The Experience of Normative Development: Land Access and Retention in City Heights, San Diego

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“Because people embody lives as if living free, power often gets in the way but seems unable to become an absolute force.” – La Paperson

Abstract
This study of development in a small yet densely populated San Diego neighborhood, City Heights, leads a critical environmental discussion on the legislative, institutional, and local influences on access and retention of local land. Through qualitative research, it is argued here that the cultures of privatization and assimilation operate the misappropriation of “development” and “progress,” enabling a capitalist hegemony of land under the pretense of community benefit. Further, a survey of antithetical forces expands knowledge of community self-determination, while evaluating the very ways in which knowledge is produced.

In the context of inner-city San Diego neighborhood City Heights, this paper founds its analysis on a critique of certain practices of for-profit development which seek to position the accumulation of monetized wealth as generative of community enhancement [1], therefore skewing the idea of human productivity as solely constituted by labored landscapes and fiscal measurements [2, 3]. It is then hypothesized that for-profit development creates an ideology and circumstance of commercialization and privatization, thereby disabling equal access to land. Historically excluded from the private ownership of United States’ land, communities of color continue to be prevented from full participation in rights to property, unable to procure initial capital through discriminatory lending policies, or discounted by the precondition of having to produce revenue [4, 5]. The empowerment of a community is inextricably linked to its access to self-sustaining resources, otherwise regarded as a paradigm of economic and environmental justice [6, 7]. However, along with modern constraints to human and community exploration of potential also arise consequences of environmental degradation, labor exploitation, and a greater inability to resist the former [6]. The process of mapping the manufacture of development norms in City Heights, however, reveals attempts of “counter-position” [8], in which community members organize through the intersections of enrichment strategies, therefore promoting networks of interdependence and holistic growth.

This paper ultimately challenges the normative definitions of development and the ways in which they are perceived by engaging a framework of critical environmental studies. Despite a focus on relationships with land, this study does not equate development to the unilateral use of land. Development and its connotations of progress and growth can perhaps be truthfully realized if removed from capital-based economies, which reify the power structures of heteronormative patriarchies [9]. Largely externalized, the industrial age measurement of benefit devalues non-monetary, multi-faceted growth. Disconnected from that which cannot be numerically measured, development is officiated by one-dimensional strategies that reproduce structures of inequality. Ambiguity would perhaps rid the world of bias and lend to its critical expansion.

The Problem with Capital Based Development

Neo-liberal promotion of free international trade and investment has limited price controls and increases the transnational movement of goods, services, and capital at the expense of worker’s rights and the environment [4]. Increased economic growth is often justified by the expectation of utilitarian results, but historical experiences of large wealth disparities and social unrest have continued to refute this [9]. The monetization and disproportionate absorption of profit are most visible when institutions engage in the justification of economic prosperity as the equivalent of social prosperity – at global and local levels [10]. Current frameworks of development are thus rooted in industrial economies because of their alleged contribution to the reduction of global poverty – a condition ironically reached through the very institution of industrialism as a mode of operation and impetus for previous frontiers of colonialism. Poverty, or the disproportionate distribution of resources, is said to have intensified from the industrial “advance in production,” which “increased the range of powers which sections of society had over other sections” [11, 12]. More simply, the expansion of the capitalist economy identified greater power in some, leading to a production-based struggle for growth. In the case of colonial capitalism, power manifested itself in the imperial stronghold, allowing for massive resource and labor extraction, commodification, and in the case of the latter, racialization; this led to the “underdevelopment” of the colonized [11].

As profit-based development qualifies the uninterrupted acquisition of resources and their manipulation by exploited laborers, the alliance of social and environmental political action would seem likely [13]. However, mainstream environmental discourse posits global transformation as a subset of mitigation, wherein the welfare of the planet is achieved through technologized innovation. Ecological modernization and conventional sustainable development schemes “attempt to resolve traditional tension in environmental politics between striving for economic...
growth and protecting the environment,” disregarding the acquisitive nature of global economies [14]. Comprehensive sustainable change requires the mutual recognition of the commodification of nature and labor [13, 15]. Valuable environmentalist strategy understands the trope of sustainable development bounded by the interests of capitalism, intimately connecting stewardship of the environment with the liberation of people. Liberation is understood in the imperative context of individual self-determination beyond the indoctrinating control of totalitarian and democratic nation-states as well as the human rights discourse, in which an anthropocentric order is established and therefore dismissive of the intrinsic rights of the rest of the world. Here, liberation of the people is therefore a counterpart of environmental stewardship and vice versa.

