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# SOUTH CENTRAL

*A blueprint to dismantle multi-generational inequity and restore community health in South Central Los Angeles*

## ROOTED

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### **Executive Summary**

South Central Los Angeles, in mainstream media and in the minds of those who do not work and live here, is often branded by the violent and chaotic flashpoints in its history, including the Watts Rebellion in 1965 and the LA Uprising in 1992. As we will demonstrate, these events were culminations of the generations of institutional neglect and exploitation that preceded them. Continuing to this day, albeit in different forms, this legacy still affects South LA residents in all aspects of their daily lives, from housing and employment, to transportation, policing, and the environment. Compounded, this overall disenfranchisement cannot be dismantled piece by piece at a time when South LA's residents are increasingly vulnerable to multiple forms of displacement and erasure.

Developed with the input of over 30 South LA community-based organizations and institutions and 125 resident leaders as part of the South LA Building Healthy Communities (South LA BHC) Collaborative, South Central Rooted sheds light on a history of structural and racialized inequity that spans over a century. These persistent conditions regularly elude the attention of mainstream media and public officials; however, the pervasiveness of these inequities has material consequences on the health and quality of life of South LA residents, from cradle to grave (and too often, early grave).

While South LA's history is one of a testing ground for racist policies, it has also been a real-life laboratory for innovative solutions. The roots of South LA resistance run deep. And in our view, where progress has been made in South LA, it has been led in large part by those on the ground—grassroots leaders, community organizers, and local residents—coming together to demand change. Many of the tools, strategies, and narratives South LA leaders developed and used—once considered too radical—have been adopted by our movement brethren in other cities and even by policymakers. This is because South LA's grassroots leaders know the answer lies within intersectional and community-driven system change. Drawing on research and local knowledge, this report identifies where band-aid solutions have failed, where gains have been made, and where future opportunities lie in South LA.

This report explores a framework for understanding intersecting root causes, outlining four key “drivers of disparity” in South LA:

- Gentrification, Displacement, and Homelessness;
- Poverty, Disinvestment, and Joblessness;
- Policing, Suppression, Deportation, and Mass Incarceration;
- Environmental Racism.

In addition to this root-cause analysis, we add a health equity lens to demonstrate the tangible, day-to-day consequences on residents' abilities to lead full lives and participate meaningfully in their communities. This approach lends itself to an intersectional analysis that takes into consideration the many factors and systems that impact individual and community health. In addition, in recent years, health equity has gained credible traction within both government and philanthropy. It has become a powerful framework for our allies in these sectors to seriously tackle the complex challenges faced by communities like South LA and develop long-lasting solutions.

In each chapter, the report explores the research and data that explains how each driver impacts health disparities in general and in South LA in particular, the history of root causes, current contributing factors, and local campaigns and strategies to address them. Throughout the report, we



identify where these factors and strategies cut across multiple drivers. It is our hope that this analysis fosters new thinking and discussion among systems leaders, funders, organizers and advocates about the need for intersectional approaches to transform conditions in South LA and similar communities across the country.

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# Gentrification, Displacement, and Homelessness

**R**ecent data shows that 63% of households in South LA spent 30% or more of their income on housing, more than other service planning areas in Los Angeles County and virtually unchanged from the years of the Great Recession. Rent increases have also occurred more sharply in South LA than Los Angeles in general. As a result, in 2015, one in ten South LA adults experienced housing instability. In LA City Council District 9, which includes the Figueroa Corridor where gentrification facilitated by the University of Southern California and other private developers has been taking place, homelessness increased by 44% in 2016 (the largest increase among the 15 council districts in the city that year) and by another 11% in 2017.

Increasingly, families with children are changing the face of homelessness, especially in South LA, where the increase in homelessness among young people far outpaced all other age categories. In City Council District 8, for instance, more than 1 in 4 homeless people are under the age of 24. At the same time, African Americans continue to be overrepresented in the homeless population. And women and trans and gender non-conforming individuals of any ages who are homeless are more likely to be exposed to additional trauma, like violence, sex trafficking, substance use, and police harassment.

