations.³²

Although a galaxy of different interest groups, ranging from public-sector unions to industrialists, supported the ‘Lakewoodization’ of Southern California’s suburban fringe, the major social impetus came from organized homeowners. Miller skilfully demonstrates how the ideology of the 1970s tax revolt (as well as, by extension, the 1980s slow-growth protests) was prefigured by the 1950s and early 1960s movements for

suburban incorporation, which unified ‘middle-class and upper-class homeowners . . . around an anti-bureaucratic, anti-welfare ideology’. Typical pro-incorporation literature luridly depicted homes threatened by ‘exorbitant taxes to pay for redistributive services and bureaucratic salaries’. ‘Long before this theme was being sounded by Howard Jarvis, it was being consciously articulated as the rationale for new jurisdictions, where the evils of bureaucracy could be forever exorcised.’³³

The role of homeowners in these separatist struggles, however, differed markedly as a function of economic status. Wealthy homeowners were typically the leaders in local incorporation, while middling homeowners – to the extent that they were not the group being incorporated *against* – were usually the led. The most famous movement of affluent suburbanites in this period was the campaign by Palos Verdes homeowners to turn that peninsula into a congerie of walled, privatized residential ‘cities’. In the process, home values and organizational capacity seemed directly correlated. Thus the very wealthy Rolling Hills area had a single, powerful homeowners’ association that engineered its incorporation. Partially to ensure a protective single-family barrier around themselves, the Rolling Hillsites supported the anti-development incorporation of affluent, but less resplendent, Rancho Palos Verdes (after, however, deliberately excluding the lower-middle-class homeowners in the San Pedro Hills tract). Rolling Hills and Rancho Palos Verdes then combined forces to promote the incorporation of Rolling Hills Estate. Incorporation expert Johnny Johnson – the Mephistopheles of a dozen Lakewood Plan cities – was brought in to consolidate the Estate’s two dozen contentious homeowners’ associations into a single federation on the Rolling Hills model.³⁴

The basis of almost every residential incorporation in this era was the existence of a sharp gradient of home values between the inclusive community and the area intended for exclusion. South El Monte, for instance, was scarcely a Shangri-la like Rolling Hills, but its incorporation allowed its middle-income homeowners to separate themselves from nearby apartment dwellers and welfare recipients. In other cases, the insulation of home values went hand in hand with the definition of communal lifestyles. Thus the incorporation of La Habra Heights enabled its homeowners’ associations to restrict development and impose a one-acre minimum zoning law to ensure the maintenance of a ‘horse-oriented community’.

Other minimal cities have anchored home values in amenities as varied as golf courses, beach fronts, universities, and country clubs.

These myriad local manipulations of the 'exit option' by homeowners' groups and business cliques have generated the current nonsense-jigsaw map of Southern California. One consequence of this ongoing process – Lakewood Plan populations now exceed one and a half million in Los Angeles County – has been the extension of residential segregation across a vast metropolitan space. According to the 1980 Census, Los Angeles County was nearly 13 per cent Black, but 53 of its 82 cities (including 30 Lakewood Plan incorporations) had Black populations of 1 per cent or less.³⁵ Moreover, Orange County – conceived, as Miller suggests, as 'perform[ing] the same function for middle-class taxpayers that the Lakewood Plan cities were originally intended to perform, but. perform[ing] that function more effectively' – reproduces the same result: with 0.6 per cent Black housing units compared to 10 per cent in Los Angeles County. Overall, while established Black and Chicano neighborhoods were losing several thousand units a year to freeway construction, non-Anglos were able to purchase only 3.3 per cent of the new housing stock constructed during the 1950s boom.³⁶

'Lakewoodism', combined with a widening homeownership gap since the 1960s, has also accelerated the sorting out of the county's population between zones of single-family homeowners (the majority in low-tax-rate minimal cities) and renters (the increasing majority in higher-tax older cities). 'Between 1960 and 1970 home ownership in the county as a whole dropped dramatically, but homeowners continued to be attracted to the Lakewood Plan cities.' At the same time, homeowners in some older, 'independent cities' – like Whittier, Culver City, Manhattan Beach, Torrance and Glendora – gentrified themselves by 'fiscal zoning': by restricting construction of multi-family dwellings, raising the threshold value (or lot size) of new housing, and competing for commercial centers.³⁷

Miller argues that the 1970s explosion in property values – which, as we shall see, spurred both the tax revolt and slow-growth protests – was directly related to limitations on housing expansion and residential densification brought about by the 'fiscal zoning' practices of the Lakewood cities and their older imitators. The affluent enclaves with their gold-plated,

ever-rising property values tend to steal higher-income taxpayers as well as shopping malls from primate cities and needier suburbs, thus intensifying the spiraling conflict between rich and poor cities over revenue-generating resources. The huge magnet of fiscal zoning has also sucked hundreds of industries out of the heart of Los Angeles. In 1977 the *Times* reported that the city was losing up to fifty firms a year to the suburbs and Orange County, a trend that only increased in the 1980s with the flight of industry and warehousing to the Inland Empire. Not surprisingly Black workers, less mobile than their jobs because of de facto residential segregation, have suffered disproportionately from this relocation of industry.³⁸

To summarize: the Lakewood Plan and the Bradley–Burns Act gave suburban homeowners a subsidized ‘exit option’ as well as a powerful new motive for organizing around the ‘protection’ of their home values and lifestyles. The ensuing maximization of local advantage through incorporation and fiscal zoning – whether led by affluent homeowners or business fractions – inevitably produced widening racial and income divides. And, by eroding the tax base of the city of Los Angeles, this fiscal-driven spatial restructuring precipitated more bitter, zero-sum struggles between the affluent homeowner belts of the Westside and Valley, and a growing inner-city population dependent upon public services. As we shall see later, part of the logic of the 1978 tax revolt, which burned over the Valley in particular, was to equalize advantages between Los Angeles’s ‘captive’ white suburbanites and the residents of the Lakewoodized periphery.

DEFENDING THE FAT LIFE

It is Nature’s contours versus Man’s ever stronger bulldozers, the historic past versus the politically expedient, the private vale versus the public highway, the orchard versus the subdivision, . . . the person versus the populace. . . . *Richard Lillard, 1966*³⁹

The history of homeowner activism in Southern California divides into two epochs. In the period we have examined so far – roughly the forty years between 1920 and 1960 – homeowners’ associations were overwhelmingly concerned with the *establishment* of what Robert Fishman has called

'bourgeois utopia': that is, with the creation of racially and economically homogeneous residential enclaves glorifying the single-family home.⁴⁰ In the subsequent period – roughly since the beginning of the Kennedy–Johnson boom – homeowner politics have focused on *defense* of this suburban dream against unwanted development (industry, apartments and offices) as well as against unwanted persons. The first epoch saw only episodic conflicts between developers and homeowners; indeed the former were frequently the mobilizers of the latter in the common cause of exclusionism. Homeowners had little material interest in opposing home-value-raising 'growth', except in occasional cases where it threatened to dump noxious uses on their doorsteps.

After 1965 the structural context of homeowner interests dramatically changed. On one hand, the open space amenities that supported the lifestyles and home values of wealthy hillside and beach dwellers were threatened by rampant, large-scale development; on the other, traditional single-family tracts were suddenly inundated by waves of apartment construction. New development was perceived as a categorical threat to the detached culture of low-density residential life. However reluctantly, in the face of entrenched conservative stereotypes and prejudices, elements of the environmental critique advanced by the Sierra Club and California Tomorrow gained currency amongst homeowner activists, who grasped at the notion that the endangered open spaces around their homes – even the 'pastoral scatteredness' (aka sprawl) of their subdivisions – were conservation values as much as rock piles in Yosemite or wild rivers on remote coasts.

This 'new urban environmentalism' is usually recalled as a Bay Area invention associated with the 1960s movements to save the Bay and preserve hillside open space, which subsequently spilled over into statewide efforts at coastal conservation in the Jerry Brown era. In fact, identical concerns about deteriorating amenities produced parallel backlashes against growth in a number of wealthy Southern California communities. By the early 1970s, for example, environmental regulation of land use had become a potent, sometimes explosive, issue in the archipelago of 'redtile' communities from Coronado and Point Loma (in San Diego), to San Clemente, San Juan Capistrano, Newport Beach, Riverside, Redlands and Santa Barbara. These old-money resorts and retirement centers, built out of

restrictive covenants and Spanish Colonial architecture, contained influential constituencies of retired admirals, landscape artists, horse ranchers, professors, yachtsmen, and the like – all determined to see that disruptive development went somewhere else.

But the best southern analogue to Bay Area patrician environmentalism was the broad-based homeowners' movement that emerged in the 1960s to 'save' the Santa Monica Mountains. This famous range, from the movie colony at Malibu to the Griffith Observatory (including the Hollywood Hills), contains one of the largest concentrations of affluence on the planet: a unique ecology which Reyner Banham memorably described as the 'fat life of the delectable mountains'. Thousands of rambling split-levels, mansard-roofed mansions and mock Greek temples shelter in the artificial lushness of dozens of arroyos and canyons with world-famous names. But, as Banham pointed out, it is an ecology imperiled by its own desirability: on the one hand, by overdevelopment and 'hill cropping'; on the other, by man-made disasters like slides and fires.⁴¹ With lifestyles and property values so dependent upon the preservation of a delicate balance, it is not surprising that wealthy homeowners emerged from their 'thickets of privacy' to organize the earliest and most powerful coalition of homeowners' associations in the country.

Already in the early 1950s, the pioneer Federation of Hillside and Canyon Homeowners, founded in the gated movie colony of Bel-Air, was crusading against hotrodding on Mulholland Drive and lobbying for slope-density down-zoning and the establishment of minimum lot sizes to control new hillside development. With a dozen affiliated associations by the mid 1960s (grown to fifty in 1990), and armed with volunteer expertise in land-use law and planning, the Federation was an evolutionary leap beyond any homeowners' group in existence.⁴²

Moreover, at a time when academic opinion still visualized the typical Southern California homeowner as a yahoo with a power mower and a Goldwater bumpersticker, the Federation's world view was being represented by Richard Lillard's acclaimed *Eden in Jeopardy (Man's prodigal meddling with his environment: The Southern California experience)* (1966). A founder of the Federation and first president of the Residents of Beverly Glen, Inc., Lillard polemicized passionately (and at times almost radically) against a mechanized capitalism that seemed determined to turn nature

into 'one big parking lot' and to erase the past with a 'quicken destruction more exact than wartime bombing'. In an extraordinary epilogue, which remains an eloquent summary of the Federation's ideology, he described the opposed value systems locked in struggle over the future of Los Angeles:

Allied on the one side have been love for unspoiled nature and adjustment to it, respect for the past, conservationism and conservatism, single-dwelling home life, agriculture, Utopianism, the status quo, individual character, established wealth, traditional legality, privacy and private property, and nostalgia. . . . On the other side are concentration on development and alteration, immediate use and exploitation of nature or improvement on nature, emphasis on repetitive recreation for masses of people, the inalienable rights of all to the pursuit of happiness, adulation of novelty and the doings of the newly prominent, and a faith in force, machinery and progress.⁴³

For Lillard and the Federation, Eden's last-ditch defense was in the Santa Monicas, where a handful of large landowners – including Hilton Hotels, the Lantain Corporation, Castle and Cooke, Gulf-America and the Tucker Land Company – were threatening to 'despoil' the hillsides west of Sepulveda Pass. They had capitalized the Las Virgenes and Triunfo water districts with the aim of bringing as many as 450,000 new residents into mountain tracts (including Lantain's proposed '20-square-mile Trousdale Estates' nightmare). Development, however, hinged on a plan by the State Division of Highways to cut four new freeways through wild canyons and to convert scenic Mulholland Drive, on the crestline of the Santa Monicas, into a four-lane, 120-foot-wide expressway. The Federation, in alliance with the Sierra Club and Friends of the Santa Monica Mountains, mobilized ten thousand homeowners to oppose this 'lunatic' mountain freeway scheme. Their petition counterposed the creation of a regional park to permanently conserve open space.⁴⁴

The first chairperson of the resulting Santa Monica Mountain Regional Park Association was a wealthy electronics entrepreneur, Marvin Braude, who presided over the Crestwood Hills Homeowners Association, a Federation affiliate in Brentwood. Braude – who today relishes his reputation as 'the sage of the slow-growth movement' – was the first standard-bearer for homeowners on the Los Angeles city council. With the ardent support of the Federation and the Santa Monicas movement, he

ousted the bribe-tainted incumbent in the ritzy eleventh councilmanic district (which included the Reagans' would sod of Pacific Palisades) in 1967 and began his long, unbroken representation of the interests of Westside canyon and hill dwellers.⁴⁵

To veteran politicians, however, Braude's election was a fluke. Although the protracted struggle against the corporate exploitation of the mountains (and the related issue of offshore oil drilling in Santa Monica Bay) had injected environmental issues into city politics, the hillside homeowners were still caricaturable as 'limousine conservationists'. The 'greening' of the Santa Monicas, like growth-control initiatives in redtile beach towns or Marin County villages, was widely seen as a hypocritical attempt by the rich to use ecology to detour Vietnam-era growth around their luxury enclaves. By 1972, however, this first wave of preservationist protest was reinforced by populist outbursts in dozens of flatland white-collar communities. Suddenly 'slow growth' no longer seemed so socially precious or, for that matter, politically containable.

