

**The Park Made of Oil: Towards A Historical Political Ecology of the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area.**

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## **Abstract**

Within the park-deprived inner-city landscapes of Los Angeles, an unprecedented change is underway. Long considered to be the epitome of anti-nature, Los Angeles is witnessing a boom in park development and ecological restoration. Derelict, blighted and contaminated inner city brownfield sites are being converted to greenspaces, nature parks, and wildlife refuges. Indeed, Los Angeles has been the recent recipient of hitherto unimaginable political and fiscal support to ameliorate the dearth of parks in its neglected urban core. In this paper we situate the current round of park development within its historical context, by focusing on a very particular local site – the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area. Applying the theoretical lens of political ecology, we trace some of the political, economic, ecological and institutional factors from the late 1920s onwards, which engendered the creation of a park atop an oilfield. In so doing, we deepen the understanding of how local greenspace allocation, poverty, race and political power are oftentimes complexly entangled. Precursor to a much larger project currently in the planning and development stages, the creation of the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area reveals some of the ways that the Southern California oil industry has shaped nature spaces in Los Angeles.

**Keywords:** Parks, Los Angeles, political ecology, environmental justice, Baldwin Hills.

## **Introduction**

It would be easy to miss the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area in Los Angeles, without the park's small entrance signs. Upon first inspection, it is an unremarkable site, bearing few of the hallmarks of a State Park. Surrounded by an operating oilfield, the park's entrance adjoins a major thoroughfare – more of a speedway than a street. There are no grand boulevards, nor are there any impressive civic buildings typical of urban parks of this size. On a clear day though, the park offers tantalizing, multi-million dollar views of the Pacific Ocean and down town Los Angeles. It also contains the last extant patch of coastal sage-scrub in the Los Angeles basin. The park is cherished by surrounding residents, who are predominantly people of color, because there are few greenspaces within the city's park-deprived urban core, and the battle for this park was hard-won. A recent park expansion plan testifies to the fact that the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area is an important element in Los Angeles' local environment (Mozingo, 2000).

On December 29, 2000, a parcel of 68 acres of land (Vista Pacifica) was added to the park. At a cost of \$41.1 million dollars, and literally snatched from beneath the bulldozers that had begun leveling the site for a 241 unit residential development, it was at the time the most expensive park acquisition in the history of the State of California (Wave Community Newspaper, 2000; LA Times, 2000). The park expansion represented a victory for the largely African-American and Latino community on its border, made possible through a concerted and coordinated effort on the part of a coalition of

community activists, non-profit organizations, local politicians and several public agencies.

Funding sources for the park included \$32.5 million from Proposition 12 (championed by then Mayoral candidate and now Mayor Antonio Villagarosa) known as the “Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000”; \$5 million from the Los Angeles County Proposition A entitled: “Safe Neighborhood Parks, Gang Prevention, Tree-Planting, Senior and Youth Recreation, Beaches and Wildlife Protection” initiated by County Supervisor Yvonne Braithwaite Burke and legislative appropriations initiated by Democratic Senator Kevin Murray and Assemblyman Herb Wesson; and the then Governor Gray Davis’ support of \$3.5 million from the State’s general fund (Pincetl, 2003; Wave Community Newspaper, 2000; Wolch et al., 2005).<sup>1</sup> It was a landmark event, given the history of political apathy towards park development in Los Angeles (Davis, 1996; Hise and Deverell, 2000), and significantly, one that involved local politicians who were all people of color.

The alliance of politicians of color, environmental non-profits, local park activists and local government marked a radical departure from the usual complicity between politics and land development in the metropolis (Davis, 1998; Pincetl, 1999; Press, 2002). Indeed, Stephanie Pincetl (2003) has characterized this nascent parks movement as a new form of urban regime, a view supported by historian Kevin Starr (2004). Moreover, the movement appears to be aligned with a broader environmental justice platform and has considerable political clout. For example, State Senators Hilda Solis and Martha Escutia, instrumental to some of the above-mentioned park developments, also championed legislation to revise California’s air pollution standards to take into account children’s

health and to require the State's Environmental Protection Agency to consider the environmental justice effects of its policies and decisions.

In this paper we briefly explore some of the environmental and socio-political transformations that led to the development of the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area. Located in Los Angeles' Baldwin Hills, the park materialized in part due to the political savvy of local politician Kenneth Hahn, who used a climate of social unrest to justify its creation and to simultaneously bolster his appeal to his African-American constituents.<sup>2</sup> We aim to historicize and unravel the story behind the development of the park, drawing upon mixed methods research that took place from January to May, 2002. Using a combination of archival research, in-depth interviews, and geographic information systems (GIS) analysis we excavate the socio-political underpinnings of the park to unravel the entangled economic, political, historical, cultural and environmental factors that culminated in the development of the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area.<sup>3</sup>

Applying the theoretical lens of urban political ecology, we seek to answer three specific questions: (1) who were the key actors shaping the development of the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation area? (2) how did their interactions impact the local environment over time?, and (3) has park development in the Baldwin Hills from the 1920s to the present alleviated or exacerbated the vulnerability of local residents to environmental change? We begin our exploration by situating recent expansions of the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area within Los Angeles unprecedented park revivification.<sup>4</sup>

## **Los Angeles' park renaissance**

It seems Los Angeles is a city in the midst of a park renaissance. Following decades of unfettered real estate development that irreparably destroyed unique local landscapes and confined people of color and the urban poor to bleak industrialized wastelands (Davis, 1996; Press; 2002), a coalition of community groups, non-profit environmental organizations and local politicians has been patiently stitching together a plan to radically transform the inner city. Their actions have recently seen the passage of the State of California Urban Park Act (2001), dedicated to financing the “acquisition and development of parks, recreation areas and facilities in neighborhoods currently least served by park and recreation providers” (California State Parks, 2004). Over the past four years alone, more than \$87 million dollars has been spent purchasing and transforming former brownfield sites into new city parks and greenspaces.

The new park funding has included \$45 million for the Taylor Yards - a 40 acre park on a former rail yard in downtown Los Angeles, \$33.5 million for the Chinatown Cornfields park – a 32 acre brownfield site abutting Los Angeles' Chinatown, and \$4.5 million for the 8.5 acre Augustus Hawkins nature park, a former brownfield in South Los Angeles. In 2004, a further \$130 million dollars was set aside under the Act for park acquisition and development. What is most telling about this change of attitude towards parks in the urban core is revealed by the ideology enshrined in the Urban Park Act (2001) and the titles of the park bond propositions. Targeted not only at park deprived areas, but also at “destructive or unlawful conduct by youth...and other urban population groups”, this raft of legislative initiatives represents a resurgence of an older idea of

nature; as much about the maintenance of law and order and the policing of transgressive behavior as it is about greenspace provision (op. cit.).

It is no accident that park provision in Los Angeles has been linked to racial unrest following, and attributable to, urban uprisings such as the Watts Riots in 1965 and Rodney King riots in 1992 (Ouroussoff, 2001, p. F6). Indeed, recreation researchers Foley and Ward (1993, p. 68) sermonized that the: “young of South Los Angeles are black, brown, strong and combustible, and guns need to be replaced with balls, seeds and paint brushes”. This narrative harks back to the inception of the first urban parks in the United States, where ‘Nature’ was put to the service of fighting immorality and instilling civility; a trope that has since directed the urban park movement (Boyer, 1978; Cranz, 1982; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1995; Loukaitou-Sideris and Stieglitz: 2002; Schenker, 2003; Taylor, 1999; and Young, 2004). To better understand why and how parks have become linked to fighting incivility we turn to the nascent field of urban political ecology.