Homeless individuals are exposed to more mental and physical health problems than the housed population, but are less likely to have a regular source of care or resources to manage their conditions. Research has suggested homeless individuals could expect up to 30 fewer years of life expectancy than their housed counterparts. Even those who have managed to avoid homelessness in South LA may be marginalized to neighboring and less desirable parts of the city and likely experience food deserts, less walkable streets, pollution near freeways and industrial uses, and overcrowding. All of these make them more vulnerable to cancer, asthma, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

The precariousness of housing in South LA is tied to a long history of exclusionary development and other discriminatory policies that target people of color. A position paper by Councilperson Marqueece Harris-Dawson (CD8) stated, “For nearly 60 years, policies at every level of government have contributed to a disappearing social safety net, the loss of affordable housing, the rise of mass incarceration, the reduction of middle-class jobs, and the destruction of mental health care.”

Housing discrimination, such as redlining and racial



covenants, confined many African American residents to a small area of South LA in the first half of the 20th century, when Whites still dominated the region. The wartime economy and the desire to flee the Jim Crow South continued to spur the growth of the African American population, prompting the city to build public housing projects in South LA that turned out to be inferior even by the standards of the day. However, the burgeoning manufacturing sector and the opening of the public sector to the African American community allowed for a Black middle class to develop at this time.

In the sixties, however, the police force became a means to keep the Black community in its place through an aggressive brand of policing, including racial profiling, that then-LA Police Department (LAPD) Chief William Parker championed. In essence, the police enforced segregation in South LA, just as the courts outlawed more blatant forms of housing discrimination. The post-war boom had expanded the housing and private automobile market, allowing primarily White families to move out of cities to new suburbs. The departure of industries and public investments quickly followed suit. The confluence of chronic unemployment, residential segregation, and racialized poverty came to a boil in the six-day Watts Rebellion in 1965.

South LA was part of a larger national pattern of deindustrialization and neglect of the inner cities that spilled into the 1970s. With a depleted tax base, basic services were eroded for the remaining residents, whose poverty was too entrenched for them to move away. South LA then became a fertile ground for an underground economy of theft, drugs, and prostitution. Many residents who were victimized by this economy, such as drug users and sex workers, were also criminalized because of it. The crack epidemic in the 1980s fanned tensions among warring gangs, and gave LAPD more

license for their aggressive tactics.

The abandonment of South LA left an opening for newcomers, including Asian and Latinx immigrants, who filled unenviable niches in the stratified economy that were denied to longtime African American residents. By 1992, when the acquittal of four LAPD officers who were caught on videotape beating a Black motorist sparked yet another unrest, the Uprising spread across a much broader geography and made clear that African Americans were not the only residents of South Central LA languishing under a system of criminalization and economic exclusion.

These decades of systematic economic deprivation and housing exclusion are crucial in understanding the housing crisis in South LA. Usually, middle-class families, especially homeowners, are able to build on their equities and pass down their wealth to later generations. This is not the case for the majority of Black residents in South LA. In spite of the fact that South LA real estate values plummeted since the 1960s, African American renters (nor newcomer Latinx immigrants, for that matter) were not able to accumulate enough generational wealth to buy up vacant South LA properties. What's worse, the subprime lending crisis that began in the late 1990s and led to the Great Recession a decade later, affected people of color disproportionately. Predatory lending resulted in foreclosures of many of the remaining Black and Latinx homeowners in South LA, pushing them into the housing market as renters. Studies show that areas in South LA with high rates of subprime lending were also highly correlated with high rates of eviction. Not only could they not accumulate wealth, South LA residents, as a whole, actually lost wealth that could help them weather such an economic downturn. As if that were not enough, an exceptional potential homebuyer in South LA could face more discrimination from banks that charge higher fees and interest rates to minority borrowers or steer them into more costly subprime mortgages.

