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Toward an Abolitionist Critique of Climate Justice

By

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my work to those who have lost their lives to a crisis. To those gone from wildfires, COVID-19, police brutality, homelessness, and incarceration—I believe the system we live under has failed you somewhere along the way.

I dedicate this work to my nieces, who gave me the inspiration and motivation to come to graduate school and learn all that I could to maybe make the world a better place, just as they have made my world the best place.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge all the scholars whose work has come before mine. Scholars such as Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Laura Pulido have made it possible for us to have the radical imagination of a world without environmental catastrophe and social injustice.

Thank you to my committee Julie Sze, Eric Chu, and Jonathan London for helping through this process. Thank you for the phone calls and Zoom meetings where I talked through some of my toughest challenges.

Finally, a personal thank you to my best friends who I could not have done this without.

Abstract

The climate and environmental justice (CJ/EJ) movements have provided a voice to those suffering from environmental hazards and initiated policy change. However, geographer Laura Pulido et al. (2016) criticizes the EJ movement's reliance on state solutionism and argues that the neoliberal political structure of the United States has stunted the necessary progress needed to address systemic injustices like racism and income inequity, both of which result in "limited gains in improving the physical environments of vulnerable communities" (p.21). This shortcoming extends to the more recent Climate Justice (CJ) movement. Responses to climate injustices include current mainstream regulatory actions which tend to focus on pro-market solutions of mitigation and adaptation; some popular examples include carbon reductionism, green infrastructure, and technological fixes. While this progress is sensible, it ignores the fundamental drivers of structural inequities that make certain communities more vulnerable to climate impacts in the first place. In this paper, I will extend Pulido's critique of the reliance on the democratic orientation of neoliberal policy structures to solve environmental injustices to the CJ movement. I argue that an abolitionist framework that addresses communities' root causes of vulnerability, community history, and current social and environmental challenges could be a useful approach to the CJ movement in order to equitably and holistically address climate impacts. I use a case study of the historically disinvested neighborhood of Boyle Heights in Los Angeles County, California to explore how historic urban and social inequities play a role in community vulnerability to climate impacts. This analysis will be done by examining the spatial compounding crisis of extreme heat risk and housing vulnerabilities, while critiquing municipal governmental response to climate injustices through an abolitionist lens. The results shed light on notable gaps in current urban climate research and CJ movements on the ground, and open up opportunities for radically reimagining climate interventions through abolition. This research suggests that the field of abolitionist studies can provide a new framework that ultimately demands the unveiling of root causes of vulnerability in communities facing increasingly severe climate extremes. This research can provide a more holistic roadmap to reparations and adaptations for communities experiencing climate crisis.

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Introduction—Layers of Crises

Just within my two years of graduate school (2019-2021) there have been multiple catastrophes in our social, political, and environmental spheres. We are living amidst a deadly global pandemic, where many of us virtually carried on with school and work while essential workers were staring COVID-19 in the face. Simultaneously, we are witnessing climate change transform our environments right in front of our eyes. In California, the summer skies of 2020 were filled with smoke from 4,105,786 acres of land burned by wildfires (CAL Fire, 2020), where over half of the acres burned each year can be attributed to climate change (Abatzoglou & Williams, 2016). Meanwhile, social movements are swelling. During the Spring of 2020, George Floyd died in police custody while police officer Derek Chauvin forced a knee on his neck for nine minutes. He was one person out of the 164 people killed in police custody in the first eight months of 2020 (Cohen, 2020). This murder, amongst other violence against black folks, brought the already growing Black Lives Matter movement into full swing all over the nation. Predominantly Black communities were met with state-led violence, tear gas, and rubber bullets all of Spring and Summer of 2020.

These social, political, and environmental crises are vital to the context of my thesis. I cannot write within this time period without acknowledging all that is going on with our world and our people. We have come to normalize chaos and, in a time of so much despair and mortality, the passivity to turmoil ought to be deconstructed. As a Community Development graduate student, my goal is to think deeply and critically about the events that affect our communities. Analyzing across scales and diverse communities, these crises are interconnected and have been produced and nurtured by long histories of state-sanctioned violence. The authoritarianism and violence of the Trump era, the long history of America reproducing a

police-state that systemically targets black people, the rampant unmanaged spread of deadly COVID-19, and the land of California burning up right to the edge of my own backyard are just some of the events of the past two years that have flared up out of a dysfunctional government. Simultaneous crises are rising in a state founded upon/in settler colonialism and it is not a surprise. This is our normal and resting state. It has been seen throughout history: the intersections of classism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism are co-crises that manifest for many people in America. As Julie Sze (2020) contextualizes in her book “Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger”, we are in a moment of danger, precariousness, survival, and *crisis*. Looking onward contextually with the state of the world, the climate crisis is set to continue to exacerbate existing tensions if nothing is changed.

As crises layer, we scramble to find solutions. Historically, social movements such as the Civil Rights Movement and parts of the Environmental Justice movement rely on the democratic orientation of neoliberal policy structures (Pulido, 2017). The general process for social movements and policy structure to “work” is something that I coined as the: “injustice-advocacy-policy change pipeline”. This simplified model suggests that there is a social injustice that exists; people organize and advocate for their rights and voices to be heard, then, if their work pays off, there will be a policy change. This can happen at different scales of government or other structures. Mainstream society has accepted the government recognizing the existence of injustice by following up with policy changes as “success,” as if the injustice is then eradicated. An example of this is the more conservative perspective that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 eradicated discrimination because the law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. We have come to understand through fields of study like Critical Race Theory (West, 1995) that the “injustice-advocacy-policy change pipeline” does not

fix social issues that are ingrained in the social fabric of our institutions such as racism. There is more work that needs to be done.

I argue that this pipeline structure to policy change is also too narrow to address climate injustices. The Climate Justice movement will not “succeed” under this pipeline structure and follows the same critical sentiment that more work needs to be done other than just policy change. Understanding climate justice requires recognizing that climate change does not impact everyone equally. This reality confronts the question: how can climate justice be achieved when the climate is actively changing, warming, and harming people? The virtue of “justice” stemming from antiracist and feminist definitions requires radical hope for change in a world governed by a system that doesn't always prioritize it. This thesis aims to rethink how climate justice is being “achieved” and suggests there is a different framework through which to approach the movement.

Benford and Snow (2000) have discussed the concept of “framing” regarding social movements. The framing of social movements is important because it “denotes an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction. It is active in the sense that something is being done, and processual in the sense of a dynamic, evolving process. It entails agency in the sense that what is evolving is the work of social movement organizations or movement activists” (p.614). The climate justice movement is not fixed and the way it is approached or framed is evolving through more radical intentions. Julie Sze and Jonathan London (2008) discuss how environmental justice is at a crossroads as it expands to address new communities, problems, and geographies. Climate justice, as an extension of environmental justice, follows the same sentiments. The movement is about expansion, and through time, I believe, inherently radicalization. Academia and activists

continue to move the conversation about climate justice in this direction, but I believe there are still gaps in the policy and solution-based climate justice work. The mechanisms our government and institutions use to achieve “justice” in climate justice are lacking and narrow. There is a basic belief in our society that our government is supposed to bring us long-term solutions to improve collective welfare. I set out to dig into this belief, to uncover that the actions to “justice” brought by institutions and government are not enough for the “moment of danger” we find ourselves in.

Climate injustices are rooted in and at the intersections of racism, settler colonialism, and capitalism. To conceptualize the impacts of climate change and the injustices experienced on the ground, this research explores the intersection of historical housing practices, the current housing crisis, and climate-induced extreme heat. I explore the discussion of housing as it intersects with heat to understand how humans are experiencing climate crisis within our own everyday environments. To holistically approach the gap in climate justice, it is important to address the institutional barriers in our urban realm that exacerbate climate-related injustices such as historical housing discrimination, disinvested neighborhoods, and de facto residential discrimination. These housing-related barriers have actively increased communities’ exposure rates to extreme heat and pose a public-health risk, therefore resulting in those impacted people facing a climate crisis. This research will use a case study of a majority Latinx neighborhood in the Boyle Heights area of Los Angeles County to demonstrate the urgency for a new approach and framework to this work.

The framework I suggest and defend through this work is abolition. I define abolition through this thesis as a transformative framework that reimagines society free of oppressive structures and recognizes histories of injustices in order to create that new vision (Critical

Resistance, 2020). In a podcast called *The Intercept*, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, an abolitionist geographer, says “Abolition is about presence, not absence. It's about building life-affirming institutions” (*The Intercept*, 2020). Abolitionist studies can offer the climate justice movement tools and ways of thinking to address how people are being threatened and impacted by climate change at the root cause of vulnerability. It can begin to critique how our institutions approach climate change and climate injustice. The long urban histories of places have not been “life-affirming” when it comes to explicit racist and oppressive policies that influence our environments today. Abolition opens doors for imagining beyond the abstract global narratives, requiring each community to tell its own story and unravel unique and individual solutions.

Methodology:

The purpose of my research is to understand the following question: in what ways can the field of abolitionist studies inform Climate Justice policy initiatives to address root cause vulnerability on a neighborhood level? To investigate this question, I have executed a *transversal narrative review*. A transversal narrative review is done by examining existing literature and other secondary sources to identify key themes and issues across multiple disciplines. I use this method specifically to synthesize approaches to climate justice as a movement and abolition as a framework. To understand the full picture, I have conducted an *empirical analysis* of historic housing practices and policy and the current housing crisis to expose the root causes of environmental injustices. To further ground this research, I introduce a *case study* of the Boyle Heights (BH) neighborhood in Los Angeles to examine how the city government is approaching the impacts of climate change-induced heat.

