

Hi, my name is Greg Gonzalez, and I'm one of the two hosts of the local history podcast called L.A. Meekly. It's just me here today for a special kind of episode that runs concurrent with a talk that Eric Nusbaum is giving to the Glendale Library Arts & Culture about his wonderful book *STEALING HOME: Los Angeles, the Dodgers, and the Lives Caught in Between*. It's a special story, but one not unfamiliar in Los Angeles, a city where the land is constantly being fought for, and its history paved a dozen times over. The decimation of the neighborhood known as Chavez Ravine and the people who lived there was only one in a long series of stories in Los Angeles of people being displaced, and their homes being replaced.

Los Angeles is going through a major housing crisis at the moment. The cost of living has gone up while wages remain stagnant, and the available and affordable spaces for the constant flux of transplants means long-time low-income residents are on the edge of homelessness, or being displaced; forced to move out of state to survive. The housing crisis is a tangled web of misery; gentrification, displacement, homelessness. Those who have and have not. Those who live and those who survive. Statistics and hypotheses are not my strong suit. Looking at stories for understanding *is*. I offer you three.

I'd like to start at the beginning, but where to even begin with the Kizh, the indigenous people who called this land theirs for thousands of years before the Spanish came exploring. It's the same story that all indigenous people tell, not only across our country, but on every continent. Life was complex, full of rituals and hardships, but simple. The coastal indigenous people of California were for-the-most-part peaceful because their resources were abundant. They were hunter-gathers with plenty of things to hunt and gather.

Then the explorers came. Juan Rodriguez first came to the west coast in 1542, and was met with the curious inhabitants of the land. The expedition in 1769, led by trusted Spanish military officer Gaspar de Portola, would be more official. The Spanish crown sought to secure and protect the land from Russian fur traders heading south. After the Spanish laid waste to Mexico and its way of life, they came to California, to spread the word of God and to stake claim on the land; New Spain. Missions were erected along the coast as not only military sites, but as sacred religious grounds, where padres could convert the indigenous people to Christianity.

The expedition was led out of San Diego, through present-day La Habra over the Puente Hills, through the San Gabriel Valley and on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, arrived along the river. Upon arriving, in present-day Los Angeles, they were greeted by a party of Kizh men, who presented the Spanish with gifts; baskets filled with pine nuts and strings of beautiful shell discs. The Spanish gave them tobacco and glass beads. Three years later, the San Gabriel Mission would be founded, collecting Kizh from around the *entire* area; converting them and making them the primary work-force, and prisoners.

In 1781, Felipe De Neve, Spanish governor of California, selected eleven families to make the trek to Alta California. These eleven families were the original settlers of Los Angeles, 23 adults and 21 children. When they arrived, the Kizh were still there, in their village along the river. When the settlers began building the city, the Kizh aided them. They helped them build the Zanja Madre, the mother ditch that would move the route of the river so it could flow into the

settlement. They labored in the fields and worked as muleteers and water carriers among many other roles. But they continued to live on their own, aside from the settlement; the future metropolis. Our idea of the city-center is based on where the eleven families first settled. La Placita, later to be known as Olvera St Plaza in Downtown Los Angeles. Their original site. But long before they had built this pueblo, the Kizh Village, Yang-Na was already there, or at least neighbored it. Yang-Na had several dozen dome-shaped huts scattered around the area, along the west bank of the river. It housed several hundred residents. An elder sycamore tree stood in Yang-Na, standing six-stories-tall, providing the highest-ranking Kizh members with shade. It was their council tree. Yang-Na had been their home for thousands of years. The tree was said to be 400 years old, dating farther back than Christopher Columbus landing on Plymouth rock. Is this how we measure time when it comes to conquering indigenous groups? The clock starts when the change comes, and from that point on it never stops.

By 1821, Mexico had won independence from Spain and secularized mission-owned land. The indigenous peoples were free from the confinement but found themselves a people now designed to be working class. Some of the converted people returned to Yang-Na, to work in the pueblo. Others found work on ranches or in the mountains. It seemed like the farther from home, the better off they were.

