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Claremont McKenna College

Advocating for Existence: The History of Environmental Justice
Movements Surrounding the Port of Los Angeles

submitted to
Professor Lily Geismer

by
Walter Holden Brostrom

for
Senior Thesis
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Introduction

Approaching from the north on the 110 freeway, known as the “Harbor Gateway,” the first indicators of the San Pedro Harbor port complex that emerge are the cranes. Jutting out against the line of the horizon, they seem to stand as tall as the high rises in downtown Long Beach. Their arms extend out from the uniform rows in which they are organized, creating cross-hatched webbing. Next, the extensions and remnants of port industry appear. At first, a few scattered shipping trucks, or a trucking insurance store. Trucking and railway companies increasingly occupy space closer to the complex.

The freeway ends in Central San Pedro, one of the smaller subsets of towns that neighbor the Port of Los Angeles. From here, the cranes loom over the surroundings; it is difficult to visually discern that the ocean is in the near vicinity, aside from the inlets that service the shipping terminals. San Pedro offers various port-related attractions: The Los Angeles Maritime and Battleship USS Iowa museums stand close to each other, directly parallel to the Port across the port’s main channel; further south, old berths and warehouses have been converted into restaurants, markets, and activity centers.

To the left of the discontinuation of the 110 stands the Vincent Thomas Bridge, its emerald-green towers echoing the design of the cranes that are situated all around it. The bridge spans the length of the Port of Los Angeles, cutting directly through the center of it, before ending at the point in which Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach meet. From the apex of this bridge, the vastness of the entire operation become more apparent: to the south, the shipping terminals the landscape, the cranes surrounded by stacks of red, blue, green, and pink shipping containers, the bright colors and formation bearing resemblance

to children's building blocks. To the north, more terminals, now accompanied by the berths of railyards, and their ensuing tracks; the hubcaps of the refineries in the area; shipping and manufacturing warehouses.

The neighborhood of Wilmington sits tucked into this morass of industry. Its southern boundary rests directly against port terminals. The eastern boundary loosely traces the 103 freeway, ending at the Intermodal Container Transfer Facility (ICTF) train yard, which occupies an extended sliver of the neighborhood borders. The Marathon and Los Angeles oil refineries sit on the norther border, along with the BNSF Railway Company Watson railyard, within a few blocks of Phineas Banning High School, named after the man widely known as the "Father of Los Angeles Harbor."¹ The 110 freeway defines Wilmington's western boundary.

The smell of diesel is palpable almost immediately anywhere within a couple miles' radius of the port. For those that are unaccustomed to the air quality, after about an hour an itch can develop in the throat, eyes begin to singe slightly, and a headache develops as a result of the increased particulate in the air. All of the census tracts directly neighboring the port in both San Pedro and Wilmington are in the 90th percentile of pollution burden in the entire state of California, with the majority of adjacent tracts within the 80th to 90th percentile as well.² Wilmington and San Pedro tracts score within

¹ "History," The Port of Los Angeles, City of Los Angeles, Accessed December 4, 2021.

² "CalEnviroScreen 4.0 Results," Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, California Environmental Protection Agency, October 2021.

the top twentieth percentile in terms of statewide asthma rates, with Wilmington is within the top ten percentile of cardiovascular diseases statewide.³

This account captures a brief glimpse of the physical reality of the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach in the present day. What this does not fully encompass is the larger network of the logistics regime for which the port complex serves as the fulcrum, including an extensive network of truckyards and freeways, railyards and railways, and shipping and distribution centers that extend across the South Coast Basin region. The Port of Los Angeles and Port of Long Beach together handle forty percent of imports into America.⁴ The Port of Los Angeles alone accounts for forty percent of the West Coast's entire market share and is one of the largest ports in the world.⁵ Beyond its sheer shipping prowess, the port is one of the largest employers in the city, region, and nation, providing 133,000 jobs in Los Angeles, roughly 500,000 jobs across the greater five-county region—which includes Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, Ventura, and Orange counties—and over 1.5 million jobs nationally. Those figures are almost doubled when the Port of Long Beach is included. To put this into perspective, the port complex accounts for one of every nine jobs in the South Basin Region, and one of every fifty jobs nationwide.⁶ Despite consistently being the most active port in the nation, the port was

³ “CalEnviroScreen 4.0 Indicator Maps,” Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, California Environmental Protection Agency, October 2021.

⁴ Soumya Karlamangla. “The Busiest Port in the U.S.,” *New York Times*, November 4, 2021.

⁵ “Annual Facts and Figures,” The Port of Los Angeles, The City of Los Angeles, Accessed December 4, 2021.

⁶ *Ibid.*

only growing, with port officials estimating that the port is set to break its annual record for imports and exports in 2021.⁷

As such, it was no surprise when the recent slowdown of shipping at the ports and subsequent supply chain issues received such urgent and national attention. A problem that largely began with interruptions and stoppages across the global supply chain at the beginning of the pandemic came to a head at the Southern California ports recently, as they struggled to both unload and transport massive surges in cargo brought on by increased American consumption. As dozens of ships began to fill the harbor, the Biden Administration called for the ports to start running 24-hour operations in order to alleviate the buildup of ships and nationwide product shortages.⁸ Much of the recent focus and media attention has revolved the combination of a report that anticipated \$90 billion in losses across the country and limited access to commonplace and holiday goods for consumers in the United States, and the rupture of an oil pipe off of Huntington Beach caused by an idling shipping vessel's anchor.⁹

This present-day event serves as a telling microcosm of the historical and current approach to issues surrounding port operations: natural environmental matters are only included when unavoidable, while the port's economic vitality and capacity largely serves as the focus surrounding port matters. The prioritization of financial concerns has

⁷ "The Busiest Port in the U.S."

⁸ Don Lee and Chris Megerian, "Biden will announce Expanded operations at Port of Los Angeles as Supply Chain Crunch Continues," *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 2021.

⁹ "Long Beach and Los Angeles Port Delays May Disrupt US Holiday Season," Russell Group, 31 August 2021; "The Busiest Port in the U.S."; Anita Chabria, Thomas Curwen and Richard Winton, "How a coast crowded with ships, port gridlock and an anchor may have caused O.C. oil spill," *Los Angeles Times*, October 6, 2021.

come at the direct expense of a de-prioritization of issues of labor and, even more prominently, environmental impacts on local and regional residents of Los Angeles. In the case of the current slowdowns, the Biden administration and others advocating the 24-hour operations of the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach did not fully consider the toll it would have on already short-staffed longshore workers and truckers. There was equally little attention paid to the impact that these idling ships would have on the communities surrounding the port and extending along its shipping routes. The California Air Resources Board estimated that the additional emissions of idling ships equal that of the 5.8 million passenger vehicles in the region, adding increased burden to those communities of San Pedro and Wilmington already suffering from some of the highest rates of cardiovascular issues and diseases in the state.¹⁰

This thesis seeks to shed light on the historical forces that gave rise to the preference of the health of the Port of Los Angeles' economy and growth over that of its workers, neighboring residents, and environment. The convergence of economy, labor, environmental injustice, and spatial and migratory factors primes the Port of Los Angeles and its surrounding communities as a powerful example of the myriad choices that shape environmental racism and disadvantaged communities across the state, country, and world. In response to and refusal of this racism and environmental burden, community-based environmental justice movements in South Los Angeles ultimately brought about more tangible environmental change than the agencies officially responsible for regulation.

¹⁰ "Emissions Impact of Ships Anchored at Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach," California Air Resources Board, November 9, 2021.

This thesis draws upon existing scholarship surrounding various spatial, economic, political, labor, and environmental justice movements throughout Los Angeles' history, in the process highlighting distinct moments of tension and accord.¹¹ Beyond academic contributions, this thesis aims to recognize and uplift the efforts of individuals, neighbors, groups, and environmental justice and community-based organizations that have fought tirelessly for the health, safety, and vitality of their communities in Los Angeles and around the San Pedro Harbor port complex. While many people and efforts have gone formally undocumented, and there are too many to incorporate. It specifically recognizes the work of Coalition for a Safe Environment (CSAFE), Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), Coalition for Clean Air (CCA), Mothers of East Los Angeles, Communities for a Better Environment (CBE), National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), and the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports (CSP).

¹¹ Juan D. De Lara, *Inland Shift: Race, Space, and Capital in Southern California* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018). De Lara details how economic and political precedence of the logistics regime and infrastructure growth fostered grassroots resistance from communities over labor, environmental, and health injustices; Juan De Lara, ““The Port is Killing People:” Sustainability without Justice in the Neo-Keynesian Green City,” *Annals of American Association of Geographers* 108, no. 2 (2018). De Lara points to the adoption of green growth strategies around the Port of Los Angeles as a reinforcement of preexisting racial, class, and socioeconomic plight. This effort was subsequently challenged by a joint labor and environmental call that green growth alleviate these racial and class-based discrepancies, as opposed to reaffirming them; Karen Brodtkin, *Power Politics: Environmental Activism in South Los Angeles* (New Brunswick, NJ.: Rutgers University Press, 2009). Karen Brodtkin examines how in the wake of deindustrialization and white flight in the region, labor forces were challenged by a grassroots environmental movement in a struggle that pitted jobs against health in South Los Angeles.

In order to fully untangle the intersections of the port, labor, political, migratory, and environmental influences, this thesis is broken into three chapters. The first chapter illustrates the South Los Angeles' economic and demographic development in the post-World War II period. It highlights the rise and fall of industrialization and subsequent deindustrialization in the region, bringing about extensive white flight. In its wake, a growing population of Mexican and Central American migrants moved into the region. All the while, the Port of Los Angeles ushered in a new era of post-war growth, marked by the advent of container shipping methods introduced in the 1970's. This growth coincided with a new impetus on environmental regulation, with state and local authorities seeking to remediate Los Angeles' poor air quality and disappearing coastline.