REVOLT AGAINST DENSITY

Those immortal ballads, *Home Sweet Home*, *My Old Kentucky Home*, and *The Little Gray Home in the West*, were not written about apartments . . . they never sang songs about a pile of rent receipts.
*Herbert Hoover*⁴⁶

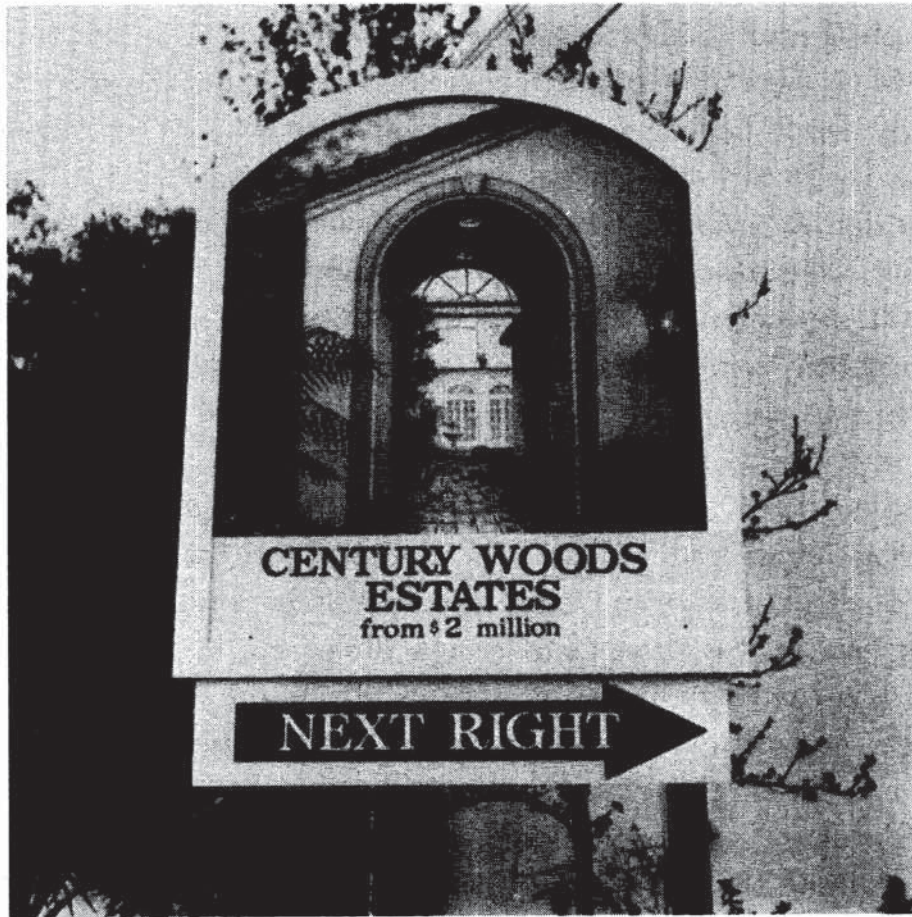
The explicit issue of this shortlived prefigurative revolt was 'density', especially the Vietnam-boom apartment and condominium construction that was perceived to be drowning Edenic landscapes of detached, single-family homes on quiet streets. Although the suburban wrath of 1972-3 caught many politicians by surprise, it had a distant direct ancestor in a 1956 uprising of Valley homeowners against the so-called 'Simons' Resurvey', that threatened to dump 2,600 acres of industry into single-family subdivisions.⁴⁷ As in the 1970s, homeowners had rallied to prevent the 'contamination' of their lifestyles. But whereas in the 1950s the issue had simply concerned zoning, in the 1970s it had overtones of an emerging Darwinian struggle between homeowners on one hand, and developers and renters on the other.

The new, deeper causality was an epochal change in the regional political economy, an unexpected clouding of the California dream. The postwar virtuous circle of good jobs, rising incomes, cheap land, and quality public services was beginning its slow disintegration into the present vicious circle of social polarization, expensive land and a declining public sector. The Watts Rebellion of 1965, and the subsequent 'Chicano Power' protests, had already registered non-Anglo anger at exclusion from boom times and decent housing; after 1970 new class contradictions began to surface in white suburbia as well.

Orange County – the home rush frontier of the 1950s – provides a vivid illustration of this historic transition. In 1960 over two-thirds of the new housing units constructed in the county had been detached single-family homes. By the end of the decade the proportions were almost reversed: 60 per cent of new construction consisted of apartments and condominiums. Higher interest rates in the late sixties, combined with a disappearing supply of cheap farm land and the entry into the housing market of younger and poorer 'baby boom' families, drastically altered the equation of housing affordability. Starter homes for under \$20,000 (in real terms) – the basis for family formation in the 1950s – became extinct, while the percentage of Southern California households with incomes at the minimum mortgage threshold fell from over half to barely a quarter.⁴⁸

The development industry, evolving into the 'new Octopus' discussed previously, adapted to this structural change with a combination of strategies. On the one hand, it applied tremendous pressures on planning agencies in the six Southern California counties to open up virgin home-building frontiers in the mountains, desert and interior basins.⁴⁹ Although the Federation blocked the juggernaut in the western Santa Monicas, compliant county supervisors sacrificed a million acres of open space for breakneck single-family development in the Agoura and La Puente hills, the Conjeo, Santa Clarita, Simi and Saddleback valleys, the San Bernardino and San Jacinto basins, and the Mojave Desert around Palmdale. The developers neglected to calculate, however, that the first generation of arriving homeowners would have a powerful interest in trying to pull up the gangplanks to prevent further urbanization and loss of rural amenities.

Meanwhile developers were also busy infilling the single-family belts of the urban coastal plain with multi-unit housing, carefully segmented to take



LAND INFLATION

optimum advantage of land values and market demand. At the upscale end they introduced planned communities of condos and 'townhouses' (i.e. row houses for the middle class); at the lower end, they constructed seeming infinities of 'dingbat' stucco tenements.⁵⁰ Planners and politicians accommodated the new density by re-zoning single-family zones. In some older urban areas – East San Diego, parts of Santa Monica, Long Beach, and so on – whole neighborhoods of 1920s bungalows were ripped out and replaced by rows of badly built dingbats. A stratum of homeowners (primarily elderly people who owned a second home, rental unit or developable lot), as well as wealthy 'tax investors' attracted to the lucrative write-offs of multi-unit housing, were instant beneficiaries of densification. Most homeowners, however, were angered by the rate of infill, the deterioration of the physical aspect of their communities, increasing traffic congestion, rising numbers of poorer people (and sometimes minorities), perceived tax costs, and the dilution of their political clout.

Accumulated resentments against apartment construction and suburban 'deruralization' vented themselves in the April and June 1972 local elections. The *Times* Orange County edition noted that 'disaffected homeowners and environmental groups turned out in large numbers in South Coast cities to unseat incumbents'. In Tustin, Brea, Yorba Linda, Orange and Fullerton simmering grievances over apartment infill boiled over into bitter council contests. In unincorporated Laguna Niguel, residents appealed to county supervisors to prevent further increases in density, while the homeowners' associations of the Saddleback Valley banded together to seek federal funding for a study of how to restrict density and preserve open space. In Irvine the slow-growth realignment of the 1980s was prefigured by the Citizens' Coalition which united homeowners and environmentalists to protest the city's repeated failure to keep faith with its promise of responsible growth management. Finally, in redtiled Newport Beach and San Juan Capistrano, irate homeowners tossed out pro-growth mayors and their supporters.⁵¹

Further up the coast, Torrance, Hermosa Beach and Redondo Beach – launching their careers as upwardly-mobile fiscal zoners – passed new limitations on apartment construction, while the 'Save Our Coastline' coalition crusaded to incorporate Rancho Palos Verdes as a further rampart against apartment encroachment on the peninsula. Within Los Angeles

itself (in subsequent months), the Hillside Federation campaigned to stop the sprawling Allied Canon project in Benedict Canyon, while a dozen Valley homeowners' associations tangled with the city over pro-apartment zoning revisions.⁵²

Far out on the subdivision frontier of eastern Los Angeles County, homeowners' associations from Hacienda Heights, Diamond Bar and Rowland Heights united as the Puente Hills Community Coalition to petition supervisors to roll back apartment zoning, restrict development to one-acre lots, and provide more recreational land (demands echoed a few miles away by a La Habra Heights homeowners' coalition). Anti-density tremors continued eastward through redtiled Riverside and Redlands before reaching a crescendo in Palm Springs where Desert People United confronted voters in the fall elections with the choice, 'Carmel versus Las Vegas!'. The first act of the newly elected slow-growth council majority was to impose a tough 120-day moratorium on multiple-unit construction.⁵³

The significance of these Southland skirmishes was amplified statewide by the parallel progress of local growth control in Northern California and, especially, by the passage in November of Proposition 20, which provided for coastal commissions to control beachfront development. In the course of the battle over Proposition 20, the *Sacramento Bee* revealed that Jack Crose, formerly Jesse Unruh's chief aide and now nemesis to the Hillside Federation as lobbyist for the Santa Monica Mountain landowners, had organized thirty-four capital lobbyists into the so-called 'Committee to Kill Ecology Legislation'.⁵⁴ Faced with a spreading homeowners' revolt, the development industry suddenly sang the praises of regional government and housing the poor. In a revealing *Times* op-ed piece, super-developer Eli Broad, posing the issue of the 1970s as 'no growth versus low-income housing', argued that the region needed 'larger-scale decision-making . . . less subject to local prejudice'.⁵⁵

But the 1972–3 Los Angeles mayoral campaign resounded with a cacophony of 'local prejudices'. Although Broad and the building-trades unions rallied around the pro-growth carpetbagging of 'Big Daddy' Unruh, a majority of developers clung to incumbent Mayor Yorty. Originally elected in 1961 on a wave of Valley homeowner resentment against Downtown – Yorty now became the hammer of growth control. Torquing up Broad's pseudo-proletarian rhetoric, he churlishly denounced City

Planning Director Calvin Hamilton's proposal to safeguard single-family areas by rolling back some of the multiple unit zoning – a move Yorty claimed would create a city 'that only the rich could afford to live in'. On another occasion he stupefied observers by demanding that leaders of homeowners' associations be forced to register themselves as political lobbyists. Finally, at a 'Yorty Years Dinner', he 'attacked Communists, environmentalists, opponents of city oil drilling and concluded the speech by [again] denouncing Hamilton's zoning rollback plan'.⁵⁶

