

NEOLYMPICS: RACE, NATION, AND NEOLIBERAL CULTURE AT THE 1984
LOS ANGELES OLYMPIC GAMES

by

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ABSTRACT

The 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games were a hugely consequential moment in the history of the 1980s United States and the development of the neoliberal world. In ways which historians have not fully comprehended, these Olympic Games – the first ever to be funded by the private sector instead of the state — were a powerful transmitter of neoliberal ideas and a vehicle for neoliberal practices. They are a case study of how and why Americans learned to think about the role of the state, society, and themselves in ways which buttressed neoliberal change. The Games shaped the meaning of neoliberalism on an “everyday” level, establishing ideas like global individualism, privatisation, and marketisation as “common sense” solutions to local problems of unemployment, crime, and the continuance of a racialised political economy. Underpinning the apparent desirability of neoliberal ideas was the idea that these Games could build a fairer, meritocratic, post-racial society.

This history of LA’84 is a story of how Americans saw within neoliberal ideas the promise of egalitarian change at the local level. Olympic preparations in Los Angeles provoked residents to ask larger social, political, and economic questions. Olympic organisers needed to tread carefully through the local contexts of LA in the late 1970s and early 1980s, moulding their plans around notions of race, national identity, and economic conduct. In doing so, the Olympic preparations for 1984 reveal the ways in which mass consent to the neoliberal project took shape. Rather than a coherent inculcation from the top down, Angelenos, businessmen, street vendors, athletes, artists, police, and the interests of real estate contested and shaped consent at the neighbourhood level. Using the lens of racial capitalism, this thesis analyses the archives of LA’s Olympic Committee, City Hall, the LAPD, and the press, demonstrating that new invocations of “multiculturalism”, race, nation, and identity were not the products of neoliberal changes in the city. Rather, they were the forums in which Olympic organisers sought to manufacture the social conditions in which an individualised, privatised, and marketized America took root.

*For Robert George Fitt,
who was my first history teacher.*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACLU: American Civil Liberties Union

ACOG: Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games

CORE: Congress of Racial Equality

DARE: Drug Abuse Resistance Education

HOA: Homeowner Association

IAF: Industrial Areas Foundation

IOC: The International Olympic Committee

LA'84: The 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games

LACSD: Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

LAOOC: The Los Angeles Olympic Organising Committee

LAPD: Los Angeles Police Department

NAACP: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

NOT: The No Olympic Tax Campaign

ONP: The Olympic Neighbor Program

OPEC: Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries

PDID: Public Disorder Intelligence Division

SBA: The Mayor's Office for Small Business Assistance

SCCOG: Southern California Committee for the Olympic Games

SCOC: The South Central Organising Committee

UNO: United Neighbourhoods Organisation

UCLA: University of California, Los Angeles

USC: The University of Southern California

'Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul'.

Margaret Thatcher

The Sunday Times

3 May 1981

INTRODUCTION

29 April 1992

Adams Boulevard & Western Avenue

Los Angeles

10 p.m.

The palm trees were burning. The symbol of a city — *the city* — of the post-war United States. The palms had come from overseas to beautify the fledging metropolis of Los Angeles in preparation for the 1932 Olympic Games. Many an idealist has made the same journey, heading west to Hollywood in search of fame and fortune. Few make it. Fewer still become icons, cultural ambassadors for their new home in the way these trees have. They are ubiquitous icons of the Southern California good life. They have shed their European roots. They are Angelenos now, inauthentic in their new surroundings yet essential to the *mis en scène*. These Olympian visitors had come and stayed for ever, and now they were aflame.

The approaching crowd seethed. Overhead, a news helicopter surveyed the changing vista south of the Santa Monica Freeway. Across the city, buildings burned, revealing by morning spewing columns of black smoke holding up a ceiling of rage and smog. The fires spread, threatening the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Building, a 1949 landmark designed — in the era of Jim Crow — by Black architect-to-the-stars Paul Revere Williams. Maybe in Los Angeles, back then, a man could escape his race.

The throng moved west on Adams and encountered the red-brick, white-column grandeur of the Amateur Athletic Foundation headquarters. Inside were held the memories of the city's Olympic past. Entrusted with the two-hundred-million-dollar legacy of the 1984

Games, those inside the building were charged with dispensing this bounty for the good of all Angelenos. The building was the keeper of ephemera and documents, and the guardian of the Olympic memory in the imagination of the city: that golden summer when all came together as one to show the world what LA was all about. But now, all that stood between the building and immolation on the altar of injustice were two security guards. Their names have been lost to history, but the *Los Angeles Times* recorded the folklore:

Two security guards, armed only with reason protected the building during the disturbances, informing crowds in the streets of the AAF's function in the community and requesting that they keep moving;

Unarmed guards with nothing more than their uniforms and a plea for reason kept the building and its extensive grounds safe by telling potential looters that the place was a museum for the city's Olympic history. Even the rioters seemed to understand. Los Angeles is an Olympic city. The history and artefacts of its accomplishments in that regard are special, to be cherished and celebrated, not looted. Los Angeles has millions of people from thousands of places, speaking hundreds of languages. But the Olympic Games look, feel, and sound the same to all.¹

The same to all? Whatever the complex realities of life in Los Angeles, the Olympic memory has been *the* universalist creed for anyone seeking to unite one of the world's most diverse cities. Those "sixteen days of glory" witnessed astounding physical feats in the Olympic

¹ Randy Harvey, '84 Olympic Flame Still Burns', *Los Angeles Times*, 11 May 1992, C9; Bill Dwyre, 'LA and the Olympics Were a Golden Match', *Los Angeles Times*, 30 March 2006, S22.

Coliseum matched only by the performance given by the city itself to a global audience. The invocation of the memory of that golden summer had, it seemed, spared the Amateur Athletic Foundation from destruction. Perhaps those who poured onto the streets that April night in anger at justice too-long-denied had simply forgotten where they were, shaken from a wanton reverie by two security guards proclaiming that “Los Angeles is *the* Olympic city”.

When the 1992 LA Rebellion fizzled out days later in the face of the police, the National Guard, and US Marines fresh from *Operation Desert Storm*, more than fifty people lay dead. When the state had extinguished the fires and restored order to the city of angels, one question still smouldered beneath the wreckage: “where do we go from here?”. For a diverse cross section of Angelenos and commentators, the memory of the 1984 Olympic Games held the answers to this question.²

* * *

On 5 May 1992, Peter Ueberroth climbed the steps of the Amateur Athletic Foundation (AAF) where, days earlier, two security guards had delivered their Olympic sermon. Ueberroth had been the president of the Los Angeles Olympic Organising Committee (LAOOC), the private group which organised the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. In recent days, LA Mayor Tom Bradley had called Ueberroth and asked him to take charge of the city’s reconstruction. Parts of LA had been devastated. Beyond the deaths, analysts estimated property damage somewhere in the region of \$1 billion dollars, twelve-thousand people had been arrested over

² Vignette compiled from: Harvey, ‘‘84Olympic Flame Still Burns’; Dwyre, ‘LA and the Olympics Were a Golden Match’; Mark Dyreson and Matthew Llewellyn, ‘Los Angeles is *the* Olympic City: Legacies of the 1932 and 1984 Olympic Games’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, no. 14 (2008): 1991-2018; Stuart Silverstein and Tammerlin Drummond, ‘Up to 40,000 Out of Work After Unrest, Analysts Say’, *Los Angeles Times*, 6 May 1992, A1; Paul Harris, *Black Rage Confronts the Law*, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 186. The number of deaths remains disputed, see: Carolina A. Miranda, ‘He’s Laying Down a Marker’, *Los Angeles Times*, 30 April 2017, E5.

the course of six days, and forty thousand Angelenos were now out of work as a result of the civil unrest. Some analysts feared ten thousand of these jobs would never return.³

Less tangibly, but keenly felt nonetheless, the Rebellion had exposed the lies the city had long been telling itself about race and diversity. Throughout the 1980s, the city had celebrated the “soft multiculturalism” of LA life, a diverse civic identity which took pride in difference.⁴ Now, LA had an identity crisis. Although the city’s Black and Latino populations had always recognised the emptiness of the city’s multicultural sloganeering, the evidence was now there for all to see.⁵ In the twenty-seven years since the Watts Rebellion of 1965, in which Black residents rose up against poverty, racism, and police violence, conditions for many of the city’s people of colour had not changed.⁶ Los Angeles was riven by race, poverty, and violence. It was a fragmented metropolis, a city in crisis.

The 1984 Olympics had been the ultimate expression of the city’s supposed harmony and fraternity, and this is one reason why the mayor had called on Ueberroth to take charge of Rebuild Los Angeles (RLA), a public-private partnership between government, residents, and businesses of all sizes. Bradley tasked RLA with the leviathan mission of repairing, rebuilding, and rehabilitating the city.⁷ Ueberroth deliberately chose the steps of the AAF to

³ Silverstein and Drummond, ‘Up to 40,000 Out of Work After Unrest, Analysts Say’; Harris, *Black Rage Confronts the Law*.

⁴ “Soft multiculturalism” speaks in “patchwork quilt” rather than “melting pot” metaphors. See: Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 347-65; George Francis-Kelly, ‘The Wheels on the Bus: The Tourism Industry Development Council and Envisioning Spatial Futures in post-Rodney King Los Angeles’, *Journal of American Studies* 56, no. 2 (2022): 230.

⁵ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, (London: Pimlico, 1998), Chapter 5: 267-322.

⁶ On the Watts Rebellion and the wider 1960s in LA see: Mike Davis and Jon Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire: LA in the Sixties*, (London: Verso, 2020).

⁷ On Rebuild LA see: João Costa Vargas, *Catching Hell in the City of Angels: Life and Meanings of Blackness in*

announce the formation of RLA to the press. He invoked the memory of the “can-do,” entrepreneurial spirit which the Games had spread effervescently around the city.⁸ Crucially, he also signalled to Angelenos, politicians, and business leaders that RLA’s approach to reconstruction would copy the LAOOC’s approach to staging the Olympics. The LAOOC had, for the first time in history, staged an Olympic Games paid for not by public funding, but by the private sector. Ueberroth led a private, profit-driven, pro-business Games which connected some of the world’s largest corporations to the social infrastructure of LA’s poorest neighbourhoods.

Ueberroth’s entrepreneurial, business-led reconstruction had broad support from a diverse cross section of Angelenos. In the city’s Black community, the clergy, the Nation of Islam, gang members, small-business owners, the Urban League, and the Black press all agreed that the ‘return of Black business’ was essential and that a business-led (and therefore *profit-led*) reconstruction was the best approach.⁹ RLA, and the broad support for it, evinced a neoliberal consensus; a neoliberal *culture* had taken hold across the neighbourhoods of Los Angeles.¹⁰ This was a neoliberal common-sense which was anti-statist, anti-welfare, pro-

South Central Los Angeles (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 233; Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s* (London: William Collins, 2021), 243.

⁸ Beverly Beyette, ‘Los Angeles Reflects on Legacy of the Olympics: City Sees Itself in New Light a Year After Flame is Extinguished at Coliseum’, *Los Angeles Times*, 4 August 1985, Part VI, 2.

⁹ Hinton, *America on Fire*, 251-2; Ashley Dunn, ‘Gang Members Test Capitalist Waters’, *Los Angeles Times*, 4 July 1992, B3; Jonathan Peterson and Patrick Lee, ‘Ueberroth Says Calls to Aid Rebuilding Are Flooding In’, *Los Angeles Times* 6 May 1992, A1; Costa Vargas, *Catching Hell in the City of Angels*, 192; Donna Murch, ‘The Color of War: Race, Neoliberalism, and Punishment in Late Twentieth-Century Los Angeles’, in *Neoliberal Cities: The Remaking of Postwar America*, ed. Andrew J. Diamond and Thomas Sugrue (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 128-153, 140-1; Daniel Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 120.

¹⁰ For survey histories of neoliberalism see: David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford

corporate, and entrepreneurial in nature. Advocates of the consensus held that through “enterprise zones” of low taxation, through “Black entrepreneurialism”, and through individualistic “self-reliance” facilitated by the private sector, South Central LA could not only be rebuilt, it could thrive.¹¹

On a deeper social and cultural level, business ownership and the free market seemed to connect directly to Black Angelenos’ articulations of a new relationship between capitalism and their own racial and national identity.¹² For residents of South Central, RLA held the promise of “going mainstream”, of finally making American capitalism work for them, and of realising the full potential of an entrepreneurial ‘Blackness as self-help’.¹³ There was, then, something materially economic happening, but also something in which Angelenos had emotionally invested socially and culturally, something which held meaning about race, identity, and what it meant to be an American citizen.

RLA ultimately failed in its mission. The Northridge Earthquake of 1994 eclipsed the post-Rebellion reconstruction of South Central and the program sputtered out.¹⁴ The path which led to the beating of Rodney King, the 1992 Rebellion, and RLA has been well-plotted by scholars, but research has yet to account for the local conditions which gave rise to the

University Press, 2007); Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order: America and the World in the Free Market Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

¹¹ Mike Davis, ‘Who Killed Los Angeles?: The Verdict is Given’, *New Left Review* 1, no. 197 (1993), 12.

¹² Hinton, *America on Fire*, 252; Dunn, ‘Gang Members Test Capitalist Waters’; Peterson and Lee, ‘Ueberroth Says Calls to Aid Rebuilding Are Flooding In’.

¹³ Hinton, *America on Fire*, 252; Dunn, ‘Gang Members Test Capitalist Waters’. On defining Blackness as self-help entrepreneurialism see Costa Vargas, *Catching Hell in the City of Angels*, Chapter 6: 177-213.

¹⁴ Melissa Chadburn, ‘The Destructive Force of Rebuild LA’, *LA Curbed*, 27 April 2017, <https://la.curbed.com/2017/4/27/15442350/1992-los-angeles-riots-rebuild-la#comments>.

neoliberal consensus around LA's reconstruction.¹⁵ Neither the 1992 Rebellion, nor the neoliberal culture which governed local responses to reconstruction, can be fully understood without considering the city's most significant moment of the preceding decade: the 1984 Olympic Games.

The Games were the key moment in the development of a local neoliberal culture in Los Angeles. They did not simply pop-up for two weeks in 1984 and disappear again just as quickly. Rather, Angelenos lived with the Olympics for six years from the announcement of LA's successful candidacy in 1978. The planning of the Games bridged the economic decline of the 1970s and the "malaise" of the Carter presidency on one side and Reagan's ascendancy on the other. Running the Games as a business on a for-profit basis, the LAOOC needed to tread carefully through the local context of LA in the early 1980s in order to sell the Olympics as a product. The city's racial idiosyncrasies, its business and cultural climate, and its socio-economic order all held the potential to disrupt the smooth-running profitability of the Games. Organisers therefore pursued neoliberal strategies which could safely encase the generation of Olympic profits from the political demands of the city around them. As such, LA'84 was an exercise in the privatisation and marketization of everyday life in the city through the subversion of social infrastructure in the interests of private capital.

When Angelenos interacted with their Olympics, they engaged with capitalism in its neoliberal form. Analysing the planning and execution of the 1984 Games reveals the local experience of global-facing ideologies, bringing scholarship on neoliberalism down to earth and putting it into conversation with the locally specific realities of life in Los Angeles. The

¹⁵ Robert Gooding-Williams, ed., *Reading Rodney King, Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Lynn Mie Itagaki, *Civil Racism: The 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion and the Crisis of Racial Burnout* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Felicia Angeja Viator, *To Live and Defy in LA: How Gangsta Rap Changed America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

Games were an accelerant for the neoliberalisation of everyday life and telegraphed the benefits of this approach not only to city residents, but to the world. They were an antenna for the transmission of neoliberal ideas and a vehicle for neoliberal practices, which established a hegemonic neoliberal culture in the city. While some Angelenos of colour resisted the Games, others were active participants in using the Olympic moment to fashion an egalitarian, post-racial city by harnessing neoliberal strategies on their own terms. Viewing the neoliberal processes of LA '84 through the lenses of racial and national identity, however, makes clear the ways in which the egalitarian promise of neoliberal post-racial individualism succumbed to the demands of racial capitalism. Building mass consent to neoliberal economies at a global level depended on local strategies which sapped race and identity of their political potency, and the redefinition of the nation state as a facilitative framework for private capital.

ON NEOLIBERAL RACIAL CAPITALISM

Neoliberalism as a category of analysis has been criticised by scholars for its definitional elasticity, the lack of theoretical coherence of the *neo* prefix, and for the uneven ways in which “actually existing neoliberalism” has manifested as the result of a political-intellectual project.¹⁶ Nevertheless, historians continue to find the neoliberal lens useful for exploring not only the last quarter of the twentieth century, but also for analysing the long-term global development of capitalism from the final collapse of formal empires to its present conjuncture.¹⁷ For some, the neoliberal project was a nation-building or nation-defining one,

¹⁶ For an overview of the debate on the “uses and abuses” of the term see: ‘Debating the Uses and Abuses of “Neoliberalism”’: Forum’, *Dissent*, 22 January 2018, accessed 5 February 2020, https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/debating-uses-abuses-neoliberalism-forum.

¹⁷ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*; Slobodian, *Globalists*; Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*; Dieter Plehwe, Quinn Slobodian, and Philip Mirowski, eds., *Nine Lives of Neoliberalism* (London: Verso, 2020); Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015);

which dominated the latter half of the twentieth century.¹⁸ Others have used the term to interrogate the intersections of politics, culture, race, urbanisation, and policing, particularly in the US.¹⁹ Shifting away from a western focus, scholars have also begun to analyse neoliberalism in post-colonial contexts in the Global South.²⁰

The neoliberal lens is most useful when the term is considered not as a noun — neoliberalism — but as an adjective, a descriptor of behaviours and ideas which were neoliberal in character. As Quinn Slobodian argues, neoliberalism has never reigned uncontested, nor has it ‘mapped neatly onto reality’.²¹ Rather, in Slobodian’s analysis, neoliberal thinking was one set of answers among many to ongoing economic questions posed by the twentieth century, chiefly: how might capitalism survive under conditions of mass democracy and decolonisation? Neoliberals found answers to this question in a ‘vertical shift’, continually advancing policies which placed the operation of capitalism at the global

William Callison and Zachary Manfredi, eds., *Mutant Neoliberalism: Market Rule and Political Rupture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

¹⁸ James Vernon, ‘Heathrow and the Making of Neoliberal Britain’, *Past & Present* 252, no. 1 (2021): 213-47; Aled Davies, Ben Jackson, and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, eds., *The Neoliberal Age? Britain Since the 1970s* (London: UCL Press, 2021).

¹⁹ Jordan T. Camp, *Incarcerating the Crisis: Freedom Struggles and the Rise of the Neoliberal State* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016); David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009); Jason Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007); Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, ‘Backstory to the Neoliberal Moment: Race Taxes and the Political Economy of Black Urban Housing in the 1960s’, *Souls* 14, no. 3-4 (2012): 185-206; Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2019); Andrew Diamond and Thomas Sugrue, eds., *Neoliberal Cities: The Remaking of Postwar Urban America* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

²⁰ Muriam Haleh Davis, *Markets of Civilisation: Islam and Racial Capitalism in Algeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022); Quinn Slobodian and Dieter Plehwe, eds., *Market Civilizations: Neoliberals East and South* (New York: Zone Books, 2022).

²¹ Slobodian, *Globalists*, 21.

level, not the national.²² An institutional global order could, they believed, shield capitalism from the unpredictable disruption of democratic demands within nation states. Neoliberals tolerated democracy at best as a stabilising force and organisational framework but sought at every opportunity to push the operation of markets beyond national borders, far from the political enfranchisement which mass democracy threatened to unleash.²³

The neoliberal vertical shift, which has sometimes come under the moniker of “globalisation”, gave rise to a common misconception that neoliberal nations were weakened states, that free markets were organic, and that deregulation reigned supreme. The neoliberal encasement of globalised capitalism, however, actually required strong national government intervention in the domestic economy and in the lives of “everyday” people at the local level.²⁴ In the US, the rise of militarised policing, “wars” on drugs, and mass incarceration are manifestations of what strong, neoliberal state apparatus look like.²⁵

Neoliberal projects were about more than just encasement of capital, however. At the domestic level, insidious social and cultural messaging sought to educate, induce, or force populations into neoliberal ways of thinking. Wendy Brown had described this phenomenon as a ‘normative order of reason’ that underpins the creeping marketization of everyday life.²⁶ Brown’s analysis rests on what Michel Foucault called *homoeconomicus*: the individual as ‘the entrepreneur of himself’.²⁷ *Homoeconomicus*, argues Brown, is historically distinct from earlier iterations of the capitalist worker. As an individual repository of their own social and

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 17.

²⁴ Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, 88.

²⁵ Murch, ‘The Color of War’.

²⁶ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 9.

²⁷ Michel Senellart, ed., Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 226.

cultural capital, the world in which *homoeconomicus* lives is one in which all spheres of life and human endeavour are economic, all conduct is market conduct, and all action is framed and measured by economic metrics.²⁸ ‘This intensely constructed and governed bit of human capital [...] is taken with leveraging its competitive positioning and with enhancing its monetary and non-monetary portfolio across all endeavours and venues’, concludes Brown.²⁹ When people go home, they do not cease market conduct, thus family life, religion, sex, politics, education, sports, even morality become spheres of economic activity.³⁰ *Homoeconomicus* competes, rather than trades, with its neighbours. The 1984 Olympic Games — the embodiment of individual betterment and competition — were the cultural performance of *homoeconomic* virtues.

Encasement and the marketization of everyday life were strategies of control, order, and authority. The third neoliberal strategy, however, promised emancipation. Individual utopianism celebrated deregulation, anti-normativity, individualism, and a border-less world.³¹ It worked through culture, promising untold wealth to those who adopted the correct entrepreneurial outlook on life, shunned welfarism, and seized opportunities to flourish in a world freed from the suffocating limitations of national regulation.³² Individual utopianism recast the state as a cultural facilitative context. In the US, as Gary Gerstle has argued, utopianism borrowed the language of the American Revolution, casting neoliberal individualism and the casting off of constraints as historically coherent with America’s very foundations.³³ Jeremy Gilbert has argued that neoliberal culture has been effective because it

²⁸ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 10.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Cooper, *Family Values*; Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, 90-2.

³¹ Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, 93.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

can pass itself off as ‘trans-historical common sense [...] refuting its own specificity and historicity’.³⁴ Individual utopianism was nothing short of the fulfilment of the American Dream. In Los Angeles, the city’s cultural identity as the nation’s capital of individual reinvention and aspiration provided fertile soil for neoliberal culture to take root.

The culture of individual utopianism held radical potential. Within it lay the possibility of moving past race to establish a colour-blind, post-racial social order in which the economy saw neither colour nor identity, only the meritocratic content and conduct of an individual’s character. The only drivers of success in the post-racial free market would be entrepreneurial gumption and individual dynamism. Paul Gilroy has argued that neoliberal post-racialism emerged in the latter-half of the twentieth century, in which the interests of globalising capital required divestment from overt displays of white supremacy. The language of “multiculturalism” became imbued with value, establishing what Gilroy has called a ‘neoliberal Black vernacular’ of “making it”: ‘a vernacular of [...] aspiration, of fortitude, and resilience’ based on the belief that race and racism can be overcome on an individual basis through entrepreneurial drive.³⁵ Gilroy grounds his argument in sports, the ultimate expression of the “level playing field” where all start equal and determine their own individual success. Neoliberal culture induces and entices with its egalitarian promise. The Olympics are the world’s premier cultural display of individual-utopian virtues.

The history of the neoliberal world can thus not only be found in the machinations of the Mont Pèlerin Society or the top-down political-economic projects of Reaganism and Thatcherism. The neoliberal vertical shift in fact went both ways. As the free operation of

³⁴ Jeremy Gilbert, ed., *Neoliberal Culture* (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 2016), 17.

³⁵ Paul Gilroy, “‘We Got To Get Over Before We Go Under’”: Fragments for a History of Black Vernacular Neoliberalism’, *New Formations* 80-81 (2013): 23-28.

capital ascended, there was a socio-cultural down-draft in which “everyday” Americans scrambled to find meaning in a changing nation and a changing world. Neoliberal impulses were evident in the answers which “everyday” people sought to a diverse set of local questions about urban life in 1980s America, questions about the role of the state, the meaning of national and racial identity, and the boundaries of citizenship. The LA Olympics of 1984 were a crucial site at which Americans felt the neoliberal downdraft. Between 1978 and 1984, the private group of individuals which made up the LAOOC exerted influence over state infrastructure, legislation, and culture to encase Olympic capitalism, placing it beyond the political demands of the people of Los Angeles. Its accompanying programs of public relations and youth services infused the social infrastructure of the inner city with neoliberal messages. The development of policing in the interests of Olympic security turbo-charged the punitive capabilities of the city’s police forces.