Chapter Two will detail the port's expansion into a hub of imports as a key cog in burgeoning globalized trade. As the port pushed for short-term and long-term development projects and plans through the 1980's and 1990's, it garnered largely unmitigated political and financial support from regional, state, and national leaders, who saw the larger port logistics complex as a source of commerce and jobs that would alleviate the impacts of the loss of manufacturing. Despite the port's success, labor groups facing deregulation and advances in technology had no choice but to substantiate port development. Environmental policies and regulators, commissioned to ensure that the port uphold emissions standards, had little power against the port's regional and nationwide importance and thus did little to slow its massive expansion.

Chapter Three addresses the stark realities that emerged around the port in the late 1990's and early 2000's when its growth fueled extreme pollution and fostered unsafe and unhealthy work environments. The emergence of grassroots environmental justice

movements through the 1980's and 1990's began to permeate around the port, gaining important legal victories and halting port development. At the same time, labor movements among unionized longshore workers and largely ununionized truck drivers were beginning to resist their working conditions. These two distinct and historically disparate factions ultimately joined forces in a coalition around the 2008 Clean Trucks Program, ensuring that any environmental benefits of the program did not come at the financial toll of truck drivers.

In the port's centuries-old history, the initial instances in which it was forced to comply with regulations and halt development were brought about by the concerted efforts of community-based organizations and local citizens. The incorporation of labor into environmental movements within the coalition around the Clean Trucks Program ties in the intersection of environmental issues with those of race, class, and socioeconomic status, culminating in a broader environmental justice movement. At its core, this thesis argues that the only successful environmental regulation around the port have been borne out of environmental justice movements.

Chapter 1: Shaping South Los Angeles

The narrative surrounding Los Angeles becoming the city it is today largely centers around its vast, car-centric sprawl and the complex network of freeways that connect it. While this was, and still is, a defining feature of the city, Los Angeles' escalation into a 'megametropolis' is also due to lesser-known yet equally-important factors that largely emerged following the end of World War II. Through the middle of the 20th century, Los Angeles was one of the manufacturing capitals of the country, rivalling many of the midwestern and northeastern hubs in terms of production and scale. At the same time, the Port of Los Angeles grew into one of the busiest ports in the nation handling an increasing flow of global trade.

These economic developments, along with the jobs it created, supported dynamic migration and immigration within the region, as well as conflicts and questions around labor. It also increased smog and pollution across the city and the region, attracting increased national attention as part of broader environmental awareness. By the 1970's, impending deindustrialization, shifts in regional demographic composition, and expanding environmental regulatory initiatives would set the scene for arguably the port's most critical phase of development and shape the prospects of the communities in South Los Angeles.

The car-dominated urban sprawl not only contributed to the physical definition of Los Angeles, but it also provided an early instance of environmental discrimination. In 1940, the California State Highway Commission built the Arroyo Seco parkway, the first

freeway in the West.¹² Nestled into the Arroyo Seco canyon, the freeway connected already heavily-populated Pasadena and Downtown Los Angeles, allowing for faster transit and a higher threshold of vehicles. The Arroyo Seco freeway foreshadowed what was to come in the region, as freeways sprang up along various corridors throughout the Los Angeles Basin over the ensuing decades. In doing so, Los Angeles was at pace, or even ahead of the country and the national freeway expansion that occurred with the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act.¹³ However, what many viewed as impressive progress came at the direct destruction of some of Los Angeles' most vibrant and thriving minority communities. Under the guise of 'slum clearance' or 'blighted neighborhoods,' officials tore down houses in the neighborhoods of Boyle Heights, Pico, and Sugar Hill, predominantly composed of Black and Latinx Angelenos.¹⁴ In their place, massive concrete pillars, ramps, and parkways carved up these communities, physically imposing new boundaries that promoted isolation and displacement. These freeways were, and still are, major sources of pollution. The minority communities situated around these corridors bear the brunt of diesel and particulate matter from automobile congestion, leading to heightened levels of asthma, cardiovascular disease, and low birth weights.¹⁵

All of this expansion ultimately aided the concurrent movement of vast suburbanization across the region. This push was both to accommodate and invite one of

¹² Christopher C. Sellers, *Crabgrass Crucible: Suburban Nature and the Rise of Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 140.

¹³ Robert Gottlieb, *Reinventing Los Angeles: Nature and Community in the Global City* (Boston: The MIT Press, 2007), 193.

¹⁴ Steve Chiotakis, "LA freeways: The Infrastructure of Racism," *Greater LA, KCRW*, 30 June 2020.

¹⁵ "CalEnviroScreen 4.0 Results."

the fastest population growths in the country, as the Los Angeles gained 1.2 million new citizens within its city limits from 1930 to 1960.¹⁶ Throughout this period, the second half of which in conjunction with larger post-war suburbanization trends, developers extended the metropolitan area into what it resembles today, a vast sea of built landscape framed by mountains and ocean. While today it is apparent that Los Angeles' sprawl is unmistakably un-natural—that is, representing the elimination of its original, natural environment and ecology—its development was not initially seen in this light. As Christopher Sellers expertly delineates in his book, *Crabgrass Crucible*:

(The) narrative of suburbanizing as nature-completing ... readily gave way to city-building tales highlighting its built and social dimensions. But what both these as well as their nature-erasing antithesis tended to overlook was how suburban city building did not merely wipe away an underlying nature. It also sought to reveal or to expose it, make it *more* visible.¹⁷

Sellers is pointing out a critical piece of the suburbanization of Los Angeles that, especially in hindsight, is easy to overlook: in comparison to conventional city development, in which the city center was a dense, urban core from which the rest unfolded, Los Angeles expanded with an illusory connection to nature in mind. In continually moving out towards the edges of the basin, the promise of the natural world was more tangible, with proximity to the mountain ranges betraying the open, natural space between them and development.

The rapid growth of Los Angeles as the Western United States' manufacturing and industrial center compounded these patterns and consequences of urban sprawl. The incorporation of new industrial infrastructure nearly doubled the amount of urbanized

¹⁶ Sellers, 142.

¹⁷ Sellers, 141.

space in the region.¹⁸ Through the first half of the 20th Century, oil drilling represented the dominant industry in the region, specifically through Southeast Los Angeles.¹⁹ However, with the advent of the Port of Los Angeles' extensive development in 1922, Southeast Los Angeles became a convenient location for industry to take hold. The rubber and tire industry, already in the area since the 1920's, expanded to include the major American tire producers.²⁰ Steel production and auto industry manufacturing soon followed; In these industries, Los Angeles was the second-largest producer of goods after their capitals of Akron, Pennsylvania, and Detroit, respectively.²¹

Diversifying throughout the first part of the century, manufacturing industries exploded as a result of World War II. As the country mobilized its industry for World War II, Southeast Los Angeles became a focal point of both production and distribution. Its success in maintaining and advancing these industrial pursuits is what ultimately allowed for the postwar economic boon that advanced in the region, attracting new business, expanding markets, and, significantly, providing new jobs.

Alongside the growth of manufacturing, The Port of Los Angeles experienced unprecedented growth in the time following World War II. The Navy had assumed control of all port operations through the war given its proximity to the largely-oceanic war action in the Pacific Theatre.²² Once the port resumed its normal economic activity,

¹⁸ Sellers, 149.

¹⁹ Brodtkin, 22.

²⁰ Myrna Cherkoss Donahoe, "Economic restructuring and labor organizing in southeast Los Angeles, 1935-2001," Published in *Latino Los Angeles: transformations, communities, and activism*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 88.

²¹ Donahoe, 88.

²² Charles F. Queenan, *The Port of Los Angeles: from Wilderness to World Port* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Harbor Department, 1983), 87.

it continued its plans for expansion set out in the period before the war. The difference now was that the port, in many ways buoyed by the strength of its local manufacturing economy, was primed to become one of the premier ports in the world. The U.S.'s increasing involvement in global markets and formal reengagement in trade with Japan after the signing of the 1951 Japan Peace Pact fueled this growth. In the ensuing decade, trade between the two countries increased at a rate that was nearly two-fold its pre-war levels.²³ Despite fluctuations in tonnage of product, the port nonetheless began to see dramatic increases in overall traffic that extended beyond the water, as trucking allowed for more efficient transport of goods in both directions.²⁴ A Harbor City Charter amendment that enabled the Harbor Department to issue revenue bonds to finance improvements to the harbor accentuated the economic progress of the 1950s.²⁵

This growth of manufacturing, the port, and subsequent employment opportunities caused important migratory and demographic shifts within Southeast Los Angeles that exposed and prompted heightened racial prejudice. Prior to World War II, Los Angeles harbored a social and legislative hostility towards immigrants of all forms, largely around migrants of Asian, European, and Mexican descent, but including those displaced persons from the Dust Bowl migrations.²⁶ As is still the case today, many of the early foreign-born immigrants settled into ethnic enclaves and worked vital, low-

²³ Ibid., 97.

²⁴ Ibid., 98.

²⁵ Ibid., 101.