I use an abolitionist approach to my research throughout this thesis by using principles of abolition as a guiding light. These principles demand that we consider the systems, histories, and stories of places and communities. I intentionally write in a scaled perspective—starting off with a “zoomed out” look of climate change policy, housing inequities, and abolitionist studies, then “zooming in” and examining how the larger systems affect people on a neighborhood level in Boyle Heights in order to properly understand how people are affected by climate change-induced heat. This attempts to conduct research in a way that is meaningful, performed ethically, and which humanizes the impacts of climate change.

The case selection of Boyle Heights also came from the need to focus this conversation on a neighborhood level. This comes from the idea of “climate embodiment,” introduced by Michael Mendez (2020), that climate change is an embodied experience felt on a neighborhood

level. Climate embodiment works to humanize climate change and capture its' material and embodied impact. I selected the neighborhood of Boyle Heights to use as a case study because it is located in the biggest metropolitan area in California—Los Angeles; this vibrant community is also rooted in a distinct urban history filled with diverse and complex stories. Boyle Heights is known to have a layered and complicated urban formation with immigration history, racial formation, and urban politics. The neighborhood has faced many challenges throughout history with redlining, Japanese internment, the construction of the biggest freeway interchange in California, and much more. As a part of his book on the neighborhood, urban scholar George Sanchez (2020) has described Boyle Heights as a “dynamic multicultural community that has forged solidarity through a history of social and political upheaval,” as well as “the future of the United States” (p.21). This captures BH’s iconic presence in California. The diversity and history of the community make it a good case to examine under the climate justice abolition lens.

This research is meant to contribute to growing research in the field of Critical Environmental Justice which seeks to push more transformative change in the environmental justice field (Pellow, 2017) and explore how abolition can be applied to the broader Climate Justice movement. There is a significant amount of research in climate change and its impact on communities. This research adds to the field by using abolition as a theory and framework to discuss how climate justice can be better achieved and create transformative life-saving change as we experience climate change. Throughout this thesis, I will carefully examine the climate crisis through a materialist perspective by focusing on how people are experiencing and interacting with climate change in their everyday lives. This is done by exploring how our governmental structure and processes, climate change, and communities all interact. In this, the overarching goal is to expose what impacts are present today and the ways in which the history

of place has impacted the root causes of vulnerability, as well as propose a new way to approach solutions. Beyond this, the use of abolitionist theory takes the material exposure of these issues and goes deeper to propose a new approach to climate justice policies.

Limitations:

This research was conducted through the use of secondary sources of literature, articles, and other written internet sources and overall could have been strengthened with the addition of more primary sources. The future of this research would benefit from in-person interviews, surveys, and a more community-involved approach. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I felt very limited in the amount of time and resources that I had to ethically conduct in-person interviews myself. Furthermore, the community of Boyle Heights is already under-resourced and I believe that interviews might have been extractive during such a stressful time. The collective trauma of COVID-19 impacted my research and resulted in some limitations.

Chapter 1- Literature Review:

Conceptualizing crisis:

Climate change scientists have predicted a warming of a minimum of 4 degrees Celsius this century (IPCC, 2021). In 2018 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change declared that we have twelve years to address the climate crisis or there would be irreversible effects (IPCC, 2018). This along with other effects of climate change like increased natural disaster, heat waves, wildfires, etc. will disproportionately affect low income communities, communities of color, Black folks, Indigenous people, as well as the “global south” (Tsosie, 2007). Climate change can be seen as a global issue that environmental and climate justice activists have tried to tackle through advocating a state centered approach like calling for stronger environmental regulations (Pulido et al. 2016). There are National environmental regulations that are meant to improve the environment as a whole and therefore mitigate climate change on a large scale such as the Clean Air Act (1963). Also there are more specific international treaties that address climate change such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (effective 1994) as well as the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and Paris Agreement (2015) that require agreement and ratification by countries to “opt in”. Despite the efforts of activists, the U.S. has pulled out of both agreements under Republican presidents- the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 under George W. Bush and the Paris Agreement in 2020 under Donald Trump. Having the fate of our global environment be contingent on a two party political system where one side is in a state of denial breeds an insecure future. This is unacceptable and unsustainable due to the fact that the climate crisis is a material phenomenon and a fateful one at large.

Climate change policy also happens at smaller scales. States, neighborhoods, and schools are all entities that can draft up climate action plans often aiming at reducing carbon emissions or

encouraging more sustainable behavior among the community. As Michael Mendez (2020) has framed in his book “Climate Change in the Streets”, climate change worldviews can be between two positions- carbon reductionism and climate change from the streets. Carbon reductionism refers to the global treaties and other policy efforts to reduce the largest amount of emissions through market based solutions like cap and trade (Mendez, 2020). This approach relies on state initiatives through the mechanism of capital motivated legal agreements. When these legal agreements are infringed upon, fees are charged to the responsible party. This tactic of trying to reduce carbon emissions and therefore improve the environment of the planet relies on mitigating climate change through an enforcement of fee based consequences when corporations pollute. On the other hand, climate change policy at the local scale relying on community action plans lack accountability and proper metrics to ensure that community climate impacts are actually being reduced and mitigated. Given the years of activism, work by local and national government, and scholarship that has gone into climate justice, poor communities of color are still disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards.

Many scholars in the field of environmental justice such as David Pellow (2017) David Scholsberg (2012), Julie Sze (2021), Jonathan London et al (2013), and Laura Pulido (2016, 2017, 2019) have discussed the conflict and tension of environmental and climate justice policy. Scholars like Pulido et al. (2016) have suggested that the reliance on the state to regulate environmental injustices is in need of reassessment in order for the movement to keep progressing. This extends to climate injustices as well. The traditional governmental mechanisms to mitigate impacts of climate change through carbon emission regulation and sustainability planning lack the urgency transformation as needed when considering the impacts of climate change on human health and wellbeing.

Relying on fees as a way to mitigate carbon emissions creates a space for white supremacy and racial capitalism to impact communities and produce environmental racism. The neoliberal approach to regulatory noncompliance is to hold the “individual”, usually a large polluting corporation, monetarily responsible. This creates the space for white supremacy and racial capitalism because these large corporations are worth billions of dollars and have the money to pay these fines and continue to pollute neighborhoods with dominantly Black and POC residents. This extractive exchange between corporate America and low income BIPOC people is a byproduct of the inception industrial capitalist model historically. Laura Pulido et al. (2016) tells the story of the battery recycling company Exide as an example of racial capitalism and using market-based solutions inflicting environmental injustice on the vulnerable community of Vernon, California. Exide was out of compliance and leisurely paying off violations because they had the money to do so all the while they continued polluting. The profit this company was making exponentially outweighed the violations. The pollution to the surrounding Latinx community was intentional- it was written in a report that low income POC neighborhoods were less likely to resist Exide for polluting. Exide was creating a monetary profit by using the environment non-white people reside in to recklessly and knowingly pollute. Billion dollar white-owned companies like Exide profited at the expense of the Latinx communities health which reproduces white supremacy through that very act. Basing consequences through a monetary penalty in a capitalist society that is built to keep the rich on top, is inherently flawed and makes justice unachievable.

The phenomenon of climate change has transferred from hypothesis to fact through rigorous scientific research and observations (Crist, 2007). Low income residence of color, women and children are most affected by the impacts of climate change (Islam & Winkel, 2017).

Indigenous people, who have a drastically lower carbon footprint than the average non-indigenous person, will also be disproportionately affected by climate change (Tossie, 2007). We hear the words “climate crisis” a lot, but what constitutes a crisis?

Crisis is a human experience, not an object but an ongoing event of humanity that requires urgency and inference of negative impacts (Tangjia, 2014). Wang Tangjia, author of “A Philosophical Analysis of the Concept of Crisis” (2014) says that “Crisis is a dangerous state of affairs that becomes a significant threat to the existence or development of a person, organization, group, country, and even of humanity.” (p.261). Climate change can be linked to cause over 250,000 deaths annually (World Health Organization, 2021), situating it within a crisis as a “demarcation between life and death” (Tangjia 2014, p. 261). Crisis does not exist without vulnerabilities, and when a hazard and a vulnerability come together, that’s when a crisis emerges (Ribot, 2019). Poor, Black, Indigenous, and other people of color have historically been and continuously are vulnerable groups that experience environmental crises at exponential and exaggerated rates.

To address climate change in a climate crisis, without addressing vulnerabilities that result in crisis is a broken approach. The causes of vulnerability are seldom used in mainstream climate response assessments (Ribot, 2014). The reason I look at a neighborhood level is to properly examine the vulnerabilities of communities as it paints a more detailed story of the urban history of a place. While climate activists and scholars in the environmental justice field discuss the importance of this, there is a lack of representation of why communities are vulnerable to climate impacts in the first place in local climate adaptation policy. These climate adaptation plans adopted by municipalities often discuss how people can adapt through infrastructural changes but not the system that causes vulnerabilities. While climate justice

activism and scholarship has detailed the importance of addressing more “radical” issues in communities like histories of oppression, it has not seeped into our governmental structures enough to adequately address the urgency of the “demarcation of life and death” (Tangjia 2014, p. 261).

