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**Looking Beyond the Blighted Surface:  
The Gaze of Redevelopment and the Immigrants' Milieu**

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This working paper traces a historical contestation between the immigrants' milieu and the gaze of redevelopment. A central theme within that history has been the constant effort to target and implement revitalization programs in immigrant neighborhoods. As Central Business District (CBD) elites seek to capitalize on regenerative low-income areas, low-income immigrant neighborhoods have had to struggle for the maintenance and survival of their communities. These immigrant ethnic neighborhoods, however, possess a rich mixture of social, economic, political, and cultural capital ("the immigrants' milieu") which both attracts the "gaze" of redevelopment and offers potential resources for the neighborhoods' survival. The contestation has greatly influenced the field of city planning during three time periods: the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, as planning emerged as a profession; the 1960's, as city planners embarked upon a new wave of urban renewal projects; and today, as cities revitalize their CBD's in the face of globalization.

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## **Introduction**

The history of neighborhood revitalization and urban redevelopment in the United States has been one of disrupting and destroying low-income neighborhoods. A central theme within this history has been the effort to target and implement revitalization programs in immigrant neighborhoods. As Central Business District (CBD) elites seek to capitalize on regenerating low-income areas, this has historically placed immigrant neighborhoods in an ever-changing struggle for the maintenance and survival of their communities. These immigrant ethnic neighborhoods possess a strong mixture of social, economic, political, and cultural capital (“the immigrants’ milieu”) which both attracts the “gaze” of redevelopment and offers potential resources for the neighborhoods’ survival.

Tracing this lineage of contestation between immigrant neighborhoods and CBD and political elites promises to shed new light on both the urban development literature and the understanding of city planning’s relationship to immigrant neighborhoods. The contestation between these two forces has greatly influenced the field of city planning and has occurred in three time periods: the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as planning emerged as a profession; the 1960’s, during city planning’s heyday of urban renewal projects; and today, as cities revitalize their CBD’s in the face of globalization. This working paper analyzes the relationship between central business elites’ efforts to capitalize on regenerative low-income immigrant neighborhoods and the neighborhoods’ struggles for survival and adaptation to these pressures.

I examine these three time periods and ask why redevelopment has been so prevalent in the reshaping of immigrant neighborhoods. I argue that these neighborhoods possess an “immigrants’ milieu” which attracts the redevelopment “gaze,” thereby creating this contestation

and struggle between formal city planning institutions and those in the neighborhood. Throughout this struggle, the social and political contexts of cities have changed, and hence the reasons (and the purported reasons) for intervening in the immigrants' milieu have also changed. Although external intervention has historically been detrimental to low-income areas, the immigrants' milieu also provides resources that help the neighborhood to adapt and to co-evolve with the city's institutions. This is most evident in today's globalized era. The immigrants' milieu encompasses transnational linkages and resources which help it maintain its space, even in the face of large scale revitalization efforts by global cities.

### **Blight and the Gaze of Redevelopment**

Redevelopment uses institutional mechanisms to intervene in markets within city spaces experiencing disinvestment. This is done to encourage financial investment, facilitate physical upgrades to infrastructure and buildings, and improve the overall economic and social conditions in such spaces, theoretically for the residents who currently live there. Hence, redevelopment is an economic development and planning tool used by government, now usually city government, to spur relatively quick social and economic change in a given area which is characterized as "blighted."

Redevelopment, as a concept and practice, is surrounded by controversy and debate stemming from earlier efforts to change neighborhoods through large federally-funded urban renewal projects but continuing now with more locally-funded public-private projects (Anderson 1964; Gans 1968; Sagalyn 1995; Altshuler 2003). However, the debate and the controversies involved really began before urban renewal, at least as early as the Progressive era (1880's to 1920's) when social and physical planners began to focus their attention on immigrants' blighted

neighborhoods and laid the foundations of U.S. city planning (Davis 1967; Hall 2005). Tracing the lineage of redevelopment efforts back to the Progressive era reveals a broader definition of redevelopment that goes beyond its economic development purpose. Redevelopment becomes a tool of the state's institutional apparatus, a tool which city business and political elites use to change the social structures in marginalized neighborhoods in order to reclaim those spaces for the benefit of elites.

The tools of institutional intervention have varied depending on the social-political context and the aims of the CBD elites. The institutional mechanisms used by city planners to revitalize low-income neighborhoods have included redevelopment, large urban renewal projects, inner city economic development projects, and tenement housing programs, all of which have involved strong political and economic interests that shaped the programs' design and implementation. These political and economic interests stem from financial and political ties within the CBD elites trying to capitalize on regenerating attractive low-income areas in or near the CBD (Ward 1971; Gans 1982).

Historically, this capitalization of attractive marginal spaces has placed immigrant neighborhoods in a struggle for the maintenance and survival of their neighborhoods. Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, immigrant neighborhoods like those of other marginal groups in U.S. cities have laid at just the fringes of the CBD, establishing themselves in the spaces abandoned by the transformation of industry to service sectors in the CBD (Ward 1971; Ward June 1968). At different historical points, these spaces have become attractive to developers who have organized the political mechanisms of the city, especially its planning mechanism, and the economic resources of the CBD elite in regenerating these "blighted" neighborhoods.

First, a group of powerful economic and political stakeholders takes an interest in a previously “marginal space” (Smith 1995). These marginal spaces are comprised of a mixture of low-income people, social deviants, people of color, and often immigrants (Gans 1982). Once this interest is sparked, the gaze (Sartre 1956) of redevelopment begins to awaken the institutional mechanisms which exist in the neighborhood. Once an area is noticed by the city’s gaze, this new attention by the city’s formal institutions of redevelopment in turn changes the institutional embeddedness within this “place” and begins the process of social transformation in the neighborhood. The institutional forces shaping redevelopment hence awaken (through policy initiatives, renewal and economic development programs, citizen participation mechanisms, police engagement, NGO commitments) and take on a life of their own. This “marginal space” now becomes a “place” of contestation, opportunity, change, and structuration<sup>1</sup>.