### **Theoretical frame: Urban political ecology**

Urban political ecology, says scholar Keith Pezzoli (2000, p. 27), interrogates “the relationship between environmental change, socio-economic impact and political processes”. Political ecology, according to Pezzoli: “links ecological themes with social struggles” (op. cit.). It entails “charting out the field of power relations” to better understand the interactions between society and nature (Pezzoli, 2000, p. 31; see also Lipietz, 1995). Specifically, political ecology tries to unpack the connections between economic exploitation, environmental degradation, cultural politics and grassroots activism (McCarthy, 2002; Rocheleau, et al, 1996; Watts, 2000). Geographers Blaikie

and Brookfield (1987, p. 17) have provided the most oft-cited definition of political ecology as a research frame integrating the: “concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy”; an approach premised upon the recognition that nature and society are deeply interrelated (see also Bryant, 1997; Bryant and Bailey, 1997; Keil, 2003; Peet and Watts, 1996; Stott and Sullivan, 2000).

Differential access to resources and vulnerability to environmental perturbations are at the heart of political ecology research (Blaikie, 1999; McCarthy, 2002; Mustafa, 2002; Rocheleau et al., 1996). Attentive to what Rocheleau and Edmunds (1997, p. 1351) have termed “the social relations of power”, a political ecology analysis can illuminate the extent to which human induced environmental change (re)configures social and economic disadvantage, and conversely – how institutionalized marginalization impacts the environment. The applicability of political ecology to our study centers upon the ways that particular ideas about nature are mobilized for specific political and social ends (Marne, 2001).

There are several principles and “mid-range concepts” upon which most political ecology studies are predicated (Watts, 2000, p. 591), which are particularly relevant to our case study. They include: “a refined concept of marginality in which political, ecological and economic aspects may be mutually reinforcing”; a focus upon the ‘place’ of poverty in environmental issues; the interrogation of the ‘facts’ of environmental degradation; and the centrality of the imbricated nature of social relations and ecology in producing environmental transformations (see also Robbins, 2004). Other key principles include: the importance of “historical depth” and a plurality of approaches in understanding causes of marginalization and environmental degradation (as these issues

are rarely, if ever, the product of simple factors or processes); a concern with actors and institutions (e.g. activists, political agencies, non-profit organizations and social movements), attention to the historicity of what Escobar (1999) has called ‘techno-natures’ – versions of nature manipulated for human benefit; and the need to critically appraise notions of what constitutes ‘development’ (Peet and Watts, 1996, p. 6-28; Watts, 2000, p. 591-592; Zimmerer, 2000).<sup>5</sup>

The common link between the broad diversity of political ecology studies is a focus on politically and economically constituted differential access to environmental resources (Bebbington and Batterbury, 2001; McCarthy, 2002; Warner, 2000). Political ecologists frame accessibility and vulnerability as key components of environmental change among socially and / or economically marginalized peoples, especially in the (re)distribution of environmental benefits such as fertile land, or harms such as soil loss or water pollution (Escobar, 1995; Potts, 2000; Sullivan, 2000). There is an evident intersection here with the key concerns of the environmental justice movement (Keil, 2003; Miller et al., 1996). The environmental justice movement arose in response to the disproportionate impact of environmental pollution and perturbations upon people of color and low income earners in US cities (Bullard, 1993; Pulido, 2000). These communities are the most vulnerable members of American society due to socio-economic and political marginalization, and to deeply-rooted persistent racism (Pulido, 2000).

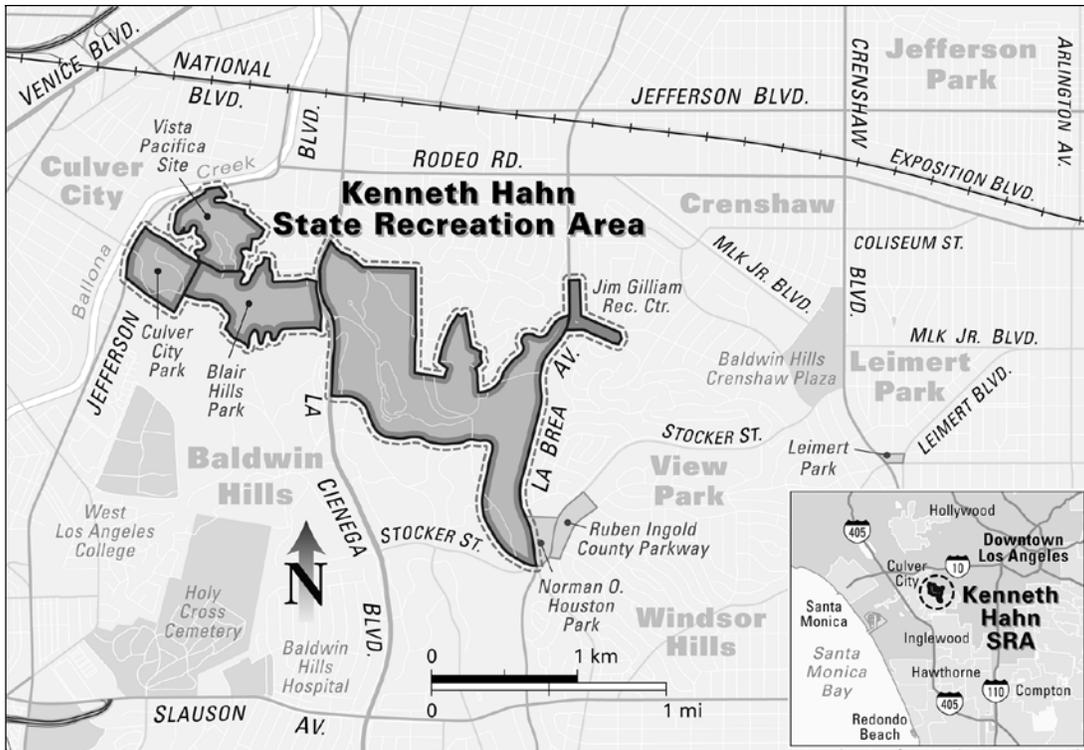
Questions about how class, race and socio-political marginality configure access to (in)salubrious urban environments feature prominently within the recent corpus of urban political ecology and environmental justice research (Barnett, 2001; Brownlow,

2002; Huang, Hsiao and Liu, 2002; and Pezzoli, 2002; Wiltshire et al., 2000). Access to healthy urban environments is largely determined by economic, social and political forces. A focus upon the processes that relegate the poor and socially marginalized to unhealthy and dangerous parts of the city, and how they in turn fight to gain admission to more wholesome environments, is the common ground shared by political ecology and environmental justice theorists. Denial of access to urban parks and other greenspace is emerging as a serious environmental justice issue (Barnett, 2001; Hurley, 1995; Winqvist, 2001; Wolch et al., 2005). Key here is the fact that industrial waste has both human and ecological impacts, and the remediation of brownfield sites for parks achieves social justice and ecological benefits (De Sousa, 2003).

At the core of the political ecology approach is a concern with the metabolization of nature – the way that natural entities are consumed, digested and transformed into ‘socio-natures’ (Gandy, 2002; Robbins, 2004; Swyngedouw, 1999; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003; Zimmerer and Bassett, 2003). A political ecology approach to parks thus offers a new way to understand how nature in the city is fashioned by political, cultural and economic contestations, and casts light on questions about who wins, and who loses in environmental struggles (Brassert, 1956). In the words of Paul Robbins, urban political ecology: “can expand beyond simply identifying the unequal distribution of risks...to explain how...urban ecologies are produced...Tracing flows...of garbage, trees, energy, runoff, and disease through built urban space, and examining governance of greenspaces...should be all the easier in a political ecology informed by a notion of the produced character of nature” (Robbins, 2004: 216).