Climate Justice:

Climate justice is a concept and a movement. It emerged from the environmental justice movement. Environmental justice embraces the principle that all people and communities have a right to equal protection and equal enforcement of environmental laws and regulations. The environmental justice movement is known to have emerged from the reaction to environmental disasters such as the 1982 protests of toxic waste dumping in a landfill close to the majority Black neighborhood in Warren County, North Carolina (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). This caused research to turn toward the issue of the disproportionate environmental risks that Black communities were facing. The poor environmental conditions found in majority Black neighborhoods that were caused by industrial activities owned and usually operated by rich white men was a larger symptom of structural racism and white supremacy. Scholars like Robert Bullard, known as the father of Environmental Justice, have reflected on the intersections of environmental disaster, race, and class (Bullard, 1993).

Bullard (2009) discusses the preexisting social injustices in New Orleans and poor infrastructure that already made the community vulnerable to disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. The poor response from the government post-Katrina in terms of aid and relief also identified that the Black population was already facing disinvestment before Katrina. Bullard's scholarship started a conversation about climate vulnerability and how these environmental

disasters will disproportionately affect Black communities and other people of color and will need to seek and advocate for “climate justice.” This creates an understanding that climate change is a symptom of capitalism as a form of organized oppression.

The two general strategies to address climate change are adaptation and mitigation. In a neoliberal world, climate justice policy would create change by helping the vulnerable communities adapt to climate change and increase their access to resources. The recognition of environmental and climate justice by various organizations is a key mechanism in creating climate justice policy. The NAACP has an Environmental and Climate Justice Program that was created to provide resources and support community leadership of frontline activists starting in 2009 (NAACP, n.d). Since then they have launched several campaigns to fund and address environmental and climate injustices happening to people of color all around the United States (Timeline Overview, NAACP). Their main goals are to: reduce harmful emissions focusing on greenhouse gasses, advance energy efficiency and clean energy, and strengthen community resilience and livability. These efforts by the NAACP recognize climate justice as a legitimate health crisis and advocate for state and national policy reform but also invest in communities to create change on their own grounds.

The strides in policy change regarding climate change have been substantial. Climate Justice activists have no choice but to work within the existing system to make changes. But the urgency of climate change has given rise to more radical perspectives. In February of 2013, there was a revolutionary article in the *Boston Phoenix* titled “The New Abolitionists- Why the climate justice movement must embrace radicalism” written by Wen Stephenson that piloted some radical reimaginings of the climate justice movement. This article was written soon after the biggest environmental civil unrest event of the 2012 Keystone XL (KXL) Pipeline protests

where 1,253 climate activists were arrested and massive amounts of police brutality was inflicted on protestors. More recently, two indigenous activists were criminally charged in South Dakota for peacefully protesting the construction of the KXL on indigenous land (Democracy Now, 2021). The police and carceral state of our society is used as a response to activists and communities protesting environmental injustices. Stephenson sheds light on the militant policing of the KXL protests and environmental activism. The article goes on to say:

“At this late hour in the climate crisis, with the clock ticking down on civilization, to be serious about climate change-based, mind you, on what science and not ideology prescribed- is to be radical.” (p.24)

Stephenson continues on to draw parallels between the climate justice movement and abolitionist movement. He says “What resonates, then, is not so much the analogy to slavery itself, or any literal comparison to the abolitionist actions, but the role of the abolitionist movement, as a movement in American and human history...” (p.24). This article brings together abolition and climate justice as movements to draw parallels and demonstrate the urgency of human lives and rights in both movements. These radical imaginings are essential to the climate justice movement in the activist perspectives as they are on the front lines of this urgent fight. Tim DeChristopher, a fossil fuel and prison abolitionist, was incarcerated for his climate activism in 2008. In an interview for the UK magazine Red Pepper he says “We are not looking for small shifts; we want a radical overhaul of our economy and society.” and with more hopefulness through the catastrophe “[climate crisis] means that we are going to have to build another world out of the ashes of this one. And it could very easily be a better world.”. This sentiment is extremely reminiscent of Fredrick Douglass- “If there is no struggle there is no hope.”

Housing

Space, place, and environments are essential to how a person accesses opportunity and resources. Housing is a manifestation of those opportunities and resources. The segregation of American communities within geographic boundaries was legislated in urban planning policies throughout time and are ingrained in America's urban foundation. Exploring historic and contemporary spatial inequities such as the long history of housing discrimination can explain how communities are vulnerable to climate change and are facing a climate crisis.

The formation of modern land ownership comes from violent settler colonial domination of Indigenous land who viewed land as communal. Settler colonialism refers to the intention of new people settling and making home on lands inhabited by Indigenous peoples (Tuck and Wang, 2012). Gaining control of land through colonial ownership creates a source of capital for the colonizer. Settler colonialism is highly concerned with spatial domination of land and transformation into private property (Tuck and Wang, 2012). The conversion of land to property implies ownership, where throughout American history European settlers created a system to control the human relationship to land through jurisdictional means. The domination and power relationship to land creates this binary between land as a commodity and people as tenants where the owner gets to decide how it's used.

Settler colonialism is described as an ongoing structure, process, and system not a singular event (Wolfe 2006, Glenn 2016). Settler colonialism as a system has paved the way to the modern American housing economy. The modern and general housing process goes as follows: a plot of land is bought by a developer, a place of shelter is materially constructed, the land owner rents or “loans” the space to other people through an exchange of capital.

Participation in the housing economy is a social and legal requirement of the human experience. The settler colonial construction of shelter through privatized land and the commodification of housing has created this inequitable housing system that is nearly impossible to not participate in. In our society being without shelter, or homeless, is criminalized and highly stigmatized.

Private property ownership is a means of capital production and a central element to capitalism. Through a Marxist critique of political economy, the relationship of capitalism and private property is that it is a main source of how many individuals accumulate wealth (Marx, 1867). In this Marxist perspective, privatization of land is a social relationship where the property owners have more power and wealth which takes autonomy away from non-land owners of the working class which results in their alienation and exploitation due to the inherent capitalist power dynamics between the working class (non-land owners) and the bourgeoisie (land owners) (Marx, 1867). Along with racial capitalism, identifying racism as a structuring logic to capitalism (Robinson, 2000), this system inherently creates social inequities based on race, income, immigration status, sex, etc. This analysis is important in relation to the climate crisis as it identifies inequities related to people's access to quality environments.

In a capitalist system where wealth and power can be generated through land ownership, it is important to understand that not all environments are equal. Many people have to experience their environments being toxic to them- apartment buildings next to freeways, inadequate greenspace, and poor air and water quality. The analysis of our current housing system through a settler colonial and Marxist lens sheds light on how people are experiencing a climate crisis relative to their living situations. The domination and possession of land through time has created a system where your proximity to being in a climate crisis is dependent on your social position and existing vulnerability, not necessarily the changing climate itself. Climate change as

a crisis is socially constructed through intentional mechanisms of oppression like settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and racist housing policies.

Throughout history there have been compounding policies that exacerbate housing inequity such as redlining. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal created the National Housing Act of 1934. The National Housing Act of 1934 wanted to encourage suburban living and provided subsidized mortgages during the Great Depression and through federal rules and regulations, encouraging the practice of redlining. The Federal Housing Administration adopted rules and regulations that refused to insure mortgages in and near Black and people of color's neighborhoods. These neighborhoods were marked red on "security maps" which meant they were "hazardous". Richard Rothstein (2018), the author of "The Color of Law", discusses the rationale behind this part of the New Deal. The government needed to protect its investment against the threat that Black and other people of color homeowners would decrease property values. Rothstein points out there is no research that backs this claim. This claim is an apparent manifesto of hundreds of years of state sanctioned racism. This along with long-term disinvestment of minority neighborhoods on a broader scale had led to generations of racially segregated cities with poor people of color being generationally poor due to never having the equal chance from overtly racist policymaking of accumulating land and therefore wealth and social mobilization (Rothstein, 2018).

This long history of housing discrimination ties back to settler colonialism and racial capitalism. It is an important connection to consider as climates warm since our housing is the literal shelter that would protect communities from climate impacts such as extreme heat or cold, increased weather events, wildfires, etc. Heat in particular is the number one killer of climate change (National Weather Service, 2018). In the United States, 11,000 heat-related deaths since

1979 according to official death certificates (EPA, nd). People are living in homes and multifamily housing without the necessary infrastructure to be resilient to rising temperatures. There are layers of oppressions that are keeping people trapped and vulnerable to climate change- a new approach is needed.

Abolition:

The model proposed to approach climate justice in this thesis as mentioned is abolitionism. Abolition is a movement and a theoretical framework. Abolition refers to the actions that interrupt and work to destroy the carceral society's tools that allow for capture and control of human beings (Critical Resistance, 2020). Abolition as a movement is focused on complete disintegration of the structures and systems that inflict racial injustice (Critical Resistance, 2020). Historically, abolition refers to the movement to abolish slavery but now can be heavily referenced to abolishing the Prison Industrial Complex since the 1980s. This concept also infers a creation of a new way of life beyond the violence of the state. Abolition calls for reforms grounded in deconstructing the power of the carceral state while redirecting collective action toward social infrastructures that do not reproduce inequities but build power within communities (Rustbelt Abolition Radio, 2020).

Abolition emerges from Black radical thought, prison abolition work, black feminist thought, and critical geography. Acknowledging that abolition is a material movement but also being applied as a theoretical framework will move the argument forward to the possibility of seeing justice through a new vision. Abolitionist praxis creates ideas of freedom, justice, security and community without relying on state powers (Rodriguez, 2019).