Angelenos, however, were not mere passive receivers of the neoliberal culture instilled by LA’84. The ways in which Angelenos interacted with, embraced, or resisted the imposition of the Olympic Games into their neighbourhoods reveal the processes by which neoliberal culture took hold. The LAOOC directed its strategies of encasement, marketization, and individual utopianism predominantly at the neighbourhoods of colour which surrounded the main Olympic venues. The smooth operation of Olympic capital accumulation required organisers to mediate hyper-local matters of race and citizenship. Neoliberal culture in LA did not descend from above. It was the result of a series of local contestations and cannot be understood without analysing the ways in which race shaped its development.

Neoliberal culture’s racial basis meant that it often arrived in the lives of “everyday people” in forms which were familiar, not new. While at times Angelenos embraced neoliberal ideas as bold strategies with which to break from a failed system, just as often,

people's neoliberal impulses can be explained by the ways in which they came disguised in a cloak of continuity. Melinda Cooper has demonstrated how neoliberals found common ground with social conservatives over matters of gender and sexuality in the interests of maintaining the familiar Fordist-family model as the idealised construct of American life.³⁶ Angela McRobbie, on the other hand, has illustrated how neoliberal culture could be adaptable to historical change. It accommodated feminist demands through the cultural construction of the modern working mother, a figure expected to engage in behaviour that demonstrates 'working motherhood is no obstacle either to glamorous and highly sexualised models of self-presentation, or to efficient house management'.³⁷ Part of neoliberal culture's effectiveness was this bipartisan malleability, an ability to present as both comfortable continuity and positive change.

The egalitarian potential of neoliberal policies succumbed to capitalist logics that *required* racial inequality. Its radical promise was scuppered by what Slobodian identifies as its main purpose: to secure 'the social conditions that allow capitalism to persist'.³⁸ Neoliberal thinkers, while rejecting race as a category of analysis, intended neoliberal economics to create national contexts in post-colonial spaces, contexts in which capitalism operated unencumbered. The model constitution written by neoliberal economist Friedrich Hayek was intended not for the US, but for decolonising nations or post-fascist states like Portugal. The end of global empires was 'essential to the emergence of neoliberalism as an intellectual movement', argues Slobodian, 'all but ignored by historians, the questions of empire, decolonisation, and the world economy were at the heart of the neoliberal project from its

³⁶ Cooper, *Family Values*.

³⁷ Angela McRobbie, 'Feminism, the Family, and the New "Mediated Maternalism"' in Gilbert, *Neoliberal Culture*, 165-91.

³⁸ Slobodian, *Globalists*, 16.

inception'.³⁹ With matters of race and decolonisation baked into it from the outset, then, the use of neoliberal strategies to secure racial uplift was doomed from the start.

LA'84 was an exercise in neoliberal capitalism and, as such, was an exercise in *racial* capitalism. The prefix *racial* refers neither to a stage nor variety of capitalism. Rather, scholars of racial capitalism begin their analyses from one foundational assumption: that all capitalism is racial.⁴⁰ Racial capitalism posits that the core processes of capitalism — accumulation, dispossession, production, and surplus — are articulated through race.⁴¹ Histories of racial capitalism recognise the ways in which the social construction of race, while never ahistorical nor static, served as a tool for naturalising the inequalities produced by capitalism, and that racialised exclusion and oppression served material ends. Ruth Wilson Gilmore has offered perhaps the most succinct encapsulation of the term: 'Capitalism requires inequality, and race enshrines it'.⁴² This statement serves not as the end point of any inquiry into the complexity of the relationship between race, labour, and class, but as an analytical

³⁹ Ibid., 13, 25.

⁴⁰ The term was popularised by the "rediscovery" of Cedric Robinson's 1983 work *Black Marxism*, but has been articulated in a long line of Black scholarship which recognised the material basis of race: Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 3rd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1983); Barbara Fields, 'Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America', *New Left Review* 1, no. 181 (May 1990): 95-118; Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972); W.E.B Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1935); Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalising California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

⁴¹ Destin Jenkins and Justin Leroy, eds., *Histories of Racial Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 3.

⁴² Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore: An Antipode Foundation Film, accessed 30 June 2022, (Kenton Card, 2020): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CS627aKrJI>.

approach that starts by asking: “what is the role of race in producing the economy?”⁴³

In its neoliberal form, racial capitalism refers to an historically contingent formulation of the economy which began in the 1970s. Critical race scholars have theorised the ways in which race, while continuing to figure in essential ways in the economy, adapted to neoliberal conditions.⁴⁴ Whereas Cedric Robinson argued that from the outset capitalism has tended to differentiate — to exaggerate social difference into racial difference — David Theo Goldberg has argued that neoliberalism purged race from public discourse: ‘race faded into the very structures embedded in the architecture of neoliberal society, [it] lost its social sacrality while retaining its personal cache and privatised resonance’.⁴⁵ Goldberg is referring here to the oft-cited “colourblind” 1980s, in which US conservatives’ rhetoric appropriated Martin Luther King’s “not by the colour of his skin, but by the content of his character” argument to attack liberal affirmative action programs.⁴⁶ Nikhil Pal Singh argues that the appropriation of King’s legacy by conservatives allowed them to switch the terms of the political debate over Black equality from ending racism to colourblindness, asserting that ‘race issues’ could be overcome once ‘blacks and whites are blended into a common nationality’.⁴⁷ For proponents of colourblindness, race was something to be surmounted and left behind.

Limiting our understanding of race under neoliberal conditions only to structural and political colourblindness, however, privileges a top-down view that ignores the ways in

⁴³ Jenkins and Leroy, *Histories of Racial Capitalism*, 3.

⁴⁴ Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*; Jayne Chong-Soon Lee, ‘Navigating the Topology of Race’ in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, eds. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 441-49.

⁴⁵ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 26; Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*, 341.

⁴⁶ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, 128-9.

⁴⁷ Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 10-13.

which, to use the example of the 1992 neoliberal consensus in LA, Black community leaders sought to construct the meaning of their own racial identity with reference to capitalism, to establish a Blackness which could participate fully in the economy.⁴⁸ A competing agenda to 1980s conservative colourblind ideology lay on the left, where multiculturalists sought to pave a road built on “diversity”. The cobblestones of the road might all look different, they might come from different quarries, and the ride along the road might be bumpy, but the materials acted in concert to lay a path for the national whole. Multiculturalists in the 1980s were not a cohesive group, but they shared a core belief in the emphatic rejection of “melting pot” metaphors.⁴⁹ Voices on both the left and right, then, advocated approaches which emphasised choice, individual labour, and personal responsibility.

The 1980s was a decade in which racial discourse sought to marry the new racial assertiveness that had succeeded the Black freedom struggles of the 1960s with the belief that, as Daniel Rodgers puts it, ‘consciousness of race was not antithetical to a vivid consciousness of one’s claims as a citizen’.⁵⁰ One could be, for instance, both Black *and* a “mainstream” citizen; one could hold within them the continuity of their racial identity — its history and memory — while at the same time move beyond the social barriers that race maintained. There is, then, an unresolved tension between the ways in which neoliberal racial capitalism represented both change and continuity. What, under neoliberal conditions, is the role of race in producing the economy? LA ’84 is a case study which moves closer to answering this question. Its organisers spoke about the local in global terms, all while staging a competition which by its very nature emphasised the national. LAOOC rhetoric appealed to both sides of

⁴⁸ Costa Vargas, *Catching Hell in the City of Angels*, 178.

⁴⁹ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 348.

⁵⁰ Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, 118.

the colourblind / multicultural debate. The committee found neoliberal approaches to staging the Games, giving it the means to create the social conditions to allow Olympic capitalism to persist in a city with extreme disparities of wealth, acute racial tensions, and a backdrop of nationalist, Cold War sabre-rattling.

ON OLYMPIC LOS ANGELES

The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics are a case study in the culture of capitalism. The Games were a vehicle for naturalising the infiltration of the private sector into the social sphere as a response to the federal austerity of the Reagan era. Through the Olympics, programs which were previously the responsibility of the state — “urban renewal”, social welfare, education — became potential markets for private enterprise. The apparent success with which the LAOOC married the private sector to the everyday lives of Angelenos telegraphed the validity and desirability of neoliberal approaches to social issues. LA’84 is a study in the early development of neoliberal culture, a history in which the key agents of historical change were not global institutions, bankers, or national politicians, but local business owners, street vendors, corporate strategists, community groups, the press, Olympic organisers, and athletes. It expands the understanding of where mass consent to a global-facing ideology — something which seemed entirely remote from the everyday lives of the people it sought to govern — came from.

LA’84 as a cultural event spoke in all three registers pertinent to neoliberal racial capitalism: the global, the national, and the local. As global events, Olympic Games are unsurpassed in their impact. Scholars have noted the vast audiences which Olympics attract. As Amy Bass observed, by the time of the 1996 Games in Atlanta, 19.6 billion people across 214 countries tuned-in to watch. In the US, they were watched by an audience of over two-

hundred million, more than ninety percent of all television owners.⁵¹ Attending to the links between the International Olympic Committee (IOC), globalisation, and corporate commercialism, Olympic scholars have charted the neoliberalisation of the IOC into a supra-national corporate entity, a process in which LA'84 played the defining role.⁵²

In a cultural sense, the Games have long stood as a preeminent 'international symbolic encirclement of a kind of liberal idealism'.⁵³ The modern Games began in 1896, but their post-1945 status has been that of *the* global mega-event, inseparable from the prevailing Cold War climate.⁵⁴ As Mary Dudziak has shown, there were direct links between Cold War international politics and American race relations, and sports historians have shown how American sports were on the frontline of integration efforts.⁵⁵ There has been comparatively

⁵¹ Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 12.

⁵² Helen Jefferson Lenskyj, *Inside the Olympic Industry: Power, Politics and Activism* (Albany: State University of New York, 2000); Robert Barney, Scott Martyn, and Stephen Wenn, *Selling the Five Rings: The International Olympic Committee and the Rise of Olympic Commercialism* (Salt Lake City: Abe Books, 2004); Stephen Wenn and Robert Barney, *The Gold in the Rings: The People and Events that Transformed the Olympic Games* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020); Jules Boykoff, *Power Games: A Political History of the Olympics* (London: Verso, 2016); Mark Dyreson, 'Global Television and the Transformation of the Olympics: The 1984 Los Angeles Games', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 1 (2015): 172–84.

⁵³ Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 12.

⁵⁴ Russ Crawford, 'Sport Since the 1960s', in *A Companion to American Sport History*, ed. Steven A. Riess (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2014), 84-105; Allen Guttman, *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Philip D'Agati, *The Cold War and the 1984 Olympic Games: A Soviet-American Surrogate War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Mary Jo Festle, *Playing Nice: Politics and Apologies in Women's Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Kurt Kemper, *College Football and American Culture in the Cold War Era* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Russ Crawford, *The Use of Sport to Promote the American Way of Life* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press Ltd., 2008); Richard Espy, *The Politics of the Olympic Games: With an Epilogue, 1976-1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Bill Shaikin, *The Olympics and the Los Angeles Games* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1988); Heather L. Dichter and Andrew L. Johns, eds., *Diplomatic Games: Sport, Statecraft, and International Relations since 1945* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2014).

⁵⁵ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton

little research on the Cold War racial dynamics of the Olympic Games.⁵⁶ For historians, the Games tend to generate more interest when they go wrong instead of right: the student massacre at Mexico in 1968, the Munich Massacre of 1972, or the western boycott of Moscow 1980 following the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. LA'84, by comparison, stands as a remarkable success story, the Games which rescued the institution from its 1970s doldrums and demonstrated its ongoing viability.⁵⁷

As international competitions, analyses of the Olympics and nationalism are well represented in the historiography.⁵⁸ There has, however, been an over-reliance on Benedict

University Press, 2000). For related sports scholarship see the work of David K. Wiggins, *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in White America* (Syracuse, NY: New York University Press, 1997); David K. Wiggins and Patrick B. Miller, *The Unlevel Playing Field: A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); David K. Wiggins, *Out of the Shadows: A Biographical History of African American Athletes*, (Fayetteville, AK: University of Arkansas Press, 2006). See also: Charles Martin, *Benching Jim Crow: The Rise and Fall of the Color Line in Southern College Sports, 1890-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Lane Demas, *Integrating the Gridiron: Black Civil Rights and American College Football* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010); Samuel O. Regaldo, *Viva Baseball!: Latin Major Leaguers and Their Special Hunger* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

⁵⁶ Works in this field include: Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*; Mark Dyreson, 'Return to the Melting Pot: An Old American Olympic Story', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, no. 2 (2008): 204-23; Douglas Hartman, *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and Their Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Matthew Llewellyn, 'Circumventing Apartheid: Racial Politics and the Issue of South Africa's Olympic Participation at the 1984 Los Angeles Games', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 1 (2015): 53-71.

⁵⁷ Matthew J. Burbank, Gregory D. Andranovich, and Charles H. Heying, eds., *Olympic Dreams: The Impact of Mega-Events on Local Politics* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2001), 53.

⁵⁸ David Clay Large, *Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007); Mark Dyreson, *Making the American Team: Sport, Culture, and the Olympic Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Toby Rider and Matthew Llewellyn, 'The Five Rings and the "Imagined Community": Nationalism and the Modern Olympic Games', *The SAIS Review of International Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2015): 21-32; Matthew Llewellyn, *Rule Britannia: Nationalism, Identity, and the Modern Olympic Games* (London: Routledge, 2011); Matthew Llewellyn, 'For a "United" Kingdom and a "Greater" Britain: The British Olympic Association and the Limitations and Contestations of "Britishness"', *Sport in Society* 18, no. 7 (2015): 765-82; Ian MacRury and Gavin Poynter, "'Team GB" and London 2012: The Paradox of National and Global

Anderson's "imagined community" in the nation-building scholarship.⁵⁹ Anderson's concept of the socially constructed nation has generated important knowledge about the discursive nature of national identity, but the processes of capital within the national space are accompanied by material practices of exclusion. Like World's Fairs before them, Olympic Games are nation-building and nation-defining occasions, but they also convey grand narratives about modernity, gender, race, and citizenship.⁶⁰ LA'84 was an antenna for the transmission of neoliberal virtues and ideals. It was also a lightning rod for those wishing to put material neoliberal ideas into practice.

At the local level, scholarship on LA'84 has avoided sustained engagement with urban history.⁶¹ The majority of the field finds that the Games had a transformative effect on the institution of the Olympics in terms of funding and organisation.⁶² However, Mark Dyreson

Identities', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no. 16-18 (2010): 2958-75.

⁵⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁶⁰ Eric Zolov, 'Showcasing the Land of Tomorrow: Mexico and the 1968 Olympics', *The Americas* 61, no. 2 (2004): 159-88; Kevin B. Witherspoon, *Before the Eyes of the World: Mexico and the 1968 Olympic Games* (DeKalb, IL: Northern University of Illinois Press, 2008); Kay Schiller and Christopher Young, *The 1972 Munich Olympics and the Making of Modern Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, eds., *The Olympics at the Millennium: Power, Politics, and the Games* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000). On World's Fairs, race, and modernity see: Nathan Cardon, *A Dream of the Future: Race, Empire, and Modernity at the Atlanta and Nashville World's Fairs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Maurice Roche, *Mega-Events and Modernity: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁶¹ John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold, *Olympic Cities: City Agendas, Planning, and the World's Games, 1896-2012* (London: Routledge, 2007) for example, contains only superficial analysis of the interaction between the Games and the city. Burbank, Andranovich, and Heying, *Olympic Dreams* includes one chapter on the impact of LA'84 on local politics.

⁶² See special issue: 'The 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games: Assessing the Thirty-Year Legacy', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 1 (2015); Boykoff, *Power Games*; Barney, Martyn, and Wenn, *Selling the Five Rings*; Wenn and Barney, *The Gold in the Rings*.

and Matthew Llewelyn have shown that LA'84 impacted in significant ways on the city itself. On the two occasions which LA hosted the Games, 1932 and 1984, local government and civic boosters used them as devices to fashion a metropolitan identity as *the* Olympic city, a Mecca of world popular culture.⁶³ They argue that the popular memory of the 1984 Games is that of a sixteen-day break from the reality of life in an 'unliveable metropolitan disaster'.⁶⁴ Stopping short of analysing the material neoliberal effects the Games had on the city — the acceleration of militarised policing, the privatisation and marketization of everyday life — scholars have not as yet fully articulated the ways in which LA'84 was less of an aberration and more of an accelerant for building a neoliberal city.

Histories of LA'84 characterise the Games as a nation-building event. They celebrated, in one such analysis, 'the primacy of the nation state. Symbols, credentials, and protocol were highly charged, with US athletes in particular as nationalist proxies, tangible representations of their "imagined communities"'.⁶⁵ The Games, argued Dyreson, 'reanimated not just the Olympics, but the American spirit'.⁶⁶ Nationalisms, however imagined, are never imagined in the same ways. The LAOOC went to great lengths to downplay overt displays of nationalism and patriotism and was internally divided over the tone of the Games.⁶⁷ Rather than a bullish patriotism, LA'84 spoke in the language of multicultural celebration, diversity, and international fraternity. The press did indeed locate a renewed "American spirit" at LA'84, but the constitutive parts of this new patriotism were more complex than the

⁶³ Dyreson and Llewellyn, 'Los Angeles is *the* Olympic City'.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 2006.

⁶⁵ Matthew Llewellyn, John Gleaves, and Wayne Wilson, 'The Historical Legacy of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 1 (2015): 5.

⁶⁶ Dyreson, 'Global Television and the Transformation of the Olympics': 174.

⁶⁷ John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle, *Encyclopaedia of the Modern Olympic Movement* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 210-11.

scholarship has observed. This new-found patriotism was, in fact, complex and infused with neoliberal undertones.

LA'84 scholarship has developed only a limited understanding of the links between the rollout of neoliberal political economy and the Olympics. Jules Boykoff has argued they were 'a perfect storm for privatisation' and that Ueberroth was 'gung-ho to inject the Games with a dose of Reaganomics' to create 'the first full throttle, corporate, capitalist Olympics'.⁶⁸ However, as Chapter One makes clear, rather than being "gung-ho", Ueberroth had little option but to pursue a neoliberal route. External political and social issues particular to Los Angeles acted upon the direction of the Games from their very inception. Boykoff's analysis of the Games focuses on their upward impact on the Olympics and leads him to dismiss LA'84 as a 'neoliberal blip'.⁶⁹ As the interaction between the Games and the city reveals, this was no blip, but a deeply significant and constitutive moment.

Social scientists have undertaken more sustained analysis of LA'84's neoliberal character. Richard Gruneau and Robert Neubauer have identified the national and global significance of the Games which legitimated a 'sweeping neoliberal political project in the United States, with repercussions that have been felt across the globe'.⁷⁰ They locate these repercussions within a political framework: Reagan's re-election campaign of 1984 in which he leaned heavily on the free market "lessons" of that year's Olympics. Concluding as they do that 'neoliberalism remained one of the most significant legacies of the Games', their important research can be pushed much deeper to consider the full extent of LA'84's

⁶⁸ Boykoff, *Power Games*, 131.

⁶⁹ Jules Boykoff, *Celebration Capitalism and the Olympic Games* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 30.

⁷⁰ Richard Gruneau and Robert Neubauer, 'A Gold Medal for the Market: The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, the Regan Era, and the Politics of Neoliberalism', in Helen Lenskyj and Stephen Wagg, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Olympic Studies* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 135.

neoliberal repercussions. To view neoliberal culture as the top-down political project of Reaganism buttresses the mistaken idea that neoliberalism descended from above as a fully formed, all-encompassing political framework.

More importantly, the city and its residents were not a passive backdrop to Olympic proceedings. Local cultures posed political questions that organisers had to address, mediate, or circumnavigate. To understand the quotidian currents of the first “Capitalist Olympics”, LA’84 must be placed into the social, cultural, and urban history of the city, focusing more on the “LA” in *LA Olympics*. Across the work on the 1984 Games, one feature unites the scholarship: the people of Los Angeles are entirely missing from their own Olympics. All that their varied lives might reveal about how they shaped and were shaped by the neoliberal process which LA’84 instigated are missing too.

In the early 1980s, the city was America’s main immigrant destination. In 1983, *Time* magazine labelled LA ‘the new Ellis Island’.⁷¹ It was a unique site for the meeting of race, economy, and urban space. Edward Soja observed: ‘One can find in LA not only the high-tech industrial complexes of the Silicon Valley and the erratic sunbelt economy of Houston, but also the far-reaching industrial decline and bankrupt urban neighbourhoods of rust-belted Detroit and Cleveland. There is a Boston in LA, a Lower Manhattan and a South Bronx, a Sao Paulo and a Singapore. There may be no other comparable urban region which presents so visually such a composite assemblage and articulation of urban restructuring processes’.⁷² This was the context faced by organisers, who could not simply “plug in” an Olympic Games without negotiating, or negating, the racial and economic politics of the city.

⁷¹ Kurt Andersen, ‘Los Angeles: The New Ellis Island’, *Time*, 13 June 1983.

⁷² Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 93.

Since the publication of Mike Davis' *City of Quartz*, humanities scholars have underlined the centrality of Los Angeles to understanding race and urban cultures in the late-twentieth-century US.⁷³ The city also features prominently in recent scholarship that analyses the phenomena of mass incarceration, policing, and the "war on drugs".⁷⁴ Despite so much scholarly attention, Donna Murch has noted the 'dearth of research into bottom-up analyses of LA's developing punitive social climate'. There is, she argues, an urgent need to recognise the voices of those who have not left strong archival traces.⁷⁵ LA '84 is a case study that

⁷³ Davis, *City of Quartz*; Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multi-Ethnic LA* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Josh Kun and Laura Pudilo, eds., *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Marcia Chatelain, *Franchise: The Golden Arches in Black America* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2020); Daniel Martinez HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón, eds., *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Viator, *To Live and Defy in LA*; Costa Vargas, *Catching Hell in the City of Angels*; Andrea Gibbons, *City of Segregation: 100 Years of Struggle for Housing in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 2018); Davis and Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire*; Itagaki, *Civil Racism*; Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*; Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (London: Verso, 1997); Dean J. Franco, *The Border and the Line: Race, Literature, and Los Angeles* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019); George Francis-Kelly, "'We Must Not Let These Stores That Trade on Human Misery Proliferate': Black Activism, Spatial Justice, and Liquor Stores in South Central Los Angeles, 1984-94", *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 6, no. 2 (2020): 1-25; Vincent Chabany-Douarre, "'A Sort of Public Living Room': Ignorance and the Racial Management of Disorder in Postwar Los Angeles", *Journal of American Studies* 56, no. 4 (2022): 538-64; Raúl Homero Villa and George J. Sánchez, eds., 'Special Issue: Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures', *American Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2004).

⁷⁴ Donna Murch, 'Crack in Los Angeles: Crisis, Militarisation, and Black Responses to the Late Twentieth Century War on Drugs', *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (2015): 162-73; Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*; Stuart Schrader, *Badges Without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019); Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Camp, *Incarcerating the Crisis*.

⁷⁵ Murch, 'Crack in Los Angeles'.

addresses these archival silences. The event generated significant press attention and sparked renewed civic activism as Angelenos sought to seize on the Games as a conduit and catalyst for improved urban conditions, business opportunities, and social justice. The archives generated by the Games offer historians an invaluable glimpse through a side window into contemporary debates on immigration, policing, and city life in the post-civil rights era, as the Cold War headed toward its denouement and globalisation ascended.

Although the Olympics are largely missing from the city's historiography, scholars of mass incarceration and Black LA have mentioned them in passing, noting their role in turbocharging the militarisation of the LAPD.⁷⁶ These passing mentions of the Games tease at the as-yet untold links between LA'84 and the everyday lives of the people of LA. More than just a chance to fill its armouries with new weapons, LAPD seized on the Games as a once-in-a-generation opportunity for growth, establishing itself as an indispensable entity on the frontline between the people and the state at a time when government sought to eliminate state involvement in people's lives altogether. The full extent of the links between LA'84 and the development of a neoliberal, punitive social climate has yet to be fully excavated.

Historians have begun to address the dearth of historical research on the local dynamics of neoliberal urbanism, which has mainly been the preserve of social scientists.⁷⁷ Historical analysis can problematise the dominant theoretical works on neoliberalism which, as Andrew Diamond and Thomas Sugrue have observed, 'share one underlying premise: change happened from the top down [...] historians are particularly well-suited to explain

⁷⁶ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 153,191, 213-14; Viator, *To Live and Defy in LA*, 20; Hinton, *America on Fire*, 233-34; Alex Alonso, 'Out of the Void: Street Gangs in Black Los Angeles' in Hunt and Ramón, eds., *Black Los Angeles*, 155.