## **A political ecology of an urban park**

The Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area is nestled on the shoulder of a prominence known as the Baldwin Hills, some six miles from downtown Los Angeles and four miles from the Pacific Ocean (see figure 1). At first glance the park appears to be a relatively mundane feature of Los Angeles' inner-city landscape. Crowned by power transmission lines, microwave radio towers and oil pumps, encircled by ranch-style housing, and covered in drab brown and olive scrub, the park is hardly a portrait of 'pristine' nature. Recently, the Baldwin Hills have been slated to become the largest urban park to be developed in modern US history – much larger than New York's Central Park (Community Conservancy International, 2001; Mozingo, 2000). Moreover, this park is to be a nature park, with the degraded landscape set to undergo substantial ecological restoration. For this reason alone, the hills would seem to be a good place to examine the political ecology of park development in Los Angeles and how parks are produced as socio-natures.<sup>6</sup> The park's history as a site of ongoing environmental justice contestation, exemplifying the politics of park disentanglement so pervasive in the urban core of Los Angeles, is what makes the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation area a compelling case study.



**Figure 1 – Location of the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area**

The rapid expansion of Los Angeles from the 1920s to the 1960s left many neighborhoods in the city’s older urban core park-deprived. The Baldwin Hills communities were no exception. The neighborhoods around the Baldwin Hills have some of the worst park accessibility problems in the Nation (Wolch et al., 2005). More than one million people live within a five-mile radius of the Baldwin Hills. Yet they have only limited access to park-space: about 0.31 acres of park space per 1,000 residents (the equivalent of a suburban backyard). This compares to an average of 31 acres per 1,000 residents for suburban Los Angeles (Feldman et al, 2001; Mozingo, 2000; Wolch et al., 2005).

Incredibly, sited atop an oilfield some 511 feet above sea-level, and commanding panoramic views of the city skyline, Hollywood and the Pacific Ocean, the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area survived Los Angeles' rapacious appetite for land. At the time oil was discovered in the Baldwin Hills, Los Angeles was in the midst of a real estate boom that would profoundly reconfigure the metropolis, instantiating urban sprawl as the standard built form (Young, 2001). Ironically, the park owes its very existence to oil production, with the concomitant odor, noise and poor visual amenity of the active oilfield preserving the site as an island in the midst of a sea of development (McKinney, 2001). But this does not completely explain how the park came into existence. As anyone familiar with Los Angeles will attest, oilfields and expensive houses happily coexist across the city – even in parts of Beverly Hills. For a better explanation we need to excavate the locality's social and political past.

*Prelude to the park – opportunities lost...*

In 1930, following their dire prediction that Los Angeles treasured landscapes would be overrun by development, Frederick Olmsted Jr. and Harland Bartholomew were commissioned by a Citizens' Committee appointed by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce to plan a comprehensive system of integrated parks, nature reserves, beaches, and neighborhood-based playgrounds for the region (Hise and Deverell, 2000; Young, 2001). One of the recommendations of the report was to preserve unique topographic features surrounding the city, including the Baldwin Hills, within regional open space (Hise and Deverell, 2000, p. 117 & 300). If Olmsted and Bartholomew's recommendations had held sway, only the occasional oil derrick would have occluded city-views for skyline motorists and panorama seekers traveling through the Baldwin

Hills.<sup>7</sup> However, the Citizens' Committee imploded in dissent. This was due to: the projected cost of implementing the plan; the proposal for a centralized park agency which threatened the ideology of 'local rule'; the scientific language of the document which alienated some readers and; opposition to perceived 'land grabs' (Hise and Deverell, 2000; Young, 2001). With the onset of the Great Depression the Olmsted-Bartholomew scheme was permanently shelved. Very few of their proposals have since been realized (Hise and Deverell, 2000; Pincetl, 2003; Young, 2001). Ironically, and perhaps through sheer good fortune, the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation has emerged as one of them.

An important obstacle to the Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan was the notion that Los Angeles had little need for parks. With abundant open space on its periphery in the form of mountains, the Pacific Ocean beaches and vast acreages of orchards and vineyards, few early planners and developers in Los Angeles recognized a need for parks (McClung, 2000, p. 152-153). Moreover, the dominance of the single family house, each with its own verdant backyard, gave Angelenos themselves little reason to venture far from home for contact with nature. In the words of McClung (2000, p. 149): parks were perceived as "a compensation for the failures of the paved environment" and since Los Angeles was in a sense a city 'built in park', it had no need for them. Added to this was a deep suspicion of city parks as "refuges for the marginal and the lairs of predators" (McClung, 2000, p. 144). With the failure of the Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan, and a widespread antipathy towards parks among Angelenos, there was nothing preventing the Baldwin Hills from being overrun by development. To understand why the hills survived relatively intact, we need to probe the social, political and economic factors that mitigated development.

*'Black gold'*

The Baldwin Hills, historian Norman Klein noted, derived their name from Elias Jackson “Lucky” Baldwin (1828-1908), a prominent businessman and land speculator in late nineteenth-century Southern California (Klein, 1990, p. 3). Baldwin arrived in Los Angeles during the property boom of the 1880s, having made his riches in the Nevada Comstock Mines. Baldwin amassed his wealth into a local real estate fortune, becoming one of Los Angeles’ early property development millionaires (Mozingo, 2000). He purchased the 4,481.5 acre Rancho Cienega O’Paso de la Tijera - comprising the majority of the Baldwin Hills, from the then Alcalde (mayor) of Los Angeles, Vicente Sanchez (Rasmussen, 1994 & 1996). In the ensuing half century, Baldwin’s eponymous hills escaped large-scale development largely because he believed them to be worthless wasteland fit only for cattle grazing (French, 1970). It was not until some fifteen years after Baldwin’s death that his family learned the true value their inheritance.

Beneath the Baldwin Hills lay the reserves of what was to become known as the Inglewood Oil Field (Higgins, 1958). First discovered in downtown Los Angeles by Edward Doheney in 1892, oil extraction rapidly became one of the pillars of the Southern Californian economy (Hodgson, 1985 & 1988; Yergin, 1991). Several large deposits were found in the early twentieth century at Long Beach, Huntington Beach and Santa Fe Springs (Quam-Wickham, 1998). Under exploration since 1916, the Baldwin Hills oilfield was first exploited in 1924 when Standard Oil Company of California hit pay dirt with discovery well No.1. By August 1925, production had peaked with 147 wells yielding 3,248,109 barrels per acre. Around this time, Southern California became one of

the world's largest oil producers and Los Angeles became a city filled with "blue-eyed sheiks" (Davis, 1990, p. 117).

In the roaring 1920s, the prehistoric remains of plants and animals trapped beneath the folded and faulted Pleistocene sediments of an ancient ocean were tapped by a "forest of derricks" to fuel the appetites of the burgeoning automobile dependent metropolis (Bottles, 1987; Moldauer, 1991; Quam-Wickham, 1998). According to Quam-Wickham (1998, 189): "...oil development radically changed existing land use patterns, encouraged industrialization, and contributed to real estate speculation in the region." Weekly updates of oil strikes, stock values and oil production levels became a fixture of the Los Angeles Times and other newspapers, igniting a national oil frenzy and spurring migration to the city. Although the oil industry became critically important to the future of Los Angeles, it had mixed blessing for neighbors of the city's oilfields.