More likely, South LA properties that had been foreclosed or abandoned were scooped up by more powerful and external interests, including developers, the University of Southern California, and equity firms that have become virtual landlords to many working-class families in South LA. The expansion of Metro light rails into South LA also made nearby neighborhoods more attractive to these developers. In essence, the byproduct of the Great Recession was the transfer of wealth from homeowners of color in South LA to corporations.

The corporatization of the rental market will continue to threaten the housing stability of existing South LA residents for years to come. The equity firms, like the Blackstone Group, treat their new properties as short-term investments. Internal documents show how they maximize profits by not improving the living conditions in these rentals

and, like speculators, by selling these properties to the highest bidders once the housing market improves. In the latter case, evictions are inevitable.

Affordable housing can ameliorate the displacement and housing instability in South LA, but that supply has been dwindling, especially since the demise of the Community Redevelopment Agency in 2011. Los Angeles lost a majority of its federal and state funding for affordable housing since at least 2009, widening the housing gap in the city. Not only is new affordable housing not being built, the existing stock of affordable housing is disappearing. The 1995 Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act exempts certain rental units from rental control, including those built after October 1978 and single-family homes. As old housing units are demolished to make way for new developments, the number of rent-controlled units will continue to shrink over time.

In addition, since the housing market rebounded from the Great Recession, LA County has seen a spike in tenant harassment as a way to pressure residents to vacate their homes. The 1995 Ellis Act, which allows landlords to exit the rental market by selling their properties or converting them to market-rate condominiums, has been invoked exponentially by speculators looking to flip their properties—not by the mom-and-pop landlords the law was intended to help. Since 2001, Ellis Act evictions have eliminated 22,132 rent-stabilized affordable housing units in Los Angeles. Without any intervention, that number is likely to climb in today's housing market. The proliferation of short-term rentals, like AirBnb, is also encroaching on South LA, further diminishing the availability of rental units while driving up rental costs.

Overcrowding has become a last resort for many South LA families trying to stay off the streets. South LA is home to some of the most overcrowded zip codes in the U.S. In general, overcrowding is correlated with poverty and poor living conditions. Research also links overcrowding to both physical and mental health problems, including more likely exposure to infectious diseases.

While reinvestment could be a god-send to a community that has been neglected for decades, both research and experience suggest that without a permanently affordable housing supply, it is more likely that newer developments will gentrify these neighborhoods, raise rent, and push out existing residents in favor of higher-income, and in many cases, White, occupants. For this reason, South LA residents and leaders have been at the forefront of campaigns demanding for development projects to put people over profits, especially those who have stayed in South LA through the lean years. These leaders have built strong coalitions and have used tools like community benefits agreements and development agreements to hold developers accountable for the well-being of existing residents and to stem the tide of displacement. Tangible benefits from these

agreements have included local hiring, funding for affordable housing and clinics, and support for local businesses. South LA leaders have also advocated successfully during the recent process to update LA's community plans, which are blueprints for development in the region, for renter protection and economic opportunities for small business owners.

At the same time, South LA organizations are collaborating on integrated voter engagement strategies to build a broader base of Los Angeles voters in favor of progressive policies and equitable development. As a result, in 2016, voters overwhelmingly approved an affordable housing development measure that requires hiring of local workers at prevailing wages as well as a \$1.2 billion homeless housing bond. In 2018, 63% of California voters approved Proposition 2 to use revenues from a tax on millionaires

for homelessness prevention and mental health services. And while Proposition 10, which would have allowed local governments to adopt rent control for any type of rental housing, ultimately failed in this same midterm election, Los Angeles County voters were evenly split on the issue despite the millions spent on misleading ads by the opposition.