The gaze serves as the starting point for considerations of “blight” as a label that, once attached to a place, conveys the institutional legitimization from the state that a place is indeed blighted and in need of change. “Blight” is a politically charged term with a loose definition. Michael Dardia (1998) defines blight as a “combination of physical and economic conditions – such as vacant or decrepit buildings, declining property values, poverty, and high crime rates that prevent private enterprise from developing the area.” Beyond an economic definition, the concept of blight has historically been associated with unhealthiness and disease<sup>2</sup>. This was especially true during the Progressive era when social reformers were concerned about immigrant overpopulation and unsanitary conditions that might spread disease. Hence, the gaze looks upon neighborhoods, provides an evaluation of them, sees the potential profit of this space, and then defines some as blighted.

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of structuration is taken from Anthony Giddens (1984), meaning “conditions governing the continuity or transmutation of structures, and therefore the reproduction of social systems.”

<sup>2</sup> Specifically, this notion of sickness relates to plant disease. See <http://wordnet.princeton.edu> for a definition.

Blight is also a social construction controlled indirectly by powerful economic interests. Once a neighborhood is defined as blighted, the city's institutions gain the legitimate power to begin the process of social transformation of the neighborhood. Current redevelopment strategies and past urban renewal and Progressive era revitalization policies represent the government's efforts to change institutional mechanisms within neighborhoods in order to encourage relatively quick and drastic physical and social changes in those places. The social changes often include pushing out the undesirable ethnic groups (Massey 1993).

### **Place and the Immigrants' Milieu**

Redevelopment reshapes "places." "Place" is more than a physical locality or a collection of assets to be positioned . . . it refers to the conglomeration of meanings and experiences which accumulate around locales through the daily life experience of people living their lives and firms conducting their activities" (Healey, de Magelhaes et al. 2003). "Places" in many ways are defined by their institutional capacity and institutional thickness as these interact with agents through social structures. "Places" also provide agents with opportunities to shape the structural forces confining them, through the places' institutional capacities. The term "institutional capacity" encompasses a plethora of civic associations, a high level of interaction among social groups, coalitions which cross individual interests, and a strong sense of common purpose. "Institutional thickness" is where households and firms are embedded within "place" (Healey and others 2003) (Healey, de Magelhaes, et al. 2003). Institutional capacity-building processes therefore stem from "place" and can be analyzed in terms of the knowledge resources, relational resources and mobilization capabilities agents draw upon and generate to maintain increased influence on and in their locality.



There are few “places” in marginalized spaces which possess the wealth of institutional capacity and thickness found in some immigrant neighborhoods. Institutional capacity building processes are very much alive in such immigrant neighborhoods and are fueled by a mixture of social, political, cultural and economic capital brewing in these neighborhoods. Those various forms of capital help create what I’ve termed the immigrants’ milieu. A milieu is a surrounding, an environment, especially of a social or cultural nature. Peter Hall (1998), in his book *Cities in Civilization*, describes a “creative milieu,” a force which helps great civilizations establish golden ages of urban civilizations. Manuel Castells (1994) applies this notion of a milieu in his theories on information technology, as the “milieu of innovation,” where spatial nodes of technological firms are clustered and lead to a mixture of ideas and products which lead to technological innovation. The immigrants’ milieu is a socio-cultural environment, a “place” where immigrants create social, political, economic and cultural forms of capital and hence develop dynamic organic institutions which lead to a vibrant and dynamic sense of urbanity and where these institutions reinforce each other, solidifying the immigrants’ claim to that space.

Immigrants have established these milieux through their efforts to help themselves adapt to their host society, survive at the margins of their new country, and maintain some of their cultural traditions. They are able to create these milieux because of their social capital. Social capital as defined by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.” Cultural capital consists of the networks of kinship and ethnic ties which help maintain social capital. Hence, cultural capital relates to accessing symbolic or material power through establishing ethnic identity (Castells 1997). Economic capital is conceptualized as the ability to gain financial resources available for

investment (Hutchinson 2004). Further, political capital can be conceptualized as influence gained in both the formal and informal political institutions shaping these marginal communities (Hutchinson 2004) .

Immigrants use various strategies to build economic and social capital and adapt to their new host society in the United States. Historically, some immigrant groups have gravitated toward establishing small businesses and also working as wage laborers as a way to gain entry into the new society's economy (Waldinger 1986). Ward (1971) describes various employment strategies for gaining capital adopted by some immigrants at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Irish immigrants found employment in warehouses and terminal facilities, German immigrants worked in the sewing machine and consumer supply trades...new arrivals from Italy in part replaced the Irish as general laborers and were attracted to redistributing fresh food from the central wholesale markets. Jewish immigrants, equipped with long experience in the handicraft industries and the local commercial life of Eastern Europe, quickly developed many branches of merchandising at a time when the retail and wholesale segments of marketing were firmly established as distinct and specialized areas in the central business district.

Other immigrant groups used different strategies depending on when they immigrated to the United States. Today, Korean immigrants to the U.S. use a strategy tailored to and influenced by the restructuring of the global economy (Ong 1994; Smith 1996; Lin 2000). Korean immigrants migrate to areas experiencing economic disinvestment and use their cultural and economic capital to revitalize those spaces and establish their ethnic community. Examples of this type of adaptation strategy can be seen in the creation of Koreatown in Los Angeles (Smith 2001). These employment strategies are used by various immigrant groups to gain social and financial capital which helps them establish their immigrant neighborhood and adapt to their host society.