²⁶ Gottlieb, 260-261.

paying service jobs.²⁷ Dust Bowl settlers were able to secure work in oil or industry and eventually acclimate into white enclaves of Los Angeles, cementing xenophobic sentiments in racial discrimination.²⁸

The Wartime mobilization of both American troops and industry brought a necessary shift in both immigration and labor composition. In 1942, the United States government signed the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement, also commonly referred to as the Bracero program. Despite the inclusion of more minority and female populations within the workforce, there were distinct labor shortages in agriculture and manufacturing that men in the bracero program filled.²⁹ Though the program was started as an emergency wartime measure, it was codified in 1951 and persisted until 1964, enjoying support from both governments alongside employers of the region.³⁰

The Bracero Program coincided with an equally large movement of undocumented immigrants into the region. Low-skill, non-union industries capitalized on the unofficial immigration status of this population, as they were not liable to provide minimum wage and housing requisites included in the Bracero Program.³¹ While this movement confronted the same nativist opposition as migrations in previous decades, post-war industrial expansion labor demands outweighed such hostility. As Martin Valdes Torres explains, “As long as jobs were available and employers were willing to

²⁷ Martin Valadez Torres, “Indispensable migrants: Mexican workers and the making of twentieth-century Los Angeles,” Published in *Latino Los Angeles: transformations, communities, and activism* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 27.

²⁸ Brodtkin, 23.

²⁹ Torres, 31.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Torres, 31-32.

hire them, men, women, and children crossed into the United States.”³² This layered influx of migration from Mexico would ensue in the decades to come, not only defining labor force dynamics but also drastically shaping the fabric of many communities in Southeast Los Angeles and beyond. Additionally, African Americans fleeing the Southern United States as a part of the Great Migration settled in large part in South Central Los Angeles, establishing it as a demographic and cultural community.³³

It is important to frame these labor and migratory movements in the greater labor trends of Southeast Los Angeles in the post-war era. The workforce in the burgeoning manufacturing sector in the region, which at the time was almost all white, was banding together to form a strong, unionized contingent. Through extensive organizing tactics and multi-occupational strikes, workers across the rubber, steel, auto, and light industries were able to secure good wages, benefits, and retirement plans through their national union partners.³⁴ The incorporation of these national union powers, which reached their peak strength in Los Angeles in the 1950s and 1960s, eventually had extended effects on the Black and Latinx populations in the area. Nationwide desegregation movements among industrial unions extended their reach into Southeast Los Angeles, and Black and Latinx workers slowly but surely began to infiltrate the higher-skill manufacturing workforce.³⁵ Though the wages and benefits were a welcome improvement, neighborhoods remained segregated through both overt and systemic racism and policies.

³² Ibid., 32.

³³ Gottlieb, 264-265.

³⁴ Donahoe, 89.

³⁵ Brodtkin, 24.

Most of the African American population still resided in South Central, while much of the Latinx community lived in East Los Angeles.³⁶

The gains made by unionized labor groups across all races were short-lived, as Los Angeles was not immune from the deindustrialization that scoured America in the mid-1960s and 1970s. Over this broader timeframe, unionized manufacturing strongholds such as General Motors, Bethlehem Steel, and Firestone Tire all shut down their Los Angeles plants,³⁷ reflecting the larger trend in their respective industries. As could be expected, the economic fallout from these closures differed in severity for white and minority employees. Having been employed and unionized for longer, many white employees received retirement benefits; others could follow new career opportunities into Orange County, where they were both economically and socially capable of relocating.³⁸ For Black and Latinx employees, who had been the most recent hires in most cases, were subsequently the first to be laid off, ineligible for the same benefits and economic mobility of their white counterparts. Signified by the Watts Uprisings, industrial collapse bolstered the realities of poverty, disinvestment, and lack of political agency for the African American population of Los Angeles. By the end of the decade, many African Americans, once the majority of the minority population in Los Angeles, had left the city.

Immigrants from Mexico and Central America, as well as the pre-existing Latinx population, moved into these vacated communities in Southeast Los Angeles.³⁹ In the

³⁶ Donahoe, 89.

³⁷ Brodtkin, 27.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Manuel Pastor et al., "Roots|Raíces: Latino Engagement, Place Identities, and Shared Futures in South Los Angeles," USC Dornsife Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration, October 2016, 2.

wake of the collapse of unionized labor in Southeast Los Angeles, ‘light manufacturing’ took over and expanded within the region. The convergence of new population and new industry led to the Latinx community assuming a large share of light manufacturing’s labor force. Comprised of industries such as food processing, toy manufacturing, garment, and furniture production,⁴⁰ these industries were non-union, low-skill, and thus, low paying, forcing former unionized, high-skill workers to take jobs at half of their prior salary.⁴¹

In spite of the fluctuations of and shifts within the manufacturing industry, the Port of Los Angeles maintained steady growth throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s. The aforementioned revenue bonds would have created opportunity for growth and development under any circumstances, but their timing within the larger scope of shipping technology proved extremely advantageous. In 1960, containerization—the mode of shipping that is ubiquitous to all of us today—became commercially feasible.⁴² This new development opened the door to extremely streamlined and reliable shipping, with the ability to bear far more product with less labor costs. This change revolutionized the industry as a whole. Despite some small-scale opposition, containerization was quickly adopted by most major ports across the world. It also equipped Port of Los Angeles with the financial means to execute the necessary alterations to accommodate larger vessels and install container cranes.

⁴⁰ Gottlieb, 271.

⁴¹ Donahoe, 96.

⁴² Queenan, 103.

As the port's economic vitality increased, so too did the pollution it created. Along with the expanding capacity for more shipping liners, the increase in freight trucks added more diesel particulate into the cloud of pollution that was steadily shrouding the city. This smog served as a visual representation of rising awareness and worry surrounding water and air pollution in the United States.⁴³ In response to this and other environmental concerns across the country, the Nixon Administration created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), consolidating much of the federal government's responsibilities and action around climate to one agency.⁴⁴ Among their first initiatives was the Clean Air Act of 1970. Under the EPA's authority, the act enabled both federal and state regulation around static and mobile sources of pollution for the first time, encompassing both industrial sites and cars, trucks, trains, and ships.⁴⁵ Federal policy also had direct bearing on the Port of Los Angeles. Beyond the Clean Air Act's pollution standards, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 determined that any project involving federal participation required an environmental impact statement.⁴⁶

These new EPA regulations were met with swift pushback. Fearing the economic and logistic ramifications on both businesses and individuals, Governor Ronald Reagan repeatedly came out against the Clean Air Act. He argued that the proposal—which called for a plan of action on meeting EPA standards by 1975, followed by tangible measures of improvement by 1977—did not consider the differences between state's

⁴³ "The Origins of EPA," United States Environmental Protection Agency, July 9 2021.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ "Evolution of the Clean Air Act," United States Environmental Protection Agency, October 8 2020.

⁴⁶ Queenan, 114.

needs and would lead to hastily-developed actions that would ultimately work against the best interests of California businesses and communities.⁴⁷ These sentiments were somewhat surprisingly echoed by the EPA themselves. Faced with a lawsuit holding them accountable to produce a plan to meet air quality standards in the Los Angeles region, the EPA found themselves fighting against the standards that they had created. The main conflict the EPA was contending with, according to administrator William D. Ruckelshaus, was losing public support through stringent measures that affected both jobs and everyday costs, such as electricity and gasoline.⁴⁸ This resistance and reluctance to enforce environmental regulation in Los Angeles foreshadows similar approaches by politicians and environmental agencies in the future, specifically as it pertained to port development.

These intertwining dynamics of space, industry, migration, labor and the environment set the stage for the increased complexity of these relationships over the decades to come. In spite of the shifts in labor, industry, and demographic movements, the port maintained constant and steady growth across an otherwise unstable time in the rest of the region. And, low-income, minority, and immigrant labor forces continued to emerge at the bottom of these relative shifts, perpetuating long-standing patterns of racial and economic segregation. In the ensuing decades, these trends demonstrated the most

⁴⁷ John F. Lawrence, "Between 'Reality' and Environmentalists: Clean Air Enforcers Caught in a Dilemma," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 27, 1972; Jerry Gillam, "Reagan Urges Modification of Clean Air Act to Ease Impact: Governor Asks All California Congressmen to Work to Eliminate Confusion and Avoid Social, Economic Chaos," *Los Angeles Times*, Sep. 27 1973.

⁴⁸ "Between 'Reality' and Environmentalists: Clean Air Enforcers Caught in a Dilemma."

pronounced and polarized outcomes of ensuing developments surrounding port growth and its subsequent regional ramifications.

Chapter 2: Growing Port, Growing Pollution

Through the end of the 20th Century, the agents discussed in the previous chapter—labor groups and workers, environmental regulators, and Angelenos residents—would face moments and movements of pivotal change. At the center of all of these changes was the dramatic and unabated growth of the Port of Los Angeles. Through compounding imports and technological advances, the port grew into one of the most important pieces in a vast global trade matrix. In the wake of deindustrialization and increased economic uncertainty, political leaders and labor factions sought to intensify the momentum of the port, touting its expansion as the utmost benefit to the city and the region at large. Despite community mobilization against the inevitable increase in pollution, environmental agencies, mired in bureaucracy and caught in between powerful financial actors, did little to interrupt the port's growth. In prioritizing the financial success of the Port of Los Angeles above all other factors, political, labor, and environmental powers neglected the health, well-being, and jobs of the people of Los Angeles.