Given the history of neglect, our residents and leaders are vigilant to make sure South LA receives its fair share of funding for equitable development from these and other voter-approved measures. They are also poised to organize and advocate for anti-displacement provisions from new developments, such as the construction of a football stadium and other sites of interest for the Olympic Games the city will host in 2028.



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# Poverty, Disinvestment, and Joblessness

**L**arge-scale structural changes described in the previous driver have resulted in an increase in unemployment and poverty. And even when employed, South LA workers suffer from low-wages, nonstandard work arrangements, and growing income inequality. Poverty limits access to quality housing, education, economic opportunity, and healthy food, creating a cycle of hardship that is difficult to escape. The concentrated poverty in South LA continues to be shaped by a legacy of racial residential segregation and disinvestment and is linked to: a lack of quality educational and employment opportunities; exposure to violence, crime and increased policing; high incarceration rates; increased psychological stress and trauma; destabilization of family and community supports; and poor health outcomes.

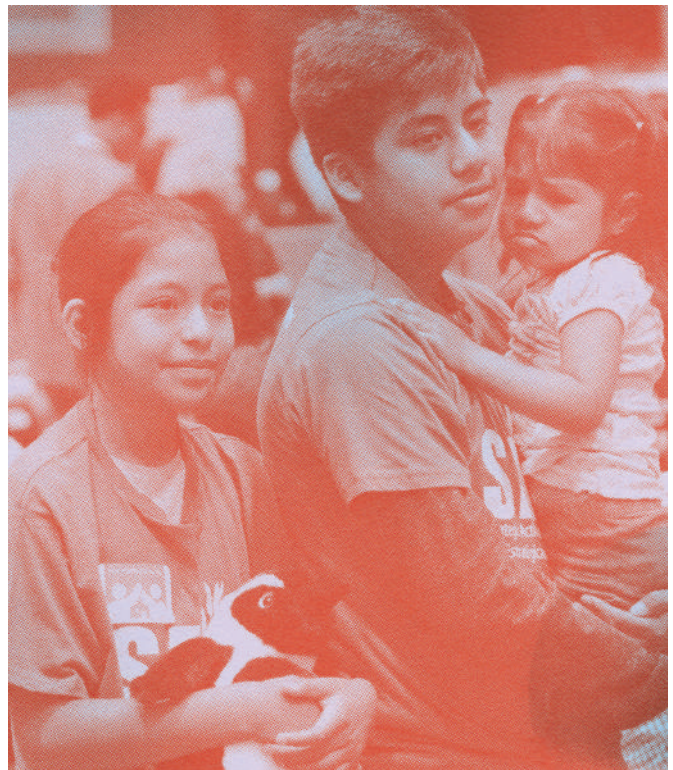
In 2015, 34% of South LA residents were living below the federal poverty line, almost double the rate in Los Angeles County (18%) and an increase from 31% in 2011. South LA had a median personal income of \$17,988, compared to over \$30,000 for LA County. The post-Recession unemployment rate that year was 14% in South LA, the highest among all service planning areas in Los Angeles. Underemployment was also prevalent. Residents face systematic barriers to full employment, which include: limited English proficiency, lack of driver's license or citizenship, lack of education, prior convictions, lack of transportation, and racial discrimination. Even South LA residents who worked full-time earned about 60 cents on the dollar in 2016, when compared to the average LA County worker. Often trapped in entry-level or low-wage service jobs, even full-time workers are excluded from advancement in key growth sectors in Los Angeles.

In addition to employment barriers, South LA residents also have limited access to financial resources, such as conventional checking accounts, and rely on the often predatory "fringe lending landscape" of check cashing, payday loans, rent-to-own finance, pawnshops and prepaid credit cards, resulting in higher debt-to-income ratio than the rest of the county. Due to the high level of police surveillance and criminalization targeting South LA, residents are also disproportionately burdened with criminal justice debt, like bail bonds.