These immigrant businesses are often the core of an ethnic enclave which serves to support both the economic and cultural capital of immigrants. Alejandro Portes describes an ethnic enclave as consisting of "important groups which concentrate in a distinct spatial location

and organize a variety of enterprises serving their own ethnic market and/or the general population. Their basic characteristic is that a significant proportion of the immigrant work force works in enterprises owned by other immigrants” (Sanders 1987). However, there is a difference between the immigrants’ milieu and an ethnic enclave. A milieu maintains a creative force, a sense of entrepreneurship which is strongly intertwined with the mainstream economy of the host society. An enclave is a segregated space, a homogenous space, separated from the mainstream. Hence, the immigrants’ milieu maintains strong links to its own ethnic group, to the host society, and to its country of origin.

More recent migration theories revolve around issues of transnationalism, where immigrants keep their ties to their home countries while seeking to adapt in their host countries (Laguerre 2000; Smith 2001; Portes 2002). For example, immigrants accumulate forms of economic capital which extend beyond their enclave boundaries and are sent to their countries of origin in the form of remittances (Portes 2002). This in turn changes the enclave to what Michael Laguerre (2000) terms a “global ethnopole.” Laguerre defines a global ethnopole as a node in a network of sites linking the ethnopole to the homeland of its residents and to other diasporic sites. The multiculturalism and globality of the ethnopole is a reflection of the multiculturalism of the global city.

Hence, although immigrant neighborhoods might look blighted and at first glance seem to be marginal spaces, in fact they possess a mixture of social, cultural, economic, and political capital that makes them dynamic spaces. These are immigrants’ milieus, similar in many ways to what Peter Hall credited with bringing golden ages to civilized urban centers. Such immigrants’ milieus have historically attracted the gaze of redevelopment and have played a central role in the development of U.S. city planning.

## **The Gaze and the Immigrants' Milieu**

The gaze of redevelopment is particularly attracted to the immigrants' milieu (Gans 1982; Castells 1983; Logan 1987; Godfrey 1997; Gotham 2001; Weiss 1980). City planning institutions constantly search for ways to pursue their goals of urban revitalization, regeneration, and increased regulation. They have ample low-income neighborhoods to choose from, yet historically, they usually have chosen to redevelop immigrant neighborhoods. As David Diaz (2005) states, "The early history of redevelopment is directly linked to the immigrant experience in the United States." Why is the gaze of redevelopment so attracted to the immigrants' milieu?

Neighborhoods near the CBD, according to sociologist Ernest W. Burgess (1925), are natural areas for acculturation to urban life where immigrants cluster for cultural and economic reasons in zones of transition. Burgess' famous model of urban growth was based on concentric circles which showed the relationship between the locations of immigrant neighborhoods and their proximity to the CBD. (See Figure 1.)

The gaze, representative of CBD elites and powerbrokers within the city's political and planning institutions who sought to capitalize on low-income spaces, has been historically attracted to the immigrants' milieu because of the dynamic cultural and economic relationships existing in the area. The organic institutions which emerge from the immigrants' milieu represent an attractive space in which to implement the regulative institutional forces of the city's planning apparatus.

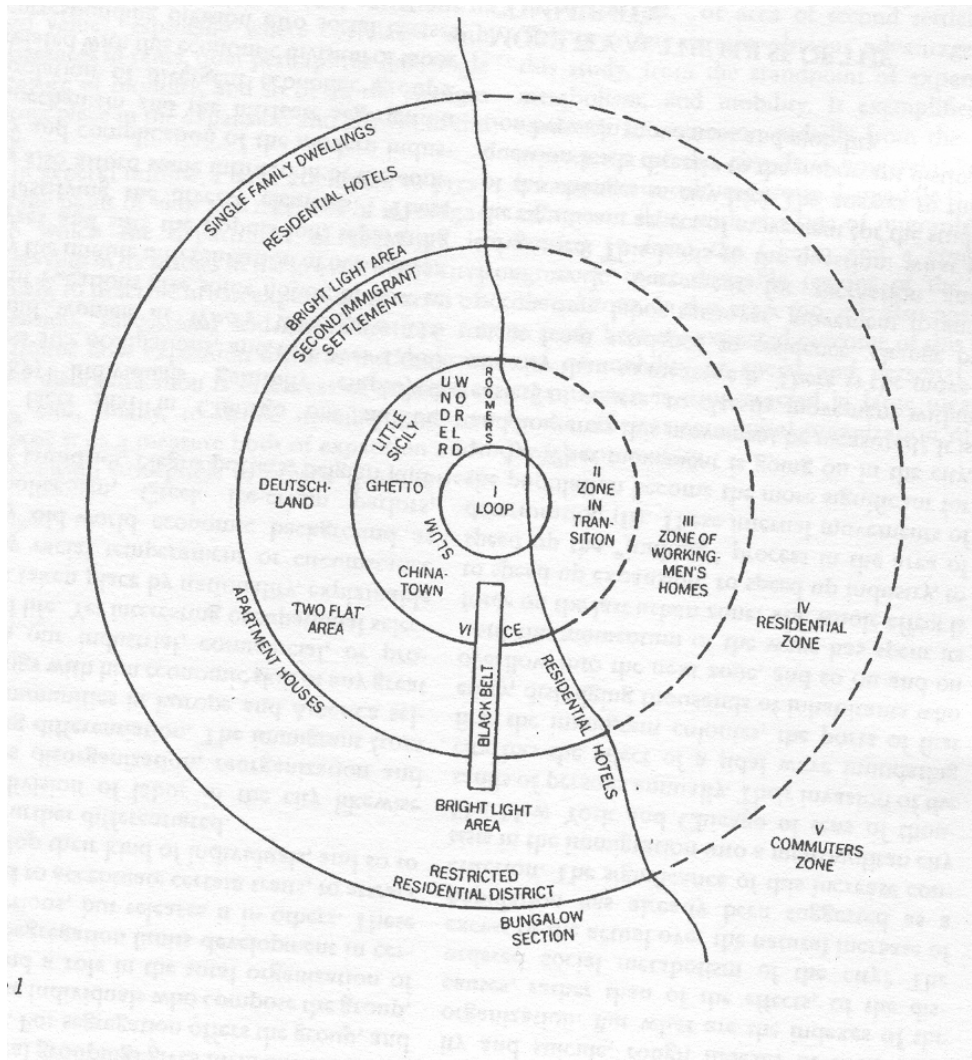


Figure 1: From Robert Park's *The City* (LeGates Publisher, 1925).