The collapse of the manufacturing trade in the 1970s, detailed in the previous chapter, was due in part to the surge in manufacturing occurring overseas, specifically in China. Due to the prevalence of cheap and vast labor pools outside United States' regulations, American companies began heavily investing in the Chinese manufacturing industry.⁴⁹ The rise of cheaper and more readily available goods, alongside an increase in credit card spending and debt accumulation among United States consumer, spurred an

⁴⁹ *Inland Shift*, 31.

increase in American consumption in the last decades of the 20th century.⁵⁰ This increase in production, coupled with an increase in consumption, meant that imports became the main focus of Asian-United States trade. The total value of import values grew by trillions of dollars over the latter two decades of the 20th Century. The Port of Los Angeles and Long Beach complex sat at the center of this influx of imports.

The ports were the prime beneficiary of this trade development for a multitude of reasons. The first reason was the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach location. While Northwest ports, such as Seattle and Portland, are closer to the Northern Asian countries, such as Japan and Korea, Southern California is geographically closest to South Asian ports, importantly those in China and Hong Kong.⁵¹ In its regional context, the port also benefited from California coastal protection policies that limits new development along the California coastline, instead promoting the growth of existing developed land.⁵² This served the dual promotion of decreased competition of the potential of new ports, as well as the increased viability of pre-existing port expansion.

Second, the vast majority of all goods produced in China use the Port of LA as their initial destination in the United States, which is its largest consumption market.⁵³ Even with national market considerations, the dual ports would be lucrative for any shipping company due to the immense population and economic dynamics in Southern

⁵⁰ Ibid., 29. Even if they did not have any change in income or wages, Americans could use a credit card or a second mortgage to continue to spend. From 1980 to 2007, consumer debt in America grew from \$5.6 billion to over \$1 trillion.

⁵¹ Edna Bonacich and Jake B. Wilson, *Getting the Goods: Ports, Labor, and the Logistics Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 62.

⁵² Ibid., 62-63.

⁵³ Ibid., 62.

California; it is estimated that up to 50 percent of goods that enter the ports stay within the region, either for consumption or further distribution.⁵⁴

This points to perhaps the most critical piece of the ports' dominance in the shipping trade with China: the deliberate propagation of a vast logistics framework and economy. Shipping services surrounding the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, early adopters and implementers of the necessary framework for containerization, began to operate largely through an intermodal transportation system, in which freight boxes could be moved directly from ships onto trucks and trains.⁵⁵ While the region already housed ample rail and trucking infrastructure, there was a distinct and targeted campaign to increase its prevalence in the 1980's and 1990's. This push stemmed from two distinct factors: on one end, the desire to accommodate the unrelenting growth of import trade and United States consumption; on the other, the distinct pressure to provide jobs and economic stimulus for the region as it battled post-deindustrialization malaise.

A rare moment of unity between the Port of Los Angeles and Port of Long Beach officials underscores the significance of this calculated push. Despite being economic competitors, the ports banded together in a 1979 lobbying effort in Washington, D.C., to convince legislators on multiple fronts that would instigate their growth.⁵⁶ California officials pushed placing the ports under federal agency jurisdiction, thus exempting them from local and state regulation. The officials also addressed the purported perils of the Clean

⁵⁴ Ibid., 61.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 53.

⁵⁶ Jerry Ruhlow, "Long Beach, Los Angeles: Ports to Lobby Jointly on Major Federal Bills," *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 1, 1979.

Air Act amendments of 1977, and sought reducing import and export tariffs.⁵⁷ Even more than any individual issue, however, was the San Pedro Bay ports officials' willingness to put aside their internal competition and advocated for the cumulative growth of their regional presence as a whole.

This coordinated effort culminated in the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach's 2020 Plan. Initially introduced in the 1980's, the plan proposed a three-pronged initiative that included increased dredging of the ocean floor, filling 27 acres of landfill area, and implementing new much more widespread trucking and rail capacity, executed over a span of the next four decades.⁵⁸ These proposals responded to the estimated growth of Chinese imports and the anticipated reliance on and investment from the United States upon them.

Local political power substantially supported the development of the ports' logistic infrastructure. In, *Inland Shift: Race, Space, and Capital in Southern California*, Juan De Lara points the importance of political influence over the spatial and economic shifts in the region:

The global economic restructuring that began in the 1970s produced a crisis discourse among policy makers, who argued for strategic interventions to lessen the financial shocks tied to industrial job losses. ... the same global economic changes that triggered capital flight away from Los Angeles and other cities in the United States provided economic opportunities for local private and public leaders to invest in transpacific trade corridors.⁵⁹

De Lara's analysis points to a central cog in the logistics boom: local political leaders, addressing both the concerns of their constituents while also stimulating the growth of the

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Nancy Yoshihara, "2020: A Southland Port Plan for the Long Haul," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 19, 1987.

⁵⁹ *Inland Shift*, 37.

region, effectively gave port logistics development the right-of-way on any new undertaking. Politicians endorsed vast logistics investments with public funds, in the midst of 1980's cuts to social services across the board, under the promotion of social benefit and public good.⁶⁰ The most common justification for these spending priorities revolved around increased jobs, economic stimulation, and reduction of traffic congestion.

This push reached its zenith in the planning for Alameda Transit Corridor project, in which agencies at the local, regional, state, and national level came together to create the underground freight lines connecting the port with the major transcontinental railroad centers near Downtown Los Angeles.⁶¹ The project secured hundreds of millions of funding dollars, many of which officials redirected from other transportation projects. Regional transportation leaders stressed “goods movement projects such as the Alameda Corridor are essential for reducing congestion and air pollution and for maintaining a healthy economy.”⁶²

Projects like the Alameda Corridor had a direct impact on public transportation in the region. In diverting funding from transportation projects to help develop more efficient capacity in transferring cargo from the port, regional leaders sidestepped the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁶¹ Ibid., 43-44. The Port Advisory Committee (PAC) proposed the Alameda Transit Corridor project at a cost of \$2.4 billion. Given that a regional logistics project of its nature had not been executed, the city established the Alameda Corridor Transportation Authority (ACTA) to oversee negotiations with the various regulations and departments that had jurisdiction. Among the other groups involved were the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority (LACMTA), and the Port of Los Angeles and Long Beach Harbor Commissions.

⁶² Ibid., 29.

actual opportunity to provide realistic solutions to air pollution, congestion, and ease of mobility for low-income communities, instead ultimately enabling further expansion of what already was, and would continue to be, one of the foremost polluting systems in the region.

A United States Army Corps of Engineers' report highlighting the extensive dredging, expansion, and transportation plans of the 2020 plan illustrates these shortcomings. A Los Angeles Times writer Greg Krikorian highlighted the report's 'lesser of two evils' environmental reasoning, writing:

The 2020 project will produce fewer air pollution problems than piecemeal expansion of the harbors because it includes new technologies and joint developments such as a new rail and truck corridor from the ports to downtown Los Angeles along Alameda Boulevard. Added Gordon Palmer, manager of master planning for Long Beach Harbor: "This project will cause a decrease in air quality. But if we do nothing, the problem will be even worse. And the reason for that is that there is going to be continuing growth in the Los Angeles region."⁶³ This response provides some significant nuances to the prevailing ethos of unbridled expansion. The quote above from regional transportation leaders advocated that these expansion projects will lead to reduced emissions across the board. Instead, these projects must be seen as the US Army Corps of Engineers puts them: with increased pollution inevitable, granting port authority over decades-long development will produce the *least* amount of pollution, further entrenching the development into the narrative of the social good.

The Army Corps of Engineers report received immediate negative feedback from local residents. The only public hearing on the report took place in October 1990. On one

⁶³ Greg Krikorian, "Port Expansion Plan to Hurt Air Quality Pollution: Report on \$4.8-billion Project Says Environmental Damage Will Be Even Worse Without It," *Los Angeles Times*, Sep. 30, 1990.

side sat local residents of San Pedro and Wilmington, who opposed the existence of the port in general due to its environmental impacts on the community, local wildlife, and recreational waters, of which the project would eviscerate 1600 acres.⁶⁴ On the other side, the hearing attracted many high-profile politicians and business leaders, among them Mayor Tom Bradley and United States Representative Glenn M. Anderson. While Mayor Bradley highlighted the need of diversified goods for Los Angeles' rapidly growing population, Representative Anderson, speaking in front of his constituents, appealed to the economic impact the ports had on their lives. "Rep. Anderson offered a prepared statement on the project, Krikorian reported, "that praised it as one that holds "enormous" economic importance for the region and the country. Today, he noted, the ports' trade and shipbuilding account for about 250,000 jobs in the region and contribute an estimated \$25 billion to the area's economy."⁶⁵

The political support of the Port's expansion because of its economic power, both in production and employment, were clearly not novel concepts at this point. However, public hearings such as this one represented a critical junction that helped to re-frame the scope of the narrative. At this point, the port represented a fulcrum of the global trade economy, with the vast majority of those in positions of power committed to maintaining and furthering its role in the supply chain. While its global production cannot be undermined, the port's impact was largely being assessed on its national and global economic scale, neglecting its regional impacts beyond jobs and financial progress. The

⁶⁴ Greg Krikorian, "Plan to Expand Ports Meets with Public Criticism," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 11, 1990.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

advocacy of the residents at the public hearing for the health and well-being of their communities played a critical role in re-centering the conversation about the Port complex to be about the physical space, rather than economic role, that it occupied.