Black scholars throughout history have crafted the field of abolitionist studies from the ground up. Namely, WEB DuBois, Angela Davis, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore have been scholars in the field of abolitionist studies through history and now. WEB DuBois was an abolitionist in the late 1800s and early 1900s and coined the term “abolition democracy” which states that we must work to abolish institutions that rely on the domination of one group over another (DuBois, 1935). This has inspired more recent work by Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore that recognize the concept and practice of abolition is more a sentiment of freedom from oppression in totality. Therefore, the extension of the long history of “abolition” as a concept and practice to climate change relies on looking at the systems that replicate oppressions and exacerbate the impacts of environmental injustices. Climate change does not exist in a vacuum- it is happening everyday in our communities where social structures need to be re-examined in order to approach the process of achieving Climate Justice.

To ground the framework, abolition as a conceptual entity envisions a world without systemic violence, racism, white supremacy and carceral power from the state. Robert Fanuzzi (2014) traces the etymology of “abolition” in a short essay saying “abolition is a word we use when we want to activate scholarship with a sense of urgency, relevance, or potential for the future.” He continues to say that abolition continues to play an important role in explaining the need for disrupting the “history of radical social justice movements into conversations about injustices that have not been abolished and charging U.S. history with unmet political needs and ambitions that render it neither finished nor secure.” (Fanuzzi, 2014, para 3). It is the concept that explains necessary social and political change that hasn’t been done yet. The way Fanuzzi explains abolition can be applied to achieving climate justice as an action and a necessary means to address the impending crisis.

Extending from abolition is abolition ecology and abolition geography. These concepts can be applied on the ground and formulate a future of climate justice. Ruth Wilson Gilmore writes about how carceral geographies are something people of color see in their everyday environment (Gilmore, 2007). BIPOC can be highly restricted and policed with which activities they can participate in, due to environmental impacts. Abolition ecology seeks to build intuitions and processes that are centered on the political ecology necessities of access to fresh air, clean water, land, environment free of toxic chemicals, etc. (Heyen & Ybarra 2020). The concept draws on the history of how BIPOC mobilize beyond injustices, make places for themselves, and materialize their environments within their own worldviews. Abolition ecology is an important framework when taking up the challenge of revisioning a future where climate justice is achieved and working everyday in small steps to make it happen. Identifying and recognizing that people of color are suffering in carceral geographies can start the process of diving into the histories of those affected and then create a game plan moving forward to create an existence without injustices. Heyen and Ybarra (2020) expand the abolition ecology discourse by saying that recognizing the deeper racialized ways that environments have been unequally socially produced through connections to settler colonialism and racial capitalism. This inherently extends itself to the work of Climate Justice.

Climate Justice advocates like Tim DeChristopher have participated in fossil fuel abolition activism protesting the expansion of fossil fuels and admittedly advocating for alternative solutions (Farren, 2016). Fossil fuel abolition links the political economy of slavery to our society's heavy reliance on the fossil fuel industry. Chris Haynes wrote an article for "The Nation" comparing the economies of fossil fuels and the slave market back in 1865. He says that the fossil fuel industry is priced somewhere around 20 trillion dollars and the only time there was

this large of an economically vested and problematic market was in 1865 when slavery was being fought to be abolished. Haynes clarifies that this comparison is solely a political economic one. This point is important to bring the conversation to the realization that the climate justice movement using an abolitionist framework is demanding that society say goodbye to trillions of dollars just as the monumental legal abolition of slavery demanded. The politics surrounding climate changing are hyper focused on the economic impacts and profits lost to the richest people in the world. This is where the ideologies of climate justice and abolition merge together to create climate justice abolitionism. The need for this framework results from the very anti-capitalist nature of both movements. To implement the ideologies of abolition in this context is to have the ability to imagine new ways of life and to progress beyond the impossibility of an economy free of fossil fuels just as it was done with slavery. Climate justice abolitionism is communal, non-market driven, and humanist.

Chapter 2: A Case of Climate Justice Abolitionism

The climate justice movement identifies that the impacts of climate change are disproportionately affecting BIPOC. The lives of the most vulnerable people are dependent on 100 companies that control most of the capital invested in fossil fuels and are polluting 71% of the world's pollution (Carbon Majors Database, 2017). This is why it is necessary for the ideologies of climate justice and abolition to merge together to create climate justice abolitionism. The need for this framework results from the very anti-capitalist nature of both movements and the acknowledgement that the state may have other intentions reliant on fossil fuel investments and the need to dissolve the power of the state is obvious in this respect. This Chapter will review the logical progression of how the intentions of the climate justice movement and abolition as a framework and worldview can merge to create climate abolitionism.

Many scholars have discussed the large discrepancies in which climate change affects different people due to the histories of colonialism and slavery. Malini Ranganathan and Eve Bratman (2019) are among the first scholars to explore how to employ climate abolitionism on the ground. Their paper “ From Urban Resilience to Abolitionist Climate Justice in Washington, DC” (2019) focuses on climate justice abolition work in a majority Black neighborhood in Washington D.C. The authors recognize something vitally important to the abolitionist approach as mentioned in abolitionist ecology, they say that situating abolitionist climate justice looks like centering historical oppressions of the cities, residents, and landscapes. Ranganathan and Bratman’s framework presents the argument that climate justice is achievable through an abolitionist framework but not a state centered one.

Ranganathan and Bratman explain that the abolitionist framework extends from “Black radical thought, but also through feminist and humanist scholarship. Taken together, these traditions insist that we understand oppression as intersectional and that we read the imperative to rehumanise as core to radical politics.” (p.3) They explain previously that the community of the Anacostia River region of Washington DC has a history of urban and social inequities. The city has employed climate resiliency as a policy approach in this region. The abolitionist framework approach used in their study is to address the issue of climate change impacts in this community by acknowledging the oral histories and historical environmental racism of this area while trying to formulate an ethics of care that aims to undo these historical traumas. This is an antithesis to the more narrow climate resiliency approach the authors describe that is heavily used in this geographic area. The practice the authors describe is about “rehumanizing” this problem solving in the face of the long histories of dehumanization of Black communities.

An abolitionist lens can shine light on problematic discourses that have evolved through state planning for climate change impacts. Climate resilience policy has been prescribed to planning frameworks that will prepare communities and infrastructure to resist climate related stressors. There has been a considerable amount of critique on resilience planning in the field of critical human geography (Mikulewicz, 2019). Resilience planning is unable to recognize the sociopolitical forces at play in many communities, ignores internal social dynamics, and errors on the side of ambiguity. Resilience planning in many communities like the one Bratman and Ranganathan describe in their study, ignores the initial causes of vulnerability in that community. This ties back to the theoretical argument made in Chapter 1, that communities only face crisis when vulnerabilities exist. The vulnerabilities caused by racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and state sanctioned violence against Black communities have existed and been reinforced by the

state. Therefore, for the state to offer heavy “resiliency ” planning without recognizing what inequities the community faces in the first place is unjust and only scratches the surface.

The abolition climate justice framework distinctly calls on a critical consciousness on the interactions between our political system and urban realm. It looks deeply into the construction of the urban realm- analyzing what historical processes placed people in the social and physical positions they are in and how environmental conditions impact them based on that. There needs to be consideration of historic urban inequities due to the impact of conscious racist decision making such as redlining. This consideration is important to be done at smaller scales- regional and neighborhood levels to discover community vulnerabilities to climate change on a more intimate level in order to uncover community needs. Much of urban climate change planning such as resilience planning is done at the local level. Merging the abolitionist urge to comb through histories of inequities and climate change planning can provide solutions based on current social dynamics and stressors. In the next chapter, I cover the urban story of Los Angeles and the neighborhood of Boyle Heights.

Chapter 3: Case Study- Heat on the Ground in Los Angeles

Los Angeles, CA

To understand what makes communities vulnerable to climate change through an abolitionist lens, we must understand the urban history and formation of a place. Los Angeles is a sprawling city in Southern California. Los Angeles has been described as a palimpsest—a city that layered urban scholarship with new information (Brook, 2013). Vincent Brook (2013) describes how LA created its own rules in his book “Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural history of Los Angeles.” For example, LA’s vast freeway system and car centric way of traveling in the mid-1900s was a different blueprint than other urban areas. With the unprecedented development, mix of architecture styles, and cultural diversity, Los Angeles “exists as layers of history, stacked one on top of another “ (Brook, 2013 p.12) says a Gabrielino professor Cindi Alvitre at the University of Long Beach. The region is layered with multiple histories. Los Angeles is amorphous and illusionary, as urban scholar Edward Soja describes the place as “[seemingly] too limitless, and constantly in motion, never still enough to encompass...Los Angeles is everywhere....Everywhere seems to also be in Los Angeles.” (Soja, 1986 p. 255). While scholars describe the region as nebulous and manifold, the residential conditions could tell a story of their own.

Through the rise of the region, people have viewed the city of Angels as a place filled with opportunity to achieve their dreams. The County of Los Angeles comprises 88 cities and has the highest population of any county in the nation with 10.4 million people (Census, 2019). It is considered the second largest metropolitan economy in the nation (Statista, 2020). The County is also a minority majority region, with nearly half of its residents being Latinx and a total of 73% of residents being people of color (USC, 2017). Los Angeles County is the 9th most diverse

metropolitan region out of the largest 150 regions in the Nation. The diversity score is 1.29 out of a possible 1.79, which is only attainable if the representation of the six major ethnic groups (Black, Latinx, API, Native American, White, and other/mixed race) were 100% evenly distributed (USC, 2017).