On the other side, Councilmember Tom Bradley – Yorty's opponent in the racially polarized 1969 election – wooed homeowners with his support for down-zoning and opposition to Palisades oil-drilling. But the leadership of the density revolt, uneasy about supporting a Black and worried that labor's defection to Unruh had fatally wounded Bradley, preferred to coin their own candidate. Over Thanksgiving 1972, representatives of fifty Valley and hillside homeowners' associations, led by Shirley Solomon of No Oil Inc. and Elliot Blinderman of the Benedict Canyon Homeowners (a Federation affiliate), rallied to endorse Joel Wachs, junior councilmember from the Valley. The Hillside Federation had helped to engineer Wachs's election in 1981 after his predecessor, James Potter, had been implicated in the 'Beverly Ridge' scandal involving a mountain land scheme financed by a Teamster pension fund with Mafia undertones. Running on an anti-apartment, 'neighborhood protection' platform, Wachs boasted that he would 'be able to unite homeowner groups in the Valley, mountains, the Westside, the Wilshire District and other areas, "making each one see they have something in common"'.⁵⁷

Meanwhile Councilmember Braude, the original champion of growth limitation, had vaulted into the county supervisors' race, challenging a Reagan appointee in the fourth district along Santa Monica Bay and the Palos Verdes Peninsula. Campaigning as ardent conservationist, he mobilized a core support which the *Times* described as 'the middle- and upper-middle-class people who live in coastal neighborhoods, feel settled, and are deeply concerned about preserving and improving the environment around them'. Braude told audiences that the recent 'Friends of Mammoth' court decision, extending California's 1970 Environmental Quality Act to private developments, armed office-holders with new powers to implement environmentalist land planning. Braude's threat to developers' hegemony

over county government was reinforced by the maverick candidacy of newscaster Baxter Ward in the Valley and North County. Although not a *soi-disant* environmentalist, Ward was nonetheless attuned to the concerns of insurgent homeowners and un beholden to any corporate interest.⁵⁸

In the event, the 1973 elections had mixed, and not entirely happy, results for the emerging politics of slow growth. In the mayoral race, Yorty's silly, McCarthyite fulminations against commie-environmentalists estranged many of the same Westside and Valley homeowners who had once warmed to his 'just plain white folks' style. But the Unruh and Wachs forces underestimated the centrality of the Black Southcentral electorate to any realignment in city politics. Unruh's massive paper strength wilted into a poor third-place showing in the primary, while Wachs registered a barely discernible blip. Bradley, regrouping trade-union support and harvesting Westside homeowners, handily overcame Yorty's desperate, last-minute barrage of racist innuendo.⁵⁹ But in any inventory of Bradley's political debts, homeowners and environmentalists were far down on the list, behind his outstanding obligations to growth-hungry unions, inner-city politicians and the Downtown development interests represented by the *Times*.

In the supervisorial races, meanwhile, Braude – despite a vigorous campaign – had minimal success carrying the gospel of affluent homeowners into industrial areas like Torrance and Compton. Baxter Ward was more fortunate in the San Fernando Valley, but his victory was counterbalanced by the confirmation of Pete Schabarum, a former pro football player and real-estate developer, in the San Gabriel Valley. With a huge war chest from developers, Schabarum began to build one of the two most powerful Republican organizations in Southern California (the other being Orange County's Lincoln Club). Massively outspending the opposition, Schabarum had managed by 1980 to ensconce two protégés, Antonovich (replacing Ward) and Dana, as a three-man, right-wing supervisorial majority – the power center, so to speak, of a broad network of conservative local officials in suburban cities committed to pro-developer land use policies and the privatization of mass transit.⁶⁰

The paradoxical result of the 1972–3 density revolt, in short, was to reinforce pro-growth coalitions at both the city and county levels. The first wave of slow-growth protest galvanized land developers as effectively as homeowners, and their redoubled campaign contributions usually

overwhelmed growth-control initiatives. Moreover, as both the Wachs and Braude campaigns illustrated, opposition to apartment construction alienated renters and minorities who (quite correctly) decoded the racist subtext in 'neighborhood preservationism'. For their part, homeowners' associations, including even the Hillside Federation, lacked the coalition-building skills necessary to overcome their parochial image.

Yet if the density revolt failed to install its own cadre in office, it has had an enormous, ongoing impact on the local regulation of apartment building. Ken Baar, a well-known authority on California housing problems, has rebutted the 'self-serving argument', advanced by landlords and realtors, that rent control is largely responsible for the current, drastic shortage of affordable rental housing in California. Instead he argues that it has been intense 'homeowner opposition to multi-family construction', stemming from the mobilizations of the early 1970s, that has constrained the supply of land for multi-family housing. Moreover, like Proposition 13, the restriction of apartment construction is generally seen as a politically irreversible fact bordering on homeowner 'right':

[I]t is not politically feasible for either the legislature or courts to force localities to ease such restrictions. . . . Few homeowners want rental units in their neighborhood after struggling to buy a single family dwelling with a yard. One of the most cherished property rights in our 'free enterprise system' is not the right to do what one pleases with one's property, but the right to live in a neighborhood in which no more multi-family housing may be constructed.⁶¹

THE BIG BANG

It was the Watts Riot of the Middle Classes.⁶²

The folk maxim that gaunt men rebel while fat men sleep was neatly reversed by the historic suburban protests of 1976–9. In face of a massive inflationary redistribution of wealth, it was the haves, not the have-nots, who raised their pikes in the great tax revolt and its kindred school and growth protests. Many of the actors in this drama were the direct beneficiaries of one of the largest mass windfalls of wealth in history. Consider, for

a moment, the position of established homeowners in the older suburban areas of coastal Southern California at the end of the seventies.

In the fall of 1973 home prices in Southern California were \$1000 below the national average; six years later they were \$42,400 higher (fifteen years later, \$143,000 higher). If in the flatlands of the Valley home values only doubled, they tripled or quadrupled in the hills or near the beach. In Beverly Hills, median home values increased \$200,000 in a single year. Averaged over all of Southern California, homeowners were reported to be earning 30–40 per cent on their equity per annum, in adjusted terms, in the late 1970s, and home values increased almost three times faster than income. As ‘the purpose of housing units came to be perceived more as investment and speculation than as shelter’, house trading became a mass mania. In the course of the decade 164,000 new realtors’ licenses were issued (bringing the total to nearly 400,000 by 1981), and homeowners were reported to be mining billions of dollars from their equity (via second trust deeds) to pay for grander lifestyles.⁶³

If the infamous German inflation of 1920–23 ruined the Weimar middle class, this Southern California land inflation of 1975–9 by contrast enriched many tens of thousands of middle-class families beyond their wildest expectations. Yet the second inflation ultimately produced almost as much anxiety and political turmoil as the first. Homeowners experienced property inflation as a roller-coaster ride that unsettled traditional household accounting, raising unreasonable hopes and fears at the same time. Moreover their windfalls of wealth appeared precarious, while their bloated tax bills seemed all too real – especially for income-strapped retirees.⁶⁴ Anxieties were particularly high in the San Fernando Valley where homeowners, believing themselves to be little more than a tax colony of Downtown L.A., yearned for the kind of local control that their counterparts in the Lakewood Plan cities seemed to possess. To make matters worse, the escalated tax assessments arrived on their doorsteps in the same seasons as court-ordered school busing and a host of new growth-related complaints. It was this *fusion* of grievances in an unstable economic climate, and not just the tax crisis alone, that explains the extraordinarily high emotional temperature in the Southern California suburbs during the summer of 1978.

It is useful, however, to recall briefly the separate itineraries of these grievances before their convergence. Episodic tax revolt, for instance, as

any county tax assessor could testify, had long been a malaise of prosperity in postwar suburbia. Irate Valley homeowners in late 1954 had nearly lynched County Assessor John Quinn when he appeared in San Fernando to defend tax increases of up to 1000 per cent. Although Quinn could justify the increases as reflecting actual inflation in property values, the unexpectedness of the hikes had whipped local homeowners into a frenzy of self-righteousness.⁶⁵ Tax revolt historian Clarence Lo recounts similar homeowner outbursts (including a recall campaign) against the luckless Quinn in the San Gabriel Valley in 1957, as well as a storming of the Board of Supervisors in 1964 and a taxpayers' strike in 1966.⁶⁶

By the early 1970s – as angry taxpayers in the South Bay and San Gabriel Valley unsuccessfully attempted to secede from Los Angeles County – veteran political observers were warning of the dangers of a coalescence of suburban anti-tax protest, especially in view of right-wing efforts to direct the insurgency against social spending. Although California Democrats were able to stem the tide of Ronald Reagan's 1972 tax limitation initiative (the lineal ancestor of the successful 'Gann amendment' of 1979), they failed miserably to legislate relief for average homeowners or to decouple tax protests from attacks on the social budget. By foolishly hoarding a \$4 billion state tax surplus, rather than spending it on social programs defended by mobilized constituencies, Jerry Brown yielded the stage to the demagoguery of Howard Jarvis and the behind-the-scenes machinations of landlords (for whom Jarvis was a lobbyist), realtors and commercial landowners. The Democratic leadership's last-gasp attempt to defuse the revolt with a 'circuit-breaker' bill (giving relief to medium-income and elderly homeowners) was sabotaged by Republicans under the leadership of George Deukmejian, just as homeowners were preparing to confront huge hikes in their assessments.

At this point, of course, the much lampooned 'hicks in the sticks' – the average homeowners of the San Fernando Valley and other non-aristocratic suburban fringes – suddenly materialized into Howard Jarvis's barbarian army at the gates. But the stunning success of Jarvis's California Taxpayers League in collecting 1.5 million signatures on behalf of Proposition 13 drew heavily upon the pre-existing subculture of homeowner activism, especially in its heartland of Los Angeles County. As Lo has shown, homeowners' associations, rather than single-purpose tax-reduction groups, were the preponderant local units in the revolt.⁶⁷

Leaders of the Hillside and Canyon Federation still boast, with justice, that they effectively ‘fathered’ Proposition 13, supplying expertise, cadre, financing, and a captive bluechip vote. The Federation’s largest affiliate, the Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association, was one of the two groups that first launched the tax revolt in the Valley in 1976, and its executives, Richard Close and Jane Nerpel, later became the leaders of Californians for Proposition 13.⁶⁸

The hegemonic role of the Sherman Oaks Association and other upper-middle-class homeowners is a key variable in Lo’s theory of how an older, more class-conscious tradition of middle-income tax protest (represented especially by the early 1960s insurgency in the San Gabriel Valley) was ultimately hijacked by the ‘upwardly redistributive, pro-business’ ideology of Jarvis’s United Taxpayers Organization. As Lo vividly portrays it, the wealthy homeowners, stung by the ‘frustrated advantage’ of much money but little political power, literally came down from the hills to reclaim the tax protest tradition built by flatlands *menu people* :

Unable to win by themselves, upper-middle-class homeowners drove down from the scenic hills of the Palos Verdes peninsula, back through the stoplights of Hawthorne Boulevard; down from their *Sunset* magazine homes in the Santa Monica Mountains, back to the unwashed Toyota Tercels gridlocking Ventura Boulevard. . . . There, they mingled with the K-Mart shoppers in the high school auditoriums of old Van Nuys, perhaps sensing the subtle differences in bearing and in taste – realizing just what it was that they had worked so hard to escape. Joining the less affluent in mass meetings, the homeowners of Rolling Hills Estates and Sherman Oaks eventually took the lead in organizing and shaping the entire tax limitation movement.⁶⁹

As virtually everyone recognized at the time, Proposition 13’s explicit promise to roll back assessments and let homeowners pocket their capital gains was accompanied, as well, by an implicit promise to halt the threatening encroachment of inner-city populations on suburbia. In rousing their neighbors, tax protestors frequently resorted to the inflammatory image of the family homestead taxed to extinction in order to finance the integration of public education and other social programs obnoxious to white suburbanites.⁷⁰ In the Valley in particular the tax revolt overlapped and intermingled with massive resistance to school busing. After a fifteen-

year-long legal battle, the courts had finally ordered the brazenly segregated Los Angeles schools to begin busing students for racial balance in 1978. Because Westside schools had possessed the foresight to sponsor token integration, the brunt of the busing was an exchange between Southcentral Los Angeles and the Valley.