In rematerializing the lost link between humans and the environment, there have been recent efforts to devolve decision-making at the community level. However, implementable solutions are still predominantly conceived by the industrialized world and imposed on the remaining social majority (Agrawal and Gibson 2001). The climate change debate, for example, urges the employment of nation-state agreements capable of misrepresenting populations and holding historically colonized peoples accountable to lower levels of emissions without first recognizing the disparate conditions created by Western imperialism itself [9]. In attempting to limit disastrous climate change, the industrialized world perceives the switch to an electric vehicle, for example, a palpable pathway to real change – just as the exchange of a coal stove to a solar cooker is heralded as a sufficient move toward sustainability. “Green” consumerism continues to lie within a framework of commodity capitalism, continuing the use of resources for the world’s social minority and yet often policing the minimal and often traditional use of resource by forest, riverine and rural agrarian communities [18]. Consuming its way out of consumption, the industrialized world’s contemporary environmental “greening” movement “only furthers the disempowerment of people elsewhere” [14].

Against Universal Binary

Conscious of both its social and environmental implications, anti-normative development can divert the negative influences of modernity while redefining the contexts in which we perceive growth. However, in exposing the separate impacts of industrialism on people and planet, we create an unintended distance between the two. Despite the concurrent effects on both, the language behind socialism and environmentalism divulges a true relation. This dualism inhibits the full realization of development that is ethical and ecologically sound for the very reason that it separates justice on those two fronts. “Post-materialists see environmental welfare (through the rhetoric of sustainable development and ecological modernization) as something largely separate from humans,” abstracting the problems of industrialization as largely conservation-based [14]. Efforts to protect the environment by, in fact, protecting a limited and linear definition of the environment – nature, the wilderness, the outside – serve to alienate humans and sustain environmental discourse simply through the preservation of biodiversity. Dominant industrial narratives further relegate humans to the urban corners of the world, creating a distinctive human landscape, which restricts the inclusion of the human species in natural terrain as simply transitory. The environmental demarcation of wilderness seeks to protect natural landscapes through the elimination of human interference, although in that process it further justifies the overt urbanization of the human habitat (Cronon 1996). This produces a rather cyclic expansion of the human rights discourse as incumbent on urban-industrialization, deferring the character of human being as existent only within its exclusivity. The long history of human cultivation of nature is ignored in this dualism, producing a paradigm of social invisibility in which all humans are typecast by modernity, therefore excluding those who rely on direct use of their environment [18]. The future of nature is reliant not only on the diffusion of conventional human development, but also on the acknowledgement of the human as a notwithstanding part of nature (Cronon 1996). The definition of environment thus plays a crucial role in expanding and reevaluating the ways in which the discourse of development is established.

Similarly, many labor rights discourses engage the uplift of the worker with the assumed foundation of industrialism, creating the rift of duality, but also disallowing the possibility of industry itself as the primary perpetrator of systemic inequality. Of course, in this sense, industry is limited in definition by its ecologically taxing and material producing nature, and reliance on the globalized free market. Marx’s developmental model of economic change has been criticized for its resource exploitative basis, specifically as a further deterrent to the equality of human by the contradictions of (1) creating an impoverished global ecology and therefore ensuring greater class competition for resources, and (2) creating an elite class order in the very distinction of humans vs. remaining environment as commodity (Sayers 2007).

Generating Counter Discourse

Dissolving the human/nature binary requires us to further bridge social and environmental concerns by refusing to see them as separate issues. Following similar paths, eco-epistemologists attack Western hegemony on various levels – denying the division of thought into duality, reimagining human relations with their landscapes, and expanding the valuations of work, progress and growth beyond contemporary habituations [13, 7]. The politicization of space is seen on many levels, working to reintroduce affinities with land, practice and dignity, and asserting the undeniable rights to these affinities [19]. Cherrie Moraga portrays a strong understanding of community as distinguished by both spatial and nonliteral configurations of land through her poem “War Cry,” in which “Lo que quiero es tierra” can be translated as both “what I want is territory” and “what I love is land.” This line’s double meaning thus demands social justice at the same time that it expresses environmental kinship [13].

Eco-epistemologists challenge the colonization and usurpation of land, destruction of native philosophies and relations with land, and establishment of slave-worked practices of destructive agriculture by refusing the rhetoric and practices of development that feminize, monocrop, and industrialize lands [13, 7]. Moraga suggests that non-acquisitive relations to land enable the emergence of types of love and sexuality that are generally repressed; seeing land as a homeland rather than a piece of property, or as a child or lover rather than a rapeable and controllable unit can radically change the way we use and respect land (Ybarra 2004). Reinventing traditional methods of cultivation that are not harmful to people and soil, small farmers
are reaffirming the practice of la milpa or the intercropping of plants in the production of foods and herbs, feeding and healing simultaneously [20]. Development therefore steps into a threshold of ambiguity, but remains to face a large trajectory of challenges that seek to order, capitalize, and subvert its possibilities.