Though the citizens around the port exercised their agency in fighting pollution around their communities, the environmental agencies largely in charge of regulating port activity did not provide much in support through the end of the 20th Century. One of these groups was the California Coastal Commission, from whom the port needed approval on any and all development projects. The Commission had assumed extensive regulatory capacities upon its founding in 1972, including making decisions around air quality, freeway development and urban density.⁶⁶ Following the regulatory trends of the EPA, the Commission's authority was considerably reduced by the time it came to deciding on a 1992 dredging-and-landfill proposal initiated by the port, one of the first major installments in its 2020 Plan. In an article on the Commission's decision-making process, Krikorian details the reasoning behind their switch from rejecting to accepting the Army Corps of Engineer's proposal, which ultimately hinged on whether or not the projects abided by the 1976 coastal act.⁶⁷ He then spelled out the contingency in the Commission's decision between acceptance and rejection, writing, "the corps and port have agreed that the waterways lost to the projects must be replaced, on an acre-for-acre basis, with coastal restoration projects elsewhere in Southern California. Previously, they

⁶⁶ Phillip Fradkin, "Powerful Regulators: Boards Forging Coastal Pattern," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 13, 1973.

⁶⁷ Greg Krikorian, "Coastal Panel Staff Urges OK of Dredging Project at Port," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 11, 1992.

had hoped to persuade the commission to accept alternative environmental projects such as artificial reefs.”⁶⁸

Understanding this process of rejection and approval brings to light two different facets of the California Coastal Commission’s role surrounding port development. The first is the imbalance of power present between the port’s agenda and the commission’s influence. While the port was proposing the first development in a 30-year, multi-billion-dollar expansion plan, the coastal commission still adhered to the code that it was initially founded upon. This is also compounded by the fact that their aim was to limit new development, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, thus limiting their influence over projects on already-developed land. The second, and perhaps more important facet of the decision, revolves around the concessions that the Coastal Commission won. The main sticking point in their approval of the corps’ plan was that all of the waterways lost to dredging be replaced in protected shoreline elsewhere along the California coast, raising it from the original proposal of 380 acres and additional environmental projects.⁶⁹ This restoration and protection of untouched coastline was by no accounts a negative, and, in fact, must be seen as a productive concession. However, it did not resolve the impacts that the dredging-and-landfill project would have on the residents surrounding the port. The myriad of obstacles in the Coastal Commission’s oversight of the port, still enabled the salvage of some natural environment, but it did not account for the health and well-being of port-adjacent communities.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Greg Krikorian, “Coastal Commission Staff Opposes \$2-Billion Port of L.A. Expansion,” *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 6, 1992.

While the California Coastal Commission had its struggles accounting for land and water matters, issues of air pollution involved entirely different agencies and processes. These processes, nevertheless, led to similar conclusions. It was a well-known fact through the second half of the 20th Century that Los Angeles, and the South Coast Basin at large, had the worst air quality in the country. However, since the codification of the federal Clean Air Act Amendments of 1970, local and state agencies, notably the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD), nor the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had come up with tangible solutions to address the pollution, much less meet the standards that the Clean Air Act Amendments required.⁷⁰ A set of lawsuits worked to address this inaction, beginning with *Abramowitz v. United States Environmental Protection Agency* in 1987. This lawsuit required that the EPA, in accordance with the 1970 Clean Air Act Amendments, establish a Federal Implementation Plan for meeting air quality standards in the event that a State Implementation Plan was denied.⁷¹ This law was reaffirmed in the 1991 case of *Coalition for Clean Air v. Environmental Protection Agency*, in which the court upheld the EPA's duty of providing a Federal Implementation Plan for clean air strategy in accordance with the newly-passed Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990.⁷² The decisions in these two cases meant that while the AQMD and state agencies would still play an integral part of crafting environmental policy in the region, it was ultimately the responsibility of the

⁷⁰ *Coalition for Clean Air v. United States Environmental Protection Agency*, 971 F.2d 219 (9th Cir. 1992).

⁷¹ *Coalition for Clean Air v. EPA*, 762 F. Supp. 1399 (C.D. Cal. 1991).

⁷² *Ibid.*

Environmental Protection Agency to create and enforce regional air quality policies through the 1990s.

These court rulings, though implemented to provide clarity, ultimately gave way to the continued indecision and impediment of stratified governance. This was evident in the EPA's 1994 proposal of their statewide air pollution solution, the first time they had taken direct jurisdiction in the state.⁷³ The EPA's initial outline imposed extreme and unprecedented regulations on all facets of transit, but notably ships docked or idle around the port and both freight trucking and rail.⁷⁴ Los Angeles Times Columnist Marla Cone highlighted how for the port specifically, "The plan also does not attempt to regulate California development, land use or population issues... Instead, the Administration plan is a series of pollution fees and emissions standards for manufacturers and other businesses."⁷⁵ While the imposition on ships, trucking, and trains were undoubtedly concerning to port operations, the EPA's outright omission of development regulation ultimately would prove more important, as it did not hinder the 2020 plan's progression. This set of rules created a seeming paradox in curbing emissions from the vehicular elements of the port: if the port was allowed to expand unmitigated, it would inevitably create more capacity and need for shipping services at every point in the supply chain, in turn making regulation of shipping that much more arduous and unrealistic. The proposal in its initial form, therefore, still played into the larger complex of the port's expansion and physical extension across the region.

⁷³ Marla Cone, "Broad U.S. Plan to Clean Up Air in L.A. Area Unveiled," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 16 1994.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Political, economic, and environmental powers at the state and local level unsurprisingly pushed back against the EPA's plan. Governor Pete Wilson's administration came out against the EPA's proposals on the grounds of both the economy and feasibility, as Los Angeles Times columnist Frank Clifford reported, "the (Governor's) critique maintains that the proposed federal standard for controlling diesel emissions is well beyond the reach of current technology."⁷⁶ The Governor also believe that implementing emissions-based fees, to be paid by individual ships at the docks, would only push shipping "away from Southern California to other states and Mexico," as opposed to motivating switches to cleaner fuel alternatives.⁷⁷

While the threat of vacating shipping industry was not new, the incorporation of technological limitations proved to be a foundational part of the region's response to the EPA. The AQMD, who would ultimately oversee the execution of any EPA decisions as they pertained to the South Coast Basin, responded to the EPA with an amended proposal that eliminated the immediate limitations on emissions from ships, trucks, and trains while still including them in their 20-year smog plan. As Marla Cone reported, this approach "would give the AQMD and the city of Los Angeles a few more years to search for more economical alternatives."⁷⁸ Within this proposal, the region would not be liable to meet emissions standards through the decade.

⁷⁶ Frank Clifford, "U.S. Plan to Clean State's Air Criticized," *Los Angeles Times*, Sep. 2, 1994.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Marla Cone, "L.A. Gains Concession on Anti-Smog Rules," *Los Angeles Times*, Sep. 7, 1994.

Beyond presumed technological limitations, many showed skepticism around the AQMD's long-term commitment to the 20-year smog plan for myriad reasons. The 'search for more economical alternatives' proved difficult; early proposals included a gas tax on individual motorists, which was met with swift rejection.⁷⁹ In an attempt to address non-emitted particulates, city of Los Angeles staff recommended to instead address loose dust, largely found in unpaved roads and lots, although that did not address the additional detriment to the ozone from diesel emissions.⁸⁰ The technological issue extended into the 20-year plan, as well, as Cone cited: "(Los Angeles Mayor Rick) Riordan's aides ... say the AQMD plan is unworkable, since it relies on technology for clean-burning heavy-duty engines that is yet to be developed."⁸¹

These examples of efforts to impose environmental regulation on the port confronted the efforts by local officials to encourage its development. Port expansion projects largely avoided serious environmental regulation, despite being an extreme source of pollution, emissions, and environmental degradation both in their execution and increased production. While the port's multi-decade plan was supported as a conscientious way of assessing and accounting for increased production, AQMD's 20-year plan found many detractors, despite its attempt to match the port's strategic timeframe while accounting, in part, for the port's increased pollution.

Embroided in these contrasting dilemmas of the port's growth were the workers in the port complex, as well as the well-established labor unions that had existed within

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

those industries. The rise of global trade, containerization, and intermodalism had profound effects on every facet of labor in the port's operations, albeit with varying outcomes. The longshore workers operated at the heart of these processes. Before containerization, longshore workers would load and unload packages from ship's holds on their own,⁸² often requiring a dozen or more employees to do so. With containerization, ships were now loaded and unloaded by crane, which required one operator, roughly half of the previously-required dockworkers, and moved at pace that was far more efficient; under containerization, crews could unload 400 to 500 tons of cargo an hour, while the prior rate was 20 tons an hour.⁸³

This dramatic decrease in necessary employees had all of the makings of providing a severe labor surplus. However, the longshore workers, buoyed by the long-standing and powerful International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), were able to reconfigure their place within the port's larger plan of growth. As Edna Bonacich and Jake B. Wilson explain in their book, *Getting the Goods*, "The passage of the Shipping Act of 1984 led to a decrease in this labor surplus and an increase in the bargaining power of dockworkers. The act ... allowed door-to-door rates, hence intermodal freight transportation. These changes stimulated the growth in containerized trade, leading in turn to growth in the demand of dockworkers."⁸⁴ As they faced the imminent threat of severe cuts to the workforce, longshore workers and the ILWU found a clear solution in the port's expansion projects and plans. Now that they were not personally moving

⁸² *Getting the Goods*, 177.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

freight on and off of ships—an additional benefit, given the grueling nature of the work—the only reasonable path towards maintaining employment was bringing in more ships, and consequently, more containers. The ILWU, therefore, decided to join in supporting the continued growth of the port.