Oil development left a legacy of environmental destruction. Hillsides were terraced, vegetation was stripped from the landscape, pools of oil and chemicals seeped into topsoil, and oil fires regularly filled the sky with plumes of acrid black smoke. Bungalows, vegetation, city streets, streams and wetlands were smeared with oil when wells frequently blew out after drilling crews hit pockets of natural gas, "ruining orchards, vegetable fields and grazing lands (Quam-Wickham, 1998, 192-3). Oil from drilling operations, land and sea-based transportation and leaking tank farms left the Los Angeles harbor covered in a thick film of oil, which migrated up the coast despoiling the city's iconic beaches. Even the city's sewers ran with oil from illegal dumping. The situation got so bad that the City's Parks and Playgrounds Commission published

photographs of pollution at Venice Beach in its 1928 annual report, listing oil production as an impediment to healthy recreation.<sup>8</sup>

### *Real estate development*

As boomtown Los Angeles experienced a twofold increase in population, the mass availability of the automobile liberated real estate developers from the limitations imposed by a dependency on streetcar and railway lines. While the growth of the nearby municipalities of Inglewood and Culver City were highly contingent on the metropolitan railway network, the proliferation of communities around the Baldwin Hills was automobile created. Residential development in the Baldwin Hills began during the 1920s, as the first homes in the district were built directly below Jefferson Boulevard and west of Crenshaw Boulevard (see figure 1). Construction peaked in 1924, and the choice of the area for the 1932 Olympic Village shows that it had already become fashionable.<sup>9</sup> Although growth slowed following the Great Depression, the 1940s proved to be a significant decade for the built environment of the district. A boom in residential development followed the return of servicemen in the late 1940s and the tide of post-war migrants flocking to Southern California. This population influx placed enormous pressure on the city, manifested in accommodation shortages and escalating land values (Goudey, 1936). During this time, housing engulfed the Baldwin Hills oilfield.

In the 1950s, single family-homes became the basic component of development in the Baldwin Hills and fetched lucrative prices as the district retained its early fashionable character.<sup>10</sup> The final wave of residential development in the area during the 1950s witnessed the extensive construction of homes atop the hills. In 1953, three major grading

operations on the sides of the hills made way for the construction of impressive new homes on the curvilinear ‘Don’ streets in the highest parts of the Baldwin Hills (all of the streets in this area were given Spanish names beginning with “Don” e.g. Don Felipe, Don Miguel, Don Tomaso, etc).<sup>11</sup> The population at that time was predominantly White, with a small Japanese minority. Beginning in the early 1960s though, the area underwent a dramatic demographic transition.

Lonnie Bunch, scholar of African-American issues, noted that following the end of residential segregation, after the US Supreme Court struck down restrictive housing covenants in 1948, the Baldwin Hills were one of Los Angeles’ few integrated communities. But harmonious relations did not last (Bunch, 1990). Larger numbers of middle class African-Americans buying homes in the area, including Tom Bradley who went on to become Los Angeles’ first black mayor, soon prompted a wave of white flight. The Baldwin Hills, says Bunch, became a “golden ghetto” of doctors, lawyers and entrepreneurs who had been “...fortunate enough to escape the culture of poverty that gripped South Central Los Angeles” (Bunch, 1990, p. 124). From the late 1960s to the early 1970s, the area became more racially diverse, as the White majority was replaced by African American, Japanese American and some Latino residents. The residential area dubbed “The Dons” had become a stronghold of middle to upper class African Americans, and by 1980 it was obvious that the Baldwin Hills were the new center of African American culture in Los Angeles.

The neighborhoods now identified with the Baldwin Hills are comprised of some 30 communities, including View Park, Windsor Hills, Fox Hills, Leimert Park, Blair Hills, Ladera Heights, North Inglewood, Crenshaw and Baldwin Vista. Although there

are pockets of great affluence amidst these communities, some of the neighborhoods on the flat lands surrounding the hills are among the city's poorest. A substantial portion of the population in these neighborhoods lives within multi-story apartments, and has a mean household income of less than \$15,000 per annum, well below the Los Angeles County average. Almost 20% of residents within these neighborhoods also fall below the national poverty level. Census 2000 figures reveal that the Baldwin Hills area is now quite socio-demographically diverse. Of the approximately 45,000 residents who live in the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the hills, the population is 76% African-American, 9% Latino and close to 6% White. Within a five mile radius of the hills the population composition shifts considerably: 29% African-American, 33% Latino and 38% White (Community Conservancy International, 2001).



**Plate 1 –Baldwin Hills rancho (ca. 1880s)** reproduced with permission of the Los Angeles Public Library, Herald-Examiner Collection

*Oil and water don't mix – nature reviled, nature revived*

The burgeoning population of Los Angeles fuelled by economic booms based on oil and land development resulted in water pressure regulation and supply problems for the west-side neighborhoods by the mid-1940s (Lund, 1954). Requiring a twofold increase in storage and distribution capacity to contain peak summer demand, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) turned to the undeveloped portions of the city to solve this dilemma. An elevated site was needed for a water supply reservoir and the Baldwin Hills seemingly fit the bill. At some 500 feet above sea level, the north ridge of the Baldwin Hills, highest point of south-western Los Angeles, was an obvious choice for the new reservoir. In the mid-1940s, most of the land immediately adjacent to the proposed site remained largely undeveloped, and the presence of the oilfield made land acquisition relatively inexpensive. In 1947, the LADWP purchased the site for the new reservoir from the Baldwin Hills Development Company. This was the beginning of public ownership of land in the locality, and sowed the seeds for what was later to become the Baldwin Hills open space and Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area.<sup>12</sup>



**Plate 2 – The Baldwin Hills Village Green (ca. 1940s)** reproduced with permission of the Los Angeles Public Library, Herald-Examiner Collection

On February 6, 1947, with a series of engineering and geological investigations completed, the City Planning Commission fatefully approved the reservoir plans. In what was to later become a tragic decision, the reservoir was constructed roughly 3,500 feet northeast of the middle of the 1,180-acre Inglewood Oil Field, operated by Standard Oil. The oilfield was created by the actions of the Newport-Inglewood fault, running from just north of the Baldwin Hills, past Signal Hill in Long Beach to south of Newport Beach, then offshore from the San Joaquin Hills. The Baldwin Hills are the surface expression of a fractured anticline, thrust upward through millennia of seismic actions (Cooke, 1984; Gumprecht, 1999; Hamilton and Meehan, 1971). Although both seismic activity and petroleum extraction were known to be potential agents of ground subsidence at the time the reservoir was proposed, engineers were confident of their plans. The reservoir was placed into service in 1951 “as a model of engineering excellence and source of pride to

its builder and owner, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power” (State of California: Department of Water Resources, 1964). With completion of the reservoir, hillside subdivisions of single - family houses overtook portions of the hills not used for oil production (Wan, 1993). The last of these subdivisions, the one closest to the Baldwin Hills Reservoir, was completed in October 1956.



**Plate 3 – The Baldwin Hills Oilfield (ca. 1940s)** reproduced with permission of the Los Angeles Public Library, Herald-Examiner Collection

Following declining returns from normal oil extraction practices, in 1954 Standard Oil introduced a new oil recovery technique called ‘high-pressure water-flooding’ in a limited numbers of wells within the Inglewood Oilfield.<sup>13</sup> The principle behind this secondary recovery technique was simple: inject salt water deep into the oilfield, to drive trapped oil from the oil-bearing sands into the wells. Encouraged by the

results from three years of pilot testing the technique in its east block leases, Standard Oil initiated full-scale water-flooding operations in 1957. Most of the injector wells were west of the fault, which itself was approximately 1,350 feet west of the LADWP's reservoir; but a few lay east of the fault, close to the reservoir's southern wall (Hamilton and Meehan, 1971).