In order to see how inequities manifest within the urban realm, it is important to look as far back as the establishment of a place. Before Hollywood, the glitz and the glam, and what we now know as the region/county/city of Los Angeles was once home to the Gabrielino tribe. There were an estimated 5,000-10,000 Gabrielino people before the first Spanish settlers arrived in 1781 to take the land and establish what is now Los Angeles (Stickel et al., 2019). The forced labor and enslavement of the Gabrielino tribe is what allowed the very first steps of development of the metropolis. The modern establishment and formation of what we identify as LA is a product of slavery and settler colonialism. The creation and current function of a booming region like Los Angeles can be connected to violence against black, indigenous, and people of color. This might be considered the first layer of the palimpsest that is LA.

The Los Angeles region has always carried the narrative of being a beacon of rich cultural diversity and a significant American dream origin story for immigrants. However, the existence of a diverse population did not translate to equality nor create immunity from discriminatory policies. People of color had to fight for their rights to the city or what Edward Soja would describe as “spatial justice” (Soja, 2014). This fight took place against the state and the institutions of power. This would include the housing market, city and county government, the justice system, and white society. This region has seen a wide variety of racial conflicts throughout its growth. It has been the epicenter of one of the most violent riots in U.S history: the Watts Riot that burned down the core of an African American neighborhood as a result of

police violence. From the Chinese Massacre 1871 to the mass deportation of Mexican Americans in the early 1930's, the zoot suit riots of 1965 to the Rodney King and broader justice riots of 1992, people of color have struggled with white supremacy in this region for centuries. The labor movements through the 90s also transformed Los Angeles social structure and highlighted the struggles of people of color within the City (Soja, 2014).

Immigration and the racial formation in Los Angeles speak to the city's character and history of spatial inequalities. Much of the region's foundational infrastructure was built by immigrants such as the roads and railroads by Chinese and Irish people. The labor of immigrants quite literally constructed the City but they also bore the brunt of racial violence. By far, the richest immigration history resides with Mexican-Americans. Neighborhoods such as Boyle Heights in East-Los Angeles in particular have been casually known to have a high population of Chicana people due to restrictive real estate covenants and city zoning ordinances. In 1908, the City adopted the nation's first city wide "use" zoning ordinance to protect residential areas from industrial development. This served as a social control mechanism to control who lives on what land in addition to what is built (Silver, 1997). Ironic to the point that immigrants laid the land in which the power of municipal state is even able to exist. As of 2019, 96.2% of residents identify as Hispanic or Latino in East Los Angeles with a 19.2% poverty rate (Census, 2019).

In 2017, USC published an Equity Profile of the Los Angeles Region. The study claims that Los Angeles is the "7th most unequal out of the nation's 150 largest metro regions" (p.33). The report states that the drivers of income inequity in Los Angeles can be tied to the disappearance of middle-wage jobs, influxes of people of color that face discrimination in the job market, lack of higher education, and income and racial segregation amongst neighborhoods. The region of Los Angeles has seen a 27% decrease of distinct middle wage jobs between 1990

and 2012. Today, nearly 1 in 5 Los Angeles residents lives below the poverty line which is quantified as \$24,600 a year for a family of four. Of those living below the poverty line, about a quarter are African American and another quarter are Latinx folks (USC, 2017).

Through years of spatial inequality has manifested a disproportionately resourced community. People of color are suffering economic inequity at disproportionate rates and are living in crumbling infrastructure with little protection from environmental disasters. The climate gap refers to the disproportionate and unequal implications that climate change holds for people of color and lower income folks (Shonkoff et al., 2006). Many folks in Los Angeles would be considered vulnerable to climate change determined by the ability to anticipate, cope, resist, and recover from climate impacts such as extreme weather events. Risk factors for heat-related mortality can be categorized as intrinsic or extrinsic (Shonkoff et al., 2006). Intrinsic factors could include pre-existing medical conditions and are more vulnerable. Extrinsic factors could be housing conditions, access to cooling centers, proper landscaping and infrastructure.

Understanding the history of how the larger Los Angeles area was formed is essential in understanding climate change impacts on a neighborhood level. Looking closer at the Boyle Heights neighborhood, knowing the history of immigration, activism, and urban inequities of Los Angeles is vital in diving deeper into the intrinsic and extrinsic risk factors for climate impacts. Boyle Heights has its own unique story to tell.

Zooming in: Boyle Heights

The Boyle Heights neighborhood was selected for this case study for its popularity in urban scholarship, news media, and research. It is a culturally significant place that has gone through many challenges and continues to face a changing social and environmental landscape.

The neighborhood is a symbol of strength given its community's resilience to urban inequities like gentrification which is perfectly summed up in the Netflix show “Gentefied” about a Mexican-American family struggling to deal with a transforming neighborhood and community perfectly placed in Boyle Heights. This chapter uses the abolitionist principles further detailed in the “Methods” section to detail the story of Boyle Heights and how the story interacts with current dilemmas of climate-change induced heat.

In George Sanchez’s book “Boyle Heights” (2020), he describes that Los Angeles had “urban apartheid” that was sustained through private-public partnership between governmental officials and the real estate industry that produced intense segregation through housing covenants. This resulted in two migrant streams of people that geographically split into the Southside and Eastside of Los Angeles (non-white immigrants) and then the Westside (white immigrants). This is how interracial communities like the Boyle Heights neighborhood were born in Los Angeles.

Boyle Heights (BH) is a historic Chicana/Mexican-American neighborhood in East Los Angeles. Similar to the rest of LA, the area became a settlement of relocated immigrants. In the mid 1800’s, Tongva refugees were forcibly removed from their previous land by European settlers. Through time, Boyle Heights became a safe haven for immigrants as it was one of the only communities in Los Angeles that did not have racist housing covenants against people of color in the early 1900’s (Sanchez, 2004). Boyle Heights eventually became a victim to redlining in the 1930’s. The Home Owners Loan Corporation described the area (Mapping Inequity, nd.):

“a 'melting pot' area and is literally honeycombed with diverse and subversive racial elements. It is seriously doubted whether there is a single block in the area which does not

contain detrimental racial elements, and there are very few districts are not hopelessly heterogeneous in type of improvement and quality of maintenance."

Boyle Heights was home to a large Japanese American community until Executive Order 9066, that resulted in mass incarceration of Japanese Americans. According to the documentary "East LA Interchange" directed by Betsy Kalin, an estimated 1/3rd of the local highschool at the time went missing due to Japanese internment. This left a huge gap in the community. This wasn't the only challenge during this time, many Mexican immigrants were targeted for deportation, and the large Jewish community face anti-Semitic violence (Sanchez, 2021).

After WWII, the community continued to face stark transformation due to efforts to construct public housing projects related to "urban renewal" that replaced single family homes and displaced already established residents (Estrada, 2005). The Chavez Ravine was home to a close knit Mexican- American community. In 1950, the three communities in the ravine- Palo Verde, La Loma, and Bishop were all forced to relocate with the promise of the first pick of the new low-rent housing opportunities. In 1959, following the opposition to urban renewal as it abided to more "socialist" or "communist" views, the City of Los Angeles decided not to build federally funded public housing and also not to give the land back to the original residents. Instead, the 300 acres were sold to build the Dodgers baseball stadium (Estrada, 2005).

Also during this time the land was split between 5 freeways that developed 15% of the existing land (Sanchez 2021). In the 1960's, Boyle Heights also experienced massive displacement due to the construction of the largest and busiest freeway interchange in the nation, the East Los Angeles Interchange freeway. Over 35 years of intense freeway construction has eliminated 2,900 homes and displaced more than 10,000 people (Sahagun, 2020).

The intervention of the government regarding housing in BH has proven to those residents that profit is prioritized over the communities' environments. Residents were coerced and even violently extracted from their homes (Estrada, 2005) by the City as a way to make room for more profitable land uses. These intentional urban planning decisions by the government are an exact example of the racial capitalist system we live in. Before the removal the Chavez Ravine community was a thriving self-sustainable neighborhood with 300 acres of unpaved roads, dozens of plots of communal gardens, and grazing sheep and cattle. Many residents of the Chavez Ravine were actively opposed to their removal and many residents were physically removed by police force. The threat and use of state-sanctioned violence has oppressed the BH community for decades. This nonconsensual appropriation of land has had lasting impacts on the community. The Chavez Ravine had enough space and land to grow their own food and create a community not completely reliant on the capitalist industry- this life isn't possible for many Los Angeles residents because of the extraction of land by the government. These decisions made by the government have lasting impacts on the community today. The existence of Dodgers Stadium resulted in immediate displacement but also lasting gentrification threats in the community by increased property values (Abdul-Khabir, 2018). The construction of the freeways displaced thousands of residents and now cause environmental impacts on the air quality and health of the community. The next section reviews the lasting and more current crises in the Boyle Heights community.