⁷⁷ Andrew J. Diamond and Thomas J. Sugrue expand on this observation in an edited collection which brings together seven historians to address the 'insufficiently historical' work in this field: Diamond and Sugrue, *Neoliberal Cities*, 1-8.

what made neoliberalism hegemonic in the Gramscian sense. With attention to the particulars of place and politics of identity, interest and ideology on the ground, historians can explain what brought about the construction of consent necessary for neoliberal policies to have staying power'.⁷⁸ Geographers David J. Roberts and Minelle Mahtani have criticised their field for treating race super-structurally, arguing as historians of racial capitalism do, that the two phenomena are co-constitutive and inseparable.⁷⁹ Historians such as Donna Murch, Thomas Adams, and James Vernon are doing this work, arguing for essential local-level research.⁸⁰

What follows cannot claim to “plug gaps” in all these various historiographies. It is a discrete analysis of a specific place at a specific historical moment. It is a case study that overlaps the fields described above to draw out a story of neoliberal common sense from below. In the archived papers of the LAOOC, City Hall, and the Police Commission, as well as local and national press coverage, there emerges the story of a cultural event which, through seduction or enforcement, took over an entire city, leaving neoliberal legacies in its wake. In newspaper articles and in the publications of local-level community organisations, those who lived with, embraced, or pushed back against Olympic preparations also tell their stories, ones in which race, place, and culture all figured in producing, challenging, and ordering neoliberal racial capitalism as a culturally hegemonic way of understanding life in late-twentieth century America.

Chapter One places the city’s 1984 Olympic bid into the longer history of Los

⁷⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁹ David J. Roberts and Minelle Mahtani, ‘Neoliberalising Race, Racing Neoliberalism: Place Race in Neoliberal Discourse’, *Antipode* 42, no. 2 (2010): 248, 250.

⁸⁰ Murch, ‘The Color of War’; Thomas Adams, ‘New Life, New Vigor, New Values: Privatisation, Service Work, and the Rise of Neoliberal Urbanism in Postwar Southern California’ in Diamond and Sugrue, *Neoliberal Cities*, 49-77; Vernon, ‘Heathrow and the Making of Neoliberal Britain’.

Angeles, from the first staging of an LA Olympics in 1932 up to the moment in 1978 when the IOC awarded the Games to the city for a second time. Within this longer history lie the seeds of the “neoliberal Olympics”, a unique set of circumstances which shaped the Games from the beginning. Rather than embracing neoliberal strategies of encasement, marketization, and individual utopianism from the outset, Olympic organisers were forced down this route by a set of hyper-local political and racial issues. Responding to growing anti-tax sentiment and the landmark passage of Proposition 13, which drastically depleted state coffers, the LAOOC’s options for federal or state-level public funding were closed off by the local concerns of white, middle-class suburban homeowners. The chapter concludes by exploring the anti-Olympic campaigns of these homeowners, who ensured that LA’84 would happen in — and *to* — the city’s communities of colour. The battles between the LAOOC and homeowners shaped the organisation into a highly centralised, unaccountable private body which sought to encase Olympic capital at every turn. From their inception, the 1984 Games were shaped by the demands of whiteness in property.

Chapter Two analyses the LAOOC’s strategy of neoliberal encasement through visual culture. It explores the design processes for the Games’ visual identity — its mascot, logo, colour scheme, and overall tone — arguing that the resulting philosophy “festive federalism” was a neoliberal aesthetic. This “look” was initially a predictably nationalistic American one, but changed drastically in tone as the LAOOC switched its focus toward private funding. Festive federalism was a design philosophy that overtly downplayed any association between the Games and the nation state in favour of internationalism, global citizenship, and multicultural “diversity”. It was a look befitting a city which aspired to become a “world city” like New York, Paris, or London.

More than this, festive federalism ensured that the Games would not be interpreted by

Angelenos as a state occasion from which they were owed something, be that infrastructure improvements or community investment. Festive-federal messaging was a means of cultural encasement, ideologically locating the Games in ways which protected profits. It celebrated the figure of the individual consumer as the ultimate expression of Olympic values and proper citizenship in Olympic Los Angeles. Through its vague invocations of post-racial diversity, festive federalism sought broad social acceptance, encouraged emotional and monetary buy-in from individual consumers, and shaped a neoliberal culture built on both colourblindness and soft multiculturalism.

Chapter Three explores the LAOOC's beautification, youth, and community-relations programs as processes of marketization, encasement, and neoliberal instruction. In its most prosaic form, beautification amounted to getting communities in poorer areas of the city to mask the material evidence of their own poverty through "clean-up drives", litter picking, and painting over graffiti. In this form, beautification was a way of ensuring the observable reality of LA life matched the Olympic City branding the LAOOC was selling. It also achieved a degree of neoliberal encasement, giving communities around venue sites the sense that they were involved and held agency in Olympic preparations. Its harder edge was felt by those who could not be made "neoliberally beautiful": the un-housed population of downtown, who were forcibly driven out of public spaces by the police in the run-up to the Games.

A deeper neoliberal logic underpinned Olympic beautification. Taken to its logical conclusion, beautification was a process for the privatisation of the city. It targeted institutions of social reproduction, particularly schools, as educational spaces of neoliberal ideological "improvement". With corporate backing, the LAOOC's youth services programs amounted to a neoliberal curriculum for "proper" neoliberal citizenship, espousing the virtues of individual utopia: consumerism, economic independence from the welfare state, self-

reliance, and the virtues of free market competition. The committee's youth and public-relations programs opened channels for the private sector into the social and public spaces of communities of colour, particularly in South Central, opening up new markets in areas of everyday life which had been recently vacated by the state in the name of austerity. Schools, hospitals, and youth services looked to the LAOOC's neoliberal strategies and the private sector to weather the storm of federal cutbacks.

Chapter Four analyses official Olympic-affiliated business opportunities to explore the myth of the neoliberal "free market" and its apparent celebration of the individual entrepreneur. The unique private funding model for LA'84 necessitated a fanatical approach to protecting corporate sponsors' right to profit from their endorsements, while ruthlessly shutting-out smaller businesses and entrepreneurs from accessing the Olympic marketplace. For the corporate sector, the Olympic marketplace was a highly regulated and privileged space in which to conduct lucrative business. For the small businesses of South Central which also bid on Olympic contracts, the Olympic marketplace exposed them to the full force of "free market" conditions on a global scale. For a small manufacturing firm from South Central, these were conditions in which they could not hope to compete. Many local firms which sought to cash-in on the opportunities that supposedly came with the Olympics found themselves heavily invested in the Games with little hope of making a return.

When it came to "doing capitalism" in Olympic Los Angeles, regulation or deregulation of the marketplace was unevenly experienced. Olympic business opportunities raised a key question for a changing political economy: what is the proper role of the interventionist state under neoliberal conditions? For the LAOOC and its corporate sponsors, the state could be a useful ally and facilitator for creating optimum business conditions in the Olympic marketplace. Small businesses seeking to get in on the act, however, found

themselves operating in a business climate with little-to-no protections. Rather than celebrate and lift-up the individual, entrepreneurial go-getter, then, LA '84 exposed the limitations of entrepreneurial citizenship. It protected pre-existing wealth by maintaining barriers to full access for entrepreneurs of colour. People of colour spied an opportunity for racial uplift within the neoliberal promises of Olympic contracts but found the logics of racial capitalism still firmly in place.

Chapter Five is concerned with the transformative effect which the Games had on the city's police forces, most significantly the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). In the wake of cutbacks to its funding at the city and state level, the LAPD identified the Games as a crucial opportunity to cement its reputation, underline the ongoing necessity for the expansion of its size and remit, and fill its armoury to bursting with new, hi-tech, military equipment. The front line between the neoliberal state and its populace, policing was a site at which neoliberal culture recast the proper role of the state as a punitive enforcer of order in the interests of the marketplace, rather than as a provider acting in the public interest. The LAPD relied on a racialised understanding of threats to the Games, one which collapsed the distinction between the global — international terrorism — and the local — young men of colour. The department adopted an economic approach to Olympic security, seeking to manipulate both supply and demand of policing to its own ends. Once the Games left town, the LAPD turned its new terrorism-fighting capabilities inward on the racialised people of LA.

The chapter concludes by analysing the responses to neoliberal policing among communities in South Central. While some resisted and feared the expansion of security and surveillance regimes in their neighbourhoods, others found that the levels of policing experienced during the Olympics had brought about positive solutions to a set of local

problems like crime and drugs. Community organisers also seized the Olympic moment to call for a permanent imposition of Olympic-style saturation policing in their neighbourhoods as a means of driving out crime in the interests of the local economy. Those calling for more policing in South Central did so with ambitions of pursuing “Black capitalism”, protecting the area as a uniquely Black space, but one which could participate in the “mainstream” economy.

Lastly, Chapter Six leaves the neighbourhoods of Los Angeles to analyse the failure of neoliberal individual utopia from a theoretical perspective. It takes as its case study the 1984 Olympic experience of super-star Black athlete Carl Lewis who equalled the record of Jesse Owens by winning four gold medals at LA’84. It argues that Lewis was the physical embodiment of neoliberal individualism, a person who eschewed gender norms and racial affiliation, all the while personifying the spirit of self-reliant competition and limitlessness. At LA’84 however, his striking visual politics clashed with the economic demands of racial and national identity in ways which ensured Lewis would fail to utilise utopianism for his own ends. Lewis’ Olympic experience was a case study in ideology meeting economic logics, articulated through matters of race, gender, sex, and patriotism. Ultimately, these competing demands imposed borders on the egalitarian possibilities of neoliberal utopia in order to maintain the social conditions for racial capitalism to persist.

The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics were a gateway for neoliberal values and practices into the United States at a time when, many felt, drastic change was needed. As they had in 1932, the 1984 Games offered the chance to redefine the city and nation anew after a decade or more of confusion, economic decline, and social upheaval. Los Angeles, then, always seeks the hosting of the Olympic Games as a means of re-inscribing social order after chaos. They promise a bright future by bringing new ways of thinking, while at the same time steeping

themselves in the timeless traditions of history. They combine what could be paradox and make it seem like common sense. In the words of Stuart Hall, neoliberal culture drew ‘from two different ideological repertoires [...] marching towards the future clad in the armour of the past’.⁸¹ As Los Angeles gears up to host the Olympics for a third time in 2028, redefining the city after the era of Donald Trump, COVID-19, Russian militancy, and the Black Lives Matter uprisings, this story of LA ’84 reveals the extent to which celebratory Olympism can carry a host of coded meanings, the extent to which it can penetrate the psyche of a city, and the prices paid by the people who live there.

⁸¹ Stuart Hall, ‘The Neo-Liberal Revolution’, *Cultural Studies* 25, no. 6 (2011): 713.

I

ONCE UPON A TIME IN LOS ANGELES: WHITENESS, REAL ESTATE, AND THE BIRTH OF THE NEOLIBERAL OLYMPICS

Summer, 1932

Downtown Los Angeles

A Ford truck trundled out of the Broadway Tunnel heading for the markets on San Pedro Street. Sammy Lee travelled this route often, accompanying his father to the markets to restock the chop suey place they ran on Sunset Boulevard, the main source of family income since their arrival from Korea. The journey used to be shorter when they lived above the shop. Locals had pushed the family out of the area; they didn't want Koreans living there. They moved to Highland Park, from where Lee and his father had departed that morning.

From the passenger-side of the truck, Lee, who was about to turn twelve, gazed out on an unfamiliar scene. Heralding the arrival of the Olympic Games, the streets were resplendent. Flags and banners adorned the streets in all directions. Decades later, Lee still remembered the chill that went down his spine at the spectacle of Olympic Los Angeles that day in 1932. His father indulged his curiosity as they continued on their journey, explaining that the Games crowned the best athletes in the whole world. For Lee, it was a transformative moment: “Gee, papa. Someday I’m gonna be an Olympic champ”. True to his word, that is exactly what he did.¹

Shortly after that fateful morning, Lee discovered a talent for diving and so began a remarkable life story. In depression-era Los Angeles, though, nothing came easy to the sons

¹ Sammy Lee, Interview by Dr Margaret Costa, 1999, Olympic Oral History Collection, LA’84 Digital Library [hereafter OOHHC].

of immigrants. Whites-only policies at his local pool in Pasadena meant Lee could only practice in the water one day a week, on “international day”. The following day, workers drained, cleaned, and refilled the pool. Undeterred, Lee made do with a home-made diving board and a sand pit for the rest of the week.

Lee went on to win gold medals for his country at the 1948 and 1952 Olympics, becoming a national sporting hero in the process. In the meantime, he earned a degree in medicine with the US Army. He served as a doctor in the Korean War, returning to the shores from which his parents had left in search of America. There followed a stint as a US Goodwill Ambassador in south-east Asia and then, upon his retirement from professional diving, a return to southern California where he practiced medicine for the next thirty-five years. Alongside his career, Lee remained involved with the US Olympic Committee and coached Greg Louganis to a silver medal at the 1976 Montreal Olympics. In 1979, Lee cameos in TV-movie *Silent Victory: The Kitty O’Neil Story*. Veteran, actor, medical doctor, Olympian, Lee’s list of accomplishments was remarkable. Yet, just as racism had kept him out of the pool in Pasadena, it continued to haunt his steps, even as he achieved success after success.

In 1955, back from the war and clutching two gold medals, Lee tried to buy a house in the pleasant Orange County suburb of Garden Grove. His realtor informed him the neighbourhood was restricted to “whites only”. Lee’s celebrity status, however, afforded him access to a powerful network of connections not usually available to first-generation Asian Americans. He wrote to a journalist about what had happened and the story spread nationwide. Vice President Richard Nixon was shocked to read about Lee’s predicament and threw his support behind him: ‘I made several calls to California. [Lee] will now find several suitable homes available to purchase in the area in which he desires to live [...] I believe that I reflect the views of the overwhelming majority of the residents of my State when I say that I

would be proud to have Sammy Lee as my neighbour', he said.² As if that was not enough, TV personality Ed Sullivan offered Lee the house next door to him.

It helps to have friends in high places, but Lee's story demonstrated the extraordinary lengths any aspirational immigrant of colour needed to go to in order to enjoy the full participation in American citizenship that homeownership represented. For those individuals without Olympic medals or the ear of the vice president, the local politics of property in LA has been perhaps the most intractable, concrete manifestation of racial capitalism. Back on that summer's morning in 1932, all of that was yet to come. To Lee, gazing out of the window at the Olympic spectacle, the Games represented endless possibility. Upon his death in 2016, obituaries effused about how Lee individually 'climbed above racism' to become a national hero.³ For Lee, the Olympics had been a vehicle for "making it" in America, a means of transcending the realities of racial capitalism, a gateway to the American dream.

* * *

The cabal of boosters which bid for the 1984 Olympics on behalf of Los Angeles, while doing so for commercial reasons, did not intend for them to become a festival of neoliberal ideas and practices. LA '84 gained its neoliberal character only after the IOC announced LA had won the bid, when organisers scrambled to respond to a set of idiosyncratic local attitudes about taxation, race, and the state, all of which threatened to destabilise funding plans for the Games. In 1978, organisers and city officials alike assumed the Games would receive at least *some* form of financial support from city, state, and federal government. Between 1978 and

² 'Nixon and FHA Join in Dr. Lee's Fight for Home', *Los Angeles Times*, 21 August 1955, A2.

³ Karen Bates, 'Sammy Lee Climbed Above Racism, Dove Into Olympic History', *NPR*, 5 December, 2016, accessed 18 November 2019, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/12/05/504421352/sammy-lee-climbed-above-racism-dove-into-olympic-history>; Valerie J. Nelson and Nathan Fenno, 'Sammy Lee, Diver who Became First Asian American to Win Olympic Medal, Dies at 96,' *Los Angeles Times*, 4 December, 2016, A1.

1980, a range of forces acted upon LA '84 planning that ensured this funding would not be forthcoming. These external forces were global, national, and local in origin, but it was longstanding local political issues which most directly shaped the neoliberal character of the Games. Local contexts around issues which were often only tangentially linked with the Games are essential to understanding how LA '84 became a constitutive site of neoliberal culture.

The LAOOC was born into a local context in which the attitudes and politics of white homeowners around issues of urban development, government welfare, and taxation were crystallising into a significant grassroots conservative movement. These homeowners campaigned forcibly against the encroachment of new developments and “outsiders” into their neighbourhoods, the very concept of redistributive liberalism, and the high levels of taxation needed to pay for it, and they couched their understanding of these terms in a racially-coded rhetoric of what was and was not “American”. When it came to property rights, welfare, and taxation, white homeowners evinced what Kevin Kruse and Julian Zelizer have called ‘an anti-government aesthetic’: an increasing, if at times inconsistent and incoherent, desire to roll back the kinds of state involvement in family and community life which had characterised New Deal and Great Society liberalism.⁴

Economic logic underpinned the social attitudes of white homeowners in places like the San Fernando Valley to the north of LA. Detached family-sized houses in quiet, well-kept, affluent neighbourhoods held the highest value, and those who enjoyed the benefits of capital

⁴ Kevin Kruse and Julian Zelizer, *Faultlines: A History of the United States Since 1974* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2019), 103. On the politics of homeownership and development in 1970s LA see: Michael S. Foley, *Front Porch Politics: The Forgotten Heyday of American Activism in the 1970s and 1980s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013); Davis, *City of Quartz*; Josh Mound, ‘Stirrings of Revolt: Regressive Levies, the Pocketbook Squeeze, and the 1960s Roots of the 1970s Tax Revolt,’ *Journal of Policy History* 32, no. 2 (2020): 105–50.

in the housing market acted to preserve it. This meant maintaining an area's desirability and character by halting any new development which threatened to lessen property values by bringing in outside populations, particularly people of colour. The arrival of the Olympic Games was anathema to the area's white home-owning middle class. The idea of Olympic venues built all over their green spaces, the arrival of thousands upon thousands of people, and all of it paid for with taxes on their hard-earned dollars was unthinkable. The homeowners of the San Fernando Valley came out fighting, shaping the neoliberal character of LA'84 from the outset.

Between 1978 and 1980, the battles between the LAOOC, City Hall, and homeowners in the Valley ensured two things. Firstly, organisers would have to turn to the private sector and employ neoliberal methods to be successful. Secondly, these neoliberal processes would happen not to white, middle-class suburbia, but to poor and working-class communities of colour. When the residents of the Valley banished LA'84 from their neighbourhoods, directing the LAOOC downtown instead, they set in motion a chain of events which created the "neoliberal Olympics". Rather than deliver new development or strategies of egalitarian change to the urban core, LA'84 maintained the capital privileges of those in the suburban periphery. It was from its inception the continuation of racial capitalism, shaped from its earliest days in ways which protected whiteness and property.

LIVING IN AMERICA: A BRIEF HISTORY OF RACE AND REAL ESTATE IN LOS ANGELES

The histories of race and property in Los Angeles are entwined. It is a story of both continuity and change: legislative victories for racial equality followed swiftly by the adaptation of racial capitalism in increasingly coded ways to ensure its survival. The 1932 Olympics, led by real-

estate boosters, cemented the city's relationship between race and property and established the economic logic which would underpin resistance to egalitarian change in the decades that followed. The story culminates in 1978, when Angelenos led the charge for a "tax revolt" which lit the short-term fuse for the privatisation and marketization of the city and created the anti-tax, anti-growth culture which the LAOOC had to operate in. Without the events of the 1978 tax revolt, there would have been no privately funded Olympics from which neoliberal culture grew. While racism in the property market is not specific to Los Angeles, what makes the city worthy of analysis in isolation is its cultural status. Since its founding, LA has teased at the promise of hope and alleviation, the idea that the city was a place where race did not represent the insurmountable barriers that it did elsewhere, particularly in the South.⁵ The complex dynamics of racial capitalism are, as a result, perhaps more exposed in LA than anywhere else.

When the Spanish colonised Southern California they created a polity which was, and has remained since, a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic space. In 1781, at the time of the city's founding, fifty percent of the population was of 'African descent'.⁶ In 1850, following the Mexican-American War, the authors of California's constitution wrote it in both English and Spanish.⁷ In 1876, the labour of Chinese immigrants brought modernity to the dusty western outpost in the form of the railway. With the arrival of trains came hopes for a 'new civility' following a period of intense violence in LA's Chinatown, during which five-hundred white and Latino men murdered twenty Chinese on *Calle de los Negros* ("Negro Alley").⁸

⁵ Hunt and Ramón, *Black Los Angeles*, 14.

⁶ Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 14.

⁷ HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 142.

⁸ Catherine Mulholland, *William Mulholland and the Rise of Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 15; James Hart, *A Companion to California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 94-9.

California became the ultimate horizon of “manifest destiny”, the place beyond the frontier where American civilisation took root. In 1896, when the Supreme Court declared that all were “separate but equal”, LA’s ‘peculiar racial order’ suggested that it might just be the place where the “equal” part could be possible.⁹ It was this racial promise which in 1913 led W. E. B. Du Bois to proclaim LA a ‘kind of Mecca for blacks’.¹⁰ Across town in Hollywood, however, D. W. Griffith was busy working on a new cinematic “masterpiece” *The Birth of a Nation*, a film which cemented the racist “lost cause” narrative of the Civil War and Reconstruction and rekindled the Ku Klux Klan.¹¹ Even as Du Bois tempered his optimism by noting the starkness of the ‘colour line’ in the city, LA was undergoing a wave of immigration from the Jim Crow South which lasted throughout the first half of the twentieth century.¹²

The 1920s lay the foundations for LA as recognised today. Civic boosters, businessmen, politicians, and newspaper owners marketed the city as the ultimate destination of the American Dream. The city’s expansion and its identity were the products of business from the outset, dependent on attracting visitors and settlers to drive the tourist industry and keep the real-estate market booming. Kevin Starr has argued that the “real-estate men” were the archetypal Angeleno of the 1920s, pitching the dream of Southern California and the promise of ‘better identity and circumstances’.¹³ Among these boosters, William May Garland

⁹ Hunt and Ramón, *Black Los Angeles*, 11. For the 1896 Supreme Court ruling see: Plessy vs. Ferguson, Judgement, Decided May 18, 1896; Records of the Supreme Court of the United States; Record Group 267; Plessy v. Ferguson, 163, #15248, National Archives.

¹⁰ Ibid., 11-2.

¹¹ John Hope Franklin, “‘Birth of a Nation’: Propaganda as History’, *The Massachusetts Review* 20, no. 3 (1979): 421.

¹² Hunt and Ramón, *Black Los Angeles*, 13.

¹³ Kevin Starr quoted in Barry Siegel, *Dreamers and Schemers: How an Improbable Bid for the 1932 Olympics Transformed Los Angeles from Dusty Outpost to Global Metropolis* (Oakland: University of California Press,

was prince, the man who almost single-handedly brought the Olympics to the city in 1932 and, in doing so, did as much as any Hollywood director to pen the myth of Los Angeles. From the very beginning, boosters like Garland cemented the “Olympic City” legend into the very bricks and mortar of its buildings.¹⁴

Despite the utopian branding, Garland and his cabal of Olympic boosters had rigid ideas about the type of metropolis they wanted to construct in the dust of this western backwater: one of white hegemony and anti-labour politics. Since 1903 and the establishment of the professionalised realty industry in LA, Garland and his fellow members of the LA Realty Board — ‘a gang of go-getter civic boosters’ — planned a city ‘free of labour strife and class conflict’.¹⁵ This was no socialist dream, however, quite the opposite. The “Red Scare” in the US which followed the 1917 Russian Revolution underlined for men like Garland the very real threat of unions: ‘There can be no prosperity in any community in which these foreign troublemakers are allowed any latitude’, he wrote.¹⁶ His characterisation of the threat posed to his own capital accumulation by a politicised labour movement as “foreign” was an early example of how a culture of “American-ness” coloured the rhetoric around local politics. To agitate for egalitarian causes was, to his mind, to take up a position of alterity that was unwelcome in his city.