In advocating a reconsideration of development, I recognize the subjectivities of knowledge production through the very real power of geography and group – of people and their position in dictating the construction of truths [19]. The paradigm of problem-solving frequently uses the methodology of pattern recognition to create models of change that are easily reproducible, at times resulting in the generalization of a problem [10]. This paper hopes to disestablish the concept of “best practices,” focusing instead on documentation and interpretation – not exclusive to either the social or biological realities of the world. "Foundational truths,” seen in the mainstream as response and resistance, are available to then serve not as exact recommendations, but as interlocutors through which strategy can be learned, modified, and applied autonomously [21, 22]. There is perhaps no ultimate global plan which can single-handedly create a more sustainable and equitable world without reducing the cultural, political, and social autonomy of peoples and/or the existence of the natural world.

This paper then attempts to decolonize the prevalent “rhetoric of sustainable development and ecological modernization” as it portends conventional economic growth, through a study of exclusion reinforced by the institutional and cultural commoditization of land [14]. To call it unequal participation would only serve to reify characterizations of lethargy, vacancy, and inaction; exclusion is but superficial. In other words, I look at the interaction of empire and counter-position (the interface of resistance and practical existence [21]) in the community of City Heights in the County of San Diego, California, as parts of the neighborhood challenge the conservative bounds of development – simultaneously affecting ecological destruction, while defending the rights to feed, heal, retain tradition, remain socially visible, and deconstruct class inequity.

Methods

For the purposes of creating a framework of field and primary source research, I ask the following questions: what are the historical and institutional influences of land use and on land use in City Heights; how do those influences create and maintain ideologies of how land should be used or developed; and together, are these institutions and ideologies limiting access to land and therefore disempowering a community and engendering exclusionary politics? The investigation of these questions is structured by the analysis of two planning legislations: the Mid-City Communities Plan and the Redevelopment Project Area plan of City Heights; twelve formal interviews with members of various organizations including International Rescue Committee and its two farm projects (New Roots Community Farm and Aqua Farm), City Heights Remedy Garden, Mid City Coalition Action Network, Price Charities, and Speak City Heights; and regular organizational meeting observations.

History of Land Use in City Heights

It should first be recognized that the unincorporated land purchased by Abraham Klauber and Samuel Steiner in the late 19th century and later annexed into San Diego was available for acquisition due to the colonization and removal of native Kumeyaay peoples. Before European settlement of the southwest, tribes of the Kumeyaay lived in the current County of San Diego for over twelve thousand years, tracing approximately six hundred generations of native lineage [23]. Kumeyaay uses of land included animal husbandry, wild animal stocking, sophisticated plant agriculture, and the creation of watersheds [23]. Originally a piece of native land and later obtained by American developers, the locality of City Heights was known as the City of East San Diego before its incorporation into the City of San Diego in December 1923 [24]. As shown in the map below, the neighborhood of approximately 1,984 acres is bounded by El Cajon Boulevard in the north, Interstate 805 in the west, 54th Street in the east, and Euclid Avenue in the south, and is divided into sixteen sub-neighborhoods.

Fig. 1. Map of City Heights Sub-Neighborhoods

Densely populated, City Heights was measured in 2010 to hold an estimated population of 78,893, 57% of which is Latino/a, 18% Asian and Pacific Islander, 12% Black, 7.8% White, and less than 3% Native American [22]. In 2011, San Diego was distinguished as the nation’s primary refugee resettlement location, with City Heights as one of the favored areas of relocation [24]. San Diego County has witnessed large influxes of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees in the 1980s after the respective incidences of the Vietnam War and Khmer Rouge reign, as well as the arrival of East Africans in the 1990s, in large constituted by Somalis and Eritreans as a result of an upsurge in civil warfare. The last decade has also seen a sizeable exodus of Iraqis to Southern California after the initiation of the United States-Iraq War. The presence of large groups of refugees and minorities in City Heights has led residents and outsiders alike to note dynamics unique to the area, negotiated by the many interactions of ethnic diversity (Burks M, personal interview, 2011). Comprised of even smaller neighborhoods like Little Mogadishu or Little Baghdad, City Heights is radically different than it was seventy years ago and has since experienced a tumultuous history, argued within this work to play a significant role in the present conditions of the community.
Mid-City Plan

Constituted by several businesses on the University Avenue and El Cajon corridor, City Heights was a successful commercial center from the 1930s to the 1950s, losing its merchant and customer base in the late 1950s as a result of the popularization of nearby single-location suburban shopping centers and the construction of Interstate 8 [24]. In 1965, San Diego City Council approved a plan seeking to promote commerce by increasing housing density in City Heights and surrounding mid-city areas – Normal Heights, Kensington-Talmadge, and Eastern Area [26]. The Mid-City Development Plan of 1965 was later updated in 1984 as the Mid-City Communities Plan and once again in 1998. The updates to the original plan are important on two fronts, as they (1) establish the four mid-city areas of focus as communities, which then contain twenty-seven smaller neighborhoods; and (2) each increase or restore commercial zones to encourage the local economy (although the second update decreases both residential and commercial density maximums to address a lack of community facilities) [26].