Despite undergoing these same issues of demand, trucking unions faced a different fate. The Motor Carrier Act of 1980 deregulated the trucking industry by exempting truckers involved in shipping from the jurisdiction of the Interstate Commerce Commission.⁸⁵ There were far fewer restrictions, therefore, on entering into the trucking industry, prompting a wave of new entrants into the port's market.⁸⁶ Among the most common new truck operators were known as 'owner-operators:' individuals who would own a truck or two and functioned outside of the union's purveyance.⁸⁷ The employment sector initially comprised of former union workers who, while willing to work for a bit less than their former union mates, still abided by the general framework of their values. A wave of Central American immigrants, who could enter the market without need of a green card and offered their services at lower wages and far longer hours, swiftly overtook that secondary market..⁸⁸

These shifts led to Teamsters, which through the 1960's and 1970's boasted some of the strongest union power in the country, to be swiftly excised from the market. Despite initial resistance, which involved formal picketing as well as informal

⁸⁵ U.S. Congress, House, *Motor Carrier Act of 1980*, H.R. 6418, 96th Congress, Introduced Feb. 5, 1980.

⁸⁶ *Getting the Goods*, 211.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

skirmishes,⁸⁹ the union was largely unable to break back into the trucking market at the port. The Teamsters would continue to remain a figure in the area, resurfacing in affiliation with the Latin American Truckers Association (LATA).⁹⁰ Various labor associations and less-formalized unions rose and fell throughout the ensuing decades, though the dispersal of workers between these less prosperous and organized associations did not have the same staying power and influence as larger, nationwide unions.⁹¹ Ultimately, beyond drastically changing the composition of the trucking labor force, these changes benefited the shipping companies above all, as they reaped the majority of the windfall from this new contracting system and lower wages.

As this chapter demonstrates, the San Pedro Bay Ports became a rallying point around which political, economic, and labor leaders could converge, promising jobs, economic growth, and regional and national prosperity. At the same time, environmental regulation surrounding the port mired in dysfunctional and disjointed leadership, inaction, and constant obstruction. Despite their best efforts and advocacy, those families and communities living near the port complex and its trucking and rail arteries were inevitably caught in the midst of this tug-of-war game. These same families and communities whose members showed up to work each day in the port's hazardous and contaminated conditions in order to sustain life for themselves and their families.

⁸⁹ Harry Bernstein and Robert J. Gore, "Teamsters Seek to Break Hold of Harbors' Non-Union Truckers," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 23, 1981.

⁹⁰ *Getting the Goods*, 220.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 218.

Chapter 3: Grassroots Resistance with Global Impact

The leaders of the San Pedro Bay port complex had every intention of continuing in their unbridled expansion in the 1990s and there was no sign it would be a problem. Port officials had support from just about every prominent sector of government and industry. The environmental agencies tasked with regulation were catering to their development plans and timelines. Labor groups, struggling to maintain holds in the port industrial complex, felt forced to comply in order to maintain relevance and hold on to worker's jobs. However, at the turn of the century, the port complex would begin to see dramatic shift in the resistance to its domination and overwhelming influence that would drastically reshape its development in the new millennium. At the heart of this resistance were community-based environmental justice groups and movements.

Movements specifically addressing port procedures largely began to mobilize in the late 1990's. But community-led groups had been engaging in environmental justice campaigns across the region since the 1980's, largely centered in the neighborhoods of East and Southeast Los Angeles. Concerned Citizens of South-Central Los Angeles, a predominantly African American coalition composed of members of the community, led one of the initial environmental battles, stopping a City of Los Angeles incineration plant proposal directly in the midst of the neighborhood, directly next to a school and recreation center.⁹² Mothers of East Los Angeles (MELA) was another prominent group concurrently working in the Los Angeles area. The coalition of Latina mothers, all operating on volunteer time, initially banded together to oppose the construction of a

⁹² Connie Koennen, "South-Central Stops an Incinerator," *Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 1991.

prison in East Los Angeles in 1987 and continued on to dually oppose the incinerator proposal in Vernon as well as an oil pipeline that would have traveled from Santa Barbara into Boyle Heights.⁹³

These two groups underscore larger trends within the environmental justice movement in Los Angeles. Many of these initiatives were organized and executed by women. Like MELA, Concerned Citizens of South-Central Los Angeles was also initiated by a mother in the community, Robin Cannon. She would become the president of the coalition.⁹⁴ The leaders and members of these groups had witnessed firsthand the devastation that similar projects had wrought upon their families and communities. As reporter Louis Sahagun stated about the Mothers of East Los Angeles, “Most of the Mothers were born and reared in East Los Angeles at a time when its low-income residents were afraid to fight government officials who railroaded disruptive projects-including freeways, prisons and dumps-through their community.”⁹⁵ Despite being raised with cultural norms that were apprehensive towards opposition, the Mothers became assertive and visible leaders in their communities, demonstrated through public speaking and representation at large community events in Los Angeles and Sacramento.⁹⁶ These minority and female communities, who have been historically the most disadvantaged socioeconomically and politically, were able to claim agency and platform through environmental justice initiatives.

⁹³ Louis Sahagun, “The Mothers of East L.A. Transform Themselves and Their Neighborhood,” *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 13 1989.

⁹⁴ “South-Central Stops an Incinerator.”

⁹⁵ “The Mothers of East L.A. Transform Themselves and Their Neighborhood.”

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

The notion of environmental activism as engagement had a strong impact with migrant communities in particular, which continued to comprise a larger proportion of the region's population, as mentioned earlier. In *Refusing Death*, Nadia Kim highlights the further level of political advocacy that environmental activism imbues on immigrant populations. "For a population that has been racialized as America's foreigners and "illegals" and gendered as hyperfertile mothers, their marginalization by the electoral system has not tempered, but rather buoyed, community organizing."⁹⁷ While immigrant population's exclusion from the normative avenues of political participation and citizenship could have been seen as limiting engagement, it had the opposite effect, prompting them to center their efforts around community-based self-advocacy. Kim continues, "this pattern ... owes to immigrants no longer viewing formal citizenship as the only avenue to political legitimacy and efficacy."⁹⁸ Many immigrant families and communities, subjected to hazardous and low-paying jobs, along with the political, legal, and personal attacks on their right to live and work in the United States, found self-advocacy and political influence through this environmental work, rooted in their insistence that the industries and systems that they largely sustained through labor did not generate sickness and death for their families and communities.

Activism around the port manifested in multiple forms. The vast majority of these efforts—including organizing around public hearings, protests, and awareness campaigns—went largely undocumented. At the heart of these efforts was Jesse

⁹⁷ Nadia Kim, *Refusing Death: Immigrant Women and the Fight for Environmental Justice in LA* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2021), 5.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Marquez, a lifetime resident of port-adjacent Wilmington and a vehement activist for environmental justice in his community. In April 2001, he officially founded Wilmington Coalition for a Safe Environment. The group's name was later simplified to Coalition for a Safe Environment (CFASE) as the organization expanded its breadth of action into other neighboring communities.⁹⁹ Marquez became a fixture of environmental efforts around the port, acting as both a spokesperson and leader for many of the community-led efforts and sentiments.

CFASE's community action often manifested in lawsuits, not only as a manner of amplifying efforts and awareness, but also to literally limit the progress of port development. These cases, and the movements at large, became bolstered by larger regional, statewide, and national organizations such as Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Communities for a Better Environment (CBE), and the Coalition for Clean Air (CCA) who worked in communion with these local community-based organizations and providing financial, legal, and outreach resources.

One of the most pivotal legal efforts of the community-based movement was a 2002 lawsuit filed against the China Shipping Holding Corporation. The lawsuit aimed to halt the process of a 47 million dollar expansion project in order for the port to accommodate increased business with the company.¹⁰⁰ Filed in July, the coalition of environmental and community groups, spearheaded in legal action by the NRDC,

⁹⁹ "Organization History," *Coalition for a Safe Environment*, Accessed Dec 5, 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Louis Sahagun, "Work to Resume on Port of L.A. Terminal," *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 2002.

claimed that the “U.S. Army Corps of Engineers violated federal law by permitting construction of the terminal's first wharf without reviewing the cumulative impacts of the entire three-phase project.”¹⁰¹ While the injunction was quickly overturned, allowing the ports to resume work, it was done so with both the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as well as China Shipping Holding Co. committing to conducting environmental impact reports on the second and third terminal of the project.¹⁰²

The coalition ultimately secured a stoppage of the work entirely after a State Appellate court ruling that ensuing October that put an official stay on the terminal’s operations until sufficient environmental impact analyses had been conducted on the entire project.¹⁰³ The NRDC’s Gail Ruderman Feuer, who served as the lead attorney on the case, declared: “it's a spectacular win for the people who have been battling the port for decades over the right to breathe without fear. This is the first time a court has stepped in and told the port that it must follow the law to protect the rights of the communities.”¹⁰⁴ The case had literal benefits and symbolic impacts on both environmental health and environmental justice efforts. In addition, the ruling carried significant financial losses for the port, as officials predicted that the delays would cost \$1.2 million a month, along with damages to their reputation as amenable business partners for other shipping firms.¹⁰⁵ Sahagun detailed the heightened urgency that this injunction carried around the port: “David McKenna, who is in charge of the city

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Louis Sahagun, “Court Halts Work at L.A. Port,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 31, 2002.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

attorney's harbor division, which fought the coalition's challenge, said, "The reversal of the trial court decision is disappointing. Hopefully, we'll be able to move forward with the project. We'll comply with all requirements.""¹⁰⁶

This case, and its ensuing outcomes, carried twofold significance for environmental regulation. First, for the first time in the history of the port's development, environmental groups were able to halt construction on a plan that had already been set in motion, proving that the port could be held responsible for their environmental degradation. Second was the financial burden that the injunction carried for the port itself, as well as China Shipping Holding Co. This decision was made in direct opposition of the port's financial well-being, which had taken precedence above all other factors for the past two decades. For the port's legal representation to say that they would "comply with all requirements" was a remarkable shift in approach in light of their past projects' undertakings going largely uninterrupted. The fact that a community-based environmental coalition was able to incur the enforcement of EPA policy, all the while creating a rift in the sequence of constant port development prioritization, would become an important precedent for the years to follow.