The Games promised Garland and his contemporaries in the real-estate industry in LA massive profits by reinvigorating a stagnant post-war economy in the city. Since late 1918, a severe global pandemic of unprecedented scale had hit LA hard, killing 115,000 people,

2019), xiii.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶ Ibid., 34.

devastating the tourism industry, and all but shutting down the local economy.¹⁷ Garland lobbied the IOC relentlessly for the Games as a way to put the city “on the map”. A reluctant IOC eventually relented and slated LA to host in 1932. Then came the crash. The 1929 crisis of capitalism ushered in the Great Depression. Drought, failing crops, and failing soil compounded the crisis in the American interior, driving people out of the dustbowl in search of work, and water, out west. LA’s population burgeoned, but these were not the sort of aspirational, wealthy middle-class types which Garland wanted to entice to settle there. With the economy again in tatters, the 1932 Olympics hung by a thread. Only Garland’s utter determination saved them from cancellation at the eleventh hour.¹⁸

To get away with the sheer audacity of staging the Olympics at the height of the Depression in a city full of people suffering extreme poverty, Garland got creative, striking deals with shipping and rail companies to dramatically reduce costs for internal delegations to make the journey to LA. For the first time, the Games would have an Olympic village to provide cheap, comfortable, communal accommodation for athletes. Garland sited the village high in Baldwin Hills on land temporarily loaned from the estate of oil man E. J “Lucky” Baldwin, for whom the area was named. Overlooking the destitute Hoovervilles of depression-era Los Angeles below, Garland and his team cheaply constructed over five hundred cottages and beautified their surroundings by planting 25,000 flowers and 800 palm trees.¹⁹ After the Games, Garland tore down the cottages and returned the land unspoiled to Baldwin. The 1932 Games happened in the city, but at the same time they existed in a space of exception. Nevertheless, the Games recorded the first ever profit for an Olympics, netting

¹⁷ Ibid., 29.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 125.

one million dollars, which was enough to pay off the state bond which had funded them.²⁰

The Games succeeded in transforming the city. In the years following 1932 the city welcomed Union Station, an international airport, national sports teams, and a major port. By 1939, the population grew to 1.6 million and by 1950, LA supplanted Detroit as the fourth largest in the country.²¹ However, the Games also marked the end of an era, the dying gasp of the kind of *laissez-faire* capitalism which had produced men like Garland, John D. Rockefeller, and Andrew Carnegie. There followed the era of the New Deal, a period in which the state intervened heavily in the economy and regulated capitalism in order to save it. Nevertheless, a racist, anti-labour culture in the LA real-estate industry endured the New Deal era and, after 1932, the city's real-estate men never looked back.

The New Deal was an economy built on racialisation. Though neoliberals would later come to detest the regulated model, the political economy of the New Deal fuelled LA's urban expansion into a starkly segregated racial geography, but one in which the state made credit available for buying houses. Federal-backed mortgages began the processes of middle-class expansion and white flight, as Hunt and Ramón argue: 'the geographic contours of Black LA were shaped by racial capitalism, most prominently in real estate and white flight.'²² The pre-eminence of the industry has had an overwhelming impact on Black life in LA as gatekeeper to the American Dream, the border guard to full citizenship. Its practices have, as Andrea Gibbons has shown, always been governed by the preservation of whiteness linked to an understanding that to own one's own home is to be truly American.²³ As a profession, it centred its code of ethics in a discourse of social responsibility: it was the

²⁰ Ibid., 179.

²¹ Ibid., 185.

²² Hunt and Ramón, *Black Los Angeles*, 8.

²³ Gibbons, *City of Segregation*, 20-5.

industry's patriotic duty to further American civilisation by enabling citizens to buy a small part of it. In this way, argues Gibbons, an industry that ostensibly sought only to maximise land-exchange values draped itself in the stars and stripes, establishing a morality in which the acquisition of property was the highest of social values.²⁴ To own property was to be truly American.

A racial logic underpinned notions of value in real estate: whiteness *as* property. Cheryl Harris has argued that property ownership and whiteness share a 'conceptual nucleus', not of ownership *per se*, but rather, the right to exclude.²⁵ Through property rights, she continues, the law recognises and protects whiteness and its privileges: 'the legal legitimisation of expectations of power and control, that enshrine the status quo as a neutral baseline, while masking the maintenance of white privilege and domination.'²⁶ Whiteness as an asset, notes Margaret Radin, shapes social relationships to capital and bleeds into matters of identity and selfhood: 'if an object you now control is bound up in your future plans or in your anticipation of your future self, and it is partly these plans for your own continuity that make you a person, then your personhood depends on the realisation of these expectations'.²⁷ In this way, debates about protecting capital in the housing market can be articulated through social and cultural forms to do with identity, race, gender, etc.

While never ahistorical nor fixed, whiteness as property has been an engine of continuity for racial capitalism. Homeownership was an intersection where race, culture, and capital met. Because of its legal legitimisation in property, argues Harris, whiteness became a culture, a set of common-sense understandings, an economic logic, and an embedded

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Cheryl Harris, 'Whiteness as Property', *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707-91.

²⁶ Ibid., 1715.

²⁷ Margaret Radin, 'Property and Personhood', *Stanford Law Review* 34, no. 5 (1982): 957-1015.

assumption.²⁸ It survives intact despite legislative changes towards egalitarianism, desegregation, and social justice. In response to changes of this nature, whiteness as property evolved into more coded and camouflaged forms over time, but its racial reality remains unchanged.²⁹ The successful pursuit, accumulation, and preservation of capital in the housing market has always relied upon the instigation and maintenance of white supremacy. This model continued to govern the politics of homeownership in LA after the Second World War and into the era of the civil rights movement, even as activists secured a raft of legislation which promised change.

After the Second World War, during which industrial demand saw an increase in the city's Black population from 75,000 to 134,000, the city formally consolidated its zoning laws, cementing in place the racialised spatial arrangement of its neighbourhoods.³⁰ Zoning stipulated that only expensive, single-family detached homes could be built in certain areas, thereby ensuring their whiteness. The city fractured into ever smaller "micro communities" on a street-by-street basis in the interests of producing and protecting "exclusivity".³¹ In 1948, activists forced the issue of racially-restrictive housing covenants to the Supreme Court, which ruled them to be unconstitutional.³² *Shelley v. Kraemer* meant that homeowners could no longer appeal to the courts to enforce the covenants, and some turned instead to threats, intimidation, and violence to police the racial borders of the city. Increasingly, communities took over the job of curating neighbourhood homogeneity. People of colour who bought property in such areas could wake up to find burning crosses on their lawns.³³

²⁸ Harris, 'Whiteness as Property'.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Gibbons, *City of Segregation*, 50.

³¹ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 151-220.

³² *Shelley v. Kraemer*, Judgement, Decided 3 May 1948, KF101, US Reports Vol. 334, Library of Congress.

³³ Paul Robinson, 'Race, Space, and the Evolution of Black Los Angeles' in Hunt and Ramón, *Black Los*

The population of the city continued to swell, funnelling people of colour into white working-class areas and amplifying racial conflict. The city sprawled relentlessly outward. White residents of the 1950s boom packed up and shipped out to the suburbs to realise the American Dream, surrounding themselves with white picket fences and affluent neighbours, with a car from Detroit on the driveway and an apple pie cooling on the windowsill. Such attributes were manifestations of whiteness, commodified by housing developers to sell the suburban good life. Capital poured into the suburbs while the city knocked down or through communities of colour to build new highways, speedily moving the affluent middle classes from the periphery to the urban core and back again and shoring up the viability of the US car industry.³⁴ Racial covenants, struck down by *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948 were no longer even necessary.

Further legislative change for racial equality in real estate came in 1959 with the California Fair Housing Act and in 1963 with the Rumford Housing Act, both of which sought to establish, expand, and strengthen laws against discrimination in the housing market. Increasingly, the tone of the debates around housing legislation shifted to one of individual liberty and rights, a language which allowed for the advocacy of white supremacy without talking directly about race.³⁵ A white backlash to the gains represented by the Rumford Act followed quickly. One year later, Proposition 14 — a ballot initiative to amend the state constitution — stood to repeal Rumford, grounded in a language of restoring an individual's liberty, their freedom to exclude:

Neither the State nor any subdivision or agency thereof shall

Angeles, 41; Gibbons, *City of Segregation*, 63-7.

³⁴ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 54; Davis, *City of Quartz*, 151-219; Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*.

³⁵ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 204-9.

deny, limit or abridge, directly or indirectly, the right of any person, who is willing or desires to sell, lease or rent any part or all of his real property, to decline to sell, lease, or rent such property to such person or persons as he, in his absolute discretion, chooses.³⁶

Advocates for the proposition argued that Rumford had violated sacrosanct American values. In this way, the imagined virtues of national identity provided the facilitative political rhetoric to re-inscribe white supremacy in the housing market. The logic of racial capitalism prevailed, and the proposition passed.³⁷ Though a federal judge eventually struck down the proposition, the whole affair had done irreparable damage.³⁸

Budding conservatives like Barry Goldwater recognised the populist potential of the language around Proposition 14. The discourse of individual rights animated Goldwater's presidential campaign and made a lasting impact on soon-to-be California Governor Ronald Reagan.³⁹ Conservative sentiment blossomed in the suburbs, and developers lined up to support GOP candidates who had created the requisite linguistic space to protect poverty values indexed to whiteness. Homeowners hunkered down, looked around them at what their hard work and proper American values had bought them, and were satisfied. Residents of peripheral spaces forged polities that were increasingly independent and designed around the central task of maintaining capital through whiteness. These "satellite cities" contracted out their municipal, fire, and police services to the City of Los Angeles, while enjoying privatised

³⁶ 'The Supreme Court: Saying No to Proposition 14', *Time*, 9 June 1967.

³⁷ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 204.

³⁸ Robinson, 'Race, Space, and the Evolution of Black Los Angeles', 45.

³⁹ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 122.

independence from City Hall on matters of taxation and zoning.⁴⁰

The archetypal model for the satellite city was Lakewood, which lay northeast of Long Beach and was California's answer to the "Levittowns" of the east coast. Independence from the state in matters of protecting property values became known as the "Lakewood Plan" and informed suburban attitudes toward the role of the state across a wide range of policies. Attitudes turned increasingly anti-welfarist in nature. Suburbanites considered their nice, detached family homes in affluent, bucolic neighbourhoods to be the products of their own entrepreneurial efforts and hard work. The idea that the state should redistribute wealth to those lacking the necessary American virtues with which to achieve the suburban dream on their own, like they had, was anathema.⁴¹ Such was the climate in LA as the events of summer 1965 approached.

The Watts Rebellion of 1965 was as much a response to housing injustice as it was to police brutality.⁴² For white suburbanites, however, the Rebellion served only to embed racial assumptions about the welfare-receiving "underclass". Fear of the racialised residents of the urban core gripped white suburban imaginations. "Urban" and the associated problems of inner-city living came to define understandings of race.⁴³ As Black freedom struggles continued throughout the late 1960s, the whiteness of suburbia seemed all the more desirable. To shield it from the demands of Black activism, and to entrench the economic realities of racial capitalism even as civil rights victories banished overt racism from everyday discourse, those whose capital interests lay in whiteness and property sought strategies to adapt to a changing society.

⁴⁰ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 165-9.

⁴¹ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 154.

⁴² Taylor, 'Backstory to the Neoliberal Moment'.

⁴³ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 204.

The most effective strategy for policing and protecting property values as the 1970s progressed was the common-interest homeowner association (HOA). HOAs collectively assumed control over a development's maintenance, amenities, and upkeep, becoming active in designs of urban planning, zoning, and land use. The proximate institutions of social and cultural reproduction — schools and cultural spaces — were sucked into HOAs' spheres of influence and many developments employed private security. Membership of an HOA was often mandatory. They represented, in the words of the US Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 'the most significant privatisation of US local government responsibilities this century'.⁴⁴

HOAs proliferated as a response to the freedom struggles of the 1960s.⁴⁵ At the time of the Rumford Fair Housing Act in 1968, they amounted to 10,000 nationally. By the time of the 1992 LA Rebellion, there were 150,000 individual HOAs governing an estimated thirty-two million Americans.⁴⁶ Mike Davis has characterised HOAs as 'the most powerful "social movement" in Southern California...in defence of home values and neighbourhood exclusivity [...] LA homeowners love their children, but they love their property values more'.⁴⁷ Through HOAs and the privatisation they facilitated, racial homogeneity of neighbourhoods in the interests of protecting value linked to whiteness circumvented legislative changes to the housing market aimed at racial equality.

The geopolitical shifts of the turbulent 1970s threatened to upend the racialised status quo of the LA housing market, throwing up challenges to the hegemonic privileges accrued over decades by white homeowners. Persistent stagflation, globalisation, decolonisation, the

⁴⁴ Gibbons, *City of Segregation*, 119.

⁴⁵ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 161.

⁴⁶ Gibbons, *City of Segregation*, 120.

⁴⁷ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 153.

oil crisis, the Watergate Scandal, the disastrous exit from Vietnam, an influx of superior foreign cars from Japan, deindustrialization, all contributed to a crisis of national confidence and identity and created tangible economic problems in “everyday” life. At the same time, demand for new housing in LA was increasing. The city’s population grew by over one million, fuelled by immigration from South and Central America.⁴⁸ A stream of defence contracts enriched local industry, and low-paid, non-unionised labour jobs proliferated. The underground economy expanded, as did rates of violent crime, the prison population, and the number of un-housed and undocumented people living on the streets.⁴⁹

The Nixon Administration devolved responsibility for desegregation and housing to city governments and private developers. In doing so, the federal government lost the ability to regulate or oversee the industry.⁵⁰ The 1970s witnessed the birth of the “profitopolis”, where banks, realtors, and business stood to profit from the opening up of credit to low-income Black populations on predatory terms. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor argues that this is where the roots of neoliberal ascendancy can be found: ‘In the decline of the struggles of the 1960s, there arose an economic and political neoliberal order, de-emphasising structural explanations for inequality and the need for an interventionist state’.⁵¹ Developers rushed to build multi-occupancy dwellings for a growing population of immigrants, fracturing the decades-old relationship between white suburbia and the development and real-estate industry.⁵²

The successful campaign of real-estate boosters to bring the 1932 Olympics to the city

⁴⁸ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 12; Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: the 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 163; Kruse and Zelizer, *Faultlines*, 27.

⁴⁹ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, 192-3.

⁵⁰ Taylor, *Race for Profit*, 6.

⁵¹ Taylor, ‘Backstory to the Neoliberal Moment’, 188.

⁵² Davis, *City of Quartz*, 170.

had turbo-charged an industry which changed the city beyond all recognition. By the late 1970s, the politics which accompanied LA's expansion had been forced to meet repeated challenges from activists and legislators who sought greater equity in the housing market for the city's ever-increasing population of colour. As legislation changed, those parties whose class positions were determined by whiteness in property adapted to legislative change in ways which maintained the racial-capitalist logics underpinning the value of their assets. Now, established middle-class, white homeowners' interests ran contrary to developers who sought to build profitable, multi-occupancy housing across the city. Homeowners switched from forging their neighbourhoods to defending them against rampant development and the influx of outsiders.

PROPOSITION 13 AND THE BIRTH OF THE NEOLIBERAL OLYMPICS

In the late 1970s, white homeowners in places like the San Fernando Valley had another problem. High inflation had driven up the value of their homes, but the idiosyncrasies of LA's property-tax system meant that costs owed to the state, which were indexed to exchange value, increased significantly at a time when all were feeling the pressures of higher costs of living.⁵³ Some households faced tax increases of twenty-five percent owed on their property.⁵⁴ Faced with the twin enemies of high taxation and the constant threat of new development, homeowners in the Valley organised via their HOAs to find a way of ensuring the continuation of the material privileges of whiteness. In 1978, as the IOC was considering the LA's Olympic bid, conditions in Los Angeles were ripe for a white suburban revolt.

The tax revolt by Valley homeowners directly impacted on the character of LA '84.

⁵³ Ibid., 181.

⁵⁴ Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 44; HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, 121.

Campaigners brought to bear their recent experience fighting property tax to challenge the LAOOC from the outset. The grassroots campaigners of Valley homeowners, motivated by preserving their property values, succeeded in prohibiting the LAOOC's early Olympic plans and shut the committee off from using public funding. The neoliberal character of the LAOOC was forged by its battles with Valley homeowners, during which organisers shaped the organisation into a powerful, private group which was anti-democratic, highly centralised, and existed in a state of exception outside the normal regulatory environment of the state. By 1980, Ueberroth had fully embraced the need for neoliberal strategies to make the Games a success.

In 1978, anti-tax sentiment in the Valley manifested in Proposition 13, a ballot initiative to amend the state constitution. It promised to freeze property-tax assessments at their 1976 levels. Reassessments could not take place unless a property was sold, a measure which incentivised property owners to hunker-down in segregated neighbourhoods. For Valley homeowners, the proposition offered them a chance to take control of their property taxes in the same manner as the "Lakewood Plan", which they had long coveted.⁵⁵ More than this, argued Mike Davis, Proposition 13 was an 'explicit promise to roll back assessments and let homeowners pocket their capital gains' accompanied by 'an implicit promise to halt the threatening encroachment of inner-city populations on suburbia'.⁵⁶ "Inner-city", of course, was code for "Black or Latino".

Couched in the language of conservatism, Proposition 13 was in fact a neoliberal coup. Historians have misunderstood the passage (by a landslide) of the proposition as indicative of the white-conservative revolution in Southern California which carried Reagan

⁵⁵ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 166.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

to the White House.⁵⁷ Recent research has problematised this conservative framing, showing the tax revolt was less about ideological conservatism and more to do with a prosaic response to declining disposable incomes that resulted from a tax system which was crooked and subjective, equally detrimental to renters and Black homeowners.⁵⁸ Standardisation of property-tax assessments under Proposition 13 promised colourblind equality, representing the hope of racially progressive tax reform.

Rather than an expression of coherent conservatism, the passage of the proposition in June 1978 was *the* epochal moment at which a neoliberal approach to urbanism gained a foothold in Southern California, spread nation-wide, and killed-off the New Deal Era for good.⁵⁹ It severed local government from funding with which to progress urban policy and necessitated a model of urban regeneration based not on the delicately balanced public-private partnerships of previous decades but on a corporate, profit-led takeover of public space. Behind the apparently grassroots nature of the campaign was a who's-who of neoliberals from the University of Chicago and the Mont Pèlerin Society, who had been agitating for tax reform since the early 1970s. This group had proposed Proposition 1, 'a proto Proposition 13', as early as 1973.⁶⁰ Although Reagan had thrown his support behind it, it had failed to pass.

⁵⁷ Dominic Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell: The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the Populist Right* (New York: Anchor Books, 2011); Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Prose of America in the 1970s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982); Clarence Y. H. Lo, *Small Property Versus Big Government: Social Origins of the Property Tax Revolt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Matthew Dallek, *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan's First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁵⁸ Mound, 'Stirrings of Revolt'; Foley, *Front Porch Politics*; Robert O. Self, 'Prelude to the Tax Revolt', in *The New Suburban History*, eds. Kevin Kruse and Thomas Sugrue (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 144-60.

⁵⁹ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 156.

⁶⁰ Mound, 'Stirrings of Revolt', 130.

The 1973 effort was spearheaded by a band of neoliberals including Milton Friedman, James Buchanan, William Niskanen, and future Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy. Arthur Laffer, recently appointed at the University of Southern California (from his previous position at the University of Chicago) also provided intellectual foundations for the movement.⁶¹ It was backed by the corporate coffers of tax-dodging Dart Industries, as well as Standard Oil and the California Chamber of Commerce.⁶² All of these entities were Olympic boosters. Although their efforts had failed in 1973, by 1978, conservative resentment over taxes provided more fertile soil for their plan to take root, driving voters to polling booths in support.

Suburban homeowners rallied in support of Proposition 13, at which point it took on its grassroots conservative character. Local businessman Howard Jarvis led the charge more than any other, with homeowners in the San Fernando Valley serving, in the words of Mike Davis, as his ‘shock troops’.⁶³ Organising through their homeowner associations, Valley residents mounted a furious campaign to pass Proposition 13 and, in a development that soon proved significant for the LAOOC, the homeowner association of Sherman Oaks was the vanguard of the revolt.⁶⁴ Arch-neoliberal Milton Friedman concluded that the mass support from white suburbia indicated that ‘the populace is coming to recognise that throwing government money at problems has a way of making them worse, not better’.⁶⁵ As Mound demonstrates, Friedman’s interpretation of events gained almost universal acceptance on left and right, on street corners, and in the media.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Kruse and Zelizer, *Faultlines*, 108.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 156.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁵ Mound, ‘Stirrings of Revolt’, 130.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

The passage of Proposition 13 wiped out \$5.5 billion of income for local government, crippling county-level revenue.⁶⁷ With no money to pay for anything, municipalities slashed funding for education, public health, and infrastructure. School bus services suffered, as did provision of summer school and sports programs. With their main revenue stream closed off, local government turned ever more towards the private sector and entrepreneurial strategies to generate funding for the services which the public still demanded.⁶⁸ The result was a complex arrangement of public-private partnerships and the infiltration of economic concerns into political issues, government planning, and development. Government enticed private developers into areas with low-tax revenue by offering tax incentives and publicly provided infrastructure. They labelled such areas “blighted”, a term with very loose definition, then pushed for their redevelopment into revenue-generating commercial spaces from which sales tax dollars could be made, driving up local property values in the process. Local government often funded tax cuts for private developers by raising utility rates for residents. Residential development made far less money than new commercial spaces and so the city’s static segregation was compounded by a lack of multi-occupancy housing projects.⁶⁹ Urban regeneration became a revenue stream for local governments and private developers, paid for by local people.

Homeowners, despite now enjoying a lesser tax burden, were not the principal beneficiaries of Proposition 13. Foley has demonstrated how big corporations and commercial property owners were the big winners: Pacific Telephone saved \$130 million; PG&E saved \$90 million; Standard Oil saved \$13 million. Moreover, the federal government collected

⁶⁷ Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 239; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 270.

⁶⁸ Gibbons, *City of Segregation*, 133.

⁶⁹ Jeffrey I. Chapman, ‘Proposition 13: Some Unintended Consequences’ (September 1998), Public Policy Institute of California.

twenty-two percent more in income taxes than before the proposition passed, as homeowners could not claim higher property tax deductions on their tax returns.⁷⁰ Big business, which had pushed for tax cuts in California since the early 1970s, did very well out of Proposition 13, and now local government turned to the private sector with further incentives to infiltrate the public sphere through urban regeneration projects.

The strict limitations on local property tax imposed under Proposition 13 amounted to neoliberal encasement: co-opting state mechanisms to move the processes of corporate capitalism out of the state's reach. More than anyone, the social strata who remained regulated after Proposition 13 were low-income renters and homeowners of colour, whose positions in society were regulated by an ever-more-militarised police force, a ballooning system of mass incarceration, and by racialised cultural understandings among white society about crime, welfare, and urban space. Just as the dust from Proposition 13 was settling, Angelenos learned the Olympics were on their way. The passage of Proposition 13 directly created the immediate conditions in which the newly formed LAOOC had to operate.

The city's repeated bids to host the Games were focused on business opportunities and prestige. In 1939, William May Garland established the Southern California Committee for the Olympic Games (SCCOG) and initiated a decades-long campaign to return the Olympics to Los Angeles.⁷¹ In 1978, under the direction of attorney John C. Argue, SCCOG finally succeeded. Surrounding Argue were a team of businessmen, boosters, and other men of neoliberal persuasion. The bid was, as it had been for Garland back in the 1920s, a commercial opportunity first and foremost. Among the team was Justin Dart, head of Dart

⁷⁰ Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 241.

⁷¹ For a brief history of the attempts to return the Olympics to LA see: LAOOC, *Official Report of the Games of the XXIIIrd Olympiad Los Angeles, 1984* (Los Angeles: LAOOC, 1985), 5-12. [Hereafter: *Official Report*].

Industries, who had spent the 1970s building up corporate political action committees to donate vast sums to the Reagan presidential campaign. Gerstle has said of Dart: ‘[he] detested F.D.R. [President Franklin Roosevelt]’ and had spent forty years trying to rid the US of the New Deal Order.⁷² Joining Dart was Rodney Rood, president of Atlantic Richfield Oil, and Howard Allen, president of energy company Southern California Edison. The oil embargo by OPEC nations [Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries] in 1973 had instigated an energy crisis, with thirteen-percent inflation and a nine-percent hike on imports from the OPEC group. There was talk in Washington of a windfall tax on the profits of US oil firms had made as a result of rising prices.⁷³ Both Rood and Allen no doubt found the anti-tax culture of LA made it a comforting place to do business.

Other members included television producer David Wolper and, standing out among the corporate cabal, William Robertson, a local labour leader appointed by Mayor Tom Bradley. Robertson went on to have a frosty relationship with LAOOC president Peter Ueberroth that never thawed.⁷⁴ Ueberroth had built his fortune in the travel industry and had witnessed first-hand what neoliberal deregulation at the expense of working conditions could accomplish when Jimmy Carter replaced the Civil Aeronautics Board with the market-oriented Federal Aviation Administration. Increased competition had driven down prices and spawned a low-cost travel sector, with high profits to be made.⁷⁵ While “anti-labour” is perhaps an unfair description of Ueberroth, he was certainly not going to let Robertson dictate conditions.

⁷² Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, 110-11.

⁷³ Rick Perlstein, *Reaganland America's Right Turn, 1976-1980* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020), 532.

⁷⁴ Peter Ueberroth with Richard Levin and Amy Quinn, *Made in America* (New York: William Morrow and Company Inc., 1985), 30.