In characterizing the larger mid-city areas as communities rather than neighborhoods, the updated plan engages in mixed-use strategy – affirmed by smart growth theorists as a crucial antithesis to consumptive suburban landscapes (Fulton and Shigley 2005). Promoting the intermixing of housing and business, the Mid-City Plan distinguishes the role of communities as fundamentally different from suburban neighborhoods reserved solely for residences. Maintaining the original plan’s goal of increasing local economic growth, the 1998 plan shifts some focus away from the expansion of real estate and recommends “an emphasis on capturing the local community’s spending dollars by focusing on community goods and services” [26, 20]. Externally, this emphasis seems to operate under workers’ control of production, and retains capital locally. However, the recommendation reproduces the idea that goods and services are so deemed only if they can quantifiably generate revenue. Community exploration of potential continues, then, to exist within the precondition of creating capital. Inquired by many scholars, the revealing question asks whether generated revenue truly represents the “wealth” of the community, and if it is distributed proportionately across the community [5].

The ideological implications of American work culture, or what is seen as viable and productive work, can be said to encourage the development of industry. The Mid-City Plan’s prioritization of economic development is further evidenced by the highlight of certain plan details in its summary, including the recommendations of: “the addition of light manufacturing designated land in City Heights,” and “capitalizing on the community’s diversity...by fostering an International Marketplace” [26]. Lending legislative favor to business- or property-related projects; institutions, such as the City Planning Association, have the direct ability to exclude participants from initiating projects “of risk” and the indirect consequence of negatively influencing other institutional or social perceptions of development outside convention.

Market-driven trends, in addition to city planning, may also influence the ability of local projects to receive capital. Attributed to the revitalization of communities, localized economies theoretically allow for increased investment in greater-risk ventures (projects conventionally deemed difficult outside of property and infrastructure) through various single or combinatory strategies, including the greater use of state regulation, the involvement of trade unions and community organizations in decision-making, and the intensification of control of production by workers and residents [27]. In response to exploitative free market economics, democratic decentralization (or the socialization of production) is believed by many to be founded in the greatest capture of profit or benefit at the level of the worker. The theory of economic socialization works mainly through the worker-product relationship and is perhaps limited in further analysis of what constitutes a benefit beyond its monetized valuation [28]. Eisenschitz and Gough explain the contradictions of socialized local economies in their requirements of capital: “local collaboration – in order to compete for internationally mobile capital; local collective services – in order to foster enterprise” [27]. Localized exchange and labor are dependent on results that cyclically enable them, producing either a reliance on state intervention or a local competition based on criteria akin to market-driven neo-liberalism. In both cases, local development is directed by an outside entity or an external demand, reducing the self-determination of the community to a pretense of relationship.

With only ten representatives from all four mid-city areas, the planning process lacks substantial community participation [26]. “Community” rhetoric is used within the plan insofar as it relates to the meeting of planning groups, although a significant portion details the expansion of public facilities for community connection. According to the association, public facilities for the mid-city are defined as such: schools, parks, libraries, and community service centers [26]. The second update of the Mid-City Plan calls for the imperative establishment of additional elementary schools and public parks – setting up a land use emphasis on the acquisition of open space. The transformation of open spaces into public parks has long been of thematic importance for American land use planning, underlying a culture of recreation that is hard to contest. These manicured rearrangements are being challenged and reimagined in important ways that establish different sets of ideals and redefine the meaning of public space.

Redevelopment

With the 1970s influx of the methamphetamine industry, City Heights experienced an accelerated increase in crime rates up until 1995 - indicated by City of San Diego officials to contribute to the degradation of the physical and social environment of the community [22, 29]. Responding to the escalation of crime and the onset of urban blight, the Redevelopment Agency of the City of San Diego proposed a City Heights project area redevelopment plan, which was approved by City Council in 1992 and incorporated into the San Diego City and Mid-City plans [12].