Since the time of the field's discovery, the northern boundary of the oil pool had expanded approximately 300 feet, and now extended under the Baldwin Hills Reservoir (op.cit.). Removal of oil and water from subsurface pools created voids beneath the reservoir. As early as 1943, ground surveys conducted by engineers of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power had detected surface elevation changes occurring in the Baldwin Hills. By 1957, it was clear that these elevation changes defined a bowl-shaped depression matching the boundary of the Inglewood Oilfield. That same year, surface faulting began to appear, with ground rupturing especially evident in and adjacent to the area of water flooding operations. Nonetheless, Standard Oil intensified operations with twenty one additional oil wells between 1957 and 1963. During this time eight more faults became active, a circumstance later attributed directly to water flooding practices (Hamilton and Meehan, 1971, p. 333-334).

In mid- and late 1963 water flooding operations intensified further, as four additional wells near the reservoir were started. Shortly thereafter, a series of bizarre operational problems occurred. Uncontrolled loss of fluid was encountered in five injectors, while a sixth well was 'pinched or sheared off at depth' (Hamilton and Meehan, 1971 p. 340). Earlier, in May of that year, brine had been detected seeping from surface cracks south of the reservoir. Even so, oil recovery operations continued unabated, with

operations managers seemingly unperturbed by this course of events. Just over six months later, the reservoir ruptured. Although 8,000 residents from the neighborhoods below the reservoir were frantically evacuated in the hours before the reservoir failed, the 292 million gallons of treated drinking water that disgorged through a 75 foot wide chasm in the dam wall killed five people, destroyed 65 homes, damaged 210 houses and apartments and caused over \$12 million dollars of property damage (Hamilton and Meehan, 1971; Rasmussen, 1994). There were no reports of damage to the oilfield.

A 1964 report documenting the findings of the Department of Water Resources' investigation into the tragedy concluded that tectonic activity and subsidence were to blame. The LADWP immediately compensated residents for the flood damage. In 1966 the City and its insurers filed two law suits against oil companies operating in the vicinity of the reservoir. The case was settled out of court in 1970 for nearly \$3.9 million dollars, only a fraction of the damages incurred by the City and local landowners.



**Plate 4 – Residents of the Baldwin Hills (ca. 1940)** reproduced with permission of the Los Angeles Public Library, Herald-Examiner Collection

*The park is born*

Five years after the dam failure in 1968, Los Angeles County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn was driving down La Cienega Boulevard accompanied by Assistant Chief Deputy Davis Lear. Supervisor Hahn reputedly had an epiphany. Looking at the former reservoir site, Hahn saw its potential for a park. He was reputedly influenced by the findings of the McCone Commission into the Watts uprising of 1965 and by the Kerner Commission report into civil unrest in the Nation's cities. According to a community newsletter, and corroborated by a personal interview with Mr. Jim Park – Assistant Director of the L.A. County Department of Parks and Recreation (one of Hahn's key staff at the time), Supervisor Hahn was made aware of a Federal Revenue Sharing Program by then Vice-

President Spiro Agnew and saw the possibility of funding a large regional park in the locality.

Hahn recognized that the Baldwin Hills were degraded, heavily contaminated and of marginal value without extensive remediation. He also recognized that the local state held property in the area and that a park in this location would partly assuage his constituents' desperate need for greenspace. No surprisingly, he linked the need for the park to crime reduction in the aftermath of the Watts riots, stating: "high incidences of crime, decreasing protection from law enforcement and the fiscal crisis of the County" necessitated a regional park "close to home"<sup>14</sup>. Official telling of the Baldwin Hills story suggests that a politically astute and impressively networked Hahn garnered a remarkable coalition, ranging from the local to the Executive levels of government, to support the development of a park on the defunct reservoir site. This coalition consisted of County Supervisors, Mayors, City Councilors, State Senators, State Assembly representatives, Governors, and even Vice-Presidents and Presidents - attested to by numerous photographic memorabilia hanging in the parks' recreation center.

In 1968 Hahn began putting aside funding for the park. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors authorized preparation of a park plan in 1975, and allocated two million dollars towards the proposed park. The County purchased a small portion of Baldwin Hills site for a park site in 1976. Additional funding for park expansion was provided via Federal, State and municipal sources, including the State Bond Acts of 1980 and 1984. Ground was broken for the park on June 26, 1982 and the 138 acre park was officially opened on November 14, 1983.<sup>15</sup> At the time of opening, the park had cost a mere \$27 million dollars, mainly due to the fact that significant portions were already

government-owned property. Supervisor Kenneth Hahn described the park as “one of the great urban parks in America.”<sup>16</sup> He promoted it as a family-oriented space, and credited the existence of such a large area of ‘undeveloped’ land in its “natural state” to the operation of the oil industry. Indeed, Hahn’s own narrative account depicts the land as previously “going to waste”.

It is very likely that the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area was not solely the product of Hahn’s personal revelation, but rather reflected the ideological beliefs of his politically influential family. Missing from official accounts about the creation of the park is an acknowledgment of how particular ideas about ‘nature’ were deployed by the Hahns for political ends. Our archival research has revealed that members of the Hahn family were established members of the Baldwin Hills political elite, and had a penchant for parks. Kenneth Hahn’s brother, Gordon R. Hahn was a long-serving Los Angeles Councilman and a member of the California State Assembly from 1947-1953. Councilman Gordon Hahn was a strong supporter of bond initiatives to finance park and recreation facilities within the city, holding them to be antidotes to urban ills. For example, he was quoted in the Los Angeles Sentinel as stating: “legislation of this type is the best means we have for reducing our enormous juvenile delinquency figures...” (L.A. Sentinel, 1955).

Kenneth Hahn publicly expressed similar sentiments. At the opening of new facilities at Alondra Park in 1958, a regional park that he created in the City of Gardena, Hahn stated: “relatively small expenditures in recreational facilities now can save taxpayers millions of dollars by preventing juvenile delinquency”.<sup>17</sup> A week earlier at another park opening he had commented: “It is much wiser and more economical to

spend money constructively in providing our youth with good parks and playgrounds than it is to be constantly building more jails, juvenile halls and detention camps and adding police, probation officers and judges”.<sup>18</sup> For Hahn it was critically important that: “children have healthful, wholesome recreation available to them”. His mantra seemed to be: “wholesome recreation is a major deterrent to juvenile delinquency”.<sup>19</sup> But he also recognized that “adults too, need open green areas where they can relax from the tensions and strains of modern living”.<sup>20</sup>

Parks were a key platform in Hahn’s impressive political career and he is remembered by many as a park crusader. Kenneth Hahn was personally responsible for the creation, upgrading and redevelopment of over 30 municipal parks in the previously neglected neighborhoods South Los Angeles at a time when civil rights were not widely recognized. He named many of them after prominent African Americans. Hahn also created over a dozen public golf courses and 18 municipal swimming pools, numerous senior citizens centers and was instrumental in opening school grounds for community recreation. Hahn instigated free pool attendance in the ‘minority’ neighborhoods that formed his constituency. He also established security guards for park facilities, since there was widespread violence in parks at the time, including gang-related homicides, and he was instrumental in bringing United States Department of Agriculture summer nutrition programs to parks.