⁷⁵ Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, 67.

Completing the group was ‘Westside Democratic chieftain’ Paul Ziffren, who had experience in political fundraising and had worked with the Bradley campaign.⁷⁶ Ziffren went on to serve as LAOOC Chairman. Tom Bradley, who had been elected in 1973 as the city’s first Black mayor, was also fixated on the Olympic bid. Bradley saw the Games as the ultimate expression of LA’s new “world city” status: a hi-tech, cosmopolitan hub for business and finance, a capital of culture, and an attractive place for investment and trade on par with New York or London.⁷⁷ While not officially involved as a member of the LAOOC, Bradley had thrown his support behind the bid and remained involved in selecting someone to lead the organisation.

A series of events coalesced to determine the choice of which city would host the Games in 1984, draining power downwards away from the IOC towards LA boosters and, eventually, putting the HOAs of the Valley in a position of significant influence. The Olympic brand had taken a battering in the preceding decade. Geopolitical shifts, decolonisation, globalisation, and the ongoing Cold War all fuelled persistent conflict. The Olympics were an international platform for animosities to play out, often in grisly fashion. Ten days before the Mexico City Olympics in 1968, Mexican soldiers shot and killed hundreds of unarmed students protesting the impending Games.⁷⁸ Four years later, Black September murdered twelve members of the Israeli delegation at the Munich Games. In 1976, Montreal’s Games were mired by South African apartheid and an African boycott, as well as mob corruption and a deficit of \$1.5 billion which almost bankrupted the city. Closer to home, in a humiliating

⁷⁶ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 127.

⁷⁷ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 9.

⁷⁸ Eric Zolov, ‘The Harmonising Nation: Mexico and the 1968 Olympics’ in *In the Game: Race, Identity, and Sports in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Amy Bass (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 193-217; Witherspoon, *Before the Eyes of the World*.

episode for the IOC, the residents of Denver, Colorado voted to reject hosting the winter Games of 1976 after the IOC had already awarded them to the city.⁷⁹ By 1978, with revolution stirring in Iran, LA's only other competitor Tehran pulled its bid. Other than LA, the IOC had no other bidders for 1984. With only one choice, the IOC had little power to dictate conditions.

Meanwhile, back in Los Angeles, LA '84 boosters had grown concerned about the tarnished Olympic brand. In 1977, they commissioned a survey to gauge Olympic sentiment among Angelenos. Sixty-five percent of those polled indicated no support for the Games if city or county tax dollars were to be spent. A slightly smaller percentage acceded to the use of state taxes, while nearly sixty percent of respondents indicated they would be ok with the use of federal dollars being spent on LA's Olympics.⁸⁰ Residents were generally ambivalent about the Olympics, an ambivalence which hardened into opposition the closer to home the taxes to pay for them came.

SCCOG members and the mayor, keenly aware of growing anti-tax sentiment, began to envisage the Games as a public-private partnership between the federal government and the private sector. The idea that the federal government would not be involved *whatsoever* was unthinkable among IOC members, who insisted on financial liability being underwritten by the state whenever they awarded Games to a city. Bradley, with the opinion poll and the anti-tax sentiment of the Valley in his mind, refused to underwrite the costs and threatened to withdraw the bid. The IOC had to blink first. For the first time in Olympic history, it awarded a summer Olympics not to a city or national government, but to a private group. The LAOOC,

⁷⁹ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 6-8; Schiller and Young, *The 1972 Olympics and the Making of Modern Germany*; Adam Berg, *The Olympics that Never Happened: Denver '76 and the Politics of Growth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2023).

⁸⁰ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 8.

completely independent of the state at all levels, accepted responsibility for LA '84, and liability for the commitment was jointly shared with the United States Olympic Committee.⁸¹ The LAOOC came into being on 15 June 1978 having chastened the IOC and eschewed oversight by the state. In November 1978, nervous legislators passed a City Charter amendment stipulating that under no circumstances could organisers be given public funds drawn from local taxation without express guarantees of repayment.⁸²

The legislation did, however, contain a loophole which allowed organisers to seek federal funding, as well as provision for a local hotel and ticket tax to offset the costs of security. Nevertheless, with these accessions aside, the LAOOC was, to all intents and purposes, on its own. The committee had accepted liability. LA '84 simply *had* to break even at the very least. More than that, to overturn the scepticism and hostility of Angelenos, the committee needed to deliver on promises of Olympic profits and legacy benefits for the city. To do so, the LAOOC would have to operate as a business and run the Games on a for-profit basis. Argue and his cabal of businessmen needed to find the right kind of hard-nosed, entrepreneurial figure who could rise to the significant challenges they now faced in trying to make the Games work.

Peter Ueberroth fit the bill. He was in his forties, white, lived in the San Fernando Valley, had voted for Proposition 13, and was a card-carrying Republican. Outside his office door he hung a plaque with a quote from Winston Churchill: 'Some see private enterprise as a predatory target to be shot, others as a cow to be milked, but few are those who see it as a sturdy horse pulling the wagon'.⁸³ He wore his free-market credentials proudly, the epitome of

⁸¹ Ibid., 9-14.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Kenneth Reich, *Making it Happen: Peter Ueberroth and the 1984 Olympics* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1986), 26.

the individual, entrepreneurial go-getter. He had built up his travel business into the second largest in the country. He kept a weekend home at Laguna Beach and was an admirer of Ronald Reagan.⁸⁴ Wolper described him to the rest of the LAOOC selection committee as ‘the cheapest sonofabitch I know, but he will know how to operate this thing’.⁸⁵ Ueberroth took the job of LAOOC President in March 1979 and immediately set about accumulating power. In one particularly testy exchange with the IOC, an official pointed his finger at Ueberroth and railed at him: ‘You, Mr. Ueberroth, represent the ugly face of capitalism and its attempt to take over the Olympic movement and commercialise the Olympic Games’.⁸⁶ The description was astute.

Despite the LAOOC’s business credentials, both it and the mayor still assumed the federal government would be picking up substantial portions of the Olympic bill. Bradley was confident he could secure \$141.5 million for venue building and refurbishment. His deputy, Ray Remy, pushed Bradley to pin down Jimmy Carter on the matter. According to a memo he sent to Bradley in mid 1979, Remy had earmarked an Olympics in the Valley, at the site of the Sepulveda Recreation Area, as a way of kickstarting infrastructure improvements and building a water reclamation plant in the Sepulveda flood basin.⁸⁷ The Sepulveda Basin offered a perfect location for several Olympic sites. Though the LAOOC had promised to keep costs down by using existing facilities, it still needed expensive venues for rowing, swimming, cycling, and archery. For the LAOOC, Sepulveda represented a common-sense location which could provide suitable infrastructure and a large middle-class customer base.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Ibid., 27; Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 28.

⁸⁵ Reich, *Making it Happen*, 28.

⁸⁶ Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 86.

⁸⁷ Memo to Tom Bradley from Ray Remy, 3 May 1979, Container 115, President’s Trip to California and Iowa 5/4/79-5/6/79, Office of Staff Secretary, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

⁸⁸ Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 73-91.

The federally funded Sepulveda plan, however, soon fell apart. Not only was Carter lukewarm toward the Games, the homeowner associations of the Valley once again came out fighting, determined to protect their property values and tax base.

The neoliberal strategies which the LAOOC adopted were shaped by the battles it had with the homeowner groups of the San Fernando Valley. An Olympics in the Sepulveda Basin was anathema to the Valley's HOAs, which had just finished their successful grassroots campaign for Proposition 13. The Olympics would mean developers, construction, outsiders, a loss of value-boosting green space, and they would saddle the area with the costs of upkeep for the new venues once the Games were over. The HOAs of the Valley, with their grassroots organisational networks already in place, scrambled into action. They used the political agency afforded them by the whiteness in property which they had accrued over decades to mount a successful challenge of the LAOOC's plans. The No Olympic Tax movement and the Campaign to Save the Sepulveda Basin were led by exactly the same HOAs which had so vociferously pursued Proposition 13. Mike Davis argued that the anti-development HOAs of the 1980s lacked a singular defining enemy, or any clear victory or defeat, but in fact, the LAOOC's Olympic planning was a very real manifestation of their anxieties which they rallied to successfully overcome.⁸⁹

The No Olympic Tax movement (NOT) sought to close the federal loophole in the City Charter amendment of 1978, which still allowed the LAOOC to use public dollars on Olympic projects. NOT activists fought against federal funding for the Olympics in a language of fiscal prudence, pointing to the disaster of Montreal in 1976, but beneath the surface their campaign was about maintaining the political power of Valley HOAs. Legal advice sought by the LAOOC noted that, should it wish, the federal government could

⁸⁹ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 186.

supersede and ignore Valley residents' demands and circumvent local politics altogether.⁹⁰ HOAs had no power over federal projects spending federal money. NOT rested on securing HOA power over its tax base in the same terms as Proposition 13. Even its leaders were the same: head of the Sherman Oaks Homeowner Association Richard Close, and secretary of "Californians for Proposition 13" Jane Nerpel.⁹¹ Close and Nerpel were joined by City Controller Ira Reiner, who was eyeing Tom Bradley's job and building a reputation as a penny-pincher. The campaign against Bradley's plans for \$141.5 million in federal funding provided Reiner the perfect opportunity to promote his political brand.⁹²

NOT activists drew on their Proposition 13 experience and went to work gathering 115,000 signatures to qualify for an anti-Olympic tax ballot.⁹³ Relations between NOT, the Campaign to Save the Sepulveda Basin, and the LAOOC grew increasingly tense over the course of several bad-tempered public meetings. During one particularly ugly exchange, Valley residents, who were Ueberroth's neighbours, jeered at his attempts to allay their concerns. At a meeting at Birmingham High School, where his children attended, activists had included Ueberroth's home address on their campaign literature. Later that day, someone threw poisoned meat over his garden wall, targeting the family dogs. The animals survived the attack, but the strength of Olympic animosity in the neighbourhoods of the San Fernando Valley was plain to see, as was some residents' willingness to embrace extreme, quasi-

⁹⁰ Memo, 9 August 1979, Folder 70, Box 60, LAOOC Records, Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles [hereafter LAOOCR].

⁹¹ 'A Note From Ira Reiner', NOT Campaign Literature, Folder 7, Box 60, LAOOCR.

⁹² 'Fight Over Funding Revived in LA', *Evening Outlook*, 19 December 1979, A16; Albert Kelley, 'City Controller Reiner Opposes Use of Valley Lands', unknown cutting, 26 September 1979, Folder 7, Box 60, LAOOCR.

⁹³ Transcription of Radio Interview, 24 July 1979, Folder 1, Box 106, LAOOCR.

guerrilla tactics alongside more traditional campaigning.⁹⁴

Tom Bradley also faced growing dissent over his enthusiasm for both federal funding and the Sepulveda plan. At a meeting between the mayor and local homeowners, Richard Close grilled him repeatedly about guaranteeing residents democratic rights to vote down the plans. Anti-Olympic activists, in keeping with the changes in discourse around whiteness in property since the late 1960s, voiced their concerns in a coded-racial language of individual rights. They also framed their concerns using environmentalism, varying from legitimate concerns about building in a flood basin to possibly tenuous ones about interfering with the migratory patterns of birds.⁹⁵ In 1984, one cutting piece of commentary in the *Los Angeles Daily News* reflected: ‘if the [Olympic] torch bearer runs through Sepulveda Basin this summer he will be trailed by howling mobs of hillside homeowners demanding an environmental impact statement from him before he reaches the Mulholland Highway’.⁹⁶

The LAOOC responded to anti-Olympic activism in ways which fashioned it into an anti-democratic, neoliberal entity. Its first inclination was to go around HOA activists. In stark contrast to the private sector confidence for which it has been remembered, the risk of losing federal funding greatly concerned the LAOOC. The committee launched a surveillance campaign of NOT activities and consulted expert help to try and derail the Valley campaigners. The LAOOC’s early battles with Valley groups were instructive in

⁹⁴ Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 75-6.

⁹⁵ Robert Ballenger, ‘Basin Coalition Hostile to Mayor’, *Valley News*, 25 April 1979; Various Transcripts, 24 April 1979, Folder 1, Box 106, LAOOCR; ‘Mayor Tom Bradley Tours the San Fernando Valley’, 1979-4-24, No. FE764T, KTLA News Collection, Film and Television Archive, University of California, Los Angeles [hereafter FTA].

⁹⁶ Bruce Winters, ‘Bradley Back, Sarajevo’s Got Him’, *Los Angeles Daily News*, 26 February 1984, cutting taken from File 1, Box 12, John Downing Weaver Papers, Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles [hereafter JDWP].

demonstrating the value of encasement, as on this occasion it did not succeed in placing its Olympic plans to marketize and profit from the Valley beyond the reach of local people.

The archived papers of the committee reveal the extent to which it was panicked by NOT. The extensive collection of NOT campaign material and interview transcripts evince the close surveillance which organisers mounted of anti-Olympic activities. ‘What a tissue of lies, half-truths, and gobbly-de-gook! [sic]’ protested one LAOOC staffer about NOT’s literature.⁹⁷ The committee instructed law firm Latham & Watkins to assist in their efforts to circumvent NOT activists and, in doing so, had chosen a firm which Mike Davis described as ‘notoriously associated with the land development industry’, the arch-nemesis of Valley HOAs.⁹⁸ Winner, Wagner & Associates, an LA-based public relations firm, also advised the LAOOC on the legality of the ballot initiative for which NOT campaigned. Their advice set out all the ways in which NOT’s initiative could be deemed inadmissible, right down to technicalities like the type of ink used by petitioners.⁹⁹ Expert consultation such as this stood to assist the LAOOC in using activists’ democratic frameworks for redress against them.

By 1979, the committee’s surveillance activities ramped up. A good place for NOT to gather signatures for its petition was outside polling booths on election days, where there would be a guaranteed stream of people who were registered to vote. Under election law, advised Latham & Watkins, LAOOC staffers would not be allowed within one-hundred feet of the polling stations.¹⁰⁰ Undeterred, the committee circulated a memo to all staff asking them to stake out polling places on election day that November in order to monitor how successful

⁹⁷ ‘A Note From Ira Reiner’.

⁹⁸ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 193.

⁹⁹ Letter to Peter Ueberroth from Winner, Wagner, & Associates, 28 September 1979, Folder 7, Box 60, LAOOCR; ‘Questions and Answers on Qualification of an Initiative for a City Charter Amendment’, Folder 7, Box 60, LAOOCR.

¹⁰⁰ Letter to LAOOC from Latham & Watkins, 16 August 1979, Folder 7, Box 60, LAOOCR.

NOT's petitions were: 'If you can find out anything, please let me know as soon as you can', the memo pleaded.¹⁰¹ The LAOOC, then, learned early on that democratic institutions threatened their plans, and that autonomy to operate outside of the usual state structures would benefit their ability to generate revenue. Even though NOT failed in its efforts to qualify a ban on federal Olympic funding for the ballot, it had provided the committee with a valuable lesson about the urgent need to circumnavigate the political demands of local democracy.

At the same time, however, the LAOOC had to keep Angelenos on-side in order to drum up engagement and excitement around the Games. The committee continued to walk a tight rope between securing exceptional autonomy through encasement and investing time and effort in winning over sceptical LA residents. The LAOOC accordingly ditched the unpopular and distracting federal-funding plan. The politically-powerful HOAs of the Valley hated it, and it was becoming clear to Ueberroth that autonomy from government might be a beneficial thing to have.¹⁰² Once it became clear just how much private capital the LAOOC could attract — television network ABC provided an unprecedented \$225 million to secure broadcast rights early on — Ueberroth ditched his tense alliance with City Hall, left Bradley to continue his futile campaign for federal funding from a recalcitrant Jimmy Carter, and set out on a neoliberal road of complete autonomy.¹⁰³

When Coca-Cola and Anheuser-Busch came onboard to the tune of \$20 million, the LAOOC also ditched the Sepulveda Plan.¹⁰⁴ Its attention turned to areas downtown where it could site Olympic venues. The Coliseum stadium in Exposition Park, on the north edge of

¹⁰¹ Internal Letter to All Staff, 5 November 1979, Folder 7, Box 60, LAOOCR.

¹⁰² Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 73-91.

¹⁰³ Reich, *Making it Happen*, 15; on ABC's transformation of how sports are consumed see: Travis Vogan, *ABC Sports: The Rise and Fall of Network Sports Television* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

¹⁰⁴ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 234; Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 73-91.

South Central, was where Garland had staged the 1932 Games and it now provided the focal point for LA '84. Downtown areas differed markedly from the San Fernando Valley. Here was the flip side of whiteness as property, poor and racialised communities of colour without the political clout to push back against the LAOOC. Moreover, many leaders in Black neighbourhoods across LA, including the local chapter of the NAACP, actively lobbied for Olympic development to attract investment in neglected neighbourhoods.¹⁰⁵ Staff of the predominantly Black Southwest College repeatedly urged the LAOOC to construct its swim stadium on their campus.¹⁰⁶ Among the deprived neighbourhoods of South Central, an early belief in neoliberal-utopian deliverance via the Olympic Games was stirring.

Ueberroth, now insulated from the accountability that came with state involvement, set about shaping his LAOOC into the sort of entity that could run neoliberal strategies of encasement, marketization, and utopianism. Kenneth Reich, who spent years covering Olympic developments for the *Los Angeles Times*, characterised the committee as a 'totalitarian utopia' and a 'benevolent dictatorship', operating on a philosophy of lean-ness at all times which, as one staffer recalled, provided a motivational myth to amass as much revenue as possible.¹⁰⁷ The highly-centralised, secretive structure of the committee, Reich said, envisioned 'perfection in social and political organising'.¹⁰⁸ Ueberroth enforced stringent rules about leaking or talking to the press in order to tightly control the Games' public narrative. The committee's public relations director became accustomed to having Ueberroth cancel his lunch appointments, even when they were with internal members of the board.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ 'Basin Olympic Facilities Backed', *Valley News*, 16 April 1979, File 1, Box 106, LAOOCR.

¹⁰⁶ NBC News Transcript, 17 July 1979, File 1, Box 106, LAOOCR.

¹⁰⁷ Reich, *Making it Happen*, 20.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 15-6, 246.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

This was, then, no *laissez-faire* culture, but rather a tightly regulated, private organisation laser-focused on protecting its marketability and brand.

The LAOOC sought to work through democratic structures and state institutions only when they could be rendered subservient to the business needs of the committee. It used the celebratory nature of the Games to place itself in a state of exception, a location outside of the normal regulatory environment of the state. The need to put on “a good show” provided the ultimate justification for steamrolling over any legislation to do with environmental protection or workers’ rights. Not only did the LAOOC seek to break down legal blockages, it favoured utilising the attention as a facilitative mechanism that could create favourable conditions for Olympic business. A host of Olympic-related amendments and new bills found their way to the State legislature in the hands of compliant and supportive politicians. While some of these new laws were benign — allowing foreign dentists to practice medicine for the duration of the Games, for example — others were more troubling. One bill provided permission for peace officers to be privately employed by the LAOOC in security roles, while others constituted significant breaks with hard-won labour and equality laws governing working hours and employee rights.¹¹⁰

Civil liberties groups like the ACLU grew increasingly concerned about an ‘Orwellian nightmare’ emanating from the committee.¹¹¹ Senator and former LA police chief Ed Davis introduced legislation on the committee’s behalf that would grant it access to the criminal records of Olympic job applicants. This was in violation of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights

¹¹⁰ ‘Olympic Related Legislation Introduced in Sacramento this Session’, Folder 7, Box 69, LAOOCR.

¹¹¹ Judy Chu, ‘Freedom Could be a Loser at the Olympics’, unknown newspaper cutting, 18 January 1984, Box 2, Ann Stutts Olympic Games Collection, Special Collections, California State University, Northridge [hereafter ASOGC].

Act, a land mark piece of civil-rights legislation.¹¹² One senior staffer commented that an executive order ‘would make the whole problem disappear’.¹¹³ The ACLU mounted resistance which brought about a compromise: the two parties settled out of court on an agreement that the LAPD would review applicants for Olympic jobs and make ‘recommendations’ to the committee.¹¹⁴ The settlement had passed the screening of applicants from one omnipotent body to another, and now the police were, in effect, working for the LAOOC too.

The committee also pursued a state of exception in labour law, seeking to exclude the LAOOC from “day of rest” requirements which stipulate how many days someone could work for without a break (six). On this issue the committee met no resistance, state offices rubber stamped the request with no fanfare. One staffer informed Harry Usher, Ueberroth’s “number two”, that ‘the wheels have been greased’ at the labour department and ‘no further administrative help’ was therefore necessary.¹¹⁵ Environmental protection laws, as had been evident with the Sepulveda Plan, posed potential inconveniences to Olympic development. The AB713 (Stirling) Bill exempted any new Olympic facilities from the provisions of the Environmental Quality Act.¹¹⁶ Elsewhere, the committee worked with corporate partners to maximise profits that would otherwise be impinged by state regulations. Budget rent-a-car, which was to provide 920 vehicles for LAOOC use, won approval from the Department of Motor Vehicles to register the cars out of state, in Georgia, in order to exempt them from the requirement to be fitted with the California Clean Emissions System. This saved \$700 per vehicle, a total saving of \$98,000 for Budget and \$10,000 for the LAOOC.¹¹⁷ The committee

¹¹² Memo to Harry Usher from Alan Epstein, 16 September 1983, Folder 7, Box 69, LAOOCR.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ ‘Police to Keep Job Checks Secret’, *Los Angeles Times*, 23 March 1984, Part I, 21.

¹¹⁵ Memo to Harry Usher, 25 October 1983, Folder 8, Box 69, LAOOCR.

¹¹⁶ ‘Olympic Related Legislation Introduced in Sacramento this Session’.

¹¹⁷ Memo to David Simon from Stan Broberg, 8 May 1984, Folder 1, Box 74, LAOOCR.

repeatedly rendered the law and the institutions of state subservient to Olympic businesses requirements in the interests of maximum revenue generation at the expense of environmental and labour protections.

CONCLUSION

In the half-century between LA's two Olympic Games, racial capitalism permeated everyday life in the city, built into the bricks and mortar of its homes by the real-estate industry. In 1932, the Olympic Games had promised the industry a way out of the economic doldrums caused by the global flu pandemic of 1918 and the Wall Street Crash of 1929. More than this, boosters saw the Games as the ultimate expression of LA's civic values, a means to communicate the meaning of a city that sold the American Dream while combating potential threats to the accumulation of capital in its property. By the 1970s, after the upheavals of twenty years of struggle for equality, political scandal, crises of globalisation, and uncharacteristic self-doubts about America, boosters in LA again looked to the Games as a way of defining Los Angeles anew, this time as a "world city", a major hub in a globalised network of capital.

LA'84 arrived into the specific context of LA in the late 1970s, where a culture of homeownership which indexed property value to whiteness articulated through "traditional" American rights and values had been firmly established over generations. This culture coloured the tone of LA'84 from its very inception. That is not to suggest that, had the Games gone elsewhere in the US, they would have found a housing market that was any different. There was, though, something idiosyncratic about the racialised geography of the market in Los Angeles, where local people thought in hyper-local terms about who belonged in their neighbourhoods, but where the city's "peculiar racial order" hinted at futures not possible

elsewhere. LA was not just somewhere to live, it was an idea and a belief. It was, for some, an expression of *hope*, while for others who had already realised the American Dream, the privileges of whiteness in LA were something to be robustly defended. The anti-tax, anti-development articulations of whiteness which found legislative expression in the landmark Proposition 13 were the very specific product of Southern California before they came to inform a wider politics of small-state, anti-welfare, austerity government in the early 1980s.

The announcement of the Games in 1978 coincided with an episode in which white, middle-class, property-owning Angelenos reinscribed the material privileges of whiteness in property with direct reference to ongoing immigration from abroad and the egalitarian gains of the Black freedom struggles. The aftermath of Proposition 13 directly impacted on the nascent planning of the LAOOC, which unsuccessfully tried to act in ways contrary to the wishes of the Valley's powerful homeowner associations. Anti-Olympic homeowner activists ensured from the outset that LA'84 would do nothing to harm the capital privileges of the suburban periphery. By banishing Olympic projects from their neighbourhoods, valley activists instigated a situation in which the Olympics would happen in — and *to* — downtown communities of colour.

These activists forced the LAOOC down the route of total private funding and taught the committee important lessons about what it was going to take to stage a for-profit Olympic Games. In its battles with the homeowner associations of the Valley, the LAOOC morphed into a highly centralised, anti-democratic, anti-union entity perfect poised to pursue neoliberal strategies to make sure the Games made a profit. In its first two years, the LAOOC learned to subvert democratic structures and state institutions in the interests of Olympic profit encasement. It was a neoliberal move, not seeking the absence of state regulation in pursuit of a mythical “free market”, but rather seeking to transform the state apparatus into a facilitative

agent and a facilitative context. With the federally funded Sepulveda plan behind them, the LAOOC turned its attention to corporate sponsorship and never looked back. The Olympics headed downtown.