The economic conditions of South LA are marked by a history of deindustrialization and disinvestment further detailed in the first two chapters of this report. During World War II, growing labor shortages and demands for defense production, in conjunction with an executive

order banning racial discrimination in the defense industry, provided new employment opportunities for people of color in South LA. LA's post-war economy, in an era of mass unionism (especially in the manufacturing and the public sectors), allowed some Black and Brown workers to move into the middle class. Major economic shifts starting in the 1960s, however, interrupted the post-war union and wage growth, as manufacturing firms began to close their factories and relocate to other parts of the country, and eventually offshore, to take advantage of cheaper, nonunion labor. As a result, the labor force in South LA was destabilized, in both number and wages. In 1960, over 20% of Los Angeles Black workers were employed in the manufacturing sector. By 2014, this figure had fallen to just 5%.

The decline of the South LA economy was also met with White flight to the suburbs, and with it, the departure of public and private investments and decreased tax revenues. Combined, deindustrialization, disinvestment, and the shrinking of the public sector created a South LA economy that to this day is characterized by limited public services and infrastructure spending, entrenched poverty conditions, and the expansion of exploitative practices, such as pay-day lending and low-wage, part-time work. Under this economy, immigrant Latinx workers are confined to low-wage and vulnerable service sector jobs, while many Black workers are shut out of employment entirely. Even when qualified, Black workers face discriminatory hiring practices, or when hired, pay inequities. Public services and funding, which can often spur localized economic growth, continue to lag in



South LA compared to the rest of the city, despite data that demonstrate indisputable economic disparities in the region.

Un(der)employment is part of a vicious cycle that includes hyper-criminalization (the subject of the next driver), and keeps many South LA residents in perpetual poverty. The lack of sustainable employment creates an underground economy that leaves many South LA residents vulnerable to gang violence and police abuse. In an overzealously surveilled environment, South LA residents become disproportionately involved with the criminal justice system. Once saddled with criminal records, many South LA residents are kept out of gainful employment and hopelessly resort to or remain trapped in an underground economy.

Against such relentless assaults on South LA residents' economic opportunities, South LA leaders and organizers have developed innovative strategies that often serve as models for other urban cores. For example, rigorous community organizing resulted in the implementation of two green job workforce programs by local public agencies: The Green Retrofit and Workforce Program and the Utility Pre-Craft Trainee Program, which include targeted hiring, paid training, union representation, and the development of career pathways for low-income residents.

Also, in 2012, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Agency (Metro) adopted a five-year agreement that put a master project labor agreement (PLA) coupled with a Construction Careers Policy in place for transit projects in South LA—the first of its kind for a regional transportation

agency. The agreement included a targeted hiring requirement of 40% of workers from high-poverty zip codes, among other concessions from the agency. Recently, community leaders launched a Community Compliance and Monitoring Project to make sure Metro adheres to the agreement.

In order to eliminate employment barriers in an overzealously criminalized community like South LA, activists successfully advocated the City of Los Angeles to implement the Fair Chance Initiative for Hiring ordinance. By preventing city agencies and their contractors from asking for criminal record histories on job applications, the ordinance levels the playing field for many formerly incarcerated individuals. South LA leaders also campaigned vigorously for Proposition 47, which was passed by California voters with wide support in 2014. The law reduces seven non-serious, nonviolent crimes from felonies to misdemeanors. Many who were formerly convicted of such a felony can have their conviction records expunged, thereby increasing their chances of employment.

Over the years, community organizers in South LA have worked tirelessly to change the narratives about systemic poverty and unemployment in the inner city in order to win these policy concessions. Whether these strategies will take root and spread deep enough to impact other job sectors will depend in part on the next driver of disparity in South LA: policing, incarceration, and deportation.