Hahn’s park openings were highly symbolic affairs. They were attended by large numbers of guests (over 500 at times), and Hahn made a personal point of elevating African American civic leaders to prominence during the opening ceremonies. Park opening events were attended by leaders from the NAACP (National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People), Episcopal and Baptist churches, the urban league and local chambers of commerce. He was a staunch supporter of civil rights and counted Martin Luther King Jr. among his friends, being the only elected official to greet King when he visited Los Angeles.<sup>21</sup> Hahn even once said that: “the black church has been my strength and my shield, a shield to me against my enemies”.<sup>22</sup>

The creation of Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area (named to commemorate 40 years of Kenneth Hahn’s service to the County) was an achievement made possible largely by Hahn’s political acumen. The youngest person to ever serve on the County Board of Supervisors (first elected in 1952), Hahn became its longest serving member. He served eight consecutive terms, and was elected each term by record margins. Hahn’s aptitude for networking at all levels of politics and ability to garner cooperation for a variety of projects made him a formidable local politician<sup>23</sup>. Hahn was a friend of President’s Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, Ford, Carter and Reagan and had a good working relationship with Presidents Eisenhower and Nixon. Letters from State, regional and municipal agencies attest to Hahn’s political savvy, and illustrate the level of widespread support for his park proposals (LA County, 1976; Park, 1981). Indeed, there were no objections to the Baldwin Hills Park (as it was then known) from any government agency, at any level. The only objections to the park proposal came from the oil industry.

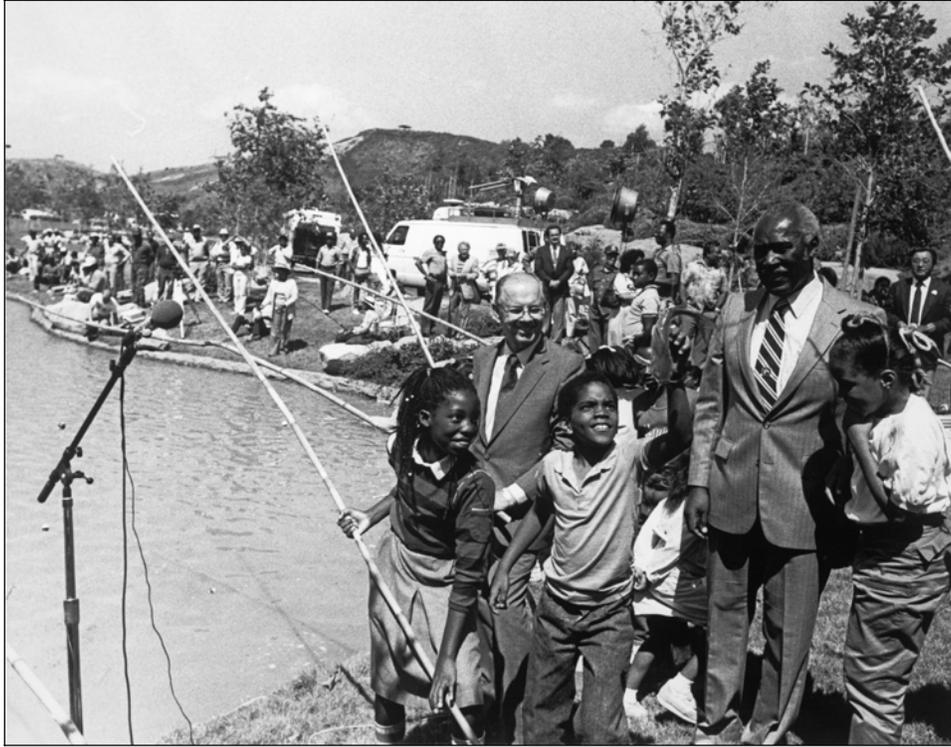
### *Oil in the political machinery*

An examination of Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs) for the proposed park casts light upon the relationship between the oil producers and the local politicians. Admittedly, some of the oil companies’ responses to the EIRs were apathetic or

complacent. For example Burmah Oil offered “no comment” on the proposal (LA County, 1976: attachment 15) and Shell stated that “we assume that, if the park is acquired, the County would evaluate what they were taking and make the park and the oil field compatible” (LA County, 1976: attachment 16). Other stakeholders including the First Colony Life insurance Company and Los Angeles Investment Company were altogether more belligerent and contemplated litigation (LA County, 1976: attachment 17). The California Southern Oil Company openly criticized the County’s projections as to the lifespan of the oilfield (LA County, 1976: attachment 14) and Chevron accused the County of failure to analyze interim development plans, raising issues of safety, accessibility and traffic control (LA County, 1976: attachment 18). Chevron’s stance ossified in the early 1980s.

By 1981, Chevron had become openly hostile towards the park (Park, 1981: attachment 10). The company asserted that the park plans were too big and that coexistence with oil production was impossible. They argued for “geographically limiting” the park to 400 acres, claiming that this would meet the County’s objectives. Chevron also highlighted what they called “a staggering sum of public funds especially in view of the ...climate of fiscal conservatism” (op. cit.). Finally, Chevron requested that all references to links between oil production and the Baldwin Hills Reservoir failure be “omitted from the final report” (op. cit). The County partly assuaged Chevron’s concerns, advising that traffic, safety and user conflicts would be properly addressed through park planning, but maintained its stance that the park would eventually total 1,300 acres in area, to compensate for the dismal provision of regional open space in the inner city and

to “improve the quality of life in this urban area” (Park, 1981: Letter from County dated May 8, 1981; Planning Group, 1978).



**Plate 5 – Kenneth Hahn at the launch of the park (ca. 1983)** reproduced with permission of the Huntington Library, Kenneth Hahn manuscript collection

Lawyers Flint and MacKay acting for these stakeholders accused the County of a “total failure of the initial draft EIR to consider the safety factors involved in mixing a producing oil facility and a large scale recreational area”, but this was not their only concern. They represented the oil field as an “attractive nuisance” that would be irresistible to park users. Their letter contained a thinly veiled threat referring to a possible violation of an injunction granted by Judge David Thomas on July 5, 1979 where it was asserted that the park would contravene the zoning of the land. Nonetheless, the

County dismissed all of these claims outright. But, Flint and MacKay were not through. Acting on behalf of the Los Angeles Investment Company, in a 27 page submission to the County dated April 8, 1981 (Park, 1981), Flint and MacKay referred to the “staggering costs of acquisition”, also echoing Chevron’s earlier sentiments. They further complained that they although they had petitioned Supervisors Dana and Antonovich to intervene on their behalf, their requests had been ignored. This is in itself a revealing insight into local politics, as Flint and MacKay tried to circumvent Supervisor Hahn who was the representative for the district, presumably because the park was his idea.

At the last minute, there was a flurry of resistance to the park from a local homeowner’s coalition. In a letter to the County Supervisors dated June 30, 1983, some residents stated that since the park was proposed “residences have changed ownership, the economic base has changed, crime has escalated and city services have declined”.<sup>24</sup> This group strongly objected to several park activities including group and overnight camping, amphitheaters, access routed for hiking from residential streets, and vista points giving “burglar’s a bird’s-eye view of [nearby] homes” (op. cit.). The group promoted developing the park as an inner city wildlife sanctuary, building concrete walls to separate homes from the park, 24 hour security patrols and closing the park after 9 pm. Julian Edmondson, Chairman of the 4500 Don Filipe Block Club joined the fray. He claimed that 1,800 homeowners feared crime, additional noise, high traffic volumes, and drug use attributable to the park.<sup>25</sup> County Supervisors acted quickly to limit dissent by erecting boundary fences and circulating newsletters promoting the benefits of the park as a place for family recreation. Strict opening hours were also implemented.