II

THIS IS NOT AMERICA: RACE, NATION, AND NEOLIBERAL AESTHETICS IN LA'84 DESIGN

Luzhniki Olympic Stadium

Moscow

3 August 1980

The organising committee for the Moscow Olympics of 1980 breathed a sigh of relief. They had done it. Weathering the storm of an international boycott, the communist system had risen to the occasion of funding, organising, and staging the world's premier sporting event. The evening's closing ceremony was full of all the usual mix of celebration and solemnity, rapture and ritual with which the Games maintained their transcendental status as a deeply special celebration of the human spirit. The long historical tentacles of Olympism placed the constancy of the Games above the factionalism and ephemeral squabbles of national politics which had surfaced in the run up to Moscow '80.

In keeping with tradition, the closing ceremony featured a symbolic "passing of the torch" between Moscow and the place where, in four years' time, the summer Games would begin again. This ceremonial transference of the Games rested on supra-national symbolism: the lowering of one national flag and the raising of another, with the constancy of the Olympic rings bearing witness. Tradition dictated, then, that the hammer and sickle descend with dignity and the stars and stripes rise in its place. The Cold War implications of such a spectacle were, surely, lost on no one, but the US boycott of the 1980 Games had created something of a constitutional crisis for the IOC, as President Carter refused to allow the US

flag to fly in Moscow's Olympic stadium.¹ For IOC director Monique Berlioux and for Peter Ueberroth, the flag affair threatened to drag the carefully managed Olympic brand into the murky waters of international politics. After a flurry of activity at LAOOC headquarters in the days leading up to the ceremony, organisers conjured an urgent solution, expediting the mostly unknown city flag of Los Angeles to Moscow. Ueberroth personally received updates as to its progress over the iron curtain at regular intervals, such was the delicate nature of affairs.²

As the hammer and sickle descended, the audience watched an unfamiliar banner unfurl into the evening air. Instead of the red, white, and blue of the stars and stripes, a jagged tricolour of green, yellow, and red framed a circular seal in the flag's centre. Within the seal, anyone who looked closely could pick out emblems that evoked a patchwork of imagery from Mexico, the modern US, California, and the imperial Spanish courts of León and Castille. For any audience member confused by what manner of place could contain within it such national hybridity, a grey circle around the seal proclaimed: "City of Los Angeles, Founded 1781".

The city flag had saved the IOC and the LAOOC from an awkward moment, but more than this, the flag ceremony held profound symbolic significance. It announced to the world the arrival of the Los Angeles city state. Communism's stewardship of the Games was over. Now it was the turn of unbridled capitalism in a city that, at least in the movies, represented everything the system could achieve. The raising of the city flag stated one thing above all else: the time of LA's global ascension was at hand.³

* * *

¹ Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 87.

² *Ibid.*, 87-91.

³ *Ibid.*; Dan Fisher, 'Olympics End; LA's Flag Flies as Symbol of 1984', *Los Angeles Times*, 4 August 1980. On LA and world-city liberalism see Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 9.

The solution to the flag problem was illustrative of the neoliberal strategies that the LAOOC embraced in search of answers to Angelenos' persistent questions about exactly who and what these Olympics were for. Blocked by local residents from accessing public funds, these Games were decidedly *not* a state occasion in the manner of previous Games. Citizens of the kinds of states which host the Olympics (usually but not always) enjoy certain democratic rights with which they can make political and economic demands of their leaders. The private governance of LA'84, however, geared these Games towards one thing only: profit. The citizens of LA could not therefore be allowed to infringe upon profits by making demands of the LAOOC for Olympic benefits in the mistaken belief that the Games were a state project, a public enterprise from which they could claim something. Any representations of the state, then, had to be carefully managed by organisers. At something as heavily nation-state orientated as the Olympics, this was no small challenge.

Running the Games as a business meant that the visual identity of LA'84 amounted to corporate branding. Accordingly, a set of messages about the Olympic "product" underlay the Games' design scheme, iconography, and colour schemes which the LAOOC hoped would encourage buy-in from its customer base. Just as organisers had de-emphasised the nation in favour of the city at the Moscow closing ceremony, they continued to elevate the local, downplay overt nationalism, and celebrate global fraternity and diversity, separating LA'84 from being portrayed as a state project even as excitement built around the national team. At the same time, through design and symbolism, the LAOOC constructed an image of its ideal Olympic-city citizen: the individual, post-racial consumer.

Over time, the committee rowed back from its earliest iconography, which was predictably nationalist in character, toward a radically different design principle called "festive federalism". Festive federalism, despite its "national" sounding overtones, was a

neoliberal aesthetic. It was the Games' core visual identity, allowing the LAOOC members to communicate ideas and meanings which reinforced their profit goals. Through its rejection of symbols and colours associated with the US nation state, festive federalism celebrated diversity and multiculturalism in an Olympic-branded supra-national space. It was a strategy of neoliberal encasement which ensured that, however patriotic one might feel about US athletes inside the arena, the LAOOC and its Olympics would not be mistaken for a state project or government offshoot from which things were owed to the people.

Alongside its globalist credentials, festive federalism leant the new "world city" of LA an idiosyncratic, multi-cultural, post-racial branding that celebrated the city's place among a global order of city-states. It lauded the idea of a new, individualistic citizen-consumer who had shed the historical burdens of race and collective identity in favour of individualised preference within the supposedly uniform meritocracy of the marketplace. Without allegiances based on notions of race, the neoliberal citizen at the core of festive federalism was an isolated individual, severed from group affiliations which might form the organisational basis from which to make political and economic demands. In their place, festive federalism celebrated commodified, individualised ethnicity and vague notions of multi-cultural "diversity" as matters of consumer choice. In doing so, festive federalism sought to cleanse difference of the political potential of race and encourage buy-in (economic and emotional) from people of colour. It was, then, colourblindness by a different name, diluting "multiculturalism" into vague and individualised claims to myriad ethnic identities. At the same time, the design philosophy of LA'84 was a strategy of cultural encasement, protecting the Games' profitability from the citizens of the democratic national space while seeking to turn a diverse and sceptical populace into active Olympic consumers.

Race, identity, and history were the tools with which festive federalism worked. Its

blending of two contemporary discourses on race — soft multiculturalism and colourblindness — aimed at achieving broad social acceptability in 1980s America, yet it had historical precedent in the decolonizing world. With one hand, neoliberal reform seemed to empower post-colonial peoples, while with the other it shored up the status quo of racial capitalism. Muriam Haleh Davis has shown how post-war economic reformers ‘operating in the shadow of empire’ recognised the obstacles which notions of identity posed to the free operation of the market. By revamping the ‘classically-liberal figure of the economically self-interested individual’, she argues, reformers ‘promoted market exchange as an essential weapon in defending whiteness’.⁴ Crucially, continues Davis, reformers conceived of this individual through racist knowledge about the inferior economic capacities of racialised peoples. In such a model, blackness was synonymous with economic deviancy. Although Davis locates her analysis in decolonizing Algeria, echoes of this racialised economic logic appear in 1980s Los Angeles. Through festive federalism, the LAOOC conceived of and promoted its vision of proper economic conduct: post-racial, supra-national consumerism which, despite multicultural credentials, left racial capitalism’s logics of whiteness unchecked.

Scholars agree that “Olympic looks” — the design, colour scheme, and symbolism of each host nation’s individual Olympics — do political work. Often, looks are carefully considered aesthetics which, organisers hope, will convey a desired set of messages about the meaning of the nation. Eric Zolov, for example, has argued that the design philosophy of Mexico 1968 sought to advance ideas about a new, modern Mexico.⁵ Similarly, Kay Schiller and Christopher Young have shown how West German organisers at Munich 1972 went to

⁴ Davis, *Market Civilisations*, 1-2.

⁵ Zolov, ‘The Harmonising Nation’.

great lengths to present the richness of German culture and provide a clean break from the recent horrors of war and Nazism.⁶ Otl Aicher, Munich's chief designer, was sure to leave the colours red, white, and black (of the Nazi swastika) out of his Olympic palette for the 1972 Games.⁷ In this respect, LA '84's festive federalism was no different; it was a cultural palette with which to convey wider meaning about a specific geographical location. Except, with LA '84, organisers were expressly *not* concerned with saying something about the United States. Festive federalism banished national imagery in favour of local and global themes with neoliberal undertones which strove to quash deviant economic behaviour, visualise LA's world city identity, and encourage people to invest in the Olympic brand.

Through festive federalism's aesthetics, capitalism, identity, and visual culture converged. The design process behind the "look" challenges dominant accounts of the 1984 Games which have found them to be a project of rekindled nationalism emblematic of a time when Americans emerged from the dark night of the 1960s, the Vietnam War, the Watergate Scandal, and the economic upheavals of the 1970s into the bright morning sun of Reagan's America chanting "USA! USA!". Gil Troy, for example, argues that the 1984 Olympics were 'a patriotic hurricane with Ronald Reagan at the epicentre'.⁸ Mark Dyreson takes a different approach to the same conclusion, citing the ways in which Reagan centred the legacy of the Games in his 1984 campaign for re-election. Rather than a brash hurricane of machismo, Dyreson argues that Reagan's campaign speeches were a return to the "melting pot" narrative of a patriotic nation of immigrants: 'The great melting pot team of 1984' hailed by Reagan

⁶ Schiller and Young, *The 1972 Munich Olympics and the Making of Modern Germany*.

⁷ 'Munich 1972: The Brand', accessed 4 March 2023, <https://olympics.com/en/olympic-games/munich-1972/logo-design>.

⁸ Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 153.

throughout his re-election campaign had shed their older identities and affiliations to become truly American, and look how great it had worked out.⁹ In both these accounts, the Games had appeared to define the nation anew.

To view LA'84 as simply a festival of American patriotism is, however, teleological. While no one can deny the outpouring of patriotic sentiment at the Games, no one could have predicted that the sceptical populace of Los Angeles would embrace the occasion to the extent they did. Likewise, Reagan's frequent invocation of the Olympics during his 1984 re-election campaign is not in itself evidence that the Games operated on a governing principle of nationalistic pride. On the contrary, nation-building narratives were explicitly *not* on the LAOOC's agenda. By removing our red-white-and-blue-tinted glasses, and by tracing the development of LA's Olympic look from the beginning, not the end, the Games' aesthetics reveal themselves not as a mirror to nationalist sentiment, but rather as a complex of meanings in which notions of neoliberal globalism reacted to and repurposed contemporary ideas of race, ethnicity, and diversity.

FESTIVE FEDERALISM

The LA'84 logo and a mascot were the LAOOC's first symbols and consisted of two unsurprising, US-themed images. The arrival of festive federalism in 1983 cast these early images in sharp relief and represented a deliberate attempt by the LAOOC to distance itself and the Games from any national (and therefore government) association. For its visual politics, festive federalism tapped into contemporary discourses of multiculturalism, ethnicity, and diversity, celebrating difference not as collective identity but as individual preference, locating the Games in an encased imaginative space beyond the nation state. Festive

⁹ Dyreson, 'Return to the Melting Pot', 213.

federalism was a neoliberal aesthetic, but it was also a philosophy, a cultural ideology which facilitated the encasement of Olympic profits while simultaneously communicating messages about the *right kind* of world-city citizenship: post-racial, individual consumerism.

The Committee seemed ambivalent about the logo and mascot from the outset, content to contract out the design process without stipulating what the images should convey. This insouciance was evident in the apparent free reign and early struggles encountered by Disney designer Bob Moore, who the Committee appointed to design the official mascot. Moore wrestled with vastly different ideas, at first trying to localise the character to LA, then to California. His early sketches included an anthropomorphic surfboard and palm tree that evoked LA beach culture, and an angel which borrowed from the “city of angels” mythology. Moore also developed the idea of a bear based on the California state flag but rejected the idea due to its similarity with Moscow’s mascot. Eventually, with none of his designs working out, Moore abandoned the idea of a locally themed mascot and opted instead for a national icon: the bald eagle.¹⁰

The LAOOC did not appear to consider the mascot an important part of the Games’ public image. The resulting design — Sam the Olympic Eagle — was met with both ambivalence and ridicule at LAOOC headquarters. Trying to make Sam less of a fearsome bird of prey and more of a commercially appealing, child-friendly character, Moore rounded off Sam’s beak and gave him ‘a wiggly belly’ [**Figure I: Sam the Olympic Eagle**].¹¹ His costume included a large Uncle Sam stove-pipe hat, over-sized yellow feet, and a striped bowtie. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that the eagle was often mistaken for a chicken, a

¹⁰ Jane Nolan, ‘Olympic Mascot is His Flight of Fancy’, *Los Angeles Daily News*, 1 August 1984, cutting from Folder 9, Box 12, JDWP; Bevis Hillier, ‘Olympic Souvenirs: Get Them While They’re Hot’, *Los Angeles Times*, 22 July 1984, Olympic Preview Supplement, 21, 26.

¹¹ Peter King, ‘Silent Sam’s Soft Sell: 2 Missions’, 23 March 1984, *Los Angeles Times*, 1.

‘frumpy parrot’ or, in the words of Ueberroth himself, ‘a fuzzy duck’.¹² Ignominy hounded Sam wherever he went. At his grand public unveiling on the steps of City Hall, the actor inside the costume (trying to warm up the crowd after a tepid response) appeared to trip over his own feet, fall, and find himself sprawled out on the steps in front of the press.¹³ On another occasion, at a press conference in Baltimore, an AWOL Sam was later found upstairs in his hotel room, wedged in a doorway. Reportedly, maintenance men had to dismantle the door frame to free the stricken bird.¹⁴ Despite the embarrassment of Sam’s debut, the LAOOC stood by him. General manager Harry Usher insisted that Sam was ‘a happy-go-lucky character’ but one that possessed ‘a look of dignity emblematic of our national character’.¹⁵ From the beginning, then, the LAOOC was content to tie the Games to the nationalistic image of the eagle, regardless of what they might have thought about it in private.

The second symbol, unveiled alongside Sam on the steps of City Hall, was the official logo, an emblem that exuded a more serious tone about the LAOOC’s ambitions. Unlike the mascot, the committee’s design brief for the logo did stipulate an important condition: the logo needed to maximise investment through sponsorship deals with the private sector. After a shaky start to Olympic planning and battles over funding and venues in the San Fernando Valley, the committee urgently needed to attract corporate sponsors. A serious logo to put on merchandise and letterheads gave organisers a corporate brand and provided sponsors with tangible affiliation to the Games. Beyond this requirement, the committee expressed little interest in the overall tone of the image, they just wanted something quickly: ‘The commercial importance of the emblem for both promotional and advertising purposes made it essential the

¹² Ibid; ‘Olympic Eagle May Fall Afowl of Muppets’, *Advertising Age*, 11 August 1980.

¹³ ‘Mascot for Olympics Introduced’, 4 August 1980, FM8970, KTLA News Project, FTA.

¹⁴ King, ‘Silent Sam’s Soft Sell: 2 Missions’.

¹⁵ ‘Mascot for Olympics Introduced’.

LAOOC secure IOC approval [of the logo] as early as possible', the committee reported.¹⁶ As such, the LAOOC granted a lot of freedom to the designers.

The winning emblem — the “Star in Motion” — was a conservative and unremarkable corporate logo that, like Sam, evoked the nation state [**Figure II: The Star in Motion**]. It consisted of three stars in red, white, and blue connected by thirteen lines suggesting speed and motion. It overtly channelled the colour scheme, stars, and thirteen bars of the national flag. By August 1980, with the mascot and logo finalised, the LAOOC had important visual representations of the Games with which they could work. Regardless of its distinct Southern California setting and novel private financing model, LA'84 promised to look like a predictably nationalistic affair.

Festive federalism, unveiled by the LAOOC in 1983, marked a radical departure from the Games' original branding. A dramatic change of tone, festive federalism visually banished the nationalistic overtones of Sam the Eagle and the Star in Motion. Gone was the red, white, and blue. Instead, festive federalism used a juxtaposed palette of magenta, vermillion, yellow, and aqua, occasionally complemented with green and lavender.¹⁷ The committee explained its design concept in a press release, breaking down the term “festive federalism”. The committee was clear about what “festive” was intended to convey: ‘the mix of hot colour and playful patterns creates a festival environment and inspires a spirit of international celebration while providing a sense of Southern California’s pluralistic identity’.¹⁸ The colour palette intended to evoke the cool colours of the Mediterranean alongside LA incandescence, reflecting an Olympic celebration of LA’s status in a global internationalist order, while

¹⁶ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 244.

¹⁷ ‘Profiles of design team’, Box 52, Morrie Gelman Papers, Special Collections, UCLA [hereafter MGP].

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

making a localised statement that celebrated LA's multicultural metropolitan identity [Figure III: Festive Federalism].

The committee's definition of "federalism" was less clear, stating that the manipulation of the colour palette into geometric shapes and stars evoked classical Greek architecture, a clear nod to Olympic history. However, behind this meaning of "federalism" lay a deeper truth about the LAOOC's position and power. If the Games were LA's cultural celebration of its new "world city status", then the committee members were in the position of cultural architects. The invocation of Ancient Greece — a relational network of city states — lent historical credence to the LAOOC's cultural stewardship of the city. It too reigned over a diverse polity but cradled under its banner the potential to unite disparate peoples through sport, culture, and the *lingua franca* of Olympism.

The LAOOC commissioned festive federalism as an expressly commercial project, recruiting designers Deborah Sussman and Paul Prezja who were renowned for understanding the implicit commercial logic behind their projects. The committee was open about recognising the couple's reputation as 'pioneers in the recently developed art of "urban decoration" [for] enlivening marketplaces'.¹⁹ Sussman's projects included the redevelopment of New York City's South Street Seaport, a place described by M. Christine Boyer as representative of 'the merchandising of history'.²⁰ These were spaces, argued Boyer, that exemplified the neoliberal model of urban regeneration that redeveloped public space in the interests of private developers. John Jerde also joined the design team as a specialist in

¹⁹ 'The Look and Style of the 1984 Olympic Games', Box 52, MGP.

²⁰ M. Christine Boyer, 'Cities for Sale: Merchandising History at the South Street Seaport' in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 181-204.

‘creating complex commercial cityscapes that are as much theatre as architecture’.²¹ The committee and its design team, then, deliberately made a kind of commercial phantasmagoria integral to the Games’ presentation.

With the principles of festive federalism laid out, the committee published a design guide which explained the philosophy behind the aesthetic. Its text retreated still further from nationalistic tone. The guide, which the LAOOC gave to each of their venue managers to govern the decoration of their sites, expressly forbade any use of the red, white, and blue colour combination other than ‘on the rare occasion when it is appropriate to emphasise nationalism instead of the traditional Olympic internationalism’.²² The committee did not elaborate on what these rare occasions might be. Going further still, designers re-defined the meaning of the Star in Motion emblem, emphasising its international quality. Stars and the colours red, white, and blue, they noted, appeared on the flags of many different countries, while the thirteen motion lines that had been so reminiscent of the US national flag’s thirteen bars, they argued, simply depicted ‘the appearance of action and speed’.²³ However unconvincing their argument, organisers went to lengths to re-present the emblem as an amalgamation of various countries’ flags; a true symbol of international celebration, but one that also tilted towards the notion of a post-national world.

If the internationalist redefinition of the emblem was not enough to convince people of its global credentials, designers set about giving the Star in Motion a makeover that was in keeping with the festive federalism palette. While it still appeared in its original red, white, and blue format on sponsor’s products and marketing, the LAOOC ruled that when used in

²¹ ‘The Look and Style of the 1984 Olympic Games’.

²² ‘A Preview of the Design for the 1984 Olympic Games’.

²³ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 244-45

this format, the logo should be ‘small’ and ‘used in a dignified manner’.²⁴ By 1984, designers recast the emblem in a series of different multi-colour versions on the banners and posters which adorned venue sites and city streets throughout the summer.²⁵ The committee’s attempts to downplay the Games’ nationalistic tone was overt. Under the cultural management of the LAOOC, magenta, aqua, and yellow became the LA city-state’s very own red, white, and blue.

The committee set about decorating Los Angeles with its new neoliberal aesthetic **[Figure IV: Festive Federalism in Situ]**. Using cheap, ephemeral materials allowed them to keep the costs down and maximise profit.²⁶ They applied it to more than thirty venues and Arts Festival sites over a one-hundred-mile radius of downtown. It adorned the athlete villages and signage and it hung from streetlights on the city’s famous boulevards. It decorated tickets, brochures, place mats, and napkins, and served as a screen to shut off venue sites from those outside who had not bought-in to the Games.²⁷ In its post games report, the LAOOC concluded that festive federalism was a great success, ‘a major factor in producing community involvement and civic pride’.²⁸ The aesthetic, it seemed, had achieved a kind of cultural hegemony.

None of the design decisions were incidental, nor were the committee’s vague invocations of identity, diversity, and globalism just paying lip service to the Olympics’ internationalist, fraternal, apolitical branding. The decision made by the upper echelons of LAOOC management to retreat from the patriotic feel of the earlier iconography marked an

²⁴ ‘A Preview of the Design for the 1984 Olympic Games’.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Derek Walter, ‘Festive Federalism Means Trying to Steer the Olympiad Back to the Idea of a Festival in Which it Had its Roots’, *Architectural Review*, August 1984, 48-51.

²⁷ ‘The Look and Style of the 1984 Olympic Games’.

²⁸ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 195.

active rejection of nationalist themes in stark defiance of the wishes of many of the committee's own staff and board.²⁹ Ueberroth, keenly aware of the global audience the Games would attract, 'asserted responsibility to show [...] the true face of the American people, not superpower propaganda', according to contemporary *LA Times* journalist Kenneth Reich.³⁰ There had to be more to the decision to dramatically change the Games' visual tone and drive through such a significant switch against majority support with only one year left to go before the Games began.

A political and economic logic underpinned festive federalism, a logic which sought to ensure, through culture, the financial encasement of the LAOOC's profits. That is, by artistically placing the Games outside of the national space, organisers presented their Olympics not as something related to America or the federal government. For the LAOOC, the issue of association with the state and the government was significant. Ever since the announcement of the Games in 1978, Angelenos had been somewhere between sceptical and outright hostile to the imposition of an expensive Olympics in their neighbourhoods. It was, after all, Angelenos who barred the committee from using tax dollars.

By 1983, the city's residents increasingly voiced concerns about the threat of extra traffic, disruption to local business, and intensified policing accompanying the Games. The predominantly low-income Black and Latino residents of South Central, near to the hub of the Games at the Coliseum, had become more vocal in criticising the LAOOC, suspicious that their neighbourhoods would be exploited for Olympic gain.³¹ Community organisations in South Central began to plot ways in which they might seize on the Games as an opportunity

²⁹ Reich, *Making it Happen*, 154-5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 138-9.

³¹ Janet Clayton, 'South Central LA Fears Olympics to Disrupt Lives', *Los Angeles Times*, 5 February 1984, Part II, 1.

for infrastructure improvements and commercial investment in their areas, paid for with Olympic funds.³² This threat to profitability, as far as the LAOOC was concerned, could not be allowed to happen. By visually cleansing the Games' branding of any association with the nation (and therefore the government), festive federalism communicated clearly that the Olympics were not a state occasion from which demands could be made. Rather, the LAOOC marketed the Games as a participatory occasion into which one was encouraged to "buy in". In this way, festive federalism served as a form of neoliberal encasement through culture, placing the free operation of the LAOOC's capital accumulation beyond the democratic demands of citizens.

As well as communicating the supra-national character of LA'84, festive federalism had significant racial undertones. Its philosophy centred on the celebration of individualism and diversity, echoing a set of competing social discourses about race and national identity from the 1970s: "soft multiculturalism" and colourblindness.³³ These opposing strategies for nation building sapped race of political potency through either celebrations of "patchwork-quilt" diversity, melting-pot unity, or declaring to "not see" race. With festive federalism, the LAOOC sought to fuse together these contradictory strategies through vague celebrations of apolitical diversity, but went beyond the nation, seeking to build a unifying Olympic identity that was post-racial and post-national. In the Olympic city, one was free to be as individualistic as one wanted, free to embrace whatever pluralistic set of identities one chose. This individualism, however, sapped race of its collective political power and social basis by elevating the individual over the community. In the festive-federal republic, race was just

³² The South Central Organising Committee, *Report on South Central Los Angeles: The Call for a Permanent Olympics*, 23 July 1984, Box 40, Frank del Olmo Collection, Urban Archives, California State University, Northridge [hereafter FDOC].