Correlating the physical appearance of an area to its economic and social problems, California redevelopment agencies have always sought to invigorate communities on a material basis. Focused simply on the physicality of an area, redevelopment and its federal urban renewal precursor have been debunked as inherent indicators of change, exposing the misguided emphasis on the beautification and construction of physical structures (Fulton and Shigley 2005). Policy analysts further point to the serious implications of redevelopment as a pathway to power, criticizing
its actions as justified by a partisan understanding of public interest. Granted the authority to plan private development on property procured by eminent domain, cities and counties often forego traditional public use schemes for acquired land (Fulton and Shigley 2005). “Originally designed to revitalize struggling inner-city neighborhoods,” redevelopment is a controversial planning tool, as “it permits [local governments] to manipulate private real estate markets to the cities’ own financial advantage” (Fulton and Shigley 2005). Supported by state and federal loans, the retail of bonds, tax increment financing or a combination of the three, the reuse and redevelopment of classified blighted areas fall under a heavy liability of debt. To counter this, local governments encourage and subsidize private redevelopment through low eminent domain sale prices, reaping the growth in property tax revenue as it is siphoned into redevelopment agency accounts – often closely linked to the city treasury and unavailable to public redistribution (Fulton and Shigley 2005). The structure and past interpretation of California’s Community Redevelopment Law (CRL) have both significantly altered the scope of land use, qualifying the privatization of land and emphasizing development as relative to economically viable, concrete structures.

The City Heights Redevelopment Project tasks itself with the very similar objectives critiqued above, referencing redevelopment as generally “reflect[ing] the goals of removing physical and economic blight and improving infrastructure, affordable housing, retail and office space, as well as community beautification” [12]. Completed projects commissioned by the agency include the restoration of the historical Euclid Tower, La Maestra clinic and medical building, affordable single and multi-family housing including senior facilities, and mixed-use residential, retail, education, urgent care and recreation centers. Heavily invested in physical renewal, the redevelopment of City Heights has undertaken significant construction of new buildings (Macgurn R, personal interview, 2011). Programs established by the redevelopment plan reflect a need to refurbish the exterior infrastructure of City Heights with arrangements that have loaned up to $4.1 million to homeowners and forgivable loans of partial project cost to businesses for storefront improvement as per surrounding design standards [12]. Most projects have been tailored to maintain density-based growth and limit sprawl by building up rather than across, placing a Walgreens within apartment complexes, a library next to a police station, and a gymnasium atop a daycare. Since land acquisition in City Heights is allowed financing by tax increment only in the case of public facility development, the investments of private companies have largely funded the real estate and commercial expansion of the project area. Debates surrounding planning mechanisms might extend approval to the redevelopment of City Heights, accounting for the reduction in crime and the attested “renaissance” of activity that the community is experiencing [22, 29]. The City Heights Urban Village, comprised of an amalgam of retail and public education and safety buildings, is in fact nationally recognized for its “comprehensive urban revitalization and development” [12]. However, the narrative of comprehensive or wide-ranging here appeals to the existing parameters of redevelopment, as national recognition has and continues to operate on prevailing American values of privatization [19]. Looking beyond the purported improvements and diversity of use in redevelopment, we apprehend the politics of space.

Private development elicits supporters and critics who investigate the effects of urban landscape changes on community residents, often reassessing purported economic and physical revitalization as gentrification. Gentrification has historically been disparaged by disenfranchised communities of color forced to relocate as a result of increased property values in newly developed areas [30, 31]. Distrust of gentrification stems particularly from a noted lack of low- and moderate-income housing in areas that seem to be revitalized for the middle and upper classes [32]. Reforms to the CRL under AB 1290 in 1993 mandate the setting aside of 20 percent of redevelopment revenue for affordable housing, threatening to shut down agencies if failing to adequately use the housing funds (Fulton and Shigley 2005). The City Heights Project Area is proportionately planned to include the housing requirements, touting approximately three different projects that either include or fully develop units of affordable housing. In order to create these housing complexes, however, the agency marked several streets of existing housing as zones of modification – a euphemism for the imperial takeover of homes under eminent domain. Displacement is a plain reality for the poor, as the required establishment of a relatively small percentage (twenty percent) of affordable housing cannot fully counteract the significant increase in rent or mortgage values – almost double in a matter of six years [33]. Ignoring the palpable fear of displacement for a fleeting moment, residents of gentrified inner cities are verifiably distributed on a spectrum of support – partial to the arrival of much needed services, but also wary of the positive relationship between the resettlement of whites with the institution of amenities [5, 30]. Scholars have indicated no real link between gentrification and its assumed theory of poverty alleviation, rather identifying it as “a calculated process designed to benefit developers, real estate companies, speculators, and investors” [32, 17]. Fundamentally based upon the ideas of commodity capitalism, the privatization of neighborhoods is liable rather to instill a culture of private ownership and the community distancing mechanisms that follow. The creation of ideology is extremely consequential to the priorities that succeed it; the confluence of City Heights Redevelopment and the Mid-City Plan initiatives demonstrate the commodification of land, implicating a very narrow delineation of development.