Michel Laguerre (2000) explains in his book, *The Global Ethnopolis*, how various cities have institutionalized these organic forms existing within the immigrants' milieu. He describes the phases the city uses to incorporate the milieu into its formal institutional apparatus. He argues that incorporation of immigrant neighborhoods occurs through the following phases: 1) insertion; 2) confrontation; 3) incorporation; 4) maturity; and 5) "parkization." The model describes how immigrants first move into a space and how city hall attempts to dismantle the new settlement, leading to phase three, when city hall integrates the settlement into the rest of the

city by providing social services and extracting taxes. The maturity phase occurs when the new settlement organizes its grassroots political system to gain more participation in city hall politics. Lastly, city hall transforms the immigrant neighborhood into a commoditized tourist site. Laguerre's thesis is helpful in terms of showing the attraction of the gaze to the possibilities of intervening and of incorporating the immigrants' milieu into the city in this new globalized era.

I will now turn to analyzing how the gaze of redevelopment has intervened in the immigrants' milieu, from the inception of U.S. city planning as a profession until today's era of globalized redevelopment.

## **Tracing the Lineage of Redevelopment**

### **The Progressive Era: Containing the Immigrants' Milieu (1880's – 1920's)**

The emergence of city planning in the U.S. can be directly traced to the Progressive era and to the social reform movements working in immigrant slum areas in New York at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Davis 1967; Hall 2005). During that turbulent time, when the second wave of American immigration was changing the face of urban cities in the U.S., the fields of housing and physical planning arose, which also paved the way for establishing city planning as a profession. The profession of planning began as a result of reform efforts focused on immigrant neighborhoods, as the political and economic elites in cities tried to figure out what to do with the increasing numbers of immigrants. The elites were mainly concerned about four issues: the risk of rebellion in those neighborhoods, the lucrative land values in neighborhoods adjacent to the emerging CBD's in the 1870's, the health risks of the unsanitary conditions in tenements (and especially fear of the spread of tuberculosis), and what they considered the need to "Americanize" the newly arrived European immigrants. Hence, the social cultural context of the

gaze during the Progressive era was one of fear and of trying to contain, control, and establish dominance over the immigrants' milieu.

The second wave of immigration dramatically changed both the social and physical make up of the United States. The second wave, between 1860-1930, was comprised of southern and eastern Europeans who were of darker complexion and non-Protestant as compared to the majority of the U.S. population at the time (Jensen 1989). This wave of immigrants settled mainly in eastern industrial cities. "Forty-eight per cent of the country's total urban population in 1920 was of foreign birth or parentage and in the cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, which together housed about one quarter of the total population, people of foreign parentage and birth accounted for almost 58 per cent of all residents . . . In a period of only forty years, between 1880 and 1920, an average of about six million people arrived in each decade" (Ward 1971). New York was the greatest city of immigrants in the world, where most immigrants lived in tenement housing and an ordinary street block could house up to 4,000 people (Hall 2005). Those immigrant neighborhoods were characterized as ghettos. Harry Manuel Shulman (1938), a sociologist of that time, describes those ghettos and their social function: "These areas of first immigrants' settlement are cultural areas. They carry the traditions of the old world culture and form a protective barrier of the familiar old world culture usages against the unfamiliar folkways of the surrounding American community."

The immigrant neighborhoods ultimately came to be seen as slums, and social reformers such as Lawrence Veiller and Jacob A. Riis unveiled the dreadful housing conditions European immigrants were living under. Riis' (1971) *How the Other Half Lives* was instrumental in showing, through photographs, the types of dilapidated housing and terrible sanitary conditions immigrants had to endure. There is no doubt that immigrants at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were

living under difficult circumstances. The gaze of redevelopment was attracted to those areas for that reason – to improve the housing and physical conditions of these blighted neighborhoods and in turn to gain increased control over the milieu.

Much of the attention to these immigrant areas revolved around health conditions because the wealthy were afraid of the spread of disease. Although some reform efforts were motivated by self interest, other early efforts at social and physical institutional urban change were aimed at ameliorating the social conditions of immigrants in tenement housing. Jane Adams and her pioneering efforts in 1889 to create social reform, for example, established a settlement house in Chicago located in the middle of four immigrant neighborhoods: Italian, German, Jewish, and Bohemian. Hull House became one of the most important settlement houses in a movement “dedicated to saving the immigrant from his (and especially her) own errors and excesses, socializing him into American folkways and adjusting him to city life” (Hall 2005).

There were other reasons, in addition to the aforementioned apparently benevolent reasons, for improving living conditions in tenement houses. Christine Boyer (1986) postulates that planning originated out of a need to bring order to uncontrolled capitalist expansion, perhaps, according to David Harvey (1973), in spite of the capitalists, but ultimately benefiting capitalism. This was especially evident in industrial cities at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when state regulations emerged which helped to both control workers and control the sanitary conditions of cities (Boyer 1986). Hence, at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century three important forces were coming together: the drastic rise in immigrants’ arrival in cities, the rise of the CBD (which began in the 1870’s), and the need to bring order to this increasingly chaotic and unsanitary urban environment. In that context, the rise of city planning took place, and the gaze



of redevelopment achieved increased control over what was seen as the chaotic and out-of-control immigrants' milieu.