³³ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 349.

another ethnic identity, severed from histories of oppression and indexed to the white “immigration experience” norm.³⁴

The LAOOC applied the logics of festive federalism elsewhere, notably to its pictogram project [**Figure V: Olympic Pictograms Rendered in Festive Federalism**]. Simplistic renderings of the human form, pictograms showed basic elements of the human body engaged in action as a means of communicating without words. Governed by the pursuit of simplicity for mass comprehension across linguistic borders, pictograms depicted humans stripped of any discernible trait other than species. They were no race, gender, nationality, nor ethnicity. At LA’84, the role of the Olympic pictograms went from functional to commercial, revealing the increasingly propagandistic, even instructive role that aesthetics played in the committee’s profit-driven approach to the Games. The commercial function which pictograms ended up having at LA’84 was far removed from their original purely functional requirement, becoming a commodified rendering of *homoeconomicus*.

The LAOOC’s pictogram project commercialised an aesthetic already steeped in supra-national and post-fascist sensibilities. Olympic organisers first used pictograms for the Tokyo Games of 1964 to bridge national barriers through the use of a universal visual language to direct international visitors. German designer Otl Aicher, an influential figure in the development of universal design, created an expanded set of pictograms for the Munich Games in 1972. Aicher’s approach and commitment to universal design was ‘shaped by his experience with some of the greatest horrors committed in the name of nationalism’, having been born in 1922 and drafted into the Wehrmacht during the Second World War. Aicher pursued images that were ‘ideologically “clean”, which helped them attain international

³⁴ Jayne Chong-Soon Lee outlines the contemporary discourse on this issue in ‘Navigating the Topology of Race’, in Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory*, 443.

success with their commercial work'. In his work for Munich '72, he declared, 'there will be no displays of nationalism'.³⁵ The Olympic pictogram, then, was by the early 1980s an established supra-national symbol, well-suited to the globalist imperatives of festive federalism.

Commercial decisions governed the pictogram project. The LAOOC initially wanted to just buy a set "off the shelf" from the Montreal 1976 Games, which were essentially no different to Aicher's Munich pictograms.³⁶ The cost of licensing the images however proved too high to justify. Having proclaimed from the outset that they would break with the disastrous financial mismanagement of earlier events, particularly Montreal, the idea of paying exorbitantly for earlier Games' iconography was anathema to LAOOC management. The committee therefore made a business decision, putting the project out to tender among local design firms. The businessmen running the LAOOC picked Bright & Associates — 'specialists in corporate identity' — as the winning bidder.³⁷ Thereafter, the pictogram project transformed from functional to financial.

Bright & Associates commercialised the post-national figure in the Olympic pictogram. They had honed their skills over many projects, including for the University of Chicago, neoliberalism's academic home.³⁸ The firm's specialism in building corporate identity differed from the ostensibly functional requirements of designing emblems to depict

³⁵ Livia Gershon, 'This Graphic Artist's Olympic Pictograms Changed Urban Design Forever', *Smithsonian Magazine*, 23 July 2021, accessed 21 October 2022, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/this-graphic-artists-olympic-pictograms-changed-urban-design-forever-180978256/>.

³⁶ Montreal 1976: Sports Pictograms, accessed 21 October 2022, <https://www.theolympicdesign.com/olympic-design/pictograms/montreal-1976/>.

³⁷ Bill Robbins, 'Pictograms: Bridging the Language Gap Among Athletes for LA Olympics', *Los Angeles Times*, 27 March 1983.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

individual Olympic events. The LAOOC imposed a set of specifications for the pictogram figure which harked back to Aicher's obsession with uniformity: it should 'bridge language barriers and convey meaning across national contexts; display uniform treatment of the subject; should not be dependent on a border'.³⁹ The result was a clean design free of identifiable traits, the human body distilled to its component parts: two legs and arms which could be manipulated into four lines, a torso, and a head. Here, then, were the blueprints of *homoeconomicus*: a raceless, genderless, supra-national individual at ease in a borderless world, free of the historical trappings of identity affiliations, with "uniform treatment" evoking the level playing field of free markets. The majority of the pictograms portrayed the figure as an athlete engaged in competition, presenting market competition as natural, and victory as the just reward for talent, hard work, and perpetual self-improvement.

Despite adding a stipulation that the figure 'should avoid stylistic fads or commercial appearance, implying to a worldwide audience that LA has a sophisticated creative culture', the LAOOC's pictogram commodified the athletic individual it portrayed.⁴⁰ In the committee's own words, the pictograms became 'primarily decorative', directly representative of the identity of the Games.⁴¹ Rendered in festive-federal colours, the pictograms became part of the iconography of LA'84, but more than this, part of the *experience* of it. The committee displayed pictograms everywhere at Olympic sites, ensuring that this image of *homoeconomicus* achieved a visual hegemony unmatched by the nationalistic figure of Sam the Olympic Eagle. Completing the process of commodification, the committee reproduced the images on a range of popular souvenirs like hats, t-shirts, and mugs.⁴² The neoliberal

³⁹ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 248.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁴² *Ibid.*

figure in the pictograms, in this way, generated its own capital through self-commodification.

As a neoliberal aesthetic, festive federalism worked for the LAOOC in two ways: as encasement and commodity. It visualised LA's world city identity whilst shielding the Games' profits. More than this, it dictated the terms of citizenship in this new world city, encouraging buy-in to the local-global model. Buying-in to full citizenship in the Olympic world city recast citizenship as consumerism and required the shedding of collective identity, most notably race. It trumpeted neoliberal virtues of the level playing field upon which individualism and self-improvement were ladders to success. For organisers, festive federalism sold the idea of racelessness to secure the conditions — political, social, and cultural — for its exercise in neoliberal capitalism to succeed, relying on a colourblind racial discourse blended with “soft multicultural” notions of diversity which tacitly cast racial identity as nothing more than an individual choice.

THE “RIGHT KIND” OF CULTURE: THE OLYMPIC ARTS FESTIVAL AND THE OPENING CEREMONY

The abstract semiotics of festive federalism crystallised into more tangible form at the Olympic Arts Festival. This “cultural Olympiad” accompanied the main sports programme and in the committee's own words aimed ‘to celebrate cultural diversity and excellence’.⁴³ The festival plundered the arts, history, and culture to stage a range of exhibitions that communicated the virtues of competition, overcoming obstacles, and individualism. In doing so, the Arts Festival used culture to construct an image of excellence defined by the idealised

⁴³ Ibid., 528; on the history of Olympic Arts Festivals see: Beatriz García, ‘Arts and Culture in the Olympic and Paralympic Games’ in *Routledge Handbook of the Olympic and Paralympic Games*, eds., Dikaia Chatziefstathiou, Borja García and Benoit Séguin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), Routledge Handbooks Online.

neoliberal consumer: a post-racial, individualistic competitor. When planning the opening ceremony, however, the committee had to confront the spectre of nationalism innate to such performances. Organisers tackled this problem by using carefully curated sections of US history and culture to try and re-narrate the meaning of nationhood around festive-federal values, a re-narration which failed to harmonise with the racial realities of Los Angeles.

Cultural space is public space. The private LAOOC acted as stewards of this public arena when it came to organising the IOC-mandated Olympic Arts Festival (OAF). Just as state retrenchment proliferated public-private partnerships, so too did the committee's stewardship of LA's arts scene in the run up to the Games fuel and celebrate the marriage of corporate sponsors and culture. For ten weeks preceding the Games, LA hosted the 'cultural component' of the Olympics per the IOC Charter, which dictated that this artistic celebration be 'on an equal standard [...] as the sports events'.⁴⁴ As *Los Angeles Magazine* put it: 'The LAOOC is arranging for what amount to almost a concurrent Olympiad in LA for artists around the world'.⁴⁵ At the OAF, artists and their works took the place of competitive athletes, and exhibitions were the new fields of contest. The commercial logic of neoliberal governance, as with the other elements of LA'84, underpinned the committee's approach, and the festival amplified processes of privatisation already underway in the city.

By the early 1980s, LA's civic arts scene had already begun to embrace neoliberal marketization. With support from the state declining at all levels, museums and galleries turned to the private sector for survival. In lieu of financial support, the state instead acted as facilitator to the private sector through a tax regime that made private support for the arts 'relatively painless'. By 1983, the *LA Times* reported that any change to this beneficial tax

⁴⁴ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 528.

⁴⁵ 'The '84 Games. What We're in For...What's in it For Us', *Los Angeles Magazine*, July 1982, 150-1.

arrangement would incite a ‘major crisis’ for venues, thereby casting corporate involvement as an essential model that was already too big to fail. At the same time, visitors responded to the ‘dollar pinch’ by becoming customers instead of patrons, said by observers to be ever more discerning in their artistic tastes, ‘separating hits from flops with ruthless efficiency’.⁴⁶ Increasingly, then, the city’s museums and galleries were governed by a commercial logic facilitated by the low-tax, low-spend state.

Under corporate patronage, cultural spaces were no longer a public good, they were a commercial opportunity. Implicit commercialism also underpinned the OAF. The LAOOC stated that the festival intended to make ‘a lasting contribution to LA and its artistic and cultural growth’.⁴⁷ The use of the economic term “growth” is revealing. While not expanding on how exactly culture can “grow”, the invocation of the term required that some sort of metric be found to measure its growth nonetheless. Increasing ticket sales, visitor numbers, and profits offered tangible and easily quantifiable evidence of LA’s “cultural growth” and, in order to maintain this growth, exhibitions had to ensure they were “hits” not “flops” by appealing to consumers.

There was certainly profit to be had. The increasing privatisation of LA’s civic cultural space led to a downtown building boom. The development of new cultural spaces was good news for the construction industry, with new projects spreading around tens of millions of dollars. ‘From downtown LA to the Pacific Ocean’, reported the *LA Times*, ‘arts patrons are busily amassing millions and monuments’ and, added one museum chairman, ‘history will recall the ‘80s as the golden decade of Los Angeles’.⁴⁸ Behind the scenes, however, the

⁴⁶ Charles Champlin, ‘State of the Arts’, *Los Angeles Times*, 15 May 1983, Calendar, 3.

⁴⁷ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 528.

⁴⁸ Barbara Isenberg, ‘Culture Palaces on Fast Track’, *Los Angeles Times*, 15 May 1983, Calendar, 4, 11.

development of new cultural spaces mirrored local post-Proposition 13 governance models in other areas of urban policy. These spaces were facilitated by public-private partnerships, with the ‘fledgling’ California African American Museum, for example, receiving \$2.9 million in public funding topped up to somewhere between \$3.5 and \$5 million with private money.⁴⁹ Through favourable tax frameworks and public funding, then, the state partnered with private business to facilitate the development of cultural spaces implicitly governed not by the commons, but by commerce.

There were other motivations for private involvement in the arts. The civic arts sector, just like the Olympics, spoke to LA’s world-city ambitions. President of the Music Center’s Performing Arts Council Michael Newton explained that the city’s ‘coming of age as a world city’ was reflected in the fact that its cultural expansion in the early 1980s was a regional, not national trend.⁵⁰ Creeping privatisation was key to LA’s burgeoning civic arts sector becoming on par with London or New York and provided the material evidence of the city’s world-class status. The OAF, which fused together LA’s cultural sector with the “world city” Olympic branding, was the ultimate expression of early 1980s neoliberal culture.

The invocation of “world city” continued to fetishize “diversity”. These terms actually amounted to a city rebrand along post-racial lines. When Oscar Katz of CBS rejoiced that ‘LA will have a cultural center unmatched in the world in size and diversity’, he voiced a post-racial understanding of “diversity” which sanded-down the jagged edges of race so that it might fit into an ever-expanding spectrum of difference. Across this spectrum, identities were individually chosen and socially equal. In this framing, “diversity” cleansed race of peoplehood and history, denying the specificity of, for example, the Black experience in Los

⁴⁹ Isenberg, ‘Culture Palaces on Fast Track’; ‘New Museum Complex’, *Jet*, 20 August 1984, 6.

⁵⁰ Isenberg, ‘Culture Palaces on Fast Track’.

Angeles. Michael Newton summarised: ‘world-class cities like London or New York don’t have just one of everything, but a whole range of things to choose from. What we are adding in Los Angeles are these choices’.⁵¹ As such, LA witnessed a proliferation of new museums, theatres, and galleries devoted to Jewish, Latino, and Japanese cultural expression, offering them up to the commercial whims of LA consumers as products in a marketplace.⁵²

Those institutions taking part in LA’84’s “cultural Olympiad” became transmitters of neoliberal culture. In the same way that festive federalism was underpinned by a post-racial celebration of diversity, the Arts Festival’s commercial logic required the neoliberal encasement of race and nation, replacing them with platitudes about ethnicity and internationalism. For its content, the OAF drew heavily on post-racial celebrations of LA’s diversity to signal the neoliberal virtues of *homoeconomicus*: individualism, post-racialism and post-nationalism, open competition, and the overcoming of barriers. At the same time, the OAF imposed a set of heavily risk-managed financial practices on individual venues designed to encase LAOOC surpluses against extraction by external institutions. On a grand, city-wide scale it presented neoliberal culture as a virtue to aspire to while at the same time imposing its material economic model on individual festival sites.

Private finance allowed the LAOOC the ‘freedom and resources’ to carefully choose the type of culture it wanted to celebrate: that which revelled in deregulation of the medium.⁵³ Times Mirror, which owned the *LA Times*, was the festival’s principle sponsor, contributing \$5 million to the committee’s OAF coffers.⁵⁴ The LAOOC set out to ‘be bold in [its] artistic

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Gary Libman, ‘Exhibits to Spotlight Minorities Olympics Role’, *Los Angeles Times*, 29 December 1983, Part V, 1-2.

⁵³ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 528.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 539.

selections’, ‘challenge artistic boundaries’, and ‘celebrate cultural diversity and excellence’.⁵⁵ With these parameters set, “Olympic culture” echoed and reinforced the neoliberal philosophies of festive federalism. With its main sponsor on board, OAF organisers planned a vast cultural celebration: ten weeks of events; 424 performances over forty-five venues; and the work of 1,500 artists and 145 performing companies.⁵⁶ In its scale, the OAF strove for a kind of local hegemony over the arts, suffocating anything that was not included under the Olympic umbrella.

The LAOOC used festive federalism to unite disparate festival venues under Olympic branding, providing a common identity that ensured clarity about just who was responsible for this cultural extravaganza. Despite this visual centralisation, however, the OAF was a decentralised, quasi-franchise operation which left financial liability for each event with individual venues. Under the LAOOC’s “cultural services agreement”, thirty-seven external “co-producers” held responsibility for organising each event and ‘in the event additional funds were required, the co-producers had authority to bring in additional sponsors for their programs. As such, they were their own fiscal centres and did not report financially to the OAF management. Profits as well as losses were theirs’.⁵⁷ For the OAF, then, the LAOOC ceded their usual cautious, highly controlled approach to the Games in favour of a model which provided distance between the committee and the unpredictable financial consequences of the choices of festival patrons.

The committee positioned itself between Times Mirror’s sponsorship fund and each individual arts venue. Their uncharacteristic ceding of control evinced significant concerns

⁵⁵ Ibid., 528.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 318.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 539.

about the viability of the festival. As the OAF's director told Ueberroth when quizzed about what guarantees there were that the festival would actually attract art-loving Angelenos to come and visit: 'Peter, there are no guarantees. It is a judgement based on instinct, and if that doesn't work, well at least we have gotten a considerable degree of attention'.⁵⁸ The committee basked in the reflected glory of the Olympic Arts Festival while keeping their main task — the sporting competitions — encased from the financial risk of a mass arts exhibition that would rise or fall according to the whims of each venue's customers.

Though the LAOOC claimed that the overriding criteria for selection was 'excellence' on a par with athletes, the need to sell tickets led to artistic selections that reinforced the neoliberal philosophy of festive federalism. Organisers favoured art that broke down regulations imposed by tradition and genre, opting for 'unique, non-traditional and, in some instances, controversial' content.⁵⁹ They also opted for events that did not hinge on national languages, instead choosing events that were 'multinational, multicultural, and multilingual' in character.⁶⁰ In practice, "multilingual performances" came to mean non-lingual, as the celebration of world cultures only worked out financially if they were in English or Spanish, or did not rely on the spoken word at all, so as not to alienate their customers. Dance naturally suited the above criteria well, whereas the implicit language-basis of theatre proved far more difficult to accommodate in the OAF: 'a non-English language performance would speak to only a limited number in the audience', they noted.⁶¹ Dance, therefore, was the only medium to run the entire ten weeks of the festival, its post-lingual "statelessness" favoured as a commercial decision.

⁵⁸ Reich, *Making it Happen*, 68.

⁵⁹ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 539.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 531.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 543.

Taken as a whole, the OAF presented avant-garde cultural forms that revelled in deregulation and the overcoming of barriers, that were non-lingual and, as such, supra-national, and that were individualistic acts of self-expression. In this way, Olympic culture was neoliberal culture, trumpeting the globalist ideals of festive federalism in its celebration of the international, the local, and the individual. Rather than choosing a specific cultural form for inclusion *because* it was excellent, OAF organisers labelled the culture they subsumed under the Olympic banner excellent *because* they had included it. According to the OAF, then, culture which echoed the neoliberal philosophies of festive federalism was culture done to Olympic standards.

For the festival's venues, inclusion in the Olympics proved to be disruptive and, for some, a negative experience. The organisers of the annual LA Festival of Masks, run by the Craft and Folk Art Museum, for example, recalled their dissatisfaction with the whole Olympic Arts affair. As the festival had to occur during the build-up to the Games, they were forced to switch it from its usual time slot in October to July. So as not to have two festivals running less than one year apart, they took the decision to cancel the 1983 event. Because of the extravagant costs imposed on them by the LAOOC, which only became clear closer to summer 1984, the Festival of Masks could only afford to run biennially for years afterwards.⁶² Such long-term considerations, of course, were not the committee's concern.

The LAOOC also switched the festival from its usual site across from the museum to one of the newly constructed cultural centres as the size of the festival increased significantly.⁶³ The committee also expanded the breadth of the Mask Festival's content to

⁶² Willow Young-Friedman, Interview by Joan Benedetti, Craft and Folk Art Museum Oral History Project, Center for Oral History Research, University of California Los Angeles [hereafter COHR].

⁶³ Ibid.

incorporate all the competing Olympic nations, renaming it the “International Festival of Masks” in line with its branding. Across the OAF, the LAOOC enforced this internationalist tone in defiance of IOC regulations that stipulated the festival be limited to ‘cultural expressions of the host nation’. Instead, recalled Ueberroth: ‘we bent the rule to meet our needs and created an international program of dance, music, and theatre that mirrored the multiethnic diversity of Los Angeles’.⁶⁴ Despite adopting a “hands off” approach to the festival’s finances, then, the committee remained omnipotent in the background, setting (or breaking) the rules and regulating the entities beneath it as it deemed necessary.

Although the new scope and size of the Mask Festival might have seemed to guarantee financial stability, venue managers reported that events were ‘overshadowed by the inequities of the finances’.⁶⁵ To cover the significantly larger costs involved with running the event on an Olympic scale, the Mask Festival organisers charged admission for the first time in its history. These costs did not fund staff pay, as an army of some 380 volunteers was needed, up from 120 in previous years. Instead, organisers responding to LAOOC security concerns spent the money on fencing off their sites from those who had not paid for entry. Fences were prohibitively expensive. Organisers found themselves in a position they had not anticipated: charging admission to pay for a fence to keep out those who had not paid for admission.⁶⁶ The fence created more than just a physical barrier, recalled one staffer: ‘[it was] totally anathema to the whole idea of the Festival’.⁶⁷ At the OAF sites, a culture-for-profit model not only directed the type of art inside the venues, it drove the securitisation of public space outside of

⁶⁴ Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 305.

⁶⁵ Patrick Ela, Interview by Joan Benedetti, Session 1, 13 October 2008, COHR.

⁶⁶ Willow Young-Friedman, Interview; Frank S. Wyle, Interview by Joan Benedetti, Session 2, 30 June 2008, COHR.

⁶⁷ Willow Young-Friedman, Interview.

them. It necessarily imposed a regime of exclusion between those people who had bought in and those who had not. Access became property, the right to exclude and to police that exclusion through securitisation of public space.

To help cover the costs, the Craft and Folk Art Museum approached the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, and the City and County for assistance, which was duly forthcoming. The LAOOC rebuffed the museum's request for reimbursement for the prohibitive extra security costs.⁶⁸ As one museum staffer recalled: 'they [LAOOC] ended up with [a huge surplus] and a lot of the participants...lost money and were not made whole, despite the fact that they did their best to make this an international celebration'.⁶⁹ The LAOOC, then, had instigated a financial arrangement that echoed post-Proposition 13 urbanism, in which the public sector facilitated private interests. Not willing to take the financial risk involved with running the OAF, the LAOOC had successfully encased the sporting Games from the "Cultural Olympiad", while still ensuring it stayed on-brand.

In marked contrast to the post-racial, post-language culture exhibited across other OAF venues, the brand-new California African American Museum in Exposition Park, just next to the Coliseum, seemed an odd choice for inclusion in the festival. Its overt recognition of race, racial identity, and memory flew in the face of the individualism and post-racial globalism of festive federalism. Nevertheless, the opening of the museum was bound up with the Games, perhaps as a nod to the much-celebrated diversity of LA on which the LAOOC centred the festival. Despite the museum's core purpose of exhibiting Black history through the prisms of race, gender, culture, and collective identity, the Black history curated as part of the OAF took on a host of complex meanings which folded America's troubled racial past

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Patrick Ela, Interview.

into a narrative of triumphant, post-racial individualism.

Conceived in the late 1970s entirely separately from the Olympics, the new museum reflected the push towards diversity and customer choice by the city's civic arts scene in general, which stemmed from greater involvement of private interests.⁷⁰ With a mixture of private and public funds, the museum found a home in a brand-new building constructed within the grounds of Exposition Park. Constructors broke ground on the site in summer 1983, and the museum opened its doors one year later in time for its inaugural exhibit to become part of the OAF.⁷¹ Accordingly, its chief curator Lonnie Bunch designed an opening exhibit which told the story of Black America's Olympic triumphs and, as *LA Life* put it, the exhibit used the Olympics 'as a hook upon which to hang an exploration of a much wider black experience in America'.⁷² In such a framing, the Olympics stood as the engine of Black history, Black athletes as the exemplars and agents of historical change.

Through the historical figure of the Black athlete, the neoliberal tone of the wider OAF seeped into the exhibit. This process began when Bunch made the figure of the Black athlete the locus of a wider history of peoplehood, oppression, and resistance. Black athletes embodied standard Olympic tropes of excellence, transcendence, and individualism, but left no space for Black history in all its complexity. The Black athlete, standing in for the collective story of Black America, championed the neoliberal virtues of individualistic achievement on the path to success, full citizenship, and social equality. Bunch argued that 'the only way you could get into the Olympics at that time was to be connected to a major university. These early pioneers are exceptional people not only because they were the best of

⁷⁰ Isenberg, 'Culture Palaces on Fast Track'.

⁷¹ 'Birth of the California African American Museum', *California Historian*, accessed 18 November 2022, <http://www.californiahistorian.com/articles/calif-african-american-museum.html>.

⁷² Diana Rico, 'Exhibit Honours Blacks in American History', *Los Angeles Daily News*, 5 August 1984, 7.

the best, but because they survived the brutal filtering system in the colleges'. On Jesse Owens, Bunch told *LA Life*: 'he became a symbol, not of blacks being equal to whites in America, but of them being contributing members of society', while the long overlooked Black female Olympians 'have had a double burden to *overcome*'.⁷³ The story presented at the Black Olympians Exhibit, then, was not of the history of racism in sport, but rather a history of Black athletes' transcendence of racism through individual merit in open competition. If individuals could overcome racism on the path to glory, then the new society of individual go-getters on the other side had no use for a collective understanding of race.

Although Bunch had devoted a lot of space to the "Black Power Olympics" of 1968, the exhibit cleansed race of its political potency. When Black athletes Tommy Smith and John Carlos stood on the dais and held aloft their black-gloved fists, it was both a symbol of protest and pride for which they were thrown out of the Mexico Games and pilloried in the press.⁷⁴ It was a defining image of the civil rights era. There was, it seemed, an unabashed claim to racial identity and collective solidarity participating in an arts festival governed by the post-racial philosophies of neoliberal culture. Bunch explained: 'the triumph of black female athletes over the burdens of race and sex [...] as well as the black-power, raised-fist salute [...] The thing I like about that is that it shows the magnificent diversity of the black community. The same time that Smith and Carlos were protesting with their fists, you have George Foreman winning the heavyweight boxing championship and waving an American flag'.⁷⁵ There, again, was that word: "diversity". In this framing, diversity equated to preference. Smith and Carlos chose to protest, Foreman to wave the flag. This emphasis on

⁷³ [My italics] Ibid.

