

and fewer freeways were admirable, the actual results were less commendable. . . .

With the creation of CalTrans in 1972, California's transportation policy became increasingly influenced by gubernatorial politics. The three governors who served California between 1967 and 1991 set transportation policy based on politics, often ignoring real long-term transportation problems. For Ronald Reagan and Jerry Brown, delay on the seismic retrofit project cost little politically. Even George Deukmejian escaped the collapse of the Cypress Structure largely unscathed. . . .

Freeway-bridge retrofit is only one aspect of the state's transportation system that has been woefully neglected for well over two decades. After the collapse of the Cypress Structure, a great deal of lip-service was paid to the seismic retrofit program, but very little has actually been done. In the introduction of its 1990 report, the governor's board of inquire observed that the Loma Prieta earthquake should serve as a powerful warning to the state's leadership that California's transportation system has been neglected for too long. The state currently estimates that for every 1.1 miles of freeway, there is a bridge (or an overpass) that needs to be retrofitted, rebuilt, or completely replaced. Yet, retrofit is just one program that we know has been delayed for political reasons. What other programs have been stopped or stalled for the same reasons? Are the freeways safe? As California's transportation system grows older, future events similar to the collapse of the Cypress may provide answers to these questions.



## *The New Urban Environmentalism*

Mike Davis

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]

From Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 169–73, 176–77, 179–81, 212–13. Reprinted by kind permission of the publisher.

The history of homeowner activism in Southern California divides into two epochs. In the [first] period—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. 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. . . .

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 "red-tile" communities from Coronado and Point Loma (in San Diego), to San Clemente, San Juan Capistrano, Newport Beach, Riverside, Redlands and Santa Barbara. . . .

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 manmade disasters like slides and fires. 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 landuse law and planning, the Federation was an evolutionary leap beyond any homeowners’ group in existence.

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 “quickened destruction more exact than wartime bombing”:

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.

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.

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’ old sod of Pacific Palisades) in 1967 and began his long, unbroken representation of the interests of Westside canyon and hill dwellers. . . .

The “greening” of the Santa Monicas, like growth-control initiatives in red-tile 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. . . .

Accumulated resentments against apartment construction and suburban “deruralization” vented themselves in the April and June 1972 local elections. . . . 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 pres-

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 manmade disasters like slides and fires. 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.

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erve open space. . . . Finally, in red-tiled Newport Beach and San Juan Capistrano, irate homeowners tossed out pro-growth mayors and their supporters. . . .

Far out on the subdivision frontier of eastern Los Angeles County, homeowners' associations from Hacienda Heights, Diamond Bar and Rowland Heights united. . . . Anti-density tremors continued eastward through red-tiled 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.

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. . . . Faced with a spreading homeowners' revolt, the development industry suddenly sang the praises of regional government and housing the poor. . . .

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. But in any inventory of Bradley's political debts, homeowners and environmentalists were far down on the list. . . .

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. . . .

[But] 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. . . .

[The] Southern California land inflation of 1975-9 . . . 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. Anxieties were particularly high in the San Fernando Valley where homeowners believing themselves to be little more than a tax colony of Downtown LA 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. . . .

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 . . . 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. . . . Growth politics, in general, seem to militate against class politics.

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