In a similar vein of resistance, divisive disputes emerged between port officials and labor groups. After years of attempts by the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) to weaken the strength of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), as happened to the trucking industry, tensions finally rose to a head during 2002 contract and labor negotiations. The disagreements over both the union's power as well as the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

longshoremen's wages became increasingly controversial since majority of the union's members longshore workers came from underrepresented groups. Thus, the fight encompassed racialized notions of who deserves high- and low-paying jobs in the country. Peter Olney, director of organizing for the ILWU at the time, refuted this concept, saying, "“Given the enormous productivity gains on the waterfront over the last 40 years and the danger of longshoring, second only to mine work in the rate of death and injury... these excellent wages would seem justified.””¹⁰⁷ This quote addressed the important context in which this dispute took place. Despite their contributions to the overwhelming success enjoyed by the port, and more specifically its tenants, the port was framing longshore workers as becoming increasingly expendable under the guise of new technology and working conditions. This tension occurred not only in a dangerous work environment, but also under increasing pollution from the port that affected the longshore workers and their families both at the docks and in their communities.

It was thus a matter of when, not if, that on September 29, 2002, the PWA locked out the longshore workers commencing a ten-day dispute in which the port entirely shut down.¹⁰⁸ The ILWU had the support of Teamsters and other trucking unions in their dispute, who affirmed that they would not break picket lines in the event of a strike.¹⁰⁹ The initial stoppage came from shipping companies who had accused the ILWU of intentionally slowing down work due to the unsolved contract negotiations.¹¹⁰ The

¹⁰⁷ *Getting the Goods*, 183.

¹⁰⁸ Marla Dickerson, Louis Sahagun, and Dan Weikel, "Ports Get Back to Business," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 10 2002.

¹⁰⁹ Louis Sahagun, "Teamsters Join Port Labor Rally," *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 2002.

¹¹⁰ "Ports Get Back to Business."

shutdown was estimated to cost the federal economy \$1 to \$2 billion dollars daily, as well as ten days of local logistics employees' wages, and was ultimately lifted by President George W. Bush, who invoked the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 in saying that the lockout threatened the nation's economy and security.¹¹¹

This event was a pivotal moment in ensuring that the workers and unions within the port logistics complex would not give way to the financial desires of the port and its shipping tenants. In advocating that their critical work maintained commensurate pay, the ILWU and its workers, with support from truckers and trucking unions, created a situation that had nationwide ramifications, to the point where it necessitated emergency presidential powers to end. This lockout, with the concurrent environmental coalition's success in stopping development, formed at a concurrent and critical juncture, in which the port had to deprioritize its bottom-line for the sake of the people who lived near and worked for it. The fact that the de-prioritization was orchestrated and executed by those same workers and communities that would benefit from the stoppages established a successful precedent for community-based activism around human health and worker's rights at the port.

While these initial movements were separate, they would ultimately portend an important relationship to come. Following these dual moments in 2002, community resistance and increased political pressure led to shifts in the development around the port. A proposed lane expansion of the 710 Freeway, which connected the ports to rail yards and would enable increased trucking services, confronted vehement community

¹¹¹ Ibid.

opposition along the freeway's entire corridor, spearheaded by Angelo Logan and the East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice.¹¹² Closer to the port, residents packed a public hearing to denounce the proposal of a new rail yard, situated mere hundreds of yards from residents and schools, that would draw over one million trucks each year.¹¹³

This protest coincided with an increasingly fraught political climate surrounding mediation of the port's ongoing pollution. In 2001, Mayor James Hahn made a pledge that the port would see no net increase in emissions as it expanded to accommodate the ever-continuing demand of imports.¹¹⁴ This pledge was brought back into the public's attention in 2004, when the Port of Los Angeles officials released a new plan to combat pollution. Residents were incensed and confused by the report's numbers and understanding of its impacts. Reporter Deborah Schoch explained, "(The report) concludes that although the amount of cargo passing through the port will quadruple by 2025, existing and proposed controls will cut pollution even without the creation of major new initiatives."¹¹⁵ The report's lack of tangible ideas to combat pollutants drew a terse response from Mayor Hahn to formulate a new plan,¹¹⁶ employing a sense of urgency and displeasure that had largely gone unseen up to this point in matters surrounding the port.

This shift would signal a change to green planning around the port, fully ushered in with the election of Antonio Villaraigosa as Los Angeles mayor in 2005. A progressive

¹¹² Deborah Schoch, "MTA Votes to Expand the 710 Freeway," *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 28, 2005.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Deborah Schoch, "City Downplays Port Pollution, Critics Say," *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 2004.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Deborah Schoch, "Mayor Tells Port to Create New Air Plan," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 13, 2004.

mayor, Villaraigosa advocated for green development, specifically around the ports, ensuring that its job creation and economic impact would provide uplift for Los Angeles that needed it most. Juan De Lara explained, “The mayor argued, for example, that the ports made significant social and economic contributions to Southern California and thus deserved public support. This idea that logistics provided added value to the general public enabled port boosters to claim that green growth represented a social and thus moral good.”¹¹⁷ By placing ‘green growth’ in a regional framework of empowerment, Villaraigosa and other port leaders were able to continue in the justification and advancement of port development. While the upfront emphasis on environmental improvement was positive, ‘green growth’ was criticized by community members and scholars, such as De Lara, of becoming a ‘greenwashing’ campaign—that is, portraying their efforts as environmentally-conscious without creating tangible progress, yet still promoting the same rate of growth and production.

To aid this green growth agenda, the Port of Long Beach and Port of Los Angeles released the dual-sponsored Clean Air Action Plan (CAAP) in 2006. The plan called for a 45 percent reduction in pollution within the first five years of its implementation,¹¹⁸ targeting every sector of pollution for which the port complex was accountable and working with its tenants, as well as rail and trucking industry, to enact these reforms.¹¹⁹ Officials touted the plan as a success, and it was undoubtedly, the most comprehensive environmental plan that had been implemented around the port in its history. But the plan

¹¹⁷ “The Port is Killing People,” 541.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 540.

¹¹⁹ “San Pedro Bay Ports Clean Air Action Plan Overview,” Clean Air Action Plan, Port of Los Angeles and Port of Long Beach, 2006.

severely lacked tangible solutions, and carried risks of furthering the pre-existing structures of unbridled port development. As De Lara explicates, “Although the joint effort [of the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach] to develop a CAAP did not mark an end to port competition, it did create political space for both ports to mobilize public assets to expand regional trade corridors.”¹²⁰ This precedence had the potential to create an ultimately damaging cycle in which regional, state, and national funding would be allocated into these projects without the environmental or economic benefits.

In its early iterations, the Clean Air Action Plan foreshadowed that exact pitfall, especially in the sections addressing clean trucking. The report details the difficulties of implementing a trucking program, given the owner-operator dynamic’s prevalence. “The movement of goods by heavy-duty trucks from the Ports through local communities is an extraordinary challenge,” the report declared, “because it involves thousands of truck owner/operators who do not have the financial resources to acquire cleaner trucks on their own.”¹²¹ The 2006 CAAP provides an acknowledgement to this dilemma that, given that many truck drivers are owners of their own trucks, they lack the means to reasonably replace their diesel rig with the more expensive clean vehicles. However, the lines directly ensuing that do not follow up on this issue: “The Ports are adopting a goal that will eliminate “dirty” trucks from San Pedro Bay terminals within 5 years from adoption of this Clean Air Action Plan. The Ports will therefore work with all concerned parties to establish new relationships and business paradigms that will help secure the necessary

¹²⁰ “The Port is Killing People,” 541.

¹²¹ “San Pedro Bay Ports Clean Air Action Plan Overview,” 17.

funding to make this important transition.”¹²² While these guidelines outlined the potential for addressing the issue of owner-operatorship, “new relationships and business paradigms” do little to hold the CAAP to any responsibility for the financial health of the drivers themselves.

With the Clean Truck Program (CTP) an autonomous and soon-to-be-established entity, environmental and labor groups formed a rare coalition to address the gap for owner-operators. This process’s initiation was documented by Los Angeles Times reporter Evelyn Larrubia, as she wrote, “In 2006, labor leaders ... approached environmentalists with a deal that would make both their goals possible: truckers had to become employees of firms, which could be petitioned for higher wages and benefits and required to buy cleaner trucks and held to maintenance standards.”¹²³ This plan allowed for both the environmental goals of the CAAP, as well as Mayor Villaraigosa’s visions for economic uplift to be realized, ultimately forming a vital bond between the two concepts. The coalition that formed out of these meetings, known as the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports (CSP),¹²⁴ created a distinctly new organization, composed of local and regional environmental groups, trucking unions, community groups and healthcare advocates, with over 50 organizations attributed to being a part of the movement.¹²⁵ The group was further bolstered by significant organizing efforts among owner-operator

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Evelyn Larrubia, “Labor, Environmentalists Unusual Allies,” *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 27, 2008.

¹²⁴ “The Port is Killing People,” 544.