Current Crisis in Boyle Heights:

An estimated 2.4 million vehicles pass through the East Los Angeles Interchange freeway everyday. The massive traffic congestion and activity has lasting health consequences for the

residents of Boyle Heights. Emissions from cars and other motorized vehicles can result in an increase of a very dangerous pollutant called ultrafine particles (UFP). A 2019 study of air pollution in Boyle Heights found that the overall average UFP concentrations in the residential areas and main streets were double the average UFP in areas of West Los Angeles (Hu et al., 2012). The UFP's are also 25% higher than the average of other adjacent residential neighborhoods such as Downtown and Southeast Los Angeles. Unfortunately, the US Environmental Protection Agency has not set out to regulate UFP's (EPA, nd) leaving the residents of Boyle Heights to live with a fear of unknown consequences. The intentional construction of the East LA Interchange through the Boyle Heights community where neighborhoods were already established leading to massive displacement without and a victim of environmental racism.

The COVID-19 pandemic has collided with extreme heat resulting in a state of crisis for BH residents. The lack of greenspace has left BH as a hotspot for both COVID and heat. There is only .7 acres of greenspace in the community for 1,000 people in Boyle Heights compared to a more affluent neighborhood like Manhattan Beach which has 12.5 acres per 1,000 people (National Health Foundation, 2020). The lack of greenspace means that the neighborhood absorbs heat into paved surfaces which results in heat being trapped. This also results in a lack of landscaping therefore tree cover and access to shade (National Health Foundation, 2020). During the height of the pandemic in 2020 and when the stay at home order was in place, the community of Boyle Heights lacked access to spaces to both socially distance and remain cool during the summer heat. It is observed that heat increases cardiac output, and with no cool outdoor spaces, many people clustered together in the coolest spots of homes (Colliver & McCaskill, 2021). People with no air conditioning were desperate to gather in indoor areas. BH had both the

highest temperatures in the area as well as the most COVID cases suggesting that there is correlation because of the desperation to be indoors. In addition, the BH community faces housing challenges like overcrowding, defined as more than one person per bedroom. This has made stopping the spread of COVID-19 impossible in houses with many people sharing rooms. The death toll for the BH community as of November 2021 is 376 people compared to a more affluent area in LA such as Bel Air that has only 24 deaths(County of LA Public Health, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic, stay at home order, historic disinvestment of the BH neighborhood leading to little greenspace and landscaping are all compounding factors in a huge crisis this community is facing. The story of Boyle Heights is multifaceted. There are layers of injustice that need to be peeled back to uncover the story and history of this place. The residents of Boyle Heights have repeatedly been faced with state sanctioned violence. The policies that have been inflicted through time such as redlining, racist housing covenants, Japanese internment, and environmental racism. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic literally trapped them in their homes with the stay at home order without consideration that not all homes are built the same. The BH residents are faced with their only places of shelter being unfit for the incoming environmental conditions climate change is promising a troubling fate. The infrastructure of the homes is inadequate, but also the social structure of housing is crumbling at residents' footsteps as they face threats of gentrification, displacement, housing unaffordability, and homelessness.

Housing vulnerabilities:

Using the tools of abolition, analyzing climate injustice can be done by grounding the phenomena of climate change spatially inside the American household. Boyle Heights faces a

multitude of housing issues: dilapidated housing, housing shortages, and now more recently the threat of gentrification. Boyle Heights has been the focal point of renewal and planning projects to try to “save” the community (Sanchez, 2020). The main housing related issue Boyle Heights faces is gentrification. With the rent in the BH community being lower than surrounding areas and the proximity to the Arts District in Downtown Los Angeles, BH has gained a significant amount of attention. The impending threat of displacement due to gentrification creates housing vulnerability in the BH community. Displacement can lead to homelessness, poorer housing conditions, and overcrowding. BH residents also live in smaller houses, have lower incomes, and have more people living in residence than the rest of Los Angeles. They also face a higher rent burden (LURN, 2017).

BH is home to about 87,000 residents that have lower socioeconomic statuses compared to other LA residents with some zip codes having a renter median income of only \$31,388 compared to the City of LA being \$74,103 (LURN, 2017). The root of displacement is the ability to own land and achieve economic stability. If property values rise, due to gentrification or other factors, BH residents have a higher risk than most LA residents of being displaced.

In 1913, the California Alien Land Act was passed saying that the ownership of land by a non-citizen was illegal. This policy has affected land ownership by immigrants today. In 2015, a report by USC estimated that there is approximately 15,000 undocumented people or “non-citizens” living in BH (Elko & Malibiran, 2015). Today, Boyle Heights has a 96.2% Latinx and has a median household income of \$42,972 compared to Los Angeles County as a whole with a median household income of \$68,044 (Census 2019). The historic anti-immigrant policy seems to have had lasting impacts on the majority immigrant neighborhood of BH because about

78% of residents are still renters (LURN, 2017). This makes the residents of BH socioeconomically vulnerable due to the lack of land ownership.

The very foundation of human resistance toward environmental factors is the home. As described previously, the housing system is based on the commodification of land and requires some sort of wealth to maintain. BH residents are facing the shakiest of grounds when it comes to just having a roof over their heads. As a predominantly immigrant community, Latinx, and low income, this community has been historically targeted and disinvested in as explained in the “Zooming in” portion of this Chapter.

An abolitionist lens requires a deeper dive into the history and formation of Los Angeles and BH as a neighborhood. Mentioned earlier, the residents of BH have faced multiple urban inequities like redlining, immigration violence, environmental racism, and housing inequities. The capitalist tool of using property ownership and security as a means of wealth accumulation leaves the BH community extremely vulnerable to economic, social, and environmental stressors. Housing is shelter. It provides humans with protection from the environment. The threat of displacement and homelessness in addition to climate change impacts such as extreme heat need to be considered in order to save this community as environmental conditions continue to be exacerbated.

Heat :

The City of Los Angeles like many major cities suffers from the Urban Heat Island (UHI) Effect which is caused by the extensive amount of heat retaining surfaces and absence of vegetation in cities (CALEPA, n.d). Los Angeles as an urban heat island can result in health threats: increased air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and heat related illnesses and death.

Cities with more than a million people can have an annual mean temperature of 1-6 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than surrounding areas while average nighttime temperature can be as much as 22 degrees Fahrenheit warmer as heat gets released from built infrastructure and pavement (CALEPA, n.d). UHI intensity varies not only across different cities, but also within cities between neighborhoods (Chakraborty, 2019). Heat related illnesses and deaths should be preventable with adequate infrastructure and preparedness. Climate change is directly tied to increased extreme heat events such as the European heat waves of 2015, 2017, and 2019 (Vautard, 2020). Preventing further heat-related deaths and illnesses requires changes in interventions and approach to climate justice.

There are known links between extremely hot weather, poor air quality, and excess morbidity. With global warming in action, this only becomes an increasing threat. Exposure to extreme heat is associated with increased emergency room visits, increased deaths from cardiovascular disease, mental health issues, adverse pregnancy and birth outcomes and an overall increase in health care cost (Lancet, 2020). The impact of Urban Heat Island Effect is specifically harmful because of the inability for the environment to cool down at night, providing no relief for humans to prepare for the next hot day.

The neighborhood of Boyle Heights suffers from extreme heat impacts. In a 2017 heatwave, 8,270 homes in BH were left without power therefore without air conditioning (Colliver & McCaskill, 2021). In the 2020 summer heatwave 74 year old long time BH resident Irma Macedonio had to wrap herself in wet towels just to try to cool down and get some sleep (Margolis, 2020). Because of the urban heat island effect, it never dropped below 90 degrees at night. Irma suffers from high blood pressure and she is considered elderly so although LA opened cooling centers she was hesitant to go due to the threat of COVID-19. Although Irma

does not have air conditioning because it broke and her landlord has not responded to her requests to fix it, even if it was working she may not be able to afford to run it as she lives on a fixed income of 800\$. Irma and many other BH residents were gambling with their lives and unable to afford to accommodate climate change (Margolis, 2020).

A 2019 study found a correlation between poorer neighborhoods experiencing elevated heat exposure. In 72% of the cases the lower income neighborhoods had higher temperatures (Chakraborty et al., 2019). This finding suggests that policymakers should create policy that looks at neighborhood specific Urban Heat Island reduction strategies. The strongest contributor to the difference in heat in neighborhoods is the amount of vegetation present (Chakraborty et al., 2019). Figure 1 and 2 demonstrate the lack of vegetation present in Boyle Heights as well as the correlation of the Urban Heat Island Index.

Figure 1: % of Tree Canopy of Boyle Heights outlined in red in comparison to the rest of Los Angeles. Google Earth Overlay: Urban Heat Island Index by EPA.