Ultimately, on November 14, 1983, the former reservoir site became home to the new park – the fifth largest urban park in the US. Since then, the County has acquired over 500-acres of former oilfield for additional parkland. Interestingly, an additional 200 acres was later donated by Chevron (Standard Oil Company), at an overall cost of \$6.8 million dollars, perhaps because the company sensed that the power balance in municipal politics had shifted decisively in favor of the local community. At the time of writing, the Inglewood Oil Field remains an active producer, with most production coming from the ongoing practice of direct injection. The 420 oil wells that remain active yield an estimated 6,900 barrels of crude oil and 3.2 million cubic feet of natural gas daily. Seismic events continue to plague the area, many attributed to oil production. Notably, the elliptical subsidence area defining the northwest portion of the oilfield continues to subside at a rate of 1 to 2 inches per year. This subsidence has in part contributed to narrative portrayals of the Baldwin Hills as inherently seismically and socially unstable.

### **Reprise: environmental racism and the Baldwin Hills**

It is appropriate here to recount one final event that captures the enduring contestations over nature in the Baldwin Hills. At the height of the California Energy Crisis, early in 2001, Governor Gray Davis took desperate action to meet the State's voracious energy appetites. He ordered a fast-tracking of the approval process for small energy plants designed to supplement supplies during peak periods of demand (Jeffe, 2001). Normally these types of power plants would require an extensive environmental review process. With the stroke of a pen Davis, using his emergency powers, reduced to the period to a mere twenty-one days (Mozingo, 2001a,b,c). In May of 2001, a joint venture of Stocker Resources who was at the time the largest lessee of the Baldwin Hills oilfield, and La

Jolla Energy Development Incorporated proposed to develop a 53 megawatt ‘peaker’ plant on the oilfield, but within the site of the future Baldwin Hills Park. The proposal was met with a wall of protest from residents who saw it as another state-sanctioned act of environmental racism.

Over 1,200 residents and community activists turned out at State Energy Commission public hearings to voice their objections to the plant. Unlike the early days of the Baldwin Hills, when white politicians represented the interests of black residents, things had changed. Governor Davis’ support for the proposal was largely motivated by a need to minimize the political crisis in which he found himself when California’s crippled energy reserves necessitated rolling blackouts. Local residents vehemently fought the proposal. They were supported by African-American politicians and leaders, including State Senator Kevin Murray, State Assemblyman Herb Wesson, and County Supervisor Yvonne Braithwaite Burke, L.A. Unified School District Board President Genethia Hayes, and their own United Homeowners Associations. Several of these politicians had been personally mentored by Kenneth Hahn. Unconstrained by their former reliance upon benevolent or even paternalistic gestures from white officials, the local residents now had the political clout necessary to resist the plant, and were ultimately successful. In June, 2001 one of the partners La Jolla Energy Development backed away from the proposal, and shortly thereafter the State Energy Commission cancelled its meeting to consider the proposal (Mozingo, 2001d).

## **Conclusion**

Today the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area is a beloved community asset, intensively utilized by local and regional residents. The park contains four playgrounds, a fishing lake, two baseball diamonds with lighting, a multi-purpose field, a half basketball court, a sand volleyball court and a community building with a meeting room. Other facilities include eight rental picnic shelters over 100 picnic tables scattered throughout the park, eight large barbecue pits and 60 smaller ones, as well as walking trails and children's play equipment. On any given day of the week the park is filled with families having picnics, people jogging, kids fishing in the lake stocked with catfish, nature lovers, couples walking along the look-out trails, teenagers playing football, students lying on blankets studying, people watchers, and a plethora of other park users. On the weekends, numbers swell dramatically as families flock to the park to escape the heat, grime and congestion of the city. Weekends and public holidays attract a vehicle entrance fee. Although not a large imposition, it is a likely deterrent to some weekend use.

It is astonishing that the Baldwin Hills, situated as they are in the heart of Los Angeles, have survived with large sections remaining relatively intact and undeveloped. This 'fortunate coincidence' may be attributed to the fact that oil extraction was far more profitable than land development (Mozingo, 2000b). In Southern California there are several examples where oil fields have recently been decommissioned and redeveloped for greenspace, including parks and wildlife reserves. The Puente - Chino Hills and the Bolsa Chica wetlands (the latter near Huntington Beach) are pertinent cases. A large regional park in Torrance – the 98 acre Willowbrook Recreation Area, developed in the 1980s is another relevant example. Formerly an oil tank farm, it was redeveloped under

the guidance of Kenneth Hahn into a remarkably similar park to the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area, complete with fishing lake, urban forest and picnic areas. Political ecology offers insights into why these land use transformations have occurred.

Parks, reserves and other forms of greenspace in the city are socially produced versions of nature, and reflect tensions, divisions and inequalities present in broader society.<sup>26</sup> A political ecology approach to parks focuses on decision-making processes about the allocation and maintenance of urban greenspace resources, and the ways multiple axes of difference (e.g. race, class and gender) configure access to these environmental assets (see for example Brownlow, 2002). This is because political ecology reframes many of the traditional concerns surrounding the politics of urban greenspace distribution - access to environmental benefits and freedom from environmental harms, by focusing on the intersection of marginality, local scale politics and environmental transformation (Bebbington and Batterbury, 2001). As Swyngedouw and Heynen (2003, p.910) explain: “economic, political and cultural processes inherent to urban landscape production” are responsible for urban environmental benefits and harms that are “spatially differentiated and highly uneven”.

Although at face value the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area may seem to be a benevolent gesture on the part of the local state to a park deprived inner-city community, we believe otherwise. Specifically, by interrogating Progressivist tropes of nature as ‘purifier and source of moral uplift’ (Baldwin, 1999; Boyer, 1978) we have shown in this paper that that new urban parks in Los Angeles have been marshaled to placate inner city people of color and the urban poor demanding a better quality of life. Moreover, through park development the local state has divested itself of a potential liability. Converting

land that had only marginal economic value – pockmarked as it is with oil wells, soaked in contaminants from oil extraction and clearly geologically unstable, into a park for inner-city people of color, the local state has fulfilled both political and economic imperatives. Rather than address the structural causes of concentrated poverty, proponents of park based urban revitalization in Los Angeles instead have operationalized a discourse that privileges physical and moral uplift and economic improvement to combat transgressive behavior by the urban poor and people of color (Hartman, 2001; Madge, 1997; and McInroy, 2000).

The cliché about idle hands has political purchase in a city where gang activity and violent crime are everyday occurrences. Indeed, Gordon Hahn’s ‘delinquent youth’ are specters that continue to haunt the reformist imaginations of Los Angeles’ politicians, entrepreneurs and community groups intent on reclaiming inner sites regarded as ‘idle’, ‘derelict’ or ‘underutilized’ land. It must be remembered that the Kerner, McCone and Christopher Commission reports (released after the 1965 Watts and 1992 Los Angeles uprising) linked park provision with civil order. In a recent example, the liberal Center for Law in the Public Interest (CLIPi), a strong proponent of urban parks in Los Angeles, stated in its report on sport and urban parks to the California Department of Parks and recreation:

*Soccer is among the most valued cultural and historical resources for Latino and other immigrant communities. Soccer provides an alternative to gangs, crimes, drugs, violence, prostitution, and unwanted pregnancies. Soccer is a central part of the social meaning diverse communities give to parks. (Garcia et al., 2002 p. 3)*

In asserting that: “active recreation programs prevent gang violence, crime, prostitution, drug abuse, teen sex, and unwanted teen pregnancies” (Garcia et al., 2002 p. 25) the

organization clearly illustrates the notion that parks are ideologically infused socio-natures. There is a direct link here with past narratives about the restorative powers of nature and the control of people seen as undesirable or unruly (Cronon, 1996; Di Chiro, 1996; Olwig, 1996; Proctor and Pincetl, 1996; Smith, 2004). Evidently, despite the rhetoric of social equity and environmental restoration, in Los Angeles we have not come very far from the environmentally deterministic and elitist ideals that underpinned the urban parks movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Ideas of ‘Nature’ were, and still are, deployed by powerful social and political actors for economic, social and political gains often at the expense of the working class and people of color.