¹²⁵ “Labor, Environmentalists Unusual Allies.”

drivers who gathered at pro-immigration rallies to push for more humane wages and working conditions.¹²⁶

Among the critical actors in this push was the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), who saw in the Clean Trucks Program an opportunity to reshape the most environmentally and economically burdened workers and communities. Professor Manuel Pastor, in the foreword of LAANE's report, "The Road to Shared Prosperity: The Regional Economic Benefits of the San Pedro Bay Ports' Clean Trucks Program," echoed these sentiments. He explained, "The core principles of the Clean Trucks Program are accountability and sustainability—the burden for buying, retrofitting, and maintaining clean trucks shifts from the individual driver to the motor carriers and the multinational shippers who pay their rates. The rewards of the twenty-first century trade boom will be more equitably shared, and a newly balanced market will ensure adequate capital for clean equipment for the foreseeable future."¹²⁷ This quote sums up the intent of the CSP coalition: to ensure that the responsibility of the Clean Trucks Program lies with the ports themselves, as opposed to the trucking industry workers, so that all parties can enjoy the environmental and financial benefits of the program. The report highlights not only the benefits for drivers, but also the impact that necessary employment would have on taxpayers. It explained that \$360 million additional dollars would be reincorporated into the community due to the tax alleviation that would come with employed drivers.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Ronald D. White, "Immigration Rallies Fuel Resolve of Port Truckers," *Los Angeles Times*, May 4, 2006.

¹²⁷ "The Road to Shared Prosperity: The Regional Economic Benefits of the San Pedro Bay Ports' Clean Trucks Program," Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), August 2007, 4.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

LAANE concluded by emphasizing the myriad health benefits that would come from the Clean Trucks Program, including improved results in school and lowered crime rates,¹²⁹ both of which stem from reduced exposure to pollution. Through this report, LAANE provided a veritable, organic justification for the Clean Trucks program.

When the Clean Trucks Program officially went into effect in 2008, the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports was able to ensure that by 2012, all trucking companies were required to employ all of their truckers at the port of Los Angeles.¹³⁰ By 2009, the Natural Resources Defense Council had reported that the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach were two years ahead of their goals in reducing truck-produced emissions.¹³¹

This was just one piece of the pollution puzzle, however, as the CAAP sought to limit a larger and more complex source: the ships themselves. The largest source of emissions around the port,¹³² ships had long proved difficult to regulate, given their water-borne location and related international designations. However, the CAAP included ocean-going vessels in their plan, laying out four different methods of reducing their fuel burning around the port complex.¹³³ When it came to the implementation and monitoring of this plan, the ports and community residents alike received assistance from the ILWU, whose presence in environmental affairs was novel but critical. The union

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹³⁰ “Labor, Environmentalists Unusual Allies.”

¹³¹ “LA Ports Meet Clean Air Goals Years Ahead of Schedule,” *U.S. Newswire*, Oct. 1, 2009.

¹³² Deborah Schoch, “Ships Are Single Largest Polluter of Air at Port of L.A.,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 2004.

¹³³ “San Pedro Bay Ports Clean Air Action Program Overview,” 28.

called for 20 percent reductions in emissions from all ships by the year 2010,¹³⁴ a dramatic step against the long-domineering tenants of the port. Deborah Schoch reported on the reasons why the ILWU was such an influential factor in these regulations. “Officials at both ports have expressed fears that, if they impose too many clean-air restrictions, companies will simply divert their ships to other ports with less stringent rules,” she explained, “But the San Francisco-based ILWU represents workers at all West Coast ports, so it could make it harder for shippers to pick and choose among ports.”¹³⁵ In establishing a unified, coast-wide policy, all for the sake of improved air quality, the ILWU made a critical commitment of labor to the same environmental and health problems that impacted longshore workers and their communities each and every day.

What the Clean Truck Program implementation and the ILWU environmental mandate demonstrate is a multi-faceted commitment to environmental justice. While both groups and movements gained consequential concessions in air quality improvements, what is more important is the incorporation of labor into the fight. The groups acknowledged that longshore workers and truck drivers inhale the same toxins, as the community surrounding the port and its freeways. The groups, therefore, stood at the intersection of economic and environmental justice movements, and recognized ways in which they are inherently connected. Beyond this, both movements were executed with the essential understanding that environmental progress could not come at the expense of

¹³⁴ Deborah Schoch, “Labor Lends Its Clout to Port Pollution Battle,” *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 28, 2006.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

economic viability. Rather, in order to uphold true environmental justice, the two goals had to be equally upheld, thus supporting each other in their achievements.

This important moment in the port's history of environmental regulation, at this point spanning almost four decades, exposes that the most extensive progress in tangible environmental regulation could be achieved only through the concerted efforts of community-based environmental justice movements. Focusing on these distinct, albeit sparse, moments of triumph illustrates the immense power and agency that the port communities held in advocating for the health and well-being of their families and neighbors. Despite the regional, state, national, and global powers that all played a part in the port's formation over time, these scenes of conflict necessitate re-centering the port in its physical footprint and its responsibilities to the San Pedro Harbor and Los Angeles communities with whom it shared the land.

Conclusion

Since its founding in 1907, the port grew unencumbered, supported along the way by most all who held any authority and agency over its operations and its future. One of the largest polluters in the region, it grew in the face of increasing concerns about the air quality in Los Angeles. The port expanded despite local, state, and federal efforts to regulate its emissions, instead becoming one of the largest ports in the world. Despite increased legal pressure from citizens and community-based organizations on those regulatory agencies, the ports still continued to grow. The voids left by deindustrialization and white flight filled by a new populace largely composed of Latinx and immigrant residents and laborers. Combining a historically low-income, disenfranchised, and in some cases undocumented workforce with increased port production and subsequent deregulation around port and trucking hiring standards led to low-paying jobs that were dangerous and harmful.

It was not until employees, citizens, communities, and organizations took direct agency and advocacy to disrupt the port's unrelenting growth. The injunction on the China Shipping Holding Corporation, combined with the ILWU-instigated lockout, halted the physical process of port expansion and suspended the port's global financial systems and supply chains, forcing the president of the United States to personally see to the resumption of its normal operations. These efforts ensured that the port had to consider the humanity and dignity of those who lived around and worked within the port's extended orbit. Through the unprecedented Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports, these advocates cemented the acknowledgement of their dignity and humanity,

ensuring that the port's precarious green development plans were at a true benefit to those that it would impact the most.

While these moments of resistance must be recognized, they nonetheless stand as aberrations in the port's continued expansion. Falling in line with its 2020 Plan, the port has continued to grow each year, enabling more and more capacity for import services. In 2021, Los Angeles became the first in history to process one million container units in a single month and ten million container units in a 12-month window. These benchmarks verified its status as one of the largest and most important ports in the world.¹³⁶ There are ongoing battles surrounding various developments directly around the port and extending out along its shipping network, among the most contentious projects being the proposed expansion of the 710 freeway.¹³⁷ While the Clean Trucks Program has improved air quality across the region, trucks from the port still pollute at a high level. As a part of Los Angeles' 2019 Green New Deal, the city is aiming to transition all drayage trucks from the port to be zero emission, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the port more broadly by 80% as an extension of the city's goals to be carbon neutral by 2045.¹³⁸ While these goals are ambitious in their own right, some critics of the plan argue that the city is not taking more urgent and rigorous steps in light of recent heatwaves, drought, and fires that have plagued the region and California.

¹³⁶ "About," Port of Los Angeles, Accessed Dec 5, 2021.

¹³⁷ "CEHAJ Statement Regarding EPA Statement on I-710 Corridor Expansion Project," East Yard Communities For Environmental Justice, May 5, 2021.

¹³⁸ "L.A.'s Green New Deal: Sustainable City pLAN 2019," Green New Deal pLAN, City of Los Angeles Office of the Mayor, 2019.

In this light, these environmental justice movements have not been successful. The areas of the city today that are most burdened by pollution are the same minority, working-class enclaves that have been historically disadvantaged. However, their self-advocacy has not been unaccounted for. In its Green New Deal, Los Angeles has a specific target goal of improving the CalEnviroScreen indicator scores of its communities within the top 10% of the state's measures by an average of 50% by 2035, as well as reduce the number of childhood asthma-related emergency room visits to 8 per 1,000 children in that same range.¹³⁹ Beyond this, the Office of the Mayor, in conjunction with City Council, established the Climate Emergency Mobilization Office (CEMO) to promote climate equity in conjunction with Green New Deal initiatives. Among its functions are establishing an Equitable Climate Action Roadmap and the Climate Emergency Commission, which will include representatives from both community-based organizations and disadvantaged communities, in order to ensure that all of the strategies and policies promoted in the Green New Deal are strategized and implemented with the input and involvement of these communities and groups.¹⁴⁰

As Los Angeles joins cities and nations across the world in undertaking vast environmental and sustainability initiatives and projects, the examples of environmental justice movements and prioritization around the Port of Los Angeles offer important

¹³⁹ "Targets," Green New Deal pLAn, City of Los Angeles Office of the Mayor, 2019. CalEnviroScreen is a statewide tool, implemented by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), that identifies the California communities that face disproportionate pollution burden, drawing from a variety of pollutant indicators.

¹⁴⁰ "Climate Emergency Mobilization Office: Equitable and Impactful Climate Solutions for all Angelenos," City of Los Angeles Department of Public Works, Accessed 5 December 2021.

inspiration, focus, and opportunity. In identifying the layered socioeconomic issues that coincide with environmental burden, sweeping and comprehensive green infrastructure proposals that initiated in these communities not only have the chance to alleviate effects of climate degradation, but also begin to redress years of multi-faceted racism and discrimination. Whether the issue is extreme heat or severe cold, drought or rising sea levels, centering solutions around the communities that have borne the brunt of environmental disadvantages carries the most potential to truly affect change.

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