In 1824, Los Angeles's only German resident, Johan Groninberg, or as he would later be named Juan Domingo, shipwrecked at San Pedro Harbor. Instead of rebuilding and setting back out to the sea, he decided to stay in Los Angeles, a city with obvious potential for growth. Four years

later, Groninberg purchased the parcel of land where Yang-Na stood. Now that he owned it, all the Kizh who lived there were trespassing. They were then evicted and forced to move. They resettled not too far away, to modern day Commercial and Alameda St. When that land was purchased in 1845, they were once again forced to vacate that land and live along the river. The council tree sat on a plot of land owned now by Jean-Louis Vignes, vineyard owner. It was said that he priced this sacred tree at \$20.

When the Americans came to the area, and fought and won the land from the Mexicans in 1848, it meant the original people, the Kizh, wouldn't even have a good foot to start off with the way they had had with the original settlers. They were treated by the Americans as the lowest class of citizen. In 1863, a vicious outbreak of smallpox took a toll on the residents of L.A. This outbreak all but decimated the indigenous population. In 1889, a branch from the 400-year-old sycamore tree broke off and landed on a truck owned by the Maier and Zobelein Brewing Company whose building was now housed there. Furious, Joseph Maier had the rest of the limbs of the tree sawed off. Six years later, the rest of the Kizh council tree was cut-up and sold as firewood and souvenirs. It is estimated that at the beginning of the 1770's when Spain sought to settle in Alta California, there were around sixty-thousand residents of different tribes. Over the next fifty years, the population plummeted by two-thirds.

Yang-Na, the village that for thousands of years was the home to the original people this area, was gone. Many different people speculate what now sits atop it. City Hall? Union Station? The 101 freeway? L.A. Civic Center? In truth, it doesn't matter what symbol of an American

metropolis has buried it. What matters is: those who stand in the way of the conquerors progress and prosperity are crushed. Landmarks toppled, and people scattered.

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Los Angeles is such a big widespread city, within such a big widespread county, that Angelenos can be completely oblivious to other parts of town. Terminal Island feels like one of those areas. But even life-long residents of L.A. who can point out Terminal Island on a map might be surprised to find that it was not always industrial; it was once home to a quaint neighborhood known as Fish Harbor, populated predominantly by Japanese and Japanese Americans; the Japanese born Issei (e-say) and their children, the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, U.S. born Nisei (ni-say)

Terminal Island is a man-made island, artificially formed by two smaller islands with great names: Dead Man's Island, and a mudflat once known to Spanish explorers as "Isla Raza de Buena Gente,(roughly translated: *Island of the Good Race People*), it later became known as Rattlesnake Island, due to the snakes that could be found there after a torrential storm. The two smaller islands formed Terminal Island, named so because of the Los-Angeles-Terminal-Railway built there at the turn of the century that connected the coast to the city. The island is nestled between Long Beach Harbor and San Pedro. And as the ports of South L.A. grew as one of the main ports on the West Coast, so did the area.

It was once a picturesque seaside area for the wealthy, who would lounge at Brighton Beach, take the ferry, BLANCHE, for a nickel ride to San Pedro, or watch regatta races from South Coast

Yacht club. But in 1901, Japanese fishermen discovered abalone in White Point by Palos Verdes, and the abalone industry in Southern California was created along the L.A. coastline, from Santa Monica to San Pedro. As the area became more industrial, the natural environment succumbed to it; harbor dredging, outcropping-- and the resort-feel of the area was transformed. To help separate the shipping industry from the fish industry in this bustling harbor, a village was constructed; break-waters built to protect against strong waves; canneries and piers were erected, and housing units, over 300, were created for the workers and their families. This new area became Fish Harbor.

The wealthy residents of the seaside area sold their homes to the people working the canneries, as slowly hundreds of working class people moved to the area. And before you say, well weren't the wealthy residents displaced? No. They chose to leave. The demographic of the area was shifting closer to those who worked in the industry, and the fishing industry was, in this area--at this time, predominantly Japanese.

Japanese fishermen dominated the industry in San Pedro and were savvy in dealings with the Anglo-Americans, so of course in 1905-logic, they had to be segregated, because how can you create a white-owned fishing empire if you don't cheat. They were soon segregated to work exclusively on Terminal Island. It did little to de-terr the drive for the American Dream. But fishing was only one aspect of the abalone enterprise. Workers could still locate-and-identify, harvest, package and distribute fish. When word traveled to Japan about how one could be successful in America in the fish industry, the population of Japanese citizens exploded, and

within a span of thirty-five years, it went from about 1,000 Japanese residents to about 25,000 and rising until 1941, when the population was counted at over 37,000.