Access

A lot of power and resources are with people who don’t have to deal with daily realities. You have to be very aware in walking the line responsibly – most don’t do that here or even live in the neighborhood (Camacho V, personal interview, 2012).

Community self-determination is threatened by power – power unavailable to overt recognition and permissive of uneven privilege. The distribution of power in City Heights reflects the interests and ideologies of some and not of others. It is important to remember to ask why power is concentrated as it is, and how that concentration influences the passage of bodies and their realities. A refocus on journey is necessary because access to land cannot represent a singular resource privilege; it is interconnected to mobility, or the capacity of realizing numerous other privileges. So far, the political character of settler colonial-influenced land-use planning has illustrated passage that shapes investment in investors masked as community benefit. Because
private investors can restructure community function and values through the power of capital transfer [32], development is liable to direction without the consent of community.

A prominent influence on the redevelopment of City Heights, private family initiated development firm Price Charities is largely responsible for the non-profit investment and for-profit real estate development of the community [25]. Within its non-profit scope, the Price family has established the operation of two entities: the Price Family Charitable Fund and the more popularly known public 501(c)(3) non-profit Price Charities. In order to be nationally registered as a non-profit, the latter is mandated to receive one-third of its funding from unrelated sources, with the remaining two-thirds accounted for by the Price family wealth. In City Heights, Price Charities uses these funds to generate or strengthen programs of education, health, and human services. From providing high schools students with college scholarships through qualifying fellowship programs to creating an "absentee rate-lowering revolutionary full school health clinic" at Central Elementary, Price Charities aims to provide the connections and resources needed for a community to "adapt to American culture" [29]. Indeed, the organization impacts the capacities of individuals and institutions, focusing on the youth and the empowering ability of communication and higher education. However, working through assimilationist parameters, it encourages adaptation without thoroughly evaluating what is entailed by American culture. Perhaps to be American, one must experience a full, comfortable life; "the mission of Price Charities is to improve the quality of life in low-income communities, especially in City Heights and San Diego County" [25]. Are all Americans unequivocally entitled to this quality of life that is without dispute defined by quantitative living, unwilling to question the psychological needs of humans in modernity? Asserting melting pot multiculturalism [8], Americanismo rears its head as the non-solution to a non-problem. The rhetoric of opportunity often trumps real inequality – real frameworks of power that deny existence, naming it difference. The narrative of civic rights goes only so far as to quantify living, focusing simply on the limited material factors of well-being [5]. Price Charities resides at a point of privilege, which allows it to signify certain issues with more importance than others. Even the benefit generated by its focus is decided by the way it shapes discourse on "issue". The subjectivity of an urban education dialogue facilitated by district superintendents' best practices is itself preceded by a partiality on the issue of education, simultaneously differentiated by and to be of urban nature. The problem here lies not in the complicity of private developers, but in the design of reformist culture that marks the strict outlines of development. At times, power can itself confuse justice (charity) with convention. Put simply, I argue that institutions such as the Price family locate their clout in being able to charitably fund projects unable to disrupt fundamental American truths of progress and property – truths conferred through the existing power structure of U.S. imperialism.

The Price Family Charitable Fund organizes its fund- and land-based grants "with special focus on the community of City Heights" [25]. Attesting to the "very expensive value of land", the foundation bases its internal assessment of applicants on the projects' "development and design plan, community improvement and support" and impact on "Price Charities' public image" [29]. According to a lead coordinator, the grant committee evaluates the longevity of a project through the relation of its mission with the development it offers procured land. Moreover, an advanced plan of design – while faring well in the foundation's assessment – can also garner the organization further contacts and resources or "non-monetary help" from the Price network [29]. The assessment follows with the project's intent of community improvement as it is closely "related to improving health and social services" [29]. Here, the community can perhaps influence the institution's decision, relying on its mechanism of support – a legally unbound, informal tool navigating its "x-marks" in formalities that let communities function in the benign ways that they should [34]. Community advocacy network, Mid-City CAN is a large system of representation, based partially in City Heights and managed through the organization and communication of several momentum teams, including but not limited to: Access to Healthcare, Improving Transportation in City Heights, Peace Promotion, School Attendance, Food Justice, and Building Healthy Communities Momentum Team [35]. Interested in "creat[ing] a safe, productive, and healthy community through collaboration, advocacy, and organizing,” Mid-City CAN is an active collection of local voices [35]. Unable to fully achieve a representative role in the land use decisions of City Heights, however, CAN momentum team projects have been refused Price Foundation land grants several times in the past (Kosower E, personal interview, 2012).