Photo by Mike Dennis

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# Policing, Suppression, Deportation, and Mass Incarceration

**A**ggressive policing, which often leads to over-incarceration and immigrant deportation, has plagued inner-city neighborhoods like South LA for many decades, but the high-profile deaths of people of color in this community in recent years, especially African Americans, at the hands of law enforcement have elevated this issue to mainstream and academic attention. The American Public Health Association counts police harassment as a “public health” problem that “disproportionately affects people of color and other marginalized populations such as immigrants, individuals experiencing homelessness, members of the LGBTQ community, and individuals with mental illness.” The Vera Institute of Justice characterizes mass incarceration as an “epidemic,” and research shows that incarceration exacerbates health disparities during a person’s imprisonment and after their release.

Aggressive policing does not only affect people when they are incarcerated; rather, the pervasive surveillance of a community creates a stressful environment that can lead to psychological distress, feelings of anxiety and worthlessness, and other mental and physical health problems for residents. Mass incarceration exacerbates the problem of poverty described in the previous driver on both individual and community levels.

While arrests by LAPD declined between 2010 and 2015, possibly due to heightened public awareness of police

suppression in communities of color, the decline did not cut across all population groups. Homeless people, among whom people of color are over-represented, were 17 times more likely to be arrested than housed individuals. Transgender and gender non-conforming people also reported high rates of harassment at the hands of law enforcement.

Young people experience the cumulative effects of overpolicing on a daily basis. They are targeted by gang injunctions, even without evidence of gang involvement. It is not uncommon for students to be suspended or expelled, or even arrested in school, for behavior that would warrant a visit to a counselor if it had been committed by a White student in a suburb. The overuse of these disciplinary measures lead to school “pushout,” which in turn lowers future income and education attainment for these young people. Furthermore, arresting students, or putting them on probation, enables a direct “school-to-prison” pipeline. Most tragically, South LA has also witnessed firsthand the brutal public killings of young residents by police.

The immigrant community is doubly victimized by the integration of the immigration enforcement and criminal justice systems. As a result, many have been criminalized under the jurisdiction of the immigration courts and denied the due process protections of the criminal justice system, such as the right to a lawyer, a speedy trial, or language interpretation. Immigrants could be detained for months, and sometimes over a year—longer than those who have committed violent crimes—and arbitrarily kept in solitary confinement or otherwise inhumane living conditions in detention facilities. Many of these facilities are privately run by companies whose primary motive is to increase their profit margins by maximizing the number of detainees and cutting costs, even critical services, at the expense of the health, safety, and overall well-being of the people under their custody. Women and LGBTQ inmates also suffer from physical abuse and sexual harassment from both staff and other inmates.

Police presence permeates spaces in South LA where residents access basic services, including public housing, schools, and transit. Beyond LAPD, residents endure regular surveillance by school police, armed private security, probation officers, and Metro staff who have the authority to cite and arrest riders. Police presence is disproportionate in parts of South LA undergoing gentrification, even where there is no evidence of increasing criminal activities. The “hyper-surveillance” of African American and working-class communities sows distrust between residents and law enforcement. And the use of “racial profiling” and “broken windows” policing contributes to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where police can subjectively find suspicious any activity (or even just the presence) of people of color as a pretext for harassment, arrest, or even a fatal encounter. Researchers





have found that many charges brought against residents in gentrifying neighborhoods are “poverty violations” that “would not attract any police attention at all if they took place in suburban cul-de-sacs, college fraternity houses, or on the docks of private yacht club.” In essence, policing is part of the gentrification agenda to clear a certain group of “undesirable” people from up-and-coming neighborhoods.

If law enforcement criminalizes poverty, the criminal justice system exacerbates it. From pre-trial detention to sentencing, people of color involved in the criminal justice system, even when innocent, suffer the loss of income and their community suffers the loss of stability. Aggressive policing compels impoverished people to spend money on bail bonds, legal transcripts, appeals, attorney fees, and visits to prisons. The majority of pre-trial detainees are charged with nonviolent crimes. Many remain detained not because they are guilty, but because they cannot afford to post bail. South LA had four of the top five zip codes in Los Angeles County for the highest total bail levied and non-refundable bond paid in 2012-2016. In these four zip codes, almost \$17 million was taken out of the community and transferred into the coffers of the bail insurance industry. Detainees who cannot afford to post bail are more likely to accept guilty pleas, even when they are innocent, to avoid the loss of jobs or housing as a result of drawn-out pre-trial detention and trials. And as previously mentioned, a criminal record hurts future chances of employment and housing.