As noted above, during that turbulent time period, overcrowding and unsanitary living conditions were the primary problems in neighborhoods of European immigrants. In 1894 Lawrence Veiller led the Tenement Housing Commission and described immigrant tenement housing as "centers of disease, poverty, vice, crime, where it is a marvel, not that some children grow up to be thieves, drunkards and prostitutes, but that so many should ever grow up to be decent and self-respecting" (Hall 2005). Interestingly enough, most social studies of the slums during that time concluded that the root of the problem was not the immigrants, but rather the lack of social and infrastructural provisions in those areas. In fact, Veiller's recommendations for improving the areas were aimed not at changing the social or cultural characteristics of immigrants, but instead at changing the physical regulation for private developers (Hall 2005). They included the "adoption of building codes and architectural regulations designed to improve the structural condition of tenements" (Diaz 2005). By changing the physical characteristics of slums, it was argued, the unsanitary conditions would lessen and the unhealthy environment improve, reducing the risk of infections for the city's population in general. Such changes were accomplished through a physical planning approach, by changing the ordinances and codifying space standards, providing fire protection, and plumbing provisions; the 1901 Tenement Housing Act called for physical/infrastructural solutions to the problem of over-congestion.

If one analyzes the immigrants' milieu in terms of the social cultural characteristics that were present during the Progressive era, the picture that emerges is very different from Hall's (2005) dreadful night vision. Everyday accounts of life in the slum present a picture of an area possessing cultural amenities and an environment comprised of strong social and kinship

networks within ethnically diverse neighborhoods. For example, a report developed by the Immigration Commission at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was supposed to call into question the then-current U.S. migration policies and place stricter barriers on immigration to the U.S., found that:

A large majority of the immigrants in cities lead a decent hard-working life, in homes that are clean, though in many cases poor, and that the undesirable conditions prevailing in congested quarters often are not brought about by the residents, but largely in spite of them . . . The neglected appearance of a great many of the streets is a result of indifference on the part of the city authorities about keeping out of the way districts clean, rather than carelessness on the part of the residents . . . There is not an exalted standard of cleanliness in the congested quarters of New York or other great American cities, but they are not intolerable filthy, except in spots and the inhabitants are not sunk in degradation beyond any natural prospect of betterment (Ward 1989).

Other studies found similar conditions in slum immigrant neighborhoods. The sociologist Harry Shulman (1938) conducted an important study in the slums at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He studied 500 families using a case method, comprising histories of 4,243 individuals. Shulman discovered that the “percentage of unbroken homes [i.e., married] was high, 75% to 94%,” compared to the native population, and that homes were physically clean but overcrowded. Those ghettos also provided economic and cultural resources for the immigrants.

David Ward states,

Most immigrants actually preferred to spend their first years near similar ethnic groups and immigrants sought low cost housing close to their employment. They took abandoned areas which higher income people had left as they went out of the city. Observers are generally able to agree that most immigrants concentrated on the edge of the CBD, which provided the largest and most diverse source of unskilled employment. Although immigrants lived in cramped quarters the overall death rate of the populations of foreign birth were frequently somewhat lower than those of native parentage (Ward 1971).

Clearly, although the immigrants’ milieu at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did possess slum characteristics, it also served as a neighborhood which helped new immigrants transition into U.S. society.

This proximity of the immigrants' milieu to the CBD created contestation over urban space at a time when the CBD in cities was first emerging. "Different edges of the CBD expanded at different rates at different times, and this selective expansion of commercial premises was in part responsible for the variation in the living condition and social characteristics of the central concentrators of immigrants" (Ward 1971). The gaze of redevelopment had been vying for control of the immigrants' milieu at these critical moments. The field of city planning emerged in the midst of this tension between the immigrant neighborhoods' survival and the desires of the cities' political and economic elites who wanted to sanitize and control the health and civic environment of those perceived chaotic urban spaces.

The planning profession in the U.S. emerged from among the social and physical reformers who were trying to figure out how to deal with congested immigrant neighborhoods in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hall 2005). In 1907, settlement workers like Florence Kelly, Lillian Ward and Mary Simkhovitch formed the Committee on the Congestion of Population. With Mrs. Simkhovitch as chair, the committee decided to hire Benjamin Marsh as secretary. They created an exhibit on the dangers of congestion which was first shown in 1908 at the Museum of Natural History. Its creators then toured the country with that New York Congestion Exhibit, advocating city planning and showing the type of congestion that existed in some major cities. Their efforts culminated in the appointment, by New York City's mayor, of a city Commission on Congestion. That city commission called the first national conference on city planning, which was held on May 21, 1909, in Washington D.C. The National Association of City Planning was born at that conference (Davis 1967). In retrospect, one can see that the catalyst for much of the Progressive era's social reform efforts was the need to find better ways

to deal with existing and arriving immigrants. The profession of city planning emerged out of the need to find both social and physical mechanisms to intervene in the immigrants' milieu.

### **Urban Renewal: Destroying the Immigrants' Milieu (1950's – 1970's)**

Urban renewal was a federally funded program, managed by cities, which aimed to redevelop "blighted" neighborhoods with the help of private interests. Herbert Gans (1968) writes:

Since 1949, [the urban renewal] program provided local renewal agencies with federal funds and the power of eminent domain to condemn slum neighborhoods, tear down the buildings, and resell the cleared land to private developers at a reduced price. In addition to relocating the slum dwellers in decent, safe, and sanitary housing, the program was intended to stimulate large-scale private rebuilding and new tax revenues to the dwindling coffers of the cities, revitalize their downtown areas, and halt the exodus of middle-class whites to the suburbs.

The legal justification of urban renewal was to alleviate the threat to the community's health, safety, morals, aesthetic sensibility and general welfare caused by slum housing (Weiss 1980). Interestingly, the social and political context surrounding the gaze's interests in the revitalization of low-income neighborhoods had changed, although the justifications for intervention remained very similar.