Retention

City Heights' Building Healthy Communities Built Environment Momentum Team (BEMT) gives impression of similarity to Price priority, working to create an advocacy plan over 12 months to promote a policy agenda focused around the "health and economic development for community residents" [35]. Included among objectives are aims to "develop land use policies that will improve community health" and “reduce environmental impacts that damage health”. One of the primary platform issues listed reads: “improve access to healthy food” [35]. The succeeding incumbent, Food Justice Momentum Team (FJMT) goes even further to connect the incidence of land use to access to healthy food and the specific needs of City Heights residents, directing attention to immigrant transition. FJMT has been instrumental in pointing out the negative impact of eventual refugee adaptation to a sedentary and innutritious American lifestyle, encouraging space, instead, for the cultivation of traditional diet foods. According to the CAN, the ability of immigrants to grow their own food is not only tantamount to their good health but also their improved ability to sustain themselves economically [35]. An active voice in the CAN and a large force in connecting City Heights' refugees to the option of small farming, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) operates two sizeable community farms – New Roots Community Farm and hydroponic New Roots Aqua Farm, each of which rents out approximately eighty plots of land or hydro-beds to families and individuals (DeCampos F, personal interview, 2012). The value of community farm has been attested to provide food security through the use of diversified cropping methods, which ward the erosion of land and the excessive use of irrigation [13]. The farms have been given much regional and national attention for the qualification of ground-breaking projects as primary approaches to the rehabilitation of immigrants. Providing a source of food and income for residents,
the farms have contributed to a shifting standard of contractual agreements, having fostered partnerships between small farmers and larger-scale product processing businesses (DeCampos F., personal interview, 2012). Despite validating recognition and the increased societal endorsement of food justice, the IRC has had a range of problems with land and funds procurement for the expansion of their food based projects. To counter this, the committee has launched a land bank program, inviting existing landowners in the area to offer “entrepreneurial refugee farmers” unused space. Facilitating land matches, the project suggests that “inviting a refugee farmer to your land will beautify your space and help the farmer feed their family and their community” [36]. In bold defiance of American anti-trespass culture that has instigated an ethos of mistrust, guided in part by a history of racism, the land bank implicitly redefines proprietorship. Enabling shared ownership, the program attempts to remove the culture of private land, although limiting the scope of ownership to its organizational focus: refugees. Perhaps the absence of a clear definition of “refugee” would allow the program to qualify all landless as refugees of private interests. However, the land bank is specifically organized around the needs of immigrant refugees, as per IRC efforts. While heralded for its concentrated work toward the recovery of incoming and established refugee populations, the IRC can also be criticized for directing attention away from original City Heights residents of color, also faced with the challenges of health and food access (Burks M, personal interview, 2011).

Additionally, with an increasing emphasis on refugee entrepreneurship, the New Roots projects risk agreement with the rhetoric of commercial development, endangering projects founded on the non-profit cultivation of land. Navigating these politics of space, for example, City Heights’ Remedy Garden organizes itself as an antithesis of privatization, counter-posing as a collectively run garden initiated for the empowerment of resident and community health. The Remedy Garden holds the view that the cultivation of remedy in addition to food is crucial for the holistic practice of preventive health. Besides diagnosing and dispensing low-cost and often free herbal medicines in the forms of tinctures, powders, and whole plant parts, the garden hosts free workshops adapted to recurring ailments within the community. “Equipment people to understand the system they have to interact with,” the workshops aim to give “immigrants and refugees who have dealt with extensive trauma some ground to stand on” (Camacho V, personal interview, 2012). Enabling a “genuine sharing of resources,” the organizers at the garden find a “lack of autonomy and dignity in the dominant health system,” explained in part by healthcare models that function via dependence; “agencies helping people only exist as far as there is a need” (Camacho V, personal interview, 2012). The workshops work instead to validate people’s physical and material and emotional life experiences by basing an educational approach on self-healing and community support. Indeed at a workshop titled “Stress Management”, a Latina woman confided in the “horrible treatment of her sisters” and her subsequent wariness of doctors and their treatment as “simply experimental” (Maria interview). Her sister was undiagnosed and died of cancer, while her other sister, although diagnosed with terminal cancer, remained to live a healthy life. Another Somali family present, while translating their mother’s words of gratitude, added their appreciation of information beyond herb qualities and uses. The workshop detailed the influence of patriarchy in the history of western medicine, in addition to highlighting the neurological, physiological and emotional responses to chronic stress. Inviting attendees to share traditional remedies, the organizers shift dominance of knowledge from presenters to the round table – reaffirming the wisdom of several different cultures and the abilities of individuals.