Yet it cannot be denied that new parks are desperately needed in inner city Los Angeles. Communities of color have recently successfully mobilized to thwart further industrial and warehousing developments in their neighborhoods and have effectively captured public funding for the development of new parks in their communities. Particularly telling is the fact that many of these communities are demanding a mix of active and passive recreation. Access to nature and ecological restoration are also high on their agenda of urban reform. As they build upon these early successes, it is clear that this new urban parks movement – driven from the bottom-up by communities of color and the urban poor, is reconfiguring previously degraded urban environments in radical new ways that promise to dramatically improve the social and ecological health of the city. Their vision of salubrious urban environments offers hope to those seeking more socially just and ecologically sustainable cities (While et al., 2004). The challenge will be to ensure that as property values improve concomitant with an improving local environment, the communities effecting these changes are not displaced.

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The American Land Conservancy administered the purchase, and transferred the land to the State of California's Parks Department and the Baldwin Hills Recreation and Conservation Authority. Another non-profit, Community Conservancy international, was instrumental in orchestrating the purchase by lobbying for and securing funding. There were other agencies that played a role too, including the Packard Foundation and Environment Now.

<sup>2</sup> James Hahn used his father's reputation with the African-American community of Los Angeles to win a Mayor election against Antonio Villagarosa. He subsequently lost the support of this vital component of the electorate after firing police chief Bernard Parks who later ran against Hahn. Recently James Hahn lost an election to Villagarosa.

<sup>3</sup> The in-depth interviews were with State agency and local parks department representatives, representatives from pertinent non-profit groups, community leaders and oil industry representatives.

<sup>4</sup> Our archival research consisted of an examination of environmental impact reports for the Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area, political maps drawn from the University of California, Los Angeles map library archives, the Los Angeles public library archives (especially the California Blue Books and State Rosters), the County of Los Angeles property title database, the University of Southern California's special collection for zoning schemes, the Sanborne Fire Insurance records, the City of Los Angeles archival material on the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Huntington Library's collection of manuscripts from County Supervisors Kenneth Hahn and John Anson Ford.

<sup>5</sup> Escobar (1999) has defined techno-nature as the cyborg entity created by human intervention in such things as plant and animal genetics, disease management, fertilizer production for soil enhancement and the like.

<sup>6</sup> Portions of the hills have steep bluffs whilst other areas are more gently undulating. Those areas of the hills characterized by more gentle slopes have already been developed for housing, whilst large areas of the hills have also been physically modified by activities associated with oil extraction. The actual extent of the landform is bounded by the Ballona Creek to the north-west, the Santa Monica Freeway to the north, Crenshaw Boulevard to the east, a portion of the San Diego Freeway, Florence Avenue, and the Santa Fe rail line to the south, and the Culver City municipal boundary to the west.

<sup>7</sup> Shaffer (2001, p. 357) provocatively argued that the Olmstead-Bartholomew Plan was not the product of beneficent visionaries, but was instead a shrewdly modernist planning instrument "cloaked in images and ideas associated with nature" yet advancing "a cultural agenda...reinforc[ing]...progress, technology and commercial development". Shaffer argued that for the proponents of the plan, "scenic parkways provided a landscape resource that increased real estate values" (Shaffer, 2001, p. 375). Clearly the plan's authors recognized that the Baldwin Hills had greater value undeveloped, and believed that the City, acting in an entrepreneurial capacity would recognize this as its midwestern and east coast counterparts had done earlier. But the Olmstead-Bartholomew plan failed to consider the strength of the prevailing land development ethos in Los Angeles.

<sup>8</sup> Eventually the local community backlash against these problems spawned a working class conservationism that redefined industry operating practices (Quam-Wickham, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> The village was demolished shortly after the games had finished.

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<sup>10</sup> The exception was a utopian, pedestrian-oriented apartment complex called the Village Green, constructed with the assistance of the Federal Housing Authority in 1942, under the direction of architect Clarence Stein and partners.

<sup>11</sup> Los Angeles County Department of Building and Safety, Building Permits, 1953, permit #s 51167, 55940, 75936.

<sup>12</sup> In the period from about 1960 through the 1980s, various small land transactions occurred in the district, but two major trends can be identified. The first was the continuing purchase of larger parcels of land by the Los Angeles City DWP during 1959 and 1975, and the second was that large portions of land were purchased by Los Angeles County Parks in 1977-8 and 1983-4. The State of California also purchased land in 1984 - Los Angeles County Tax Assessor's Records, Map Book 5029, pages 17 and 20. Other minor land holders in this area during the period included the Artesian Water Co., Daclem Building Corp., Alva Building Co., Clement L. Hirsch, Robert Schultz Enterprises, Inc., Donald and Mary E. Stovall, Citizens National Bank, Trust and Savings Banks, Crocker T., AT&T Communications Co. of Ca., Maruja B. Hodges Co., and Pacific Bell.

<sup>13</sup> In the east block, fluid pressures measured in wells had declined from pre-exploitation pressures of 570 pounds per square inch to about 50 pounds per square inch.

<sup>14</sup> Memo to County Board of Supervisors dated June 30, 1983, Huntington Library archives, Kenneth Hahn manuscripts, photo collection, box 78, Baldwin Hills' folder.

<sup>15</sup> The park now encompasses some 350 acres of land and is still growing.

<sup>16</sup> Hahn, K. 1985, Letter to Residents.

<sup>17</sup> Press release dated October 30, 1959, Kenneth Hahn manuscripts, Huntington Library, Box 59, 5.3.2.6.1, folder 4.

<sup>18</sup> Press release dated October 23, 1959, Kenneth Hahn manuscripts, Huntington Library, Box 59, 5.3.2.6.1, folder 4.

<sup>19</sup> Press release for Lennox Park dated October 5, 1959, Kenneth Hahn manuscripts, Huntington Library archives, Box 59, 5.3.2.6.1, folder 4.

<sup>20</sup> Press release dated August 1, 1958, Kenneth Hahn manuscripts, Huntington Library archives, Box 59, 5.3.2.6.1, folder 4.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Mrs. King to Kenneth Hahn manuscripts, Huntington Library archives, Box 59, 5.3.2.6.1, folder 4.

<sup>22</sup> Hahn speaking at a celebration of his career, quoted in the Los Angeles Times, September 21, 1990.

<sup>23</sup> Hahn is credited with the idea of installing emergency telephones on Los Angeles' freeways.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from homeowners to County Supervisors dated June 30, 1983, Kenneth Hahn manuscripts, Huntington Library archives, Box 59, 5.3.2.6.1, folder 4.

<sup>25</sup> Wave Community Newspaper, July 13, 1983, Kenneth Hahn manuscripts, Huntington Library archives, Box 59, 5.3.2.6.1, folder 4.

<sup>26</sup> Parks epitomize the moral geography of the city (Matless, 1997). They have held a significant place in the urban imagination (Dalby, 2003; Platt, 1994). Planners, sociologists, historians and political scientists have all considered the role of greenspace to be important in the lives of urban residents (Koehler and Wrightson, 1987; Pezzoli, 2000; Szczygiel and Hewitt, 2000, Taylor, 1999). Indeed the early urban reformers saw parks as a critical component of urban life – wherein nature furnished urban residents with a model for moral uplift, with rejuvenating air and greenery for health and spirituality, and with a space to ease the tension and anxiety of urban living (Platt,

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1994; Sporn, 1984; Sporn, 1996; Taylor, 1999; Yuen, 1996). Greenspace also featured prominently in the garden city movement, which emphasized access to greenspace in urban design (Hall, 1996).