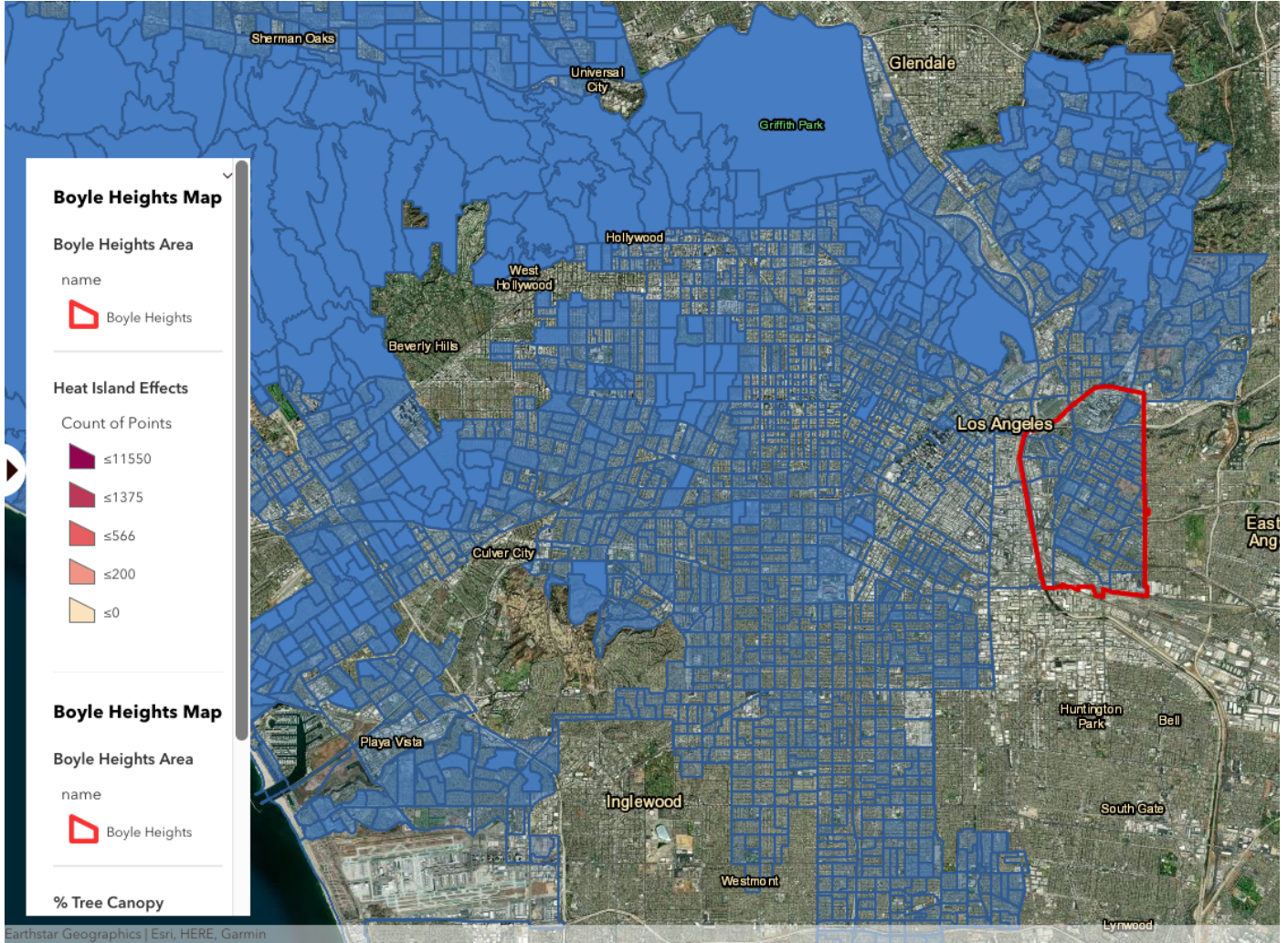
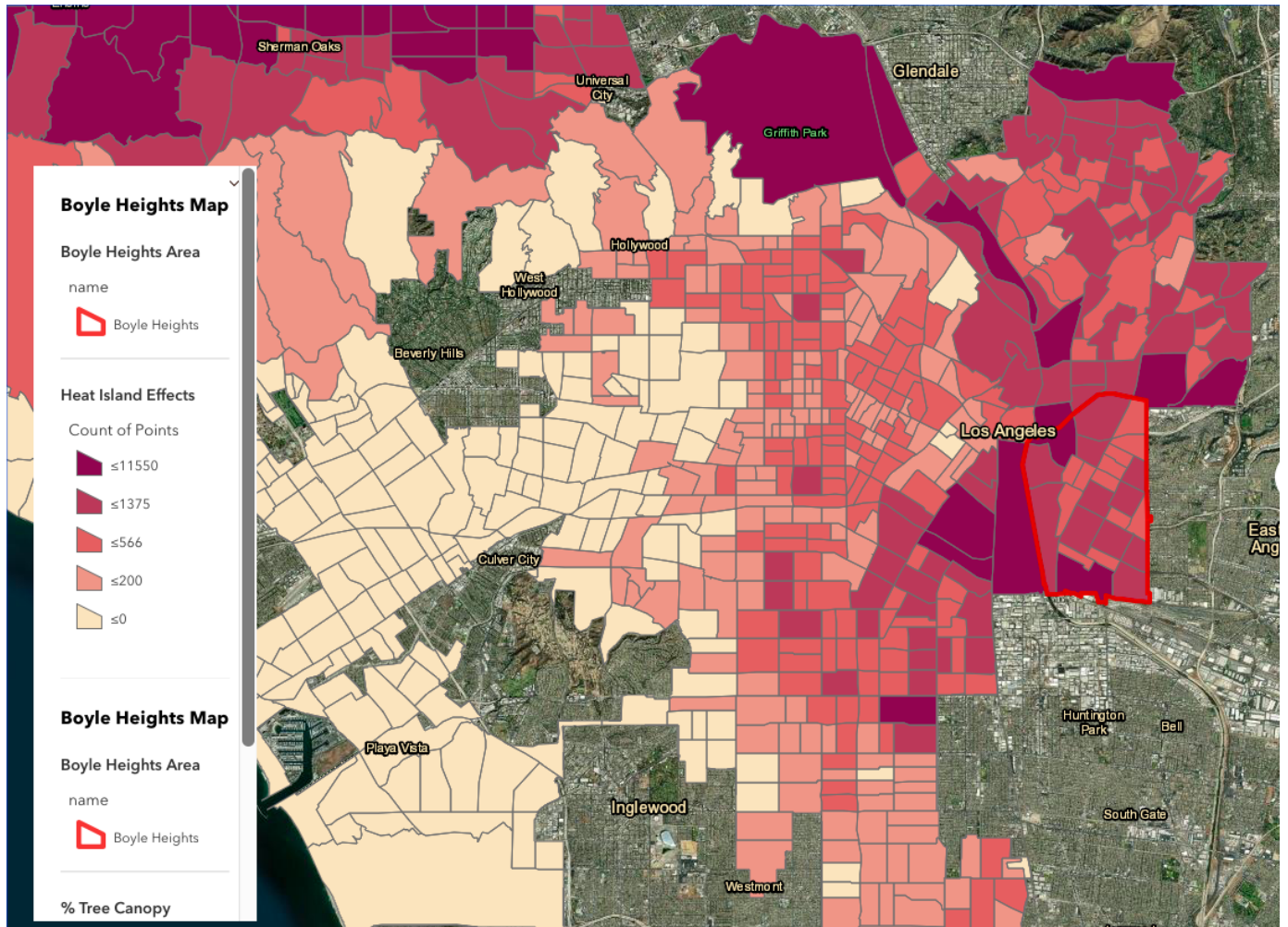


Figure 2: *Urban Heat Island Index of Boyle Heights outlined in red compared to the rest of Los Angeles. Google Earth Overlay: Urban Heat Island Index by EPA.*



Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate the higher Urban Heat Island Index in the Boyle Heights area in correlation to the lack of tree canopy in comparison to Los Angeles as a whole. The Urban Heat Island Index is a useful tool to measure severity of heat and was invented by the EPA. The index “defines and examines the characteristics of the urban heat island, and scientifically assigns a score based on atmospheric modeling for each census tract in and around most urban areas throughout the state” (EPA, nd). The darker pink color indicates a higher index meaning higher temperatures.

Government Response and Abolitionist Critique:

Understanding the impact that is felt from heat and a changing climate on the neighborhood level can guide policymakers to make more impactful solutions. I researched what measures the City and County of Los Angeles have already taken to identify what sort of response the government has shown. It is imperative to this conversation that I describe the information available to the public and how it compares to the severity of the impact of heat on the lower income people of color in Los Angeles such as the Boyle Heights community.

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDP) recognizes the risks of extreme heat and the toll it takes on its residents. On their website it says they take action in a number of ways: cooling neighborhoods or “urban heat island reduction” through implementation of cool roofs, green space, landscaping and cool pavements. There is no specific information about how this is done or any action or implementation plan on the website. The LACDP does mention a five point plan to reduce the health impact of climate change in their “Climate Change and Sustainability Program”. There are educational articles in the “Climate News” section on this page titled “7 things you should know about L.A heat waves and climate change” and “8 options for replacing your lawn with their pros and cons” that both date all the way back to 2016 and 2015. There is no evidence of real “program” or any plan that addresses solutions for the community as the County has made it seem initially.

The more comprehensive action plan comes from the City of Los Angeles. The City of Los Angeles has a sustainability plan that addresses resiliency actions to cool down the city referred to as “L.A’s Green New Deal”. The plan includes: requiring cooling roofs for all new and refurbished homes, piloting “cool neighborhoods” with cooling features like shade and water

parks, installing cool streets, and adding 90,000 trees by the end of 2020. Another goal in the environmental justice section is to reduce the number of childhood asthma related emergency room visits in LA. One of the action items is to deploy community air quality monitoring networks under AB 617 in Boyle Heights by 2021 (PLAN, 2019). There does not seem to be an update at this time on whether or not that goal was reached. This plan is long and full of commendable climate adaptation strategies. “Cool Streets” program that aims to add 60 miles of cool pavement and 2,000 trees to certain neighborhoods including Boyle Heights (CBSLA, 2021)

Highlighted through L.A’s new green deal is improving resiliency. In the “Urban Ecosystems & Resilience” section a goal listed is “reduce urban/rural temperature differential by at least 1.7 degrees by 2025 and 3 degrees by 2035” (p. 122). Many of the initiatives listed are green infrastructure related such as urban greening, cool roofs, cool pavements, water features, upgrade cooling centers and while these are sensible the focus on infrastructure and green technology might be too narrow to address the very complex issues residents of Los Angeles are having regarding heat impacts. It is important to consider people like Irma Macedonio (see section “Housing” para 4) an elderly resident of BH who lives on a fixed income, does not have access to air conditioning all while trapped in her own home due to COVID-19. The complexity and layers of crisis in her life situation is not unique to her. There are thousands of Irma’s all over Los Angeles County trapped in their homes without adequate infrastructure to deal with extreme heat. While cool roofs, cool pavements, water features may reduce heat overall- I do not think these “green infrastructures” address the root cause of the suffering Irma and others like her experience in their everyday lives due to the layers of oppressive structures they may be facing.