The coordinators of the homegrown garden collective are perhaps the better judges of surrounding illnesses as they themselves identify as residents and with challenges associated. Their work and methodologies prioritize equality of health, sharing knowledge rather than passing it on condescendingly. Renouncing chains of command, the space is truly communal and yet considered “a vacant lot” [29]. Renting land from the supposed beacon of philanthropy, Price Charities, the garden faces interminable volatility unless it is terminated. The development firm exhibits its power through a shield of U.S. private ownership laws, which guarantee land titles under a fair value exchange; in the case of the very first settlements, even lives were accountable for exchange. Once granted, the power of territory enables other powers of influence, in this case a power of definition. As stated before, Price justifies the grant of land under the condition of future development. A largely transnational trend, however, the requirement of progress and development is largely parochial and as Arundhati Roy has aptly stated, “the battle for land lies at the heart of the ‘development’ debate” (2009, xiv). Understanding the misappropriation of language, the Remedy Garden clarifies intent in a triad; ‘tierra, salud y libertad’ – land, health and freedom, each mutually reliant. The garden can provide significant anchoring against the privatization of land by first reimagining landscape.

The Price foundation is liable to require the evacuation of the garden in the case that a more viable project committed to the development of land rises in need for property [29]. Viability and development are two terms that can be heavily contested here. The garden sits at the heart of viability, providing public health care with a strong commitment to understanding the public, but it is not, nor will it ever be, in the process of creating a concrete building around and over its plants. It will not impede life for the very purposes of ‘developing’ an already developed plot of land. The equation of a life-giving – and itself living – space to a vacant, unused lot of land is the central paradigm that allows for

![Fig. 2. Image used with permission from The Remedy Garden Facebook archive](image-url)
the imbalances in power, which we have thus far outlined.

Indeed this position of property instability has spread far in dense City Heights, and even within allied organizations financial stresses have driven subtle conflicts. A portion of the Remedy Garden is set aside for free use family plots, many of which are utilized for the production of food by IRC situated refugees. The confluence of food and remedy here recreates the indigenous Mayan practice of la milpa. However, the increasing strain on land resource has impelled non-profit IRC to seek a larger presence within the Remedy Garden (Macgurn R, personal interview, 2011). Although tacit and thus far internal, this shift has propelled organizational outreach highlighting the entrepreneurial successes of refugees and a middle-class ambition as opposed to an earlier focus on food and community justice (Burks M, personal interview, 2011). The shift is perhaps shaped by private developers’ conditions of ‘sustainable growth’ – a misnomer readapted to the industrial modes of capital growth. Although successful partnerships and the limited access to land have created flourishing sources of local produce and prepared food, an increased awareness of food systems and health, and community mobilizations for affordable prices (including a successful push for the acceptance of EBT at the City Heights’ farmers market), the over-emphasis on ‘food’ strips the discourse on health of input, likely that of preventive and healing plant based medicine. Access to traditional remedies is equally important as access to traditional diets in a community that seeks to limit implicit assimilation, but more importantly limiting the prospect of good health to the intake of unprocessed, pesticide-free, GMO-free vegetables, fruits and grains, while a largely essential factor, can actually pathologize disease on a strict individual basis even if it is a symptom of a larger local issue of lack of mobility, for example. Additionally, an agency-based focus on an agenda item is liable to shift even more focus away from an already disenfranchised demographic – this has been contested to have occurred in City Heights where a vibrant food community was recently unaware of the health conditions and food access of minorities outside refugee status (Burks M, personal interview, 2011). Centers of alternative health like the Remedy Garden can promote a comprehensive understanding of community sources of ill-health, seeking a physical and intentional meeting space, which can mobilize against environmental injustice like the placement of polluting industry (Macgurn R, personal interview, 2011).

Conclusion

While we have questioned the connotations of development and entrepreneurship, we have been unable to go past the complicity of industry and involve it in the redefinition of productivity and work. Why can't industry itself entail economic activity that is ecologically permissible and viable beyond the limiting material producing paradigm? Furthermore, the topics of access and retention are perhaps incapable of fully dissolving any problems related to land, as they automatically mire it in a sort of property paradigm. Of course, while paving a way for the illustration of immediate material consequence, the inclusion and preservation discourses have sought here to change the very pathways that produce these conversations; the injustices, the biases, and the supposed “opinions” informed by the pathways have been challenged under recognizable terms but through a careful process of understanding buildups, blockages and other dynamic details for which there are not many technical names save perhaps “the idiosyncrasies of community.” Consequently, what we have is not a point to completely move forward with but one with which to keep returning and asking the same questions as they relate to the specific temporality, just as it was asked of the post-L.A. riots South Central garden, poisonous Bt cotton, Delano grapes, the machinated mid-west, swing riots of east Kent, and Tacky’s War.

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