By 1918, canneries such as the American Tuna Company, the Southern Fish Company, and Van Camp Seafood (now we call them Chicken of the Sea) employed hundreds of the residents of the area. They worked there, they lived there, and they raised families there. In the beginning, Terminal Island was an all-male community, reflecting the work pool and the nature of the company housing. But soon, women and children began to move in as more women were joining the workforce in the canneries. Back then, there was only one road and a ferry that would connect the mainland to Terminal Island. A touch isolated, the lives that were lived there were wholly unique to anywhere else in Los Angeles or Japan. An insulated American experience.

Fisherman and cannery workers would shop at Japanese-owned hardware stores, eat at Japanese-owned restaurants, drink sake at Japanese-owned bars. You could go to grocery stores stocked with Japanese goods, hang out at pool halls, beauty parlors, ice cream parlors, cafes. The community would meet at the Fisherman's hall for social activities, the same hall where judo and kendo were taught, or watch samurai films from Japan at the theater. Children would attend Walizer (WAH-LEZER) Elementary School. The local church offered Japanese-language classes. Teenagers would take the ferry to San Pedro to attend high school. Families would lounge around Brighton Beach. Baseball was brought back to the island from the mainland. Girls Day and Boys Day, two Japanese national holidays, were celebrated in Fish Harbor. A dialect known as Terminal Island Lingo, a mixture of Japanese and English, was

getting to be more common in Fish Harbor. The community of Terminal Island shared more than proximity, they shared old traditions and new experiences that were *completely* different.

It all ended in December of 1941, after the Japanese army led a surprise-attack on a naval base in Pearl Harbor, officially launching the reluctant United States into the throws of World War II and making every Japanese citizen of this country an enemy in the national eye. Terminal Island was on the radar of the Housing Un-American Activities Committee (known by their acronym, HUAC) for a long time. Not only because of their nationality, but the location of the island was near a naval base, as well as being connected to one of the biggest ports on the west coast. Because of these things, the government did not hesitate.

Hours after the attack, the FBI went to Fish Harbor and detained all the Issei (e-say) the Japanese born men, as well as boat owners and community leaders of Terminal Island. All fishing operations were shut down. Any boats that were out fishing at the time of the attack were radioed back to shore where the Coast Guard raided their boats and the men were taken away. The homes of the community leaders were searched, and contraband was confiscated. Heavily-armed American Soldiers rode around in jeeps and patrolled Terminal Island around the clock. A week later, Terminal Island was turned into a full-on military area. Whoever hadn't been detained so far, now homeless families of mostly women and children, had to seek shelter. They would have to find friends and families that would take them in. It was two more months before President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 90-66 in February of 1942, which would send 120,000 Japanese Americans around the country to internment camps for the duration of the war. The Japanese residents were given 48 hours to completely vacate.



And the residents of this once-idyllic community? They were forced to sell their possessions and whatever else they could that couldn't get packed up and moved. Fishing boats and equipment were left behind. Home and businesses abandoned. Some were able to sell their furniture, fishing gear, boats and other items but due to the time frame, they had to be sold at ridiculously low prices to those who were clearly taking advantage of the situation. Of the ethnic Japanese people forced into internment camps, about 62% were Nisei and Sansei (2nd and 3rd generation Japanese) who were American citizens by virtue of being born in the US. The other 38% were Issei (Japanese immigrants) who were either naturalized American citizens or resident aliens.

Some were sent to barracks built at the Santa Anita Racetracks, others to a camp in Manzanar in the Owens Valley, which was a property owned by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to secure water rights between the Owens Valley and Los Angeles in what many Owens Valley residents saw as grand act of swindlery. The Japanese Americans would remain there for three years, their lives in Los Angeles all but destroyed. And the quaint hybrid Japanese-American life that was once created on Terminal Island was eradicated. Gone with only scattered traces that it ever existed. The fishing boats were either taken by the military, repossessed, stolen, or destroyed. The rest of the former residents were scattered. Some canneries were still operating. The elementary school building remained; it was now used by the marines. An entire way of life gone. As you know, they were not the last.