As BUSTOP, the demagogic coalition led by Bobbi Fiedler and Paul Clarke, circulated petitions for Senator Alan Robbins's anti-busing Proposition 1, a more muscular, vigilante-type group, FORCE, led by Link Wyler and Assemblyman Paul Cline, organized a protracted school boycott involving more than half of the Valley's white students.⁷¹ But it was again the Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association, acting as the universal gear of suburban anger, who most effectively meshed anti-tax and anti-density campaigns with the anti-busing movement into a unitary protest culture. Roberta Weintraub, the Valley's enduring white-backlash member of the L.A. Board of Education, has paid homage to the Association's role in educating anti-busing militants: 'We learned our political "p's" and "q's" in the Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association.'⁷²

Although this explosive mixture of taxes and busing blew the top off the Valley (leading, amongst other things, to the emergence of a new homeowner-oriented Right dominated by Fiedler, Weintraub and Robbins), there was no immediate chain reaction in the region. As long as the yellow school buses only travelled over Cahuenga Pass, white homeowners in other parts of the suburban fringe could not be rallied around anti-busing in the same way they were being mesmerized by Proposition 13. In 1979, however, the court began to hear testimony on a metropolitan school integration scheme that would have mandated busing over the entirety of Los Angeles County, as well as parts of Orange and Ventura counties. This gave a second wind to Valley-based efforts to create a regional movement against school integration. As new franchises sprouted up along Los Angeles's suburban rim, from La Mirada to Santa Clarita, BUSTOP's president Paul Clarke boasted that his membership had surpassed 50,000.⁷³ Moreover, with Beverly Hills, Santa Monica and West L.A. now proposed as candidates for metropolitan busing, powerful Westside Democratic leaders, like Howard Berman and Zev Yaroslavsky, who had previously welcomed the integration of the Valley, had sudden changes of heart. With the Democratic establishment switching sides, and Mayor

Bradley officially 'neutral', the BUSTOP juggernaut easily rolled over and crushed the bones of the few remaining liberals standing between it and control of the Board of Education.⁷⁴

BUSTOP's victory did little, however, to slow the flight of whites from the public schools or from the older suburban parts of the city (some of which now began to take on inner-city characteristics). Just beyond the city line – in the Conejo, Simi and Santa Clarita valleys – white refugees from the San Fernando Valley were trying to reestablish the suburban Eden of the early 1950s, with low taxes and 'neighborhood' (read: white) schools. In a survey of its residents, Santa Clarita's developer, the Newhall Land Company, 'found that families who relocate in the Santa Clarita Valley cite escaping the L.A. school system as a primary reason'. The new Santa Claritans also stressed low-density, open space, low crime rates, large homes, and the 'country feel'.⁷⁵

But the developers of this white-flight 'outer valley' had no intention of subsidizing a museum-society of suburban nostalgia. Their goal was to urbanize quickly and multiply profits. As long as plenty of open space remained, they intended to plug in more modules of housing and commerce, crowding together units as land prices soared. Not surprisingly, residents of the new valleys – some of whom had been homeowners' association activists in the old Valley – mobilized to resist development that would plunge them back into the city. Thus in Thousand Oaks – the state's fastest growing city – homeowners tried to slow urbanization by rallying against Prudential's plans for a large hillside development. Similar battles were fought in the Simi and Conejo Valleys (on the San Fernando's periphery), and in Walnut and La Habra Heights, on Los Angeles's eastern suburban border. In Santa Clarita protests against metropolitan busing and a tax-revolt proposal to secede from Los Angeles County overlapped with the first stirrings of what would become, within a decade, a powerful slow-growth movement of homeowners' associations using civic incorporation to fight the Newhall Company's development strategy.⁷⁶

These rumblings in the outer valleys (together with another wave of growth restrictions in 'redtile' communities like San Clemente and Riverside)⁷⁷ alerted analysts that Proposition 13, by transforming the fiscal calculus of urbanization and emboldening suburban voters, had undermined pro-growth, as well as pro-welfare, politics across the state. Having

voted down progressive property taxation, why shouldn't suburbanites vote down undesirable growth as well? In 1980 the California Office of Planning and Research published a study with the prophetic title: *The Growth Revolt: Aftershock of Proposition 13?* State analysts found that some thirty-two growth-control measures had been placed on the ballot in the two years since the passage of Proposition 13. Nineteen were successful 'despite being outspent by pro-growth forces by an average of four to one and in one case by fifty-five to one'. The controls passed were unprecedentedly stringent, removing powers traditionally lodged with elected officials and favoring 'established, homeowners residents'. The analysts worried whether these measures might be the harbingers of new suburban unrest, possibly as sweeping as Proposition 13 itself.⁷⁸

HIGHRISES VERSUS HOMESTEADS

The area is becoming a concrete jungle. The traffic, the noise, the pollution – it's just awful and ugly – and it's getting worse. What they've done is take a nice middle-class neighborhood and destroy it, block by block. *Encino homeowner*⁷⁹

The slow-growth turmoil of the 1980s defies any single, synoptic perspective. Unlike the tax revolt there has not been a common, strategic target of protest, nor at the end of the day, any clear-cut victory or defeat. Rather, like a homeowners' version of the Tet offensive, a surprise uprising across a broad front – including guerrilla engagements, feints, and frontal assaults – has produced a confusing scoreboard of advances, losses, and inadvertent consequences. In the peak years of 1987–8, for example, control of growth was the dominant issue in nearly sixty local elections in Los Angeles and Orange counties. In each case an eccentric local history meshed with a singular balance of forces to define 'slow growth' in a specifically parochial way, from 'Glendora Pride' and 'Not Yet New York' in West L.A. (or 'Not Yet Los Angeles' in San Diego) to 'English Only' in Monterey Park.⁸⁰

Acknowledging the geographical and political sprawl of the 1980s slow-growth movement, however, is not to deny the existence of some



DENSE-PACKED SUBURBIA

Southridge, Fontana

common objectives. Doubtless the most original – illustrating the evolution of homeowner political culture since the first regional wave of growth protest in the early 1970s – has been the widespread demand for decentralization of land-use decision-making to the neighborhood level. This was the ‘hidden agenda’ of the homeowners’ associations supporting Proposition U – Los Angeles’s 1986 slow-growth initiative – and has remained an ideological dividing line between grassroots growth protest and the political advocates of a ‘managed growth’ compromise.

How conservative homeowners in the age of Reagan came to advocate a structural reform implying massive regulation of one of the most sacred marketplaces (land development) is a story that has certain fascinations. Not the least of these is the fact that ‘community planning’ was originally less a grassroots-generated demand than a self-serving slogan that seasonally emanated from the Los Angeles city or county bureaucracy. (Our narrative here contracts to focus on events in the City of Los Angeles.)

Far back in the late 1940s, following the tumultuous recomposition of Los Angeles’s social areas by wartime immigration, planners began to fret about how to reinforce communal identity in older residential neighborhoods and new outlying suburbs. They meticulously designated some four hundred ‘neighborhood’ areas in the hope that these identifications might become bulwarks against spreading anomie and disorientation. In a similar spirit, the County Department of Community Services in the early 1950s sponsored ‘community coordinating councils’ to strengthen local identity and provide focal points for the coordination of social services and charities.

This functionalist approach to neighborhood-building was later supplanted by an emphasis on reinforcing white residents’ perception of local control. Thus, after the Watts Rebellion aroused suburban concerns about integration, the conservative leadership of the school board experimented with neighborhood advisory councils as a palliative to white parents. And in 1969, motivated by similar fears over ‘outside’ encroachments into white areas, the commission appointed by Mayor Yorty to revise the city charter recommended the legal recognition of self-defined neighborhoods (with participation of at least 30 per cent of local voters) as governmental units with elected boards and appointed executives (called ‘neighbormen’). The proposal was opposed by civil rights groups, worried

about the quasi-secession of white neighborhoods, and vetoed by a city council concerned about the dissipation of its powers.⁸¹

Despite the council's repudiation of 'neighborhood power', City Planning Director Calvin Hamilton (1968–85) embraced the concept as a basis for revision of the city's hopelessly antiquated General Plan. Gesturing in the direction of 'participatory democracy', although in fact responding to the same white homeowner pressures as the school board, Hamilton established thirty-five citizens' advisory committees to help fashion 'community plans' that would eventually be synthesized into a new master plan. Thousands participated in some phase of this populist planning experiment, including future leaders of the 1980s slow-growth revolt, who were schooled in the esoterica of planning and land law while serving as citizen advisors.

With the density rebellion of the early 1970s brewing in the background, the principal promise of Hamilton's new masterplan was widespread down-zoning to preserve the integrity of single-family residential areas. Where the old plan allowed a Manhattan density of 10 to 1 (or ten million future inhabitants), the new plan, accepting locally defined standards for development, proposed to reduce density to 4.5 to 1 by rolling back 'excessive' zoning for apartments and commerce. Furthermore, it supposedly guaranteed the traditional low-density pattern of the Westside and the Valley by assigning highrise development to a series of 'growth centers' scattered through the city.

Although the new masterplan – proclaiming peaceful coexistence between safeguarded single-family neighborhoods and sanctioned highrise centers – was welcomed as the epitome of environmentally conscious, community-involved planning, it was effectively a dead letter from the beginning. For more than a decade the pro-growth majority on the city council stubbornly prevented the Planning Department from implementing the necessary down-zoning. As a result the city's zoning map remained wildly at odds with the community plans, and developers were able to introduce one over-scaled project after another, without environmental review, into supposed sanctuaries of single-family living. As offshore investment accelerated the building boom in the late 1970s, older (1930s–1950s) suburbs found themselves choking in traffic congestion and overshadowed by new commercial development. Despite a much

ballyhooed 'Downtown Renaissance' between 1975 and 1985 (26 million square feet of new office space), highrise construction actually grew three times faster in the ex-suburban belts of the Westside, South Bay and Valley (some 86 million square feet).⁸²

The result was a Jekyll and Hyde transfiguration of Los Angeles's middle-class heartlands. Although property values continued to soar, neighborhoods were Manhattanized beyond recognition. Seemingly overnight, Ventura Boulevard in Encino metamorphosed from a lowrise landscape of delis and used car lots into a concrete jungle dominated by highrise Japanese banks.⁸³ Startled hillside homeowners above the Cahuenga Pass (between Hollywood and the Valley) found themselves looking directly into the windows of North Hollywood's and Universal City's new skyscrapers. Similarly, the affluent residents of Holmby Hills and Westwood Village watched in horror as the quaint, Spanish Colonial-style intersection of Westwood and Wilshire boulevards became a windy canyon between bizarrely configured office towers. Beach dwellers in Santa Monica and Ocean Park, despite protests to the Coastal Commissions, found Miami Beach creeping up around their doorsteps, while members of the exclusive Marina Del Rey community were stunned by the plans put forward by Howard Hughes's heirs to build one of the world's largest mixed-use projects over a nearby bird sanctuary. And in Westchester and the middle-class neighborhoods around LAX, ten commuters for every resident gridlocked formerly quiet residential streets.

Confronted with this rapid erosion of their remaining suburban amenities, homeowners were once again roused to protest. The most embittered were those who had participated in good faith in Hamilton's original community plan advisory process. As a lawyer involved in the controversy observed, 'many of the homeowner groups were surprised and amazed and dismayed when they found out that all the work they had done on community plans made no difference whatever'. Even in 1978, when the Assembly (AB 283) flatly ordered Los Angeles to bring its zoning practices into conformity with its General Plan, Mayor Bradley – acting like the Orville Faubus of pro-growth – encouraged the Planning Department to mangle in heroic fashion. Given a firm deadline of 1982 to comply with the legislative decree, the city had barely completed a quarter of the required re-zoning in 1984. In response, irate homeowners, led by the Hillside Federation, went first to the courts, then to the polls.⁸⁴

HOMEOWNERS' SOVIETS?

The political process has failed us. If the people don't have a voice, you will be in the courts and in the legislative process again and again.