When activists followed the money, they found that while South LA lagged behind other areas of Los Angeles in public dollars spent on social programs and infrastructure, public expenditures on law enforcement and criminal justice are disproportionately high. For instance, in 2017 Metro approved a \$646 million annual multiagency contract with LAPD, LA Sheriff’s Department and Long Beach Police Department for transit policing. This was in addition to the \$70 million Metro spent in hiring its own security staff and another \$82 million to contract private security firms. Most citations and arrests are for behaviors that do not pose dangers to riders, such as lengthy public presence or inability to pay for a Metro fare. Fare evasion was the top reason for citations for youth under 18 in 2015. However, Metro was estimated to lose about \$5 million due to fare evasion, a small fraction of the policing budget. Activists argue that it would be cheaper to let low-income students and workers ride free or at a discount, than to build a system of public and private policing to surveil and discipline them.

South LA activists and organizers have been at the forefront of turning the tide of overzealous police suppression in inner cities. They advanced the narrative of the “school-to-prison pipeline” to the point where even the Los Angeles Unified School District recognized the harmful effects of its disciplinary policies. In 2007, the District adopted the

Schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support framework, in response to pressure from education justice advocates. In 2013, the District, once again responding to activists, strengthened the framework by passing the School Climate Bill of Rights, that eliminated the vague “willful defiance” suspensions in favor of more restorative justice approaches. Activists were also successful in pushing the Los Angeles City Council to amend the Daytime Curfew Law, which prior to 2012, resulted in the ticketing of 10,000 students in Los Angeles, 90% of whom were students of color and nearly half were aged 14 and younger, for being absent or late to school.

After years of community organizing and pushing an alternative to the “law and order” narrative against the powerful interest of law enforcement, South LA activists began to see some shift in public policy discourse in their favor. Recently, the county reconsidered the construction of jails to house an inmate population with a high propensity of mental health issues, which advocates argued was a misguided way to apply a criminal justice solution to a public health problem. There is growing support from both the California courts and legislature to do away with money bail. Metro is also considering different ways to serve and accommodate the homeless population that finds shelter in their trains and stations without further victimizing them.

Voters, who approved Proposition 47 in 2014 and Proposition 64 in 2016, are showing increasing signs of support for reducing punishment for nonviolent crimes (or even decriminalizing them, in the case of marijuana use) and shifting the cost of prosecuting and imprisoning a disproportionate number of people of color and young people to community reinvestment and prevention. South LA organizers, leaders, and activists have collectively used electoral, policy advocacy, outreach, and service provision strategies to ensure communities like South LA are prioritized for these programs.

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# Environmental Racism

**R**acist housing, land use, and labor policies, reinforced by gentrification, poverty, and overpolicing, have not only dictated (and segregated) where long-time South LA residents could live, but they have also made residents more vulnerable to pollution and environmental hazards in their surroundings. Exposure to these hazards is linked to higher rates of asthma, elevated blood lead levels, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, cancer, learning disabilities, and negative birth outcomes. Research has consistently demonstrated that race plays a significant role in the siting decisions of unwanted land uses by policymakers and industry. In South LA, as in many cities, the highest risk of pollution and environmental harms is assigned to Black and Brown communities.

Large contiguous parts of South LA rank among the top 10% most polluted census tracts in California. More than 24,000 South LA residents live within 500 feet of a major truck route and are exposed consistently to particulate matters from diesel exhaust. In addition, over 21,000 residents live within 500 feet of other unwanted land uses, such as manufacturing, warehousing and distribution, oil refining or chemical plants. Research suggests that these figures are underestimated because many land uses are misidentified in official databases.