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The first modern freeway was opened in Los Angeles in 1940, the Arroyo Seco Parkway, later becoming the end piece to the 110 Freeway. If you've ever taken this freeway, you'll agree: it certainly seems like the first. Around the same time, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) completed a map. The HOLC was part of Roosevelt's New Deal, and it was meant to relieve distressed Americans going through economic hardships during the Great Depression. The National Housing Act of 1934 was enacted in hopes to reduce the foreclosure rate during the Depression and make housing and mortgages more affordable for low-income workers. To ensure the mortgage payments didn't default, the HOLC created a city survey program, which would gather data about neighborhoods from over two hundred cities in America. This would be the residential security map. The information was gathered and the results created a rating system that graded areas of a city based on both colors and letter grades. A-Green areas represented the best investments for homeowners and banks as it was a neighborhood of businessmen. B-Blue areas of the city were for white-collar workers in desirable neighborhoods, C-yellow areas were designated for the white working class in declining neighborhoods, and D-Red areas for were hazardous, almost industrial living situations, and it was an area designated for immigrants, people of color and the lowest of the working class white residents. The term "redlining" refers to these HOLC residential security maps. The information and results were, of course, incredible biased. But their effects would be real and long-lasting. The ability to buy or refinance was more difficult if you lived in a D-red area. If you were redlined. People trying to purchase homes in redlined areas were denied loans and home insurance. Property values drop, and landlords don't even bother with the properties they own, city services go underfunded all while, crime increases. Racial restrictive housing cov-en-nants also existed

prohibiting people of color from purchasing home in certain areas. These covenants were agreed upon between white homeowners and real estate companies to keep Los Angeles suburbs, as the Boosters of the City promised, white. This is how Los Angeles was able to segregate without using the word *segregation*. Housing discrimination cripples any opportunity for residents of redlined areas to advance. This was Los Angeles, as it was many other cities across the country.

As the country boomed during World War II, cars were beginning to change the way Americans travelled, and highways began to be built. By 1941, President Roosevelt saw the country needed connective tissue between states, and the interstate system was born. In 1944, the Federal Highway Act allocated funds for California to build close to two-thousand miles of freeways across the state. Urban planners throughout the US worked in accordance with private interests, and they all looked to the Federal Highway Act as a means of renewing the deteriorating condition of American inner cities. Urban planners had little or no official interest in providing inner-city housing for those residents displaced by freeway construction; huge sections of central-city land could be cleared for other uses. Downtown business leaders and real estate developers, clamored for central-city development since they didn't know if they could survive families moving to the suburbs, *away* from the business districts. The Urban Land Institute (ULI), a national organization for real estate developers and builders, advocated urban freeway construction as a means of slum clearance and urban renewal. Groups like the ULI and the HOLC saw this as an opportunity to erase the slums from the city. In 1953, the Division of Highways announced its plans to route the Golden State Freeway, the 5, through the densely populated east side of the L.A. River, which contained areas like Boyle Heights, Hollenbeck

Heights and Belvedere. Where the ULI looked at the slum areas of L.A. and saw freeways in their place, so they coordinated plans for construction that way.

The residents of Boyle Heights fought the imposition of the freeway. Community leaders, which included city councilmen, state assemblymen, newspaper editors, religious officials and small business owners all pushed against the construction of the freeways. They had the help and support of councilman Edward Roybal, who grew up in Boyle Heights and now represented the area. He said that the population density in Boyle Heights was unequal to any other in the Southland, in a good way, and that some fifteen language-groups and nearly as many races are represented in Boyle Heights. These good citizens have been there for over fifty years living in multi-cultural harmony. Not only was the freeway going to destroy homes, schools and convalescent homes and churches, it was going to kick away at this beautiful multicultural hive.

The Anti-Golden State Freeway Committee, led by Marie Tubbs and had invited Roybal to be chair, was formed to come up with strategies to halt or disrupt the construction of the freeway. They spread awareness by sponsoring an organizing rallies and reaching out to local publications. Agents from the Division of Highways were sent out to appraise property value of the area, while Tubbs and Roybal proposed to the city council a new route. Over 350 Boyle-Hollenbeck Heights residents attended a meeting for re-hearing in Sacramento at the end of 1953. They acquired fifteen thousand signatures of opponents to the freeway construction and presented them to the commission.