Irma's story speaks to a larger gap that a plan like "LA's Green New Deal" does not address. The climate abolitionist perspective demands that people like Irma be directly connected to the plan to reduce climate impacts in Los Angeles. To be clear, I am not suggesting that the community wasn't involved in the drafting of this plan, but I suggest that these plans take community involvement to the next step. Plans like these should tie directly to neighborhoods, individuals, stories and experiences of the people that are impacted. It should be a process of explicit storytelling of the impacts, struggles and crises and tying solutions to real community issues.

Boyle Heights is facing a housing crisis. The plan has a fair amount of consideration for social issues such as housing. The plan includes a goal to create or preserve 50,000 income restricted affordable housing units by 2035. By 2021, the plan was to build 15,000 housing units. While this helps with creating a more holistic approach to climate justice the plan still lacks the nuances needed to address community level housing challenges and the everyday impact of climate change due to the scale of LA. Los Angeles is such a diverse and large City and although this is a City wide plan, I would argue that this plan should be more specific in how it is going to implement these huge promises for each community in need for housing and other goals previously stated.

Climate abolitionism urges us to think outside of normal structures, systems and processes. It is sensible that the City of Los Angeles has this large plan with a lot of big promises and general goals given that this follows suit with what business as usual looks like for a city plan. But we need to stop recreating vagueness when we are facing a climate crisis. The boundaries need to be pushed and demand that cities like Los Angeles and beyond start adapting to a climate abolitionist approach which demands we take a closer look on a smaller scale to

address embodied impacts of climate change. The research on Urban Heat Island Effect supports this- poorer neighborhoods have a higher exposure to heat and therefore heat reduction methods should be implemented on a neighborhood level (Chakraborty et al., 2019). Beyond just scaling down, I would push to say that governments should be as detailed, transparent, and public with their planning and process to implement actions.

Implementing an abolitionist alternative of this plan would demand public facing information on the follow up of goals, transparency, and accountability. When I was researching this, I could not find evidence of progress or success published by the City of LA or other entities. Many of the goals were planned to have been reached by 2020 and 2021. The absence of follow up documentation is evidence of a lack of accountability. It may be possible that the City is preparing an updated document, but even so I believe that the ongoing and everyday process of implementing these goals should be documented and public facing in a streamlined manner. This means the information should be accessible and consolidated on the same website that the plan is on or through the City's website. The goal of building 15,000 housing units can probably be traced by digging into the City's permitting documents or doing some other serious research, but that is not accessible or community-friendly accessible information. Revisioning these climate justice related plans can create more engaging and humanizing actions towards achieving justice.

Resiliency planning like LA's Green New Deal is applied as a guiding concept for governments to address climate change. Many scholars (Wardekker et al., 2020; Mikulewicz 2019; White & O Hara, 2014) have discussed how the goals and definitions of resiliency planning can be vague and implicit. Resilience planning in practice can be seen as a way for "future proofing, without clear-cut interpretation of what it means or how specific interventions might

improve [practice].” (Wardekker et al., pg 2). Analyzing this through a critical environmental justice lens as scholars like David Pellow (2017) suggests will point out the gaps in this type of planning to recognize the inequity specifically by black, Latinx, and elderly folks. This analysis will lead to the proposal of a more grounded framework of abolitionism where we critically consider who is suffering the most and reorient justice through other means.

Chapter 4: Climate Justice on the Ground in LA

It is critical to recognize the grassroots organizing taking place in Los Angeles as a vital piece of this whole puzzle. The city government may have gaps in their plans through an abolitionist perspective, but there are groups who are working tirelessly to bring change to their communities. Groups like Liberty Hill, Communities for a Better Environment, and East Yards Communities are all organizations working on environmental and climate justice in the Los Angeles Area focusing on low income and communities of color. While all the groups are fighting for a great cause, Communities for a Better Environment lays the groundwork for an abolitionist climate justice approach

Communities for a Better Environment:

This community-focused organization focuses on local transformation from the ground up and works to empower those who are suffering most to advocate for a better environment.

Communities for a Better Environment's (CBE) vision is:

“CBE envisions a society in which production and consumption are based on environmental and social sustainability, where it's held as a basic human right to breathe clean air and drink clean water in the environment where we live, work, go to school, play, and pray—regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, culture, ability, nationality, or income.” (CBEcal, nd. “Vision and Mission”, para 6).

CBE has elements of what would be considered an abolitionist approach to climate justice work.

This vision clearly outlines a radical and inclusive approach.

CBE works on a neighborhood level in some of the most affected areas like Vernon, Wilmington, and Huntington Park- all cities with neighborhoods greatly affected by severe cases

of environmental injustices. The organization focuses directly on the community's issues and strategizes to solve them. There is an abundance of updated and current information on their website with research, fact sheets, implementation plans, and resources. The website offers information about the history of communities, current work, and the processes in which they will execute their goals. CBE is doing radical and transformative work in a way that is transparent and community involved.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Radical Hope

The community of Boyle Heights faces a reality that many American communities don't find special. There are layers of urban inequities that influence modern environmental and social impacts. The climate justice movement suggests that there are solutions for communities to achieve justice through mechanisms like climate mitigation and adaptation. The climate abolitionist lens demands that we look at specific community context to approach solutions.

Laura Pulido (2016, 2017) has said that the environmental justice movement has had great success but has not succeeded in actually improving the environmentals of vulnerable communities. This same logic relates itself to the climate justice movement. Approaching a climate justice movement that demands to understand communities' past racial violence and how the state has sanctioned and produced racial violence is required to make those real improvements. Pulido (2017) repositions environmental racism to recognize the state as the source of opposition instead of a partner to work with. This is highly relatable to the messages of abolition which demands a shift from reliance on state solutionism to a more radical visioning of justice for victims of climate injustice. This involves centering the impacts of the climate crisis on vulnerable people as rooted in generations of state sanctioned violence, as previously stated . So, this brings me back to Irma Macedonio- what does climate abolitionism look like for her?

Climate abolitionism needs to be about not only radical hope for a better tomorrow, but radical actions that will achieve that goal. As the critical geographer and abolitionist Ruth Wilson Gilmore says in a New York Times interview, "Abolition requires that we change one thing, which is everything. When one says prison abolition, one cannot be talking about only prison. ... It's building the future from the present in all the ways we can," (Kushner, 2019 para 8). Climate justice policy must take tangible steps to reach those most affected by a changing climate

through addressing pre existing vulnerabilities and providing material assistance like housing renovations, monetary contributions, and other community-specific needs. For Irma Maceonio, she would have a fixed air conditioner, she wouldn't have to worry about the cost of her air conditioning through the summer, and overall she would probably live in a more supportive housing situation with resources to help her adapt to social and environmental challenges. These needs could be addressed as a part of the more radical and community focused bottom up approach that organizations like Communities for a Better Environment demonstrate. What I have described is only a small piece of the pie, Irma's life among others in Boyle Heights and beyond would require positively "changing everything". It sounds formidable, but with abolition, possible.

Radical hope in a time as disastrous as 2020-2021 has been, looks like recognizing and reclaiming the vulnerabilities that seek to deny the mobilization of communities to disrupt their changing climates. It looks like resistance to an apocalyptic fate that is sanctioned on us by the powers at be. The conclusion to this thesis turns to small and large steps of climate abolitionism being a way of thinking, acting, and responding to what might seem like a fate that's already written.

As prison abolition is about "changing everything" like Ruth Wilson Gilmore says, so is climate justice abolition. Although that seems like a daunting task, we cannot treat prison abolition or climate justice abolition as one singular event. Although radical, urgent, and transformative change is needed, the steps to achieve this is an ongoing process and approach. This thesis is an example of the very process to approach climate justice work through an abolitionist framework in academia. I believe academic work like mine, where I am writing for an academic institution and shedding light on abolition as it applies to climate justice, is a step

toward what could be called “everyday climate justice abolition” as abolition scholars have identified the term “everyday abolition”. “Everyday abolition” suggests that abolition is a way of life and thinking, and there are strategies to connect toward change in our everyday structures and practice (Lamble, 2021).

Beyond the everyday, governments and institutions need to do the work it requires to dive deeper into communities and truly assess their needs. The City of LA’s “Green New Deal” plan does a good job at comprehensively addressing climate change but it doesn't address communities in a way that feels urgently needed. It may seem impossible to capture every neighborhood's needs but abolition is about reimagining what we deem possible and impossible. For the future of our communities, we must imagine, dream, vision, and demand. Demanding that the nuanced work be done to save lives is an abolitionist reality.

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