The federal program originated as an offshoot of Roosevelt's New Deal policies (Grisby 1998). The program was first characterized as redevelopment and evolved to urban renewal as federal funding became available (Wilson 1966). It gained its institutional power through the 1949 Federal Housing Act, which provided financial resources and the use of eminent domain (Anderson 1964). Yet its true origin is traced to the 1930's and 40's as business interests from the CBD saw the need for capital investment in infrastructure and commercial development in the downtown (Weiss 1980). The gaze of redevelopment played a central role in establishing both the legitimate need for the urban renewal program and the institutional tools – such as

funding and the power of eminent domain – necessary to carry out the large top-down programs. Weiss (1980) explains, “It is extremely important to note that the public purpose of the re-housing [urban renewal] program was considered to be slum clearance; in other words, the legal justification for the public housing program was to alleviate the threat to the community’s health, safety, morals, aesthetic sensibility, and general welfare caused by the existence of slum housing. The valid public purpose was to eliminate bad housing, not to build good housing or to subsidize disadvantaged people’s incomes. How the land was reused and what became of the former residents was incidental to the main goal.” The gaze was interested in transforming those marginal spaces and not in what would happen to residents already living there.

The outcomes of those massive top-down urban renewal projects, focusing mostly on physical and economic development, were detrimental to the low-income, minority populations residing in many renewal areas (Anderson 1964; Weiss 1980; Frug 1999; Krumholz 1991; Keating 2000; Altshuler 2003). This was especially true in African American communities such as the Fillmore District of San Francisco. In fact, the program came to be known as “negro removal.” The federal government discontinued the program in 1974. Some of the negative consequences of the program included: not benefiting developers as much as expected (due to lower-than-expected rates of return on their investments), hurting minorities (about 60% of the people displaced were minorities), directly challenging the rights of private property owners, projects that took too long to be completed (with an average of 12 years), and extremely high costs (billions of dollars) (Anderson 1964). Although the program might have been a failure socially for low-income populations (especially in African American neighborhoods) and financially for the federal government, it was a major success for the initial advocates of the program, the downtown business interests, property interests and local politicians (Weiss 1980).

Urban renewal accomplished its main goals of generating large urban infrastructural development projects in inner cities of the U.S. with the federal government paying the bill. That was accomplished by bulldozing neighborhoods that the CBD elite thought needed to be regenerated (Anderson 1964; Gotham 2001). Clear examples of how the bulldozing occurred were seen in New York as Robert Moses led the city's redevelopment agency in changing the physical landscape of the city while displacing much of the city's low-income population (Caro 1974). Other examples of the same type of urban renewal included Boston's West End, where sociologist Herbert Gans documented the destruction of an Italian working class neighborhood, which forced over 7,000 people to relocate to other parts of the city (Gans 1982). Chester Hartman (1973) studied the conflicts generated by a large urban renewal project in San Francisco, the Yerba Buena Project, which he claims displaced over 4,000 people and 700 businesses. Hartman argues that the San Francisco redevelopment projects were pushed by the CBD business interests, who aimed to expand San Francisco's downtown and to push for more growth in the inner city.

The consequences of urban renewal for low-income populations, including their displacement and relocation, were distressing. As mentioned above, one of the most famous examples was San Francisco's Fillmore district, where a vibrant African American neighborhood was dispersed to make room for large-scale redevelopment that did not occur. Yet another example is that of Chavez Ravine in Los Angeles, where a well-established Mexican American neighborhood was dispersed to make room for Dodger Stadium (Cuff 2000). Herbert Gans (1982) estimated that only 0.5 percent of federal urban renewal expenditures were allocated for relocation and that between 25 percent and 30 percent of displaced households moved without

official relocation. Chester Hartman estimated that in San Francisco and New York, from 1949 to 1964, 43 percent of displaced residents moved to unknown locations (Keating 2000).

Pockets of organized resistance developed, and in some cases minority populations engaged politically and gained leverage over large urban renewal projects. One of the most important instances of political mobilization occurred in San Francisco's Mission District. There, a coalition of urban-based churches, radical political groups, and traditional Latino organizations formed the Mission Coalition Organization (MCO) to fight the extension of a BART subway station and redevelopment plans for the neighborhood (Castells 1983). That urban social movement, as sociologist Manuel Castells termed it, lasted from 1967 until 1973. Castells placed political agency at center stage in his analysis of the social movement created in the Mission District, a movement in which different groups with a common interest shared in a struggle to create a shared "meaning" that spoke for their interests. The meanings and the symbolic significance that such areas and movements take on are, in part, a representative outcome of the struggles among different groups that compete for the control of urban space (Castells 1983). The contestation which occurred in the Mission area regarding that urban renewal project was yet another instance of the gaze of redevelopment aiming to take an area over from the immigrants' milieu. Castells (1983) states that the "mobilization in the Mission was triggered, in 1966, by the potential threat of an urban renewal program," essentially by the gaze of redevelopment threatening to destroy the neighborhood. In the case of the Mission District, the immigrants' milieu remained intact as community members fought back.

One of Castells' more interesting insights is viewing the relationship between ethnic minorities and the urban structure and analyzing how a coalition of various institutional agents gained power sufficient to stop the Mission District urban renewal project. He speaks eloquently

of the characteristics to which he attributes the neighborhood's success in maintaining its own space. He describes the neighborhood's urban vibrancy and its wealth of networked churches, labor organizations and Latino ethnic organizations as "a very diverse network of neighborhood based activities, of a continuous flow of newcomers [immigrants], and of an active community of small business." Ultimately, he is describing the type of immigrants' milieu that existed in the Mission district and helped keep the neighborhood from becoming another negative legacy of urban renewal and its bulldozed neighborhoods.