The homeowner doesn't care about the Pacific Rim, he wants to be able to move down the street. *Westside Slow-Growth Leader*⁸⁵

With the assistance of the Center for Law and the Public Interest, the Federation won a landmark court order in January 1985 giving the city a hundred and twenty days to implement the General Plan conformity that it had resisted for the better part of a decade. The court also mandated the Planning Commission, under Council scrutiny, to review any project 25 per cent or more in excess of General Plan ceilings, including those in the Redevelopment Agency's Downtown fiefdom. Although the city managed on appeal to protract the re-zoning process for another five years, the ruling nonetheless precipitated a fundamental restructuring of the planning process.⁸⁶

On the one hand, it exposed the bankruptcy of the city's General Plan, while, on the other hand, it opened a breach in the historic autonomy of the powerful redevelopment agency. Political enemies of the planning bureaucracy did not hesitate to take advantage of the opportunity. Dan Garcia, the ambitious president of the Planning Commission, teamed up with Pat Russell, 'dragon lady' of the city council, to get rid of the leaderships of both the Planning Department and the Redevelopment Agency: Calvin Hamilton, under a cloud of conflict-of-interest charges, was retired, while redevelopment chief Edward Helfeld, blamed for a 'department run wild', was more bluntly fired.⁸⁷

Mayor Bradley being out of sight during this 'night of the long knives', a national planning journal worried 'who controls the city?'⁸⁸ In fact, as veteran politicians immediately recognized, the Council under Russell's spiked heel had shrewdly exploited the Federation's re-zoning victory to grab a major new chunk of power – including the ability to bargain directly with developers over density variances. As Garcia euphemistically acknowledged, 'inevitably, developers will be spending more time with the council, and that will make life in city hall more interesting'. He was implying, of course, that councilmembers – the true culprits of the

re-zoning debacle – had now placed themselves in even stronger positions to squeeze campaign ‘juice’ out of developers.⁸⁹

At the same time it seems that the two organizers of the coup d’état had a more strategic objective. They wanted additional political control over the planning process precisely to ensure that City Hall could deal more effectively with the negative political fallout of growth. Russell, whose district included the traffic-clogged LAX area, wanted developers to pay for more transportation improvements, while Garcia, an advocate of ‘fine-tuning’ conflicts in land-use interests, had been warning that City Hall would be engulfed by angry homeowners. As head of the Planning Commission, moreover, it was Garcia’s responsibility to persuade the homeowners that city government was finally ready to hear their complaints.⁹⁰

First he appointed a respected slow-growth activist, lawyer Dan Shapiro, to co-chair a new Citizens Advisory Committee to revise ‘Concept L.A.’ – the city’s outdated statement of planning objectives. Secondly, and more impetuously, he joined with leaders of the council’s ‘slow-growth’ minority – Marvin Braude and Zev Yaroslavsky – to sponsor the ‘Initiative for Reasonable Limits on Commercial Building and Traffic Growth’, which, after 100,000 registered voters signed the petition, became simply Proposition U. Its gist was a 50 per cent down-zoning of most of the commercial land in the city, with the exceptions of Downtown, Hollywood, Century City and sections of Ventura and Wilshire Boulevards. It promised not so much to stop commercial growth as to detour it from precious middle-class residences.⁹¹

If Garcia gambled that Proposition U’s bark was worse than its bite, and that it was a harmless safety-valve for homeowner unrest, he failed to convince any of his City Hall allies. Old pols saw it as the ‘opening salvo’, not only of a ‘land-use revolt’ (as the *Times* headlined it), but also of a power struggle between Yaroslavsky and Russell over the succession to Bradley (presumed either to win the governorship or retire). Since Yaroslavsky’s opening gambit was homeowners, Russell countered with the accusation that Proposition U ‘would erode economic opportunity’ in the inner city. She was echoed by pro-growth colleague David Cunningham, who denounced ‘elitists’ attempting to ‘dictate growth decisions in low-income, minority areas where the community wants more jobs and development’.⁹²

Garcia, now ridiculed by the *Times* for ‘alternating sympathies for both homeowners and builders’, was in an untenable position, and he soon retreated to the Russell camp. Having failed to coopt the slow-growth movement, he joined her in pouring gasoline on the fire. Their contrived ‘Community Protection Plan’ – or the ‘loophole ordinance’ as its detractors preferred to call it – was a brazen effort to gut Proposition U in advance by exempting an additional twenty-eight areas from its jurisdiction, including the massive Howard Hughes Center in Russell’s district. When the legality of this ploy was challenged, Russell and Garcia retained counsel from Latham and Watkins – a law firm notoriously associated with the land development industry. And when Latham and Watkins didn’t seem to work, they resorted to the even more desperate maneuver of reclassifying 56,000 parcels of land in a single day – a move squelched by the city attorney.⁹³

A slim council majority, reluctantly endorsed by the *Times*, went along with these machinations. But the pro-growth camp had unwittingly played Russian roulette with a fully loaded gun. They had ignored the warnings of the *Times*’s urban critic Sam Hall Kaplan that by trying to sabotage ‘the quite moderate’ Proposition U, they risked being carried away by a true deluge: ‘the sentiment welling up in the city’s communities for flat out no-growth’.⁹⁴ Indeed the loophole tactic, as an expression of contempt for slow-growth homeowners, and the electorate in general, produced an overwhelming public backlash. Voters who had previously paid little attention to land-use issues now nodded their heads when critics, like the leadership of ‘Not Yet New York’, a Westside slow-growth coalition, charged Russell and her confederates with ‘cold, calculated betrayal’, ‘hubris’, and creating ‘a disaster for our people’. Despite doomsday warnings that it would kill the boom, Proposition U carried the city – including Black and Chicano neighborhoods – with nearly 70 per cent of the vote in November 1986.⁹⁵

Shortly after its passage, the citizens’ committee Garcia had charged with reviewing the planning strategy presented its report. It urged the Planning Commission to rescue transportation planning from the morass of the City’s Transportation Department and to replace Hamilton’s discredited ‘centers’ strategy (which tolerated as many as *forty* highrise nodes across the city) with ‘targetted growth areas’ that would more effectively concentrate commercial development and guarantee that middle-class

neighborhoods remained sacrosanct. Its major recommendation, however, was to institutionalize citizen participation through thirty-five community planning boards acting in an advisory capacity to the Planning Commission. The fifteen members of each board were to be balanced between political appointees and directly elected community representatives – a compromise formula reached after reportedly intense debate within the Committee.⁹⁶

As all sides staked out new positions, the Advisory Committee's recommendations became meat for negotiation and maneuver. Although Russell was mortally wounded by the Proposition U debacle (losing her once 'impregnable' seat in November 1987 to slow-growth advocate Ruth Galanter), she and Garcia tried to deal themselves back into the game by embracing the community planning board proposal without the elected members.⁹⁷ Braude and Yaroslavsky, the slow-growth heroes of the day, countered with a detailed follow-up to Proposition U's broad plan: an ordinance that would allow the city to review any project of 50,000 square feet (the size of an ordinary supermarket) or more. Finally, Mayor Bradley, silent or acting by proxy through most of the Proposition U commotion, directed a major speech in April 1988 toward the slow-growth movement. Promising to arrest 'mini-mall blight' and protect hillside neighborhoods, he endorsed the principle of community participation in planning, but was characteristically vague about the composition of the boards and whether or not the city needed the kind of detailed environmental review powers advocated by Braude and Yaroslavsky.

For the Hillside Federation, however, empowerment of the community planning boards was *the* decisive issue. In their view, the embittering, generation-long experience of 'community participation' in impotent planning exercises had erased any doubt about the need for root-and-branch reform. The principal achievement of Proposition U was that it had 'at last produced a citizens' "planning constituency"'; the Federation rejected the 'pigmy version of participation' which appointed token homeowners to advisory boards top-heavy with developers and their agents. Instead they demanded *completely elected* community planning boards of local residents, meeting in townhall fashion, and invested with '*implementation power*' that could only be overridden by a four-fifths majority of the City Planning Commission.⁹⁸

Twenty years of political bad faith, in other words, had driven George Wills's 'sunbelt bolsheviks' to call for homeowners' soviets. That, at least,

was how it looked to horrified building industry executives, whose fears were not entirely with foundation. In advocating the devolution of land-use control to communities, the Federation was certainly raising one of the most radical demands in Southern California since the days of EPIC or Ham and Eggs in the 1930s. The Black Panther Party's famous call in the 1960s for 'community policing' seemed meek in comparison to the Federation's plan for neighborhoods to exercise the rights of screening development and regulating local real-estate markets. Moreover some hillside *enragés*, like Gerald Silver of the Homeowners of Encino, saw community planning merely as a prelude to zip-code federalism: 'break up the city into smaller, more manageable units'.⁹⁹

But whether or not the whole Federation fully appreciated the ideological implications of its stand, it had determined to make community planning the main issue in the aftermath of Proposition U.¹⁰⁰ The defeat of Russell had ended the era of invincible pro-growth rule on the Council, and homeowners counted on her successor, Ruth Galanter, to become the standard-bearer of their demand for elected boards.¹⁰¹ An environmental planner from a 'new left' background, but owing her election to massive support from the Federation and local homeowner groups, Galanter seemed the freshest, and most iconoclastic, face on the City Council in decades. Moreover her enthusiasm for elected boards was so much taken for granted that no one paid any heed when, at a Hillside Federation forum on community planning, she sat smiling silently through the discussion at hand.¹⁰²

The meaning behind her Mona Lisa smile was revealed a few weeks later when she voted with the rest of the Council for appointed planning boards strictly subordinate to councilmembers. A Federation leader gasped: 'She blew us out of the water . . . it was Pat Russell all over again.' Repudiating the Federation's radical vision of community sovereignty, the Council did, after a fashion, decentralize planning power, but only to itself. Grasping at the power to broker growth on a district level through puppet planning boards, individual councilmembers, however, still remained under intense pressures to deal with homeowner anger against commercial development.

By the summer of 1987 a structure of accommodation had emerged whereby Westside and Valley councilmembers were supporting each

other's manipulation of the city's 'interim control' law to pacify constituents' land-use grievances. A crazy-quilt of fifty 'interim control ordinances' – temporary moratoria on specific kinds of building – gave short-term relief to complaints by homeowners' associations about mini-malls, hillside development, apartment density, mobile home parks, and the like. At the same time, the ordinances acted to keep homeowners (in Los Angeles) away from the ballot-box and to demobilize city-wide protest into local supplication.¹⁰³ This was exactly what Dan Garcia, now teamed up with Citizen Advisory Committee leader Dan Shapiro, advocated:

The slow-growth movement should in the future avoid 'city-wide' solutions to all local problems, and instead should focus attention on community and neighborhood planning and controls. . . . Meat-ax approaches that stop all development or that do not permit individual community planning would simply further the polarization process.¹⁰⁴

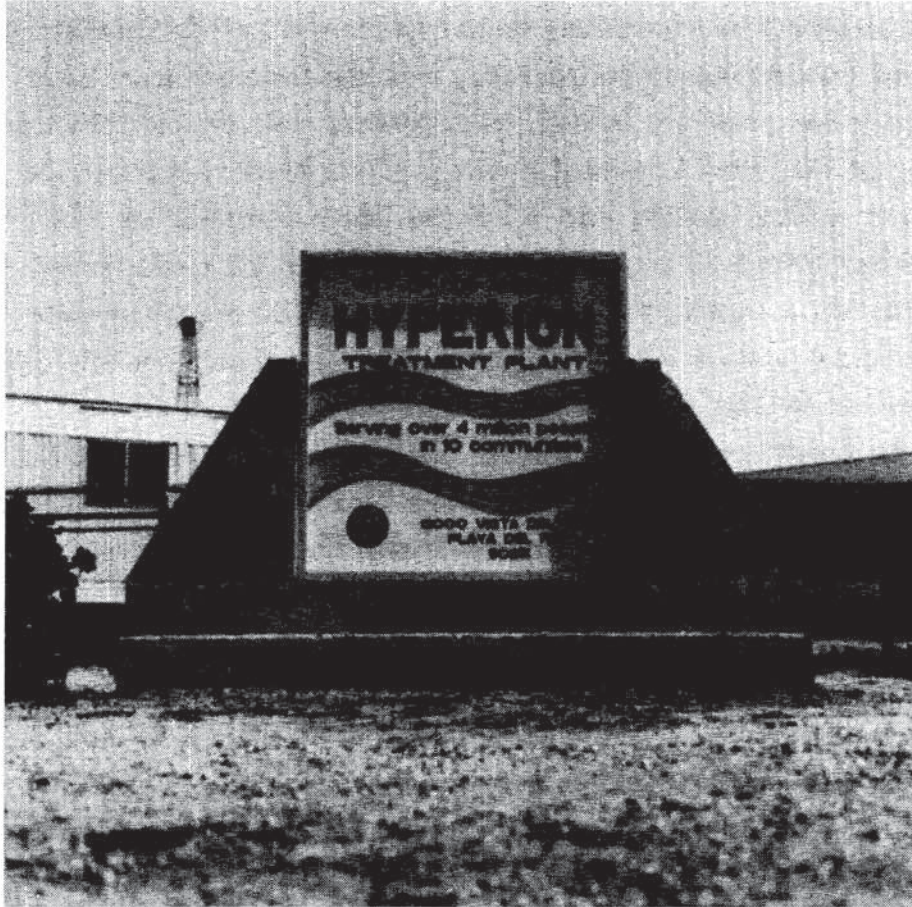
But just as the neo-feudalism of the City Council seemed on the verge of dispersing Los Angeles's slow-growth movement into benign parochialism, fifty million gallons of raw sewerage unexpectedly hit the proverbial fan.