But their resistance did not work. The dream of the future was too powerful to save the neighborhoods that laid in the path. Construction would begin in March of 1957 of the first segment of the newly renamed Santa Monica Freeway over the Los Angeles River. Land acquisition for the Golden State Freeways right-of-way started in 1958, and by 1961 families living in houses that the state had purchased and then rented back to their occupants, received orders to move. Two thousand homes were destroyed in Boyle Heights. After the Golden State Freeway split up Boyle Heights, five more freeways would push through, which includes two massive interchanges less than two miles apart. The Pomona freeway, the 60, was the next that followed, razing the Belvedere area of East L.A. The 101, the 5, the 60, the 710 and the 10 all run through East LA. The Community Redevelopment Agency would step in under the guise of urban renewal and attempt to modernize the area in question, pretty much vacating the previous residents and using the land for whatever the city or private investors wanted. The neighborhoods in Boyle Heights that were destroyed were never replicated; some people managed to move to the suburbs, some people stayed in areas that became ghettos after the freeways were constructed.

The freeways encircling LA's central business district are linked by four major interchanges, each of which stands on what used to be residential areas once identified as "slums" by the HOLC. The interchanges are these: The East LA interchange linking the Golden State Fwy (5). Pomona freeway(60) and Santa Monica freeway (10) which were completed in the early 60s. This interchange stands on a former neighborhood of Boyle Heights, which had been redlined by the HOLC. The intersection of the Harbor Fwy (110) and the Santa Monica Fwy (10) in the southwest corner of downtown LA, displaced a thoroughly blighted neighborhood with a fifty

percent African American population as well as a significant population of Mexican, Japanese and Italian residents.

For the freeways to work, homes were lost, communities were razed, mountains were moved, monuments were replaced with plaques, but something bigger was lost and that was a more communal experience. The freeway would divide communities (spiritually and physically), and the noise and pollution would affect the people who lived there. Around the same time, the historic West Adams area along with Sugar Hill had some homes demolished to pave way for the 10 FWY. Included were dozens of beautiful Victorian and Craftsman homes that were owned by prominent African Americans, a truly historic area. There were several historic battles over housing rights for African Americans and these fights originated over Sugar Hill. The area of Sugar Hill was one of black prominence in Los Angeles. Actress Hattie McDaniel was the unofficial queen of the neighborhood. Her home was a staple of Hollywood elite; it was a soiree house. By the time the urban planners came for the Sugar Hill, many of those original families had left to other areas of Los Angeles, but still those beautiful homes with history were bulldozed. This was around 1963. And because the area had changed from zoning restrictions to allow for multi-family homes, Sugar Hill and West Adams became overpopulated and were seen by many to be a slum. The Los Angeles Sentinel had this to say: "The road could have been built without cutting through the so-called Sugar Hill section," the *Los Angeles Sentinel* explained. "However, in order to miss Sugar Hill, it was 'said' that the route would have to cut through fraternity and sorority row area around USC. Sorority and fraternity row still stands and Sugar Hill doesn't, so you know who won out!". If you drive through Boyle Heights, down 4<sup>th</sup> St,

you'll find Hollenbeck Park. The 10 freeway was built right through it. The park's lake lies in its shadow. What happened to Boyle Heights and Sugar Hill is only a fraction of the lives and neighborhoods changed by the construction of the freeway throughout Los Angeles.

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Ebbets Field was built on Pigtown, a garbage dump. Disneyland was built on orange groves. Dodger Stadium was built on existing lives in Chavez Ravine, an active neighborhood. Los Angeles is not the only city to displace its low-income residents in favor of other peoples ideas of progress and spectacle, but it feels like L.A. has gotten really good at it, all the while boasting about how multicultural we are. "L.A has no history" is an easier idea for some rather than "L.A. has a history of building on top of itself and forgetting what was there before." For those who remember the roads of Chavez Ravine, L.A. isn't a sparkling city of dreams; it's a dogfight.

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