### **Redevelopment and Globalization: Incorporating the Immigrants' Milieu (1990's – present)**

Globalization is fundamentally changing the management of cities and the political and economic structures and relationships within, between and among cities (Castells 1996). Within the globalization literature, a new importance is now given to the re-emergence of the CBD and the role that transnational financial services play in shaping global processes of production (Scott 1996; Castells 2000; Scott 2001). Hence, the gaze of redevelopment reawakens and is rejuvenated as downtowns compete against each other in this new phase of global pressures. The downtowns of cities form the nuclei of globalization, functioning as a global network of hierarchical cities, linked though telecommunications and information technologies (Sassen 2002). The power of this global network structure of linked cities provides opportunities for cities to emerge as global cities; taking advantage of transnational flows of capital, finance, and information (Castells 1989; Sassen 1991). Globalization has dramatically influenced financial markets as multinationals have merged and real estate has been commoditized, and those financial changes have meant that urban hierarchies have shifted from an old core-periphery formulation toward spatial networks of multiple cores globally and within cities. Whereas



restructuring meant a transition from manufacturing to services in developed countries, globalization has meant a change in the entire global system, making some urban spaces more attractive to global capital than others. While this globalization “from above” has drastically changed cities, globalization “from below,” that is, the transnationalization of people (especially of immigrants), is also reshaping cities (Guarnizo 1998). Therefore, as the gaze of redevelopment has been rejuvenated by globalization, so too has the immigrants’ milieu, now incorporating transnational linkages which offer the milieu new forms and sources of capital.

Castells’ (1996) notion of globalization, the space of flows and space of places, is helpful in situating globalization’s effects on city development, because Castells bridges global economic flows and local experience. Globalization is sustained by an interconnected network structure of finance, transnational social networks, various scale governance systems (local, regional, national, global), and a tension between global and local placemaking – all fueled and maintained by information technologies working as glue holding these systems together. Its main aspects are faster growth, lower inflation, and productivity led by technology, especially information technology (Castells 1989)(Castells 2000). Institutionally, globalization is furthered by the rise of the neoliberal state which has helped to integrate the world’s economies, including economies that used to be contained nationally. In relation to labor, flexible specialization has contributed to flexible employment and production, increased labor and capital mobility, and a horizontally integrated firm structure (Scott 1998; Saxenian 1999; Scott 2001). This has created a skills base biased toward technological change, which now places emphasis on the importance of highly skilled labor. Hence, globalization has drastically changed the economic and cultural relationships of the world system.

Globalization is currently reshaping redevelopment processes as cities compete at a global scale under intensified networks of finance, technology, and cultural symbols. This information age, as Castells has termed it, is currently driving the bifurcation of the labor market (Castells 1996; Scott 1996) and the increasing importance of locality (Porter 1995; Castells 1996). Cities therefore depend on developing spaces for attracting new labor, both high-skilled labor and low-skilled labor, both of which prove vital to the economic vitality of a city. Allen Scott (2001) states that “globalization intensifies these trends by stimulating the growth of high-wage occupations in large cities while promoting (especially in a context of large-scale immigration from low-wage countries) the proliferation of marginal, low-skill jobs.” Within this dual nature of globalization, a dual strategy for redevelopment has emerged, one that caters to creating spaces that will attract high skilled workers and providing increased resources to spaces where low skilled (mostly migrant and immigrant) workers reside. This dual-natured redevelopment strategy is directly tied to global economic flows present within global cities (e.g., Los Angeles and New York).

This dual strategy has not been adequately studied in the redevelopment literature, probably because it is a recent phenomenon and most of the redevelopment literature related to globalization deals with resistance to global pressures by local communities (Lin 2000; Mele 2000; Smith 2001). My dissertation, *Catalytic Gaze: Co-evolutionary Adaptation in an Emerging New Mesoamerican Neighborhood in Los Angeles*, aims to contribute to the literature on globalization’s effects on redevelopment by studying the immigrants’ milieu in a neighborhood very much at the confluence of globalization (MacArthur Park); serving both as a space of cheap and efficient immigrant labor for the global city and as a space connected to transnational flows of communication and finance through the transnational social networks of

its immigrant residents. As noted above, immigrant neighborhoods directly tied to global flows of capital, information, and transportation systems have been termed “global ethnopolis” by Michel Laguerre. They are neighborhoods in which the immigrants’ milieu is sustained by immigrants’ maintaining relationships with their homelands, and they are places which emphasize transnational connections and serve as nodes in a network of specific diasporic enclaves. A global ethnopolis is a contemporary example of how today’s immigrants’ milieu is dynamically influenced by transnational relationships and globalization. Laguerre explains,

I conceive of ethnopolis as sites of attraction and sites of dispersion. They attract newcomer residents from the homeland and encourage old-timers who live in satellite sites to return to the area for church activities, seasonal festivals, social services, and shopping. They are also sites from which people move to other residential sites in the city...As interconnecting sites, ethnopolis are nodes in a network of sites linking the ethnopolis to the homeland of its residents and to other diasporic sites as well. As hybrid sites, they serve as incubators for the diversity of ethnic traditions and intra-ethnic interaction. These are dynamic sites in which the articulation of the global with the local is materialized and can be studied because it can be identified, mapped out, and circumscribed (Laguerre 2000a).

Global ethnopolis, Laguerre argues, are transforming the urban landscapes of global cities such as San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles. Many global ethnopolis are located near the downtowns of global cities, hence directly competing with global cities’ redevelopment strategies for changing their downtowns, thereby accentuating the historical tension between the gaze of redevelopment and the immigrants’ milieu. Plans for redevelopment that focus on rebuilding downtown for corporate interests are coming into conflict with the emerging global ethnopolis neighborhoods.

The social economic context under which the conflicts between corporate-focused downtown redevelopment and the growing importance of global ethnopolis must be worked out is very different from that of the urban renewal era. The federal government cut much of the funding for redevelopment and renewal during the 1970’s (Sagalyn 1995), due both to the

political and financial backlash of urban renewal and to fiscal crises associated with economic restructuring (Klemanski 1993). With those cutbacks, local officials turned to more creative forms of financial support. For redevelopment, local officials began to rely more heavily on Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to support project development and execution. In California for example, once a project area is defined as a redevelopment area, any increase in property taxes in that area (above a 2 percent annual inflation rate) goes to the redevelopment agency. The rationale claims that the improvements made in the area are responsible for the increase in property tax assessments (Dardia 1998). In 1995, redevelopment agencies were receiving 8 percent of property taxes in California, due to TIF (Dardia 1998). TIF has become an extremely controversial financial tool, because other government agencies (such as counties and school districts) lose out on those taxes (Sagalyn 1995). In essence, other government jurisdictions are subsidizing the cost of redevelopment (Dardia 1998). Yet TIF money has substituted for the large federal subsidies and has given more autonomy to the local level in redeveloping urban areas.