THE HYPERION FACTOR

Hyperion – what joy the place would have brought to those passionately prosaic lovers of humanity, Chadwick and Bentham! . . . The problem of keeping a great city clean without polluting a river or fouling the beaches, and without robbing the soil of its fertility, has been triumphantly solved. *Aldous Huxley*¹⁰⁵

As Huxley recalled it, a few months before the outbreak of World War Two he and Thomas Mann were walking along the south shore of Santa Monica Bay, 'miraculously alone' and rapt in discussion of Shakespeare, when they suddenly realized that 'as far as the eye could reach in all directions, the sand was covered with small whitish objects, like dead caterpillars'. The 'caterpillars' were, in fact, 'Malthusian flotsam' – 'ten million used condoms' Huxley estimated – washed back on shore from Los Angeles's main sewer outfall at Hyperion Beach. Without recording his famous

HOMEGROWN REVOLUTION



THE TECHNOLOGICAL FIX THAT FAILED

companion's reaction to this bizarre sight, Huxley contrasted the scene on the same beach fifteen years later: 'the sands are now clean . . . children dig, well-basted sunbathers slowly brown . . . etc.' This 'happy consummation' had been brought about by 'one of the marvels of modern technology, the Hyperion Activated Sludge Plant'.¹⁰⁶

In an otherwise ironic essay about hygiene and class distinction, Huxley took for granted that Hyperion really was 'the triumphant solution' to an ancient urban problem. Indeed, other writers have evoked the 'euphoric feeling' of this Grand Coulée of sewerage plants which transforms the waste of three million people into what has been described as 'the largest freshwater stream in Southern California'.¹⁰⁷ All the more fitting, therefore, that the preeminent symbol of Los Angeles's supposedly infinite ability to manipulate nature for the sake of development should become the grim antihero of the city's environmental crises of the late 1980s.

The breakdown of 'marvelous' Hyperion in late May 1987 gushed millions of gallons of unspeakable waste into Santa Monica Bay, defiling beaches and inflaming local tempers. It was the first of a tragicomic succession of eco-disasters that overwhelmed the Bradley administration in 1987-8 and gave slow growth the fillip of pre-apocalyptic common sense. As shit was followed by floodwater, drought, toxics, seismic safety, smog and solid waste, the horrible penny began to drop in City Hall that the growth wars between homeowners and developers were actually being fought within the limits of a collapsing infrastructure.

At first it seemed that Los Angeles could save itself simply by sticking a gilded finger in the dike at Hyperion: a \$2.3 billion renovation. But anxious engineering reports to the Mayor, immediately leaked to the press, revealed that the entire system was on the verge of collapse. As the *Times* caustically observed, 'planning procedures have been so slack that nobody made that most basic connection between population growth and the carrying capacity of a sewage system'.¹⁰⁸ Although the old trunk sewers were large enough to accommodate the ten million gallons of new flow added each year by urbanization, the treatment plants had exhausted their capacity. The Mayor's attempt to abate the crisis through voluntary water conservation was ignored, especially in affluent, 'slow-growth' Westside and Valley neighborhoods with their swimming pools and acre-sized lawns.

A crash program to expand the crucial Tillman sewage plant in the Sepulveda Basin of the Los Angeles River then ran foul of the Army Corps of Engineers, custodians of Los Angeles's flood control system. They warned the city that the Tillman expansion would critically reduce the Basin's capacity to retain floodwater – a serious issue in light of the Corps's recent, exhaustive 'restudy' of the city's flood control defenses. The city's original prime amenity – the lovely, meandering Los Angeles River – had been sacrificially transformed into an ugly concrete 'storm sewer' in the 1940s in order to protect adjoining real estate from the periodic flood menace. Now, the Corps study revealed, 'unforeseen levels of new development' were not only producing intolerable volumes of sewage, but – through adding tens of thousands of additional acres of road surface and rooftop – a 40 per cent increase in storm run-off that threatened new catastrophic floods. Moreover, the interconnections of the situation were such that additional sewage capacity at Tillman would encourage more growth in the Valley, which would in turn increase run-off, and by doing so, make Tillman even more susceptible to flooding.¹⁰⁹

Hard on the heels of these exposés of the city's failing sewer and flood-control systems came disturbing reports of disastrous groundwater contamination potentially affecting 40 per cent of the water supply. The infiltration of industrial solvents and other toxic chemicals had already forced the closure of one hundred and fifty wells, and officials confessed that it would take three decades and at least \$2 billion to flush out the polluted aquifers. Critics claimed this was a drastic under-estimate and predicted that clean-up costs could run as high as a staggering \$40 billion.¹¹⁰ But water, in any case, was becoming scarcer as a protracted drought escalated the water wars that pitted Southern California against Northern California and Arizona. As the withdrawal of Los Angeles aqueduct water from the Mono Basin, on the eastern flank of the Sierras, threatened a local ecological catastrophe, Los Angeles water authorities debated the unsavory last resort of purchasing water allotments from Central Valley agribusiness (now 'water ranchers').¹¹¹

Meanwhile Los Angeles's deadline for compliance with the 1970 federal Clean Air Act expired. Pleading with Washington for a *quarter-century* extension, the city conceded defeat in its thirty-year war against air pollution, which remained by far the worst in the advanced industrial

world. All the hardwon gains from the enforcement of mandatory smog-control devices had been more than offset by population growth and increased density of auto ownership. Moreover the housing affordability crisis, which was forcing hundreds of thousands of workers to commute from distant interior valleys, was inexorably driving up mileage and generating gridlock on the suburban fringes. A chilling February 1988 study from the Southern California Association of Governments warned that if population and job/housing trends continued at present levels, \$110 billion in new freeway construction would be needed just to stabilize existing congestion. In lieu of this investment, growing gridlock was expected to reduce average freeway speeds to sub-horse-and-buggy velocities (about fifteen miles per hour) by the end of the 1990s. Contributing to the slowdown would be the thousands of dump trucks needed to transport the city's solid waste into the desert, or beyond, as existing landfills in a five-county area reached capacity in the early 1990s.¹¹²

As each crisis implied others to come, it was difficult for City Hall to pretend these were unrelated contingencies and not the falling dominoes of overdevelopment as predicted by slow-growth forces. Mayor Bradley in particular had to face inexorably mounting pressures to declare a temporary halt to new development. Even before the Hyperion spill, Assemblyman Tom Hayden (D-Santa Monica) had allied slow growth with the environmental defense of Santa Monica Bay by demanding a strict limit on new construction until sewage capacity was increased. After the May spill vindicated Hayden, he was joined by Westside Congressman Mel Levine, as well as by Proposition U authors Braude and Yaroslavsky, in threatening to call in the Environmental Protection Agency to save the Bay.¹¹³

The hitherto unimaginable spectre of federal environmental receivership (a threat renewed in summer 1988 after the city failed to comply with clean air standards) was the shotgun that forced Mayor Bradley into a reluctant wedding with growth-control forces. He began the courtship in July 1987 when he withdrew the city's opposition to the 'Friends of Westwood' decision. This important legal victory for slow-growth activists found that the city had erred in not requiring an environmental impact report on a 26-story Wilshire Boulevard highrise. The mayor shocked his pro-growth supporters by accepting the

environmental review of all major developments – the gist of the ‘follow-up’ ordinance to Proposition U that Braude and Yaroslavsky had earlier proposed.¹¹⁴

Then, in early December 1987, after officially recognizing that the sewer system had reached breakdown point, Bradley boldly unveiled his own ten-point plan that included a monthly cap on new construction based on sewer capacity. (Yaroslavsky chortled, ‘I’m pleased that the mayor has come around to my way of thinking.’) The cap was designed to apply not only to Los Angeles, but, because of the city’s authority as sewer landlord, to the thirty other municipalities contracting its sewer treatment facilities. A draconian consequence was that the cities currently pumping more sewage into the system than their quotas allowed – including Santa Monica, Burbank and San Fernando – were faced with a total growth freeze. While developers and builders watched in dismay, some of Bradley’s most trenchant critics, including Tom Hayden, rallied to his side in what seemed to be a rehearsal for a major political realignment.¹¹⁵

City Hall, however, was not greened in a day (even under the influence of Mike Gage, the eco-thinking deputy mayor). During the 1988 campaigns, Bradley managed to badly undermine his credibility as a ‘born-again’ environmentalist – and infuriate Westside homeowners anew – by reneging on his historic opposition to Palisades oil drilling. Meanwhile his sewer cap was stalled for a half-year in the Council while jealous members – all too aware that even temporary controls could become sacred cows – wrestled with the Mayor over whether they themselves or the Board of Public Works (which he appointed) would exercise the power to ration new development and make individual exemptions. In the end the Mayor was forced to yield the prerogative to the Council, who, after excluding key megaprojects dear to their hearts and pocketbooks, finally approved (in May 1988) a nine-month trial run of the ‘most restrictive growth controls since the Second World War’. Two years later a renewed version of this ‘stopgap’ ordinance was still in place – but now described as ‘phase one of a comprehensive growth management strategy’.¹¹⁶

However prosaic a ‘sewer ordinance’ may seem, it constituted an important, possibly epochal, punctuation mark in the city’s postwar history: the moment when the Big Boom finally had to take the Hyperion Factor into account. Land-use writer William Fulton described the ordinance as a

'stunning coup' for slow-growth activists whose cause was invested with 'mainstream, regionwide political legitimacy'. It was more significant than Proposition U because it set a precedent for '*regional* growth controls', as the Mayor of Los Angeles became the 'lever to shut off development in Santa Monica and Burbank'.¹¹⁷

Skeptical slow-growth activists like Laura Lake of Not Yet New York, inured to 'wonderful plans and laws [of the city] that it violates every day', were not so sure they had won such a historic victory and downplayed the significance of the city's new-found environmental zeal. Yet the Bradley administration – moving ever greenward as it bailed itself out from one political corruption crisis to another – continued in theory to commit itself to tougher growth-management and conservationist positions. Thus in April 1990 the mayor unveiled an official 'Environmental Primer', written in a startlingly Sierra-Club idiom, that coopted almost the entirety of mainstream eco-critiques previously directed against City Hall. Acknowledging 'a city at the limits', as it reviewed one crisis after another, the Primer declared that the days of the 'high-tech "quick fix" are numbered' and proposed a 'tough cop' role for the city as environmental enforcer. Amongst many militant-sounding recommendations, the Primer urged an all-out municipal mobilization to support the South Coast Air Quality Management District's (AQMD) 'aggressive' Regional Air Quality Management Plan.¹¹⁸

Many developers now fear that the AQMD, with support from Los Angeles, may become the toughest slow-growth cop of them all. It is ironic that twelve white male political appointees – a majority of whom presumably espouse the Republican creed of maximum deregulation – have undertaken to impose the most comprehensive peacetime regulation of local economic activity since the days of Roosevelt's Blue Eagle. Acting in the face of a federal ultimatum, in March 1989 the AQMD's Board of Governors (which does include slow-growth patriarch Braude), adopted a sweeping twenty-year plan to restore clean air in the Los Angeles Basin by 2007.