Neighborhood oil drilling, in particular, is a major contributor to poor health outcomes and remains a growing concern among South LA residents. Extracting oil in dense urban areas like South LA requires extreme drilling techniques that produce wastewater contaminated with chemical additives and heavy metals. This kind of pollution affects sensory organs (like skin and eyes), as well as nervous, immune, cardiovascular, and endocrine systems, causing cancer and genetic mutations. Research has found that oil drilling sites in low-income communities of color, like South LA, are on average closer to homes, have fewer protections such as air monitoring or buffers, and have more violations and complaints on record. For example, at South LA drilling sites, the average distance to the closest sensitive land use (such as a home or school) is only 85 feet, compared to 570 feet in West LA.

Because of gentrification, many South LA residents have been pushed into areas with higher concentrations of substandard housing or have succumbed to overcrowding in order to avoid living on the streets. These areas are often marked by their proximity to industrial uses. In some cases, with the disappearance of the manufacturing sector in South LA over the past decades, housing was built on top of former industrial sites. Thus, in addition to the lack of investment to update



older structures, many living quarters contain indoor environmental hazards, such as lead, mold, and pests.

To make matters worse, South LA lacks the kind of infrastructure that could protect residents from these exposures. In South LA, 0.9 acre of open green space is afforded per 1,000 residents, well short of the 10-acre goal established by the City Council, and the region has the lowest park access rates among all service planning areas in the county.

Nonetheless, South LA residents have had some success against powerful corporate interests that tried to exploit the vulnerabilities of the region. The People Not Pozos campaign was able to shut down an oil drilling site in South LA, but only with years of intense grassroots organizing and working with allies in legislative and regulatory agencies. Recently, the Department of City Planning adopted a Clean Up Green Up Ordinance, which subjects new and expanding businesses to stricter development standards and restrictions, including setbacks and buffers that could keep South LA residents at a farther distance from unwanted use. Activists are also monitoring the distribution of revenues from Measure A, designed to improve park access in Los Angeles County, to make sure South LA get its equitable share of funding to expand green, open spaces.

South LA activists are also thinking more proactively and intersectionally. Programs that increase green jobs not only improve the employment and economic conditions of workers in South LA, but they also bring environmentally sound innovations and technology to the community. Many South LA community-based organizations, with expertise in transportation, and environmental and economic justice, are collaborating to garner funding from the Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) program, a multi-million dollar climate investment program targeted at the state's most disadvantaged communities. The TCC program, with input from environmental justice activists in South LA and elsewhere, will require projects to develop not only pollution-reducing programs, but also complementary economic, workforce development, and anti-displacement strategies.



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# SOUTH LA IS THE FUTURE

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**A**s we see throughout this report, South LA has been shaped by a century-long history of policy decisions that privilege corporations, developers, and White residents at the expense of working-class people of color. Abetted by elected officials and law enforcement, public policies have led to the neglect, criminalization, exclusion, and displacement of Black and Brown communities and are still the foundation upon which racial and economic inequities continue to be perpetrated to this day. Out of necessity, South LA has become a fertile ground for the development of organizations and alliances grounded in community-led visions and values. Community organizers and grassroots leaders have pioneered movement strategies and organizing tools, shifted mainstream narratives that devalue the humanity of South LA residents, and built a broader base of electoral and political power. In this way, South LA offers a unique progressive vision for the future.

The powers that South LA is struggling against are entrenched, relentless, and influential. Certainly, we still have a long road ahead to build power at the scope and scale needed to address the root causes of inequity. However, by offering an intersectional analysis of these root causes, this report identifies how multiple systems interact to maintain inequality in South LA. In doing so, this report serves as a call to action for current and future community leaders as well as our allies in philanthropy and government. Ultimately, the future of South LA lies in strengthening a South Central-rooted intersectional movement for social change.