Seeking innovative sources of revenue and TIF, redevelopment under the new pressures of globalization has actually intensified the corporate center strategy. Yet it also has evolved, from just providing office spaces for workers in corporate skyscrapers to now providing spaces which increase the general quality of life and sense of urbanity of the downtown. Corporate development in downtown now caters to multinational firms (transnational corporations, global finance corporations, international real-estate businesses) and also to the high-skilled workers within those firms, all of whom redevelopment agencies would like to retain in the downtown (More 1999). Part of the strategy is to create a cultural environment around amenities such as theaters, museums, convention centers, sports attractions, general entertainment businesses,

trendy restaurants, coffee shops, and businesses catering to night life. The strategy also focuses on improving perceptions of safety. This is all done in the hope of generating more Tax Increment Financing for the agency and a solid return on investment for developers. The main goal is to rejuvenate the global downtown as a space in which high-end skilled workers will live, play and work.

Another side of the emerging dual global city is that its downtown business areas and wealthier areas are also connected to other areas where low-skilled service sector employees (or potential employees) reside. Neighborhoods with low incomes, people of color and immigrant populations may actually possess strong cultural, economic, and social resources within their immigrants' milieux. Those immigrant neighborhoods, some of them already global ethnopolis, are directly influenced by global forces, especially when migrants with strong transnational linkages back to their home countries forge concrete local-global economic and cultural connections. They go beyond being isolated ethnic enclaves. They are areas with increased transnational capital emerging from their own transnational linkages and social networks (Smith 2001). Michael Peter Smith (2001) views these neighborhoods as directly tied to transnational urban flows at the conflux of globalization. As he argues in his book, *Transnational Urbanism*,

This metaphor [of Transnational Urbanism] was chosen because the forging of translocal connections and the social construction of transnational social ties generally require the maintenance of social relations that are sustained in one of two ways. Either (a) transnational social actors are materially connected to socioeconomic opportunities, political structures, or cultural practices found in cities at some point in their transnational communication circuit, e.g. transnational cities as sources of migrant employment, the means to deploy remittances, the acquisition of cultural or physical capital, consumption practices, political organizing networks, or lifestyle images; or (b) they maintain transnational connections by using advanced means of communication and travel, which because of their simultaneity, indirectly implicate transnational actors in an orbit of cosmopolitan ideas, images, technologies, and sociocultural practices that have historically been associated with the culture of cities. "Transnational urbanism" is thus a cultural rather than a strictly geographic metaphor.

Michel Laguerre (2000) takes the argument a step further and argues that such ethnic immigrant neighborhoods are directly influencing globalization within the global cities in which they are located. He explains that “the location of an ethnopole inside a global city evokes the idea that its globality cannot be understood outside the context of these intraurban relations. The ethnopole is interpreted as being global because of its transnational relations, because of its contribution to making the city in which it is located a global city, and because of its location inside a global city that sets constraints and limits to the expression of its globality.” Therefore, although such neighborhoods might be low-income and immigrant (and therefore lack legitimate citizen institutional power), they actually possess economic and cultural resources which help them transcend local political barriers and play an increasing part in the new global redevelopment process. Hence such areas experience conflict, as they did during the Progressive era and during urban renewal, but now in a more dynamic and nuanced fashion as they possess greater resources within a global social economic context.

I argue that because today immigrants’ milieux are directly tied to global flows of capital through communication, finance, and cultural systems, they have more power to influence the gaze of redevelopment. Such political and institutional influences have not been addressed in the planning and redevelopment literature. Although some empirical case studies have examined immigrant neighborhoods and redevelopment in the age of globalization (Lin 2000); (Mele 2000; Mele 2000), they lack a clear description of the immigrants’ agency in influencing institutions. Most of these global ethnopoles, with their transnational linkages, are located near the downtowns of large global cities and are directly influenced by top-down global city redevelopment strategies, strategies which they sometimes contest, sometimes successfully. Therefore the gaze and nature of redevelopment under pressures of globalization provide both

constraints and new opportunities for the immigrants' milieu facing the same global and transnational pressures.

## **Conclusion**

Redevelopment issues are at the forefront of planning theory and practice because they encompass almost all the disciplinary tools of the field. Redevelopment takes a previously marginal "place" and changes it, "improves" it, through economic development, transportation improvements, land use changes, community development, environmental design, physical and infrastructure design, and development of housing. In whatever form redevelopment assumes, planners and other practitioners working on such projects rely upon institutional mechanisms to increase their power in order to shape a specifically targeted neighborhood. In many ways, it is in considering questions and issues related to redevelopment that the field of planning really "comes together" and can make specific, concrete differences in the urban environment. Whether those differences benefit current residents or just benefit the political and economic elites within cities is debatable and is likely to vary based upon specific localities and conditions. Redevelopment projects, throughout each of the three critical time periods reviewed in this paper (the Progressive era, urban renewal, and today's globalized era), represent efforts to change the targeted neighborhoods in the interests of CBD elites seeking to capitalize on large redevelopment projects.

The redevelopment story is not all about destruction and displacement of low-income neighborhoods, however. In certain instances, the immigrants' milieu has remained intact. In some instances, immigrants have been able to use their various forms of capital and endogenous institutional resources to gain influence over large regulative redevelopment projects. Some, as

is the case in MacArthur Park, have co-evolved with their cities' institutional structures. This important story, which spans three key periods in the development of the field of city planning, has not previously been viewed or analyzed as a struggle between the immigrants' milieu and the gaze of redevelopment. This paper begins to illuminate and examine important relationships between immigrant neighborhoods and city planning institutions, in an effort to understand the relevance of those relationships for both the practice and the theory of planning.



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