Although developers and industrialists, led by the giant Watson Land Company (developers of L.A.'s new South Bay industrial and commercial complex), howled in protest at proposed regulations to cover every species of air pollution from refinery fumes to underarm deodorants, their real vehemence was reserved for the AQMD's decision in early 1990 to

systematically review all large-scale developments in the Basin. When the AQMD leveled unprecedented criticism at developer Nathan Shapell's \$2 billion Porter Ranch leviathan in the northern foothills of the Valley – the biggest single mixed-use project in Los Angeles history – the Ranch's spokesmen – ex-Planning Commission boss Dan Garcia and ex-BUSTOP leader Paul Clarke – accused the District of 'declaring war on local decision-making'. Developers, industrialists and pro-growth L.A. supervisors then retaliated by introducing a bill in the state Senate that would allow businesses to use initiative and referendum processes to veto AQMD regulations.¹¹⁹

This emergent war of position between the 'green' branches of government and the private sector (and between non-elected environmental managers and local pork-barrel politicians) is reshaping both the language in which the politics of growth are articulated, and the terrain on which different interests contend.¹²⁰ In the wake of Hyperion, a third camp – the moderate 'growth management' ideology of regional technocrats¹²¹ – has arisen between the righteous anger of the suburbs and the haughty indifference of the developers and their political henchmen. It only remains to see how homeowner activists in the suburban valleys have risen to the challenge of this new conjuncture.

NIMBYS AND KNOW-NOTHINGS

From a handful of dog lovers with pooper-scoopers at the park, [Jane] Purse's Parkwatch has grown to a citywide group of 1,000 families with a certified accountant and enough clout to get former Vice-President Walter Mondale to support their cause. . . . In November, officials approved a pilot program to have designated times and places for dogs to run without leashes. Councilman Joel Wachs, who opposed the group from his district for years, voted for the plan. 'He had no choice', said Joan Luchs of Parkwatch, who said one hundred members of the group flooded a committee meeting. They made signs depicting Wachs as the anti-Christ, one of the Three Stooges and a 'dog Nazi'.¹²²

Despite the immensity of Los Angeles's environmental crisis, it is hard to find evidence that the suburban slow-growth movement has understood its

appointment with destiny. Indeed, as the tale of Parkwatch's epic struggle for a 'pooper-scooper-less dog park' in the Valley suggests, the essence of the contemporary suburban world view is precisely the inability to distinguish the historical significance of the sewage clogging Santa Monica Bay from the precious pile deposited by Rover in his favorite dogpark. A California neologism of the 1980s perfectly encapsulates this ethos of untranscendable parochialism: *nimby*. This means 'not in my back yard' although, as we shall see, 'not on my lawn' is sometimes the better translation.

In the particular case of San Fernando Valley homeowners, the big, unitary issues of the late 1970s (taxes, busing and density) were supplanted in the late 1980s by an exotic welter of 'nimby' protests: against traffic congestion, mini-mall development, airport expansion, school siting, the demolition of the Tail O'Cock restaurant, the erection of a mosque, an arts park, subdivision and apartment construction, road widening, the shaving of a hillside, 'diamond' lanes, trailers for the homeless, the disappearance of horse stables, and the construction of a tortilla factory.¹²³

Not even the rich and famous could sneak a drug treatment center, or a pee behind a bush, past the vigilance of Valley homeowners. Faced with the prospect of the Lake View Terrace Homeowners Association picketing their Bel-Air mansion, the ex-first lady was forced to say no to plans for the Nancy Reagan (drug treatment) Center in a vacant medical building in the Valley neighborhood. Meanwhile the proposed Ventura Boulevard branch of a tony Beverly Hills bistro sparked a vehement homes-versus-urinals battle with the Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association. Opposing the eatery's liquor permit at a zoning hearing, the homeowners elaborated their fear: 'The urine on the street. . . . People don't think that the well-to-do would urinate in public or do other crude things. It's shocking, but it's true.' To this monstrous allegation, the representative of *haute cuisine* replied:

We have been here in Beverly Hills for 25 years. We have had heads of state, movie stars, presidents, governors, princes and princesses. To even suggest that any of these would urinate on someone's lawn before they step into their Mercedes is shocking. . . . I think that people who are saying those kinds of things are living in a trashy neighborhood. Our bathrooms are probably more elegant than their living rooms.¹²⁴

When it comes to solving major urban problems, moreover, the Valley homesteaders are about as patient and constructive as Sendero Luminoso. Ironically, the one big Valley-wide issue in 1987–8 was opposition to a proposed light rail commuter line to Downtown. The Valley's nightmarish traffic problems are symptomatic of the overall crisis of L.A.'s growth infrastructures. With the smog-shrouded Ventura Freeway in *rigor mortis* due to the nation's worst congestion, excess traffic clogs arterial boulevards before spilling over into residential streets. Cal Trans engineers have warned that without a quick fix of mass transit, 'the system isn't going to break down, it's going to explode'.¹²⁵ With a traffic apocalypse imminent, it might have been expected that Valley residents would have welcomed the L.A. County Transportation Commission's plan for cheap fixed rail transit.

Instead, organized Valleyites were nimby homeowners first, and harassed commuters second. The Commission, like previous outside agencies, failed to comprehend the neighborhood geography of the Valley and the fierce localisms disguised by a superficially homogeneous landscape. The proposed light rail route was plotted along Chandler Boulevard, unwittingly through the center of an Orthodox Jewish community who protested that the line would disrupt Sabbath worship. The Hassidim were reinforced by other homeowner groups who saw the route as a conspiracy by Warner Center and Van Nuys business interests who 'want to develop, develop, develop . . . at the sacrifice of the American Dream'. Ultimately Encino Homeowners' leader Jerry Silver (whose brother Bob lives on Chandler Boulevard) pulled together a hundred other homeowners' groups into the All Valley Transit Coalition (AVTC) to oppose light rail in *anybody's* backyard.¹²⁶

As incredulous traffic engineers looked on, the powerful Transportation Commission crumbled in the face of nimby multiplied by one hundred. Although polls indicated that potential users overwhelmingly approved the proposed line, there was no grassroots organization of commuters. (As Silver explained, 'people don't organize to fight *for* something, but they organize to fight *against* something'.) Rather than embroil themselves further with AVTC – a super-sized version of Parkwatch or West Hills – the Transportation Commission unheroically abandoned the field. Two years later, after arduous negotiations with homeowners' groups,

legislators announced a 'compromise' that would extend Metro Rail underground beneath Chandler Boulevard at immensely greater cost than the original light rail proposal, but without disturbing the Sabbath.¹²⁷

The current helter-skelter of homeowner protest in the San Fernando Valley becomes more racially charged further east in the San Gabriel Valley, where slow-growth politics act as a latter-day version of anti-immigrant Know-Nothingism. Although Los Angeles County's other great suburban valley has roughly the same population as the San Fernando (approximately 1,250,000 in 1985), it is fragmented into a complex class, ethnic and land-use mosaic of twenty-eight separately incorporated municipalities and numerous County 'holes'. Once the world's greatest citrus belt, the San Gabriel Valley, like the San Fernando, has been subjected to acute growth stress over the last generation. In the built-out western half of the Valley (dominated by Pasadena), where land values rose 30 per cent in 1987-8 alone, established homeowners' associations have fought fanatically to protect their single-family neighborhoods from desecration at the hands of apartment builders.¹²⁸ Meanwhile, in the Valley's rapidly urbanizing eastern half (especially along the growth corridor of the Pomona Freeway), which gained almost a quarter-million new residents in the 1980s, commuter-suburbanites have organized to slow development and preserve their remaining rural amenities.

Across the San Gabriel Valley, however, these stock-in-trade slow-growth issues have become hopelessly conflated with an increasingly virulent racial backlash. Once predominantly Anglo (with scattered *colonias* of Mexican citrus workers), the Valley has become a major destination for upwardly mobile Chicanos leaving East L.A. and Chinese entrepreneurs arriving from Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as for poorer Mexicans and Vietnamese. Whereas the quarter-million Chicanos (primarily blue-collar craftsmen and professionals) are perceived primarily as a political threat to entrenched Anglo power structures, the 150,000 Chinese (businessmen and developers as well as professionals and workers) are resented for their alleged role in overdeveloping and physically degrading whole communities.

Monterey Park – a San Gabriel Valley city of 65,000 residents about eight miles east of Downtown L.A. – has for nearly a decade been the major battlefield between white homeowners and 'growth with an Asian face'.

Ninety per cent Anglo in 1960, this hilly single-family suburb evolved during the 1970s toward an uneasy triadic balance of Anglo, Chicano and Japanese-American residents until Fred Hseih, a canny real-estate promoter with offshore banking connections, conceived the idea of selling Monterey Park as the Chinese version of the California Dream. Beguiled by slick advertisements depicting a 'Chinese Beverly Hills', thousands of Mandarin-speakers from Taiwan and Cantonese-speakers from Hong Kong and Indonesia, transformed Monterey Park into North America's first Chinese-majority suburb by 1985. A half-billion dollars of diaspora capital reshaped Atlantic Boulevard into an overscaled strip of Chinese office buildings and inundated the City Planning Department with scores of applications to build mini-malls and condominiums.¹²⁹

This extraordinary ethnic restructuring produced a nativist backlash in the form of the RAMP (the Residents Association of Monterey Park) whose self-declared aim is slow growth, particularly the restriction of new multiple-unit and commercial construction. Since most of the developers opposed by RAMP are also Chinese, RAMP has invariably assumed the alter-ego of being the main opposition to 'further Chinese take-over'. In the 1986 elections, taking advantage of the fact that the city's white minority is still a larger registered voting bloc than the new Chinese majority, RAMP swept away moderate ethnic-harmonizers (two Latinos and a Chinese-American) in favor of its own hardcore representatives. As sociologist John Horton explains, the struggle over land-use control quickly became a fight over the 'very definition of what constitutes an American community':

This nativist side of slow growth showed itself in 1985, when the City Council adopted an ordinance requiring Chinese businesses to include English translations on their signage. A year later, at 1.30 a.m., after the watchful public had gone home, the Council's slow-growth majority pushed through a resolution supporting English as the 'official language' of Monterey Park. One of the more 'patriotic' Council members even proposed that the local police cooperate with the INS in enforcing 'its American duties'.¹³⁰

Monterey Park's slow-growth Know-Nothingism reached its lowest point in the reign of Mayor Barry Hatch, an ex-Mormon missionary, who attracted national notoriety for the table-thumping charge that a 'billion Chinese . . .

are looking for a soft place to land. There's nowhere else but here. The whole valley is what they want.'¹³¹ Although 'Yellow Peril' Hatch was finally evicted from the Council by a 'rainbow' mobilization of Chinese, Japanese and Chicano voters in April 1990, RAMP-type groups had already spread throughout neighboring communities. For instance, one RAMP missionary had successfully lobbied conservative Republican homeowner leaders in San Gabriel, Arcadia, and six other cities facing Asian immigration to form a San Gabriel Valley 'slow-growth coalition' with exclusionary undertones.¹³²

The 1990 Census will undoubtedly reveal that Alhambra – an older, more modest suburb just across the San Bernadino Freeway from Monterey Park – is on the verge of becoming the Valley's second Chinese-majority suburb. Unlike Monterey Park, however, many of its new residents are poorer ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, working in local garment shops or in Alhambra's estimated two hundred Chinese restaurants. ROC (Residents Opposing Condominiums) was Alhambra's son-of-RAMP, organizing against the lower-income Chinese influx by circulating an initiative to ban all multiple-unit construction in the city. Meanwhile Alhambra's aristocratic neighbor, San Marino (former national headquarters of the John Birch Society), has used a 'bedroom ordinance' to limit wealthy but large Asian families from buying into its old-money lifestyle.¹³³

The young (1989) Valley city of Diamond Bar – a slow-growth incorporation inspired, like Santa Clarita, by the homeowners' associations – has also intensely debated the limitation of apartment construction, presumably with the purpose of excluding working-class non-Anglos of all kinds. Indeed the equation between apartments and crime is now so automatic in suburban consciousness that one recent Diamond Bar council candidate (financed by the owner of the Carl's Junior Restaurant chain) argued thus against multi-family housing: 'I don't want to see graffiti, gangs and prostitution – I want safety for everyone who lives in Diamond Bar.'¹³⁴

It would be unfair, however, to suggest that the San Gabriel Valley is the only besieged white *laager* in Southern California. In northern San Diego and southern Orange Counties – Southern California's 95 per cent white 'futuropolis' of affluent planned communities and science parks – hysterical homeowners' associations, supported by local businessmen, have begun to wage war against the very immigrant labor upon which their master-race

lifestyles depend. Decrying such infamies as urination in public, homeowners in the City of Orange, Costa Mesa, San Clemente, Encinitas and elsewhere along the 'Gold Coast' have clamored for police crackdowns on street-corner labor markets and bush encampments of undocumented Mexican and Central American workers. Since there is virtually no low-income housing between the Santa Ana barrio and East San Diego (a ninety-mile distance) thousands of day-laborers and their families – Spanish-speaking Okies of the 1980s – are forced to live furtively in hillside dugouts and impromptu brush camps, often within sight of million-dollar tract homes whose owners now want the 'immigrant blight' removed.

As these examples suggest, slow-growth Know-Nothingism, by its very nature, seems to be creeping toward Malthusian final solutions. Thus, at a 1987 conference of Not Yet New York, the Westside slow-growth alliance, one group advocated a statewide 'Elbow Room' initiative that would seal the border with Mexico, drastically restrict immigration of all kinds, and impose obligatory family planning. The irony of the situation seemed to escape the initiative's sponsors, transfixed by their blinding vision of a politically cyrogenized Ozzie-and-Harriet lifestyle: that the definitive imposition of slow growth would require the construction of a California Reich.

FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE

It is a universal fact that where the value of land is the highest, civilization exhibits the greatest luxury side by side with the most piteous destitution. To see human beings in the most abject, the most helpless and hopeless condition, you must go, not to the unfenced prairies, . . . but to the great cities where the ownership of a little patch of ground is a fortune. *Henry George, 1869*¹³⁵

In a famous passage of the *Eighteenth Brumaire* Marx depicted the French peasantry as a 'sack of potatoes', constitutionally incapable of any large-scale coherence of interest or social action except as mobilized by a charismatic leader. From our foregoing account, it is hard to avoid a similar judgment about Southern California homeowners. Try as hard as they might

to become 'sunbelt Bolsheviks', the slow-growthers remain basically peasant potatoes whose 'natural' scale of protest is disaggregated nimbyism; or would 'residential anarcho-syndicalism' be a better term? What seems exceptional was the moment of focused mass energy represented by Proposition 13 and the 'Bonapartism' of Howard Jarvis in 1978. Only the Hillside Federation, with its stable leadership and evolved program, breaks the mold of individualistic homeowners' associations, dominated by cranky personalities, consorting in temporary coalitions and then, inevitably, remolecularizing around their own back yards. It seems, in historical perspective, virtually an iron law.

Yet developers and the rest of the real-estate industry live in fear that the improbable will again occur, and that some combination of crisis and charisma will place the slow-growth equivalent of the Jarvis Amendment on the ballot. In order to forestall that particular Eighteenth Brumaire, they have devised a brilliant, if staggeringly hypocritical strategy, based on their decades of expertise in manipulating public opinion against environmentalism. Following the prescription laid down by mega-developer Eli Broad in the early 1970s, they have become 'the friends of the people', denouncing 'selfish, elitist homeowners' who prevent the 'trickle down' of growth dividends and low-income housing to the bottom of society.

The 1988 campaign against slow-growth Measure A in Orange County was something of a *déjà vu* landmark in the history of special-interest electioneering in California. Under the direction of New Right political consultant Lynn Wessell ('Weasel' to his opponents), a \$2.5 million advertising onslaught financed by the Irvine and Mission Viejo companies was repackaged as a broad-based response by unions and minority groups. Pro-growth mailings in the blue-collar suburbs of northern Orange County falsely claimed that every household faced paying \$1,800 tribute to 'some south county elitists'. A few months later, Riverside County developers, fighting 'Yes on Residents Controlling Growth' (Measure B), repeated the Weasel's strategy with 'Residents for Responsible Planning', depicted as 'a broad-based coalition with representation from organized labor, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce [and] affordable housing advocates'. Although some building trades unions and minority groups did endorse this developers' front, the money (or at least 83 per cent of it) came from the *latifundistas*, especially the 97,000-acre Rancho California Company. If in

both counties slow-growth measures that early polls judged highly popular were defeated by scare tactics aimed at blue-collar voters, it was only the revival of an ancient ploy. Long before the Weasel, the old (SP) Octopus routinely bought elections in the name of popular anti-elitism.¹³⁶

As in the early 1900s, moreover, the façade of populism dissimulates the operation of an ultra-elite power structure – in the contemporary case, of a statewide alliance of developers, builders, realtors and banks opposed to growth controls. This newer, bigger ‘Octopus’, as we saw in the last chapter, possesses extraordinary bipartisan leverage over both parties at all levels of government. Bleating loudly about the plight of the proletariat and ‘affordable housing’, the pro-growth camp (led by the California Building Industry Foundation) comprises developers opposed to inclusionary housing, builders opposed to unions, realtors opposed to housing integration and landlords opposed to rent control. While professing to be the cause of ‘responsible planning’, they have in fact sponsored a sweeping legal offensive – the second prong of their strategy – to reaffirm the untrammled rights of private development against any communitarian regulation. Ominously, this initiative has found powerful philosophical allies in rightward-moving state and federal supreme court majorities, ready to restore nineteenth-century doctrines of ‘absolute property’.¹³⁷

And, as in the bad old days at the beginning of the century, the labor and civil rights groups allied with the Octopus are being led from behind. Minority groups, rightly distrustful of white-supremacist homeowners, have jumped from the frying pan into the fire to support developers responsible for the creation of the monochromatic suburban fringes in northern Los Angeles and southern Orange counties. Powerful building-trades bosses for the most part continue to lock local labor federations (as in the City of Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino and Orange counties) into supine coalitions with big developers, even when the latter are major backers of union-busting. (One pathbreaking exception to this dreary tradition was the 1988 initiative by the giant L.A. county employees Local of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to band together with environmentalists and Valley homeowners to oppose Mike Antonovich, the anti-union, pro-growth supervisor for northern Los Angeles County.)

To legitimate their popular mandate, pro-growth forces regularly unveil polls to prove that inner-city residents and blue-collar workers are

strongly opposed to the slow-growth movement. The *Times* interpreted one poll in a front-page story to allege that growth was the major new ethnic divide in the city, threatening to unravel Mayor Bradley's historic Westside–Southcentral coalition. In fact, the evidence is far more complex and ambiguous. Despite its demonization as the 'end of the boom', Black and Latino voters overwhelmingly endorsed Proposition U, and in other polls, 56 per cent of Latinos and 40 per cent of Blacks have indicated support for a slowdown of development. Other research from Orange County and across the country has failed to find a clear class polarization over growth issues.¹³⁸

Possibly there is a significant internal divide in non-Anglo communities between renters and homeowners, with the latter more inclined toward slow growth. But the crucial point is that the polls themselves, by the exclusive way they frame questions (pro and contra economic development, for instance), simply reproduce the distorted dichotomies of growth war ideology. It is not surprising that poor people, especially renters, will choose jobs over environmental quality when the two are artificially counterposed. If it were the only choice offered, most people would also opt to cut their toe off rather than their leg. Such dubious, but ubiquitous survey methods only reveal people's relative anxieties, not their substantive opinions.

Like all ideology, 'slow growth' and its 'pro-growth' antipode must be understood as much from the standpoint of the questions *absent*, as those posed. The debate between affluent homeowners and mega-developers is, after all, waged in the language of *Alice in Wonderland*, with both camps conspiring to preserve false opposites, 'growth' versus 'neighborhood quality'. It is symptomatic of the current distribution of power (favoring both capital *and* the residential upper-middle classes) that the appalling destruction and misery within Los Angeles's inner city areas (see chapters five and six below) became the great non-issue during the 1980s, while the impact of growth upon affluent neighborhoods occupied center-stage. The silent majority of non-affluent homeowners and renters have remained mere pawns in the growth power struggles, their independent social interests (for instance, economic justice *and* environmental protection, jobs *and* clean air, and so on) suppressed in civic controversy.

If the slow-growth movement, in other words, has been explicitly a protest against the urbanization of suburbia, it is implicitly – in the long

tradition of Los Angeles homeowner politics – a reassertion of social privilege. Ironically, at the very moment when the Anglo middle classes have demographically declined to a minority within the city, their organized social power waxes at a maximum, even if dispersed into nimby-type protests. Growth politics, in general, seem to militate against class politics. Yet, as we shall see in the next chapter, a one-sided class struggle, ironically uniting homeowners and developers, rages fiercely at the level of Los Angeles’s built environment.

NOTES

1. See *Daily News*, 18 October 1987.
2. Benjamin Zycher, ‘She Should Have Said “No”’, *Los Angeles Times* (op-ed), 4 September 1987.
3. See *Daily News*, 29 November 1987.
4. Paraphrased in *Times*, 6 March 1988.
5. *Times*, 12 October 1986.
6. According to the California Association of Realtors, 76 growth-control ballot measures were put to the vote throughout the state in 1986–8. Nearly half originated in Los Angeles, Orange or San Diego counties, and 70 per cent were successful. (*Times*, 31 July 1988; and my compilation of Southern California growth measures.)
7. See the premature obituary: ‘Decisive Defeats Leave State’s Slow-Growth Movement in Disarray’, *Times*, 10 November 1988.
8. David Dowall, *The Suburban Squeeze: Land Conversion and Regulation in the San Francisco Bay Area*, Berkeley 1984, pp. 139–42.
9. George Will, ‘“Slow Growth” Is the Liberalism of the Privileged’, *Times*, 30 August 1987.
10. Of course, both ideological positions – environmentalist *noblesse oblige* and crabgrass xenophobia – end up defending substantially the same conservative interests. As George Will explains: ‘The “slow growth” movement here and elsewhere represents the growing desire of the possessing classes for “conserving government”, for laws to protect the value of the positional goods in a choice location. Conserving government is the liberalism of the privileged, it is activist government protecting the well-positioned from inundation by change and competition.’ *Ibid.*
11. Quoted in the *Eagle*, 25 September 1947.
12. See Stephen Barton and Carol Silverman, ‘Common Interest Homeowners’ Associations: Private Government and the Public Interest Revisited’, *Public Affairs Report*, May 1988, p. 5.
13. On Los Felix Improvement Association, see *Times*, 26 January 1989. The oldest HA in Los Angeles County is probably the Arroyo Seco Improvement Association in Pasadena (circa 1905).
14. Marc Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning*, New York 1987, pp. 3–4, 11–12. Robert Fogelson points out, however, that deed restrictions were not usually in perpetuity – a consideration that provided continuing impetus to restriction through public zoning. (See *The Fragmented Metropolis*, Cambridge, Mass. 1967, p. 248.)
15. J. Max Bond, *The Negro in Los Angeles*, PhD thesis, USC 1936, p. 41; and Charlotta Bass, *Forty Years*, Los Angeles 1960, p. 56.