⁷⁴ Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*.

⁷⁵ Libman, 'Exhibits to Spotlight Minorities Olympics Role'.

contrasting choices isolated Smith and Carlos as individuals in stark juxtaposition to Foreman's more patriotic, acceptable decision. Thus, the political power of the Black freedom struggle was politically cleansed.

The act of including the Mexico '68 protests in the museum turned the very recent past into the distant annals of a bygone area. Smith and Carlos' protest, in the same year as the assassination of Martin Luther King, happened merely sixteen years earlier. Now, however, the OAF rendered these events historical, fixed in the past, over. At the African American Museum's inaugural exhibit, Black athletes had struggled as individuals to overcome a racist past and achieve full citizenship, so too had America put history behind it, a past in which the nation could only be understood through the ways in which its citizens claimed collective identities, or had collective identities imposed upon them. This new America, a society classless, diverse, and colourblind, was a place severed from history, a place where individuals were free to construct themselves as new consumer-citizens with identities not forged by the past, but by market preference. As Daniel Rodgers concludes: 'In the colourblind society, amnesia was a conscious strategy undertaken in conviction that the present's dues to the past had already been fully paid'.⁷⁶ In place of history came what Matthew Frye Jacobson has called an 'Ellis Island whiteness', a symbolic invocation of immigrant aspiration and assimilation.⁷⁷ As *Time* magazine had declared in 1983, LA was the 'new Ellis Island', but rather than dissolve into the racial melting pot, at the OAF Americans could maintain their ethnic story as a building block of their individual identities.⁷⁸ "History", like the nation state, had become merely facilitative context for market conduct.

⁷⁶ Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, 143.

⁷⁷ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 7.

⁷⁸ Andersen, 'Los Angeles'.

Reportedly, despite the financial hardships imposed by the LAOOC on individual venues, the OAF was a hit, trumpeting the virtues of neoliberal culture to 1.5 million visitors.⁷⁹ However, the historical record gives little away about exactly how these 1.5 million people actually interpreted the OAF's displays of avant-garde, neoliberal culture. One project did provoke readers of the *LA Times* enough to leave archival traces: the Olympic Gateway. The scattered responses to this piece of sculpture evince a public that was in some cases amused by the cultural spectacle, and in others deeply sceptical of what the LAOOC was doing. The public, it seemed, were not passive receivers of the OAF's coded messages and, in the case of the Olympic Gateway, they struggled to find meaning in its art.

The LAOOC unveiled the Olympic Gateway on 1 June 1984 to mark the beginning of the Arts Festival. It had commissioned renowned LA sculptor Robert Graham to leave a tangible and permanent artefact of the OAF once the events were over. Graham's artwork stood twenty-five feet tall and comprised two naked, athletic bodies forged from bronze **[Figure VI: Olympic Gateway]**.⁸⁰ Provocatively, as it turned out, both athletes were headless, each standing atop a golden cone, their arms by their sides. The two sentinels towered over visitors in front of the Coliseum's main entrance, at the very heart of LA'84. In their carefully chiselled nudity and through their decapitation, the two figures in the sculpture were not the kind of traditional, triumphant civic artwork that might have been expected and therefore broadly accepted as representative of the city and its Olympics. Something about the sculpture provoked people and demanded a response.

One week after the sculpture's unveiling, at which the *LA Times* noted it received 'mildly enthusiastic applause', the paper's letters section featured public commentary on

⁷⁹ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 313.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 553.

nothing else.⁸¹ Readers' responses to the sculpture were, among those moved to write in to the paper, universally negative. The supposedly liberal residents of LA demonstrated marked conservatism in their response to the avant-garde sculpture, offended by both the figures' nudity and headlessness. Critiques included phrases like 'embarrassed and offended', 'tasteless', 'disgraces our city', 'a national embarrassment', and 'a monumental faux pas'.⁸² 'Where was Robert Graham's head when he fashioned the Olympic figures?' wondered resident Pandora Kelly, 'and where were the heads of those city fathers who approved this?'.⁸³ 'Now we know why the Russians decided to boycott', concluded another reader.⁸⁴ As a representation of either the country or the city, then, locals were less than impressed with Graham's work. It also seems that, despite the LAOOC's efforts to encase the Games from being mistaken for a state occasion, some members of the public still assumed City Hall was responsible for the sculpture.

Readers of the *LA Times* continued to try to decode the meaning of the sculpture. Many concluded that Graham had insulted the world's athletes by implying that brawny Olympic competitors had no use for a brain. Although the LAOOC's Harry Usher insisted there was no hidden meaning to the work, one reader came closer than the rest to finding one: 'My mind cannot transcend the fact of decapitation to grasp the abstract metaphor', wrote Sue Bison of Canyon County, 'If the sculptor evaded the choice of ethnic facial features by denying his glorious athletes a whole body, I wish he had chosen to thrust their heads back and up towards the sun, out of our range of visions, so at least the Gods of all nations could

⁸¹ Morgan Gendel and Roxane Arnold, 'Arts Festival of L.A. Olympic Games Opens', *Los Angeles Times*, 2 June 1984, 1, 20.

⁸² Letters to Editor, *Los Angeles Times*, 9 June 1984, Part II, 2.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

have smiled down on their proud, triumphant faces’, she continued evocatively.⁸⁵ Sue Bison completely understood the need to avoid racial or ethnic specificity on what was a piece of public art, but felt it could have been achieved without removing their heads. Of course, through the lens of festive federalism, the meaning of the headless figures becomes clearer.

The Olympic Gateway figures were, perhaps even more so than the pictogram, the ultimate distillation of the individual neoliberal citizen. One of the figures was male, the other female, but Graham had cancelled out this physical difference through proportionality, making both athletes the same height, possessed of the same muscular build, and of the same bronzed colour. Sue Bison was right; through the removal of the heads, these individuals had shorn any ties to identification by ethnicity or race, and their genders made socially equal. They could be anyone. They stood alone, waiting to define themselves in the forging heat of the Olympic crucible behind them. These were faceless, race-less individuals, defined by the virtuous enterprise of personal advancement and the solo pursuit of glory.

Overall, the OAF turned out to be something of a mixed bag for the LAOOC. It misfired on occasion. The committee could not, of course, control how visitors interpreted the displays, nor did the festival seem to be completely divorced in the public imagination from being a state-sponsored event. These risk factors, coupled with foundational concerns about making the festival financially viable, explain the LAOOC’s *laissez faire* management of OAF events, even as they maintained a regulatory presence. When the festival was over, regardless of debates about avant-garde culture, the committee had succeeded in a more prosaic sense. The festival was a hit, had not financially encroached upon the LAOOC’s central task of running the Games, and had generated some good, festively-federal public relations gains. Besides, there was one other spectacle to come which would far surpass the

⁸⁵ Ibid.

1.5 million visitors to the OAF. The opening ceremony was the LAOOC's chance to present their Los Angeles — Olympic Los Angeles — to the world.

The opening ceremony was also the LAOOC's most direct confrontation with the innate lure of nationalism that comes with hosting the Olympic Games. The task of staging the ceremony bluntly challenged the committee's strategy of distancing the Games from the appearance of a state occasion in the interests of neoliberal encasement. The IOC had set rules about certain aspects of opening ceremonies which must be observed, a panoply of parade and pageantry all of which, regardless of the implied spirit of international cooperation, hinged on national imagery, most prominently flags.⁸⁶ Tradition also called on the LAOOC to hand over the official opening of their Games to the head of state, a task which, in an election year, Ronald Reagan was pleased to undertake.⁸⁷ Despite all of its hard work building the brand of festive federalism, the committee faced the prospect of undoing its efforts by delivering a patriotic festival of USA triumphalism and national imagery. To get around this problem, the LAOOC attempted to re-frame nationhood in ways which emphasised its festive-federal philosophy.

The stakes were high. Opening ceremonies are the first real occasion on which Olympics become visible beyond just local residents to a global audience of an expected two billion people.⁸⁸ The occasion would set the tone for the rest of the Games. Mess it up, and LA'84 would be remembered not for sporting achievements in the arena, but for the embarrassment of a botched opening ceremony. What was more, the committee had to find a way to embrace a spirit of national pride and competition without jettisoning the supra-

⁸⁶ International Olympic Committee, 'Olympic Charter: 1983', MA 2274/1983, Olympic Studies Centre Catalogue, Olympic World Library [hereafter OWL].

⁸⁷ Dyreson, 'Return to the Melting Pot', 213; Troy, *Morning in America*, 153.

⁸⁸ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 38.

nationalism of their festive-federal philosophy, or the overt celebration of LA's independent world-city status. It was *the* definitive presentation of what the LAOOC wanted the world to think about LA and its Olympics and, as such, stands as a crucial historical text. As late as 1982, however, the LAOOC seemed not to have fully considered the cultural significance of the occasion.

With LA being the “entertainment capital of the world”, the LAOOC was not short of resources from which to draw. Mirroring its approach to mascot design, the committee originally handed responsibility for the ceremony over to none other than Disney to produce something spectacular and befitting of the occasion. Over time, however, the relationship between the LAOOC and Disney soured and broke down. On paper, the LAOOC spoke of concerns over budget and a loss of confidence in Disney's organisational capacity, but the ceremony which the LAOOC eventually handled in-house cost \$3 million more than the budget Disney had asked for.⁸⁹ If money was no issue for the ceremony, budgetary concerns were a smokescreen masking something else. Behind the scenes, the issue of ‘patriotism or non-patriotism’ had become the real bone of contention between Disney and the LAOOC.⁹⁰ Real fears about a ‘hyper patriotic [...] Disneyland-scale extravaganza’ had become ‘problematic’.⁹¹ Just as the LAOOC had cooled toward the Disney-designed uber-American mascot, so too had it become worried about diluting its message with a brash celebration of the nation state.

In the same way that it embraced festive federalism in place of the American “star in motion”, with just nine months to go the committee ditched Disney and began preparing for

⁸⁹ Reich, *Making it Happen*, 144.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

the ceremony in-house.⁹² It had just the man for the job on its staff: David Wolper. By instructing Wolper to lead the design of the ceremony, the LAOOC had not knee-jerked but deliberately decided to go in an entirely different direction. Wolper had been producer on the 1977 smash-hit TV miniseries based on Alex Haley's book *Roots*, and it was this specific line on Wolper's resumé which the committee was interested in. Curiously, though, Haley had written *Roots* as a personal examination of the ancestral history of race, slavery, and memory. It had been praised by none less than James Baldwin for its unflinching testimony.⁹³ For the LAOOC, however, it was not this aspect of *Roots* which held commercial value but rather its unforeseen and unintended status as a cultural phenomenon that was emblematic of a wider shift in national discourse about American identity.

Roots emerged in the national imagination alongside a host of other cultural forms which celebrated extra-American national ethnicity like *Rocky* and *The Godfather*. In 1984 the ethnic revival was at its peak. That year, Reagan, recognising the political capital of the moment, "returned" to his ancestral home of Ballyporeen in Ireland in a much-publicised visit.⁹⁴ At the end of the year, the TV miniseries *Ellis Island* also added to the ongoing romanticisation of America's history of immigration. There was, argued Matthew Frye Jacobson, 'a new pluralist sensibility' which recast American identity around a core of 'hyphen nationalism' like "Irish-American" or "Italian-American".⁹⁵ Rather than the "melting pot" metaphor, here was a cultural trope which individualised national identity as the sum of idiosyncratic ethnic parts one could choose to adopt.

⁹² LAOOC, *Official Report*, 200.

⁹³ James Baldwin, 'Review: *Roots* by Alex Haley', *New York Times*, 26 September 1976, accessed 12 January 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/21/books/review/roots-alex-hale.html>.

⁹⁴ Sarah Thomson, 'Presidential Travel and the Rose Garden Strategy: A Case Study of Ronald Reagan's 1984 Tour of Europe', *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (2020): 864-888.

⁹⁵ Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 17, 30-2.

As the category of ethnicity advanced, race retreated. Daniel Rodgers has argued that the *Roots* phenomenon recast race as a family tale which ‘held its own claims on the self’ producing ‘socially unencumbered individuals’.⁹⁶ Privileging race as something more than a social construction, as something which superseded the rights and agency of the individual, had been America’s historical mistake. ‘As the law recognised them, [Americans] resembled more and more closely individual consumers in a market’, socially detached individuals whose place in society was determined by their own claims and merits.⁹⁷ Race, concluded Rodgers, had become ‘imbued with choice’.⁹⁸

The appeal of the figure of the Ellis Island immigrant to the LAOOC is easy to see: the ‘romantic icon [...] downtrodden, hard-working, self-reliant’ were tropes that easily translated to neoliberal individualism.⁹⁹ The individualising of racial identity also suited the committee’s global philosophy, locating the choice of identifiers beyond and across the borders of the nation state. By the end of the 1970s, the travel industry had begun to capitalise on the “ethnic sell” with package trips abroad to “rediscover” one’s lost heritage.¹⁰⁰ With his background in the industry, Ueberroth would have been only too aware of how lucrative the Ellis Island market was. *Fortune* magazine noted by 1984 that businesses were alert to the value of the “ethnic sell” and, by the time of the Statue of Liberty centennial celebration in 1986, thirteen major companies — including Olympic sponsor Coca-Cola — had advertising campaigns linked to the event.¹⁰¹ The commodification of identity was good for business.

However, as *Time* pointed out in 1983, there was a ‘new Ellis Island’ now, and the

⁹⁶ Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, 128,136.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 137.

⁹⁹ Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 8-9.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 46.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 41, 46.

LAOOC was about to stage an Olympics there.¹⁰² As Jacobson has shown, the Ellis Island cultural boom was a fetishization of acquired whiteness, however appealingly draped in the language of diversity and inclusion.¹⁰³ The celebration of this older story did not translate to the contemporary immigrant from South or Central America. One could be “Italian-American” in NYC, but there was no talk in LA of “Honduran-American” or “Guatemalan-American”, there was simply “Latino”. While some Black leaders like Jesse Jackson had begun to embrace the term “African American”, its geographical imprecision also denied Black Americans access to the hyphen-nationalist celebration.¹⁰⁴ By hiring Wolper, the LAOOC wanted to tap into the *Roots* phenomenon, but it was a model which excluded significant numbers of Angelenos.

The result of trying to apply a *Roots* aesthetic to the opening ceremony was a somewhat uneven melange of LA city-statism alongside national and international celebration. Organisers could not avoid referencing the US but aimed instead to tightly control the message about how the world should understand American-ness, not as national identity, but as an international patchwork of individual contributors. Reagan spoke only the perfunctory lines necessary to declare the Games “open”, whereas Ueberroth — Olympic LA’s own head of state — spoke at length to welcome the many nations gathered to compete. During the ceremony’s lengthy “Music of America” section, Wolper and his team succeeded in staging a retelling of the national story, complete with actors, props, and a marching band, which leant heavily on Black cultural contributions to American popular music including jazz,

¹⁰² Andersen, ‘Los Angeles’.

¹⁰³ Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 8-9.

¹⁰⁴ Bob Merrifield, ‘Jackson Urges American Blacks to Rediscover Ties to Africa’, *Chicago Tribune*, 25 December 1988, accessed 9 March 2023, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1988-12-25-8802270145-story.html>.

blues, and gospel. Other than in the bloodless re-narration of western expansion during the “Pioneer Spirit” section, the blend of history and Black music provided organisers a device to get around the awkward fact that Black people did not easily “fit” into the hyphen-national, pluralist celebration.¹⁰⁵

Regardless, at the conclusion of “Music of America”, the performers came together on the field to form an outline map of the USA.¹⁰⁶ Here, then, was a nationalism acceptable to the LAOOC’s branding: the nation as the sum of its diverse parts, broken down into easily digestible historical pastiches which evoked a diverse set of individual cultural expressions. Through this cultural staging of the national story, the meaning of the USA was made legible only through the merits of its greatest artists, from whichever ethnic or racial category one cared to choose.

Elsewhere in the ceremony, the triad of localism, nationalism, and internationalism continued to strike a discordant tone. One of the ceremony’s most memorable moments, the “card stunt”, involved every member of the audience holding up a coloured card in unison, forming across the Coliseum a gallery of the national flags of every competing nation. In the ceremonial order, though, one flag dominated over all others, one which held the authority to transcend nations: the one bearing the Olympic Rings. As the ceremony moved toward its climax, organisers ditched the national tropes and sought to marry the LA city state to transcendent Olympic globalism. The vehicle for this was a ‘multi-national’ parade of 1,500 people drawn from among LA’s diverse ethnic communities, ‘an almost endless resource’ from which to recruit, noted the LAOOC. The participants, selected to champion the city’s

¹⁰⁵ 1984 Olympic Opening Ceremony Footage, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyH7UOXNIJE>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

diverse credentials, appeared in costumes ‘representative of their ethnic origin’.¹⁰⁷ Again, diversity framed as national ethnicity clashed with LA’s racial reality. It is not clear exactly what outfit Black Angelenos were supposed to wear.¹⁰⁸

By this point, however, the emotional weight of the occasion bore down on performers, athletes, and audience alike. Tears were visible as everyone in the Coliseum brought proceedings to an end by linking arms and singing a version of Diana Ross’ song “Reach Out and Touch”, its lyrics specially rewritten ‘with an appropriate international theme’ imploring ‘every nation’ to ‘join the celebration as we salute the unity’.¹⁰⁹ However uneven in tone the ceremony might have been, all was forgotten by the time it came to an end. The LAOOC had more than succeeded in navigating the difficult challenges thrown up by the occasion, telegraphing to a global audience a version of the US nation state that was simultaneously local, individual, and transcendent.

At The Olympic Arts Festival and the opening ceremony, the LAOOC applied the post-racial, individualist philosophies of festive federalism to culture and history in tangible ways. The result was a marketized — and therefore securitized — exhibition of “excellence”, with this descriptor characterised by art works which reinforced festive-federal messaging. Exhibits, which were fenced off and required payment for access, privatized the public space of culture and made commercial decisions the gatekeepers of what constituted art. To make it past the gate, culture needed to be post-lingual and post-racial and be easily transcribed by the vague rhetoric of “diversity”. The festival’s Black Olympians Exhibit and the opening ceremony posed challenges to festive-federal philosophy by making overt references to

¹⁰⁷ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 203.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

nationhood, race, and history. The diluted, re-narrated American history which emerged at these two events sought to frame a national identity which was comprised of supra-national individuals with a multitude of national and ethnic backgrounds; a contingent space filled with citizens of the world. However, the commercial decisions that governed these cultural displays meant that Black Angeleno's inclusion in this imagined national space sat awkwardly with reality.

CONCLUSION

The visual identity of LA'84 used culture in two ways: as a tool of encasement and as an ideologically resonant aesthetic. Festive federalism was more than just a colour scheme, it was an economic logic, a process by which culture facilitated the proper conditions for Olympic capitalism to take place. It tells a different story about what contemporary Marxist scholars called "postmodernism". For Frederic Jameson and David Harvey, post-modern aesthetics were culture's response to the economic, the 'cultural logic' of late capitalism, the superficial expressions of foreshortened temporal and spatial experiences of increasingly 'flexible', post-industrial processes of accumulation.¹¹⁰ Racial capitalism's critique of Marxism retrieved race from the superstructure, identifying it as a driver of the processes of capitalism. Festive federalism as a culture was a post-racial, post-national narrative imbued with ideas of multiculturalism and colour-blindness. It was the pre-economic, facilitative logic for the LAOOC's neoliberal processes, visually locating the Games outside of the imagined borders of national space so as to underscore the fact that they were not a state occasion from which the population could make claims. The LAOOC's deliberate and thoughtful approach

¹¹⁰ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990).

to changing the tone of LA'84's visual identity evinced its firm belief in the power of aesthetics to convey messages for economic ends.

As an aesthetic, festive federalism not only facilitated neoliberal encasement, it also communicated. Its philosophies of post-racial, post-national citizenship imbued the supposedly benign, functional symbol of the pictogram with neoliberal resonance. Here was the LAOOC's ultimate rendering of the idealised neoliberal citizen: the individual competitor and consumer, a raceless, genderless figure unconstrained by collective identity. Festive federalism collapsed scales, placing the individual consumer within the globalised marketplace, where markers of identity were individually chosen expressions of market preference, cleansing race of its political potency for egalitarian change.

The impact of festive federalism did not dissipate when the Games finished. As designer Michael Bierut observed: 'dozens of designers, developers, and local Chambers of Commerce burghers realized that they had been delivered a formula for civic identity on the cheap. This led to a "festive" profusion of garish banners and over-decorated way-finding systems in every down-on-its-luck shopping mall and town square in America, all of whom hung the crepe and waited for a Hollywood close up that would never come'.¹¹¹ The look became a means of refreshing tired commercial spaces, but its wide adoption across the US raises questions about the "marketability" of American patriotism in the aftermath of the Games. Chapter Six pulls this thread further.

The logic of festive federalism carried over into the LAOOC's curation of culture for the Olympic Arts Festival. Marketized, privatised festival sites turned public cultural spaces into property from which one could be either excluded or admitted, determined by one's

¹¹¹ Michael Bierut, <http://www.experiencingla.com/2017/09/festive-federalism-1984-los-angeles.html>, accessed 21 January 2021.

engagement with the Games. Exclusion also applied to organisers' artistic choices. The festival only exhibited cultural expression which reinforced the committee's design philosophy: art that was post-language and, therefore, non-national; raceless displays of culture, or in the case of the Black Olympians Exhibit, a retelling of American history in which racism had been surmounted on an individual basis by competitiveness, individualism, and self-reliance.

The opening ceremony posed a significant challenge to the carefully curated application of festive federalism, imbued as it was by Olympic traditions centred around national flags. David Wolper's experience on *Roots* came into play, re-narrating the meaning of America along individual, multi-ethnic lines of celebratory "diversity", lines which sat awkwardly with the historical experience of Black America. The ceremony's re-definition of America in *Roots* terms forecast the racial limits of individual utopianism. LA life was suffused by racial knowledge about what terms like "Black" and "Latino" meant, it was, as Chapter One illustrated, the ordering geography and logic of the city. There could be no ethnic celebration for Black Angelenos on the same terms as a white person, whose ancestral line could certainly tell a story of persecution but could not reach back to kidnap and slavery. One history told of those who fled *to* America to escape persecution, the other told the story of those for whom the very meaning of their American existence was to *be* persecuted.

The nation state was a neoliberal facilitator through its institutions and through the invocation of its popular historical tropes. A neoliberal history of America, then, was one in which the national story facilitated capitalism in the here-and-now, either through encasement, marketization, or individual utopianism. At the opening ceremony, the reframing of the American story in *Roots* terms — an individualistic ethnic celebration — eschewed an express statement about a universal, collective national identity, furthering the committee's

strategy of cultural encasement. It also, though, revealed the apparent racial paradox at the heart of individual utopianism. To claim one's Blackness as an individual market preference was still to claim an identity which required a collective understanding of race. Those people who sought to use LA'84 to claim both their race *and* their individualism, soon found the two ideas were mutually exclusive.

III

BUILDING THE PERFECT BEAST: OPENING NEW MARKETS THROUGH OLYMPIC BEAUTIFICATION

Park at 6th and Gladys

Skid Row

Los Angeles

1 August 1984

Up 6th Street, in the distance, the spires of downtown shimmered. Just one mile away from this small scrap of tarmac at an unedifying corner of the city, those monuments to banking and business seemed to be from a different planet. It was not a park in the bucolic sense, but a refuge nonetheless for the un-housed, the destitute, and drug-addicted people who frequented its public space. For forty-year-old Kathleen Paris, the park was home. She had not told her family she was living out here. They had their own problems, she reasoned, and so Paris, like thousands of others, had come where one goes in Los Angeles when they have lost it all: Skid Row. It was, and remains, a place where the city's most vulnerable people have been concentrated and fixed in place by both proximity to aid and harassment by police. A place where charities could locate, and try their best to feed, the burgeoning population of un-housed people, and where those in dire need could access what meagre social resources existed to help them. That morning, days into the Olympics, the precarious balance of Skid Row life was thrown into disarray.

It seemed park residents had been all but abandoned by the state, but now without warning, the state showed up. Guarded by the LAPD, city workers moved in, grabbing trash bags and hurling them into the back of a truck, shooing the park's residents out of the way. Twenty-two-year-old Lionel Thomas arrived on the scene in a panic. He had been taking a

shower in a nearby mission, returning to find the city throwing his precious few belongings — blankets, pants and shirts for job interviews, some papers, and a bible — into the truck. Gone were the tenuous links to a former life or an alternative future outside of the park: identification papers, photos, the material evidence of one’s official existence. Gone were sleeping bags and food. Paris was distraught. In one bag callously tossed away were soap, shampoo, a steam iron, and photos of her grandchildren. She pleaded with the workers to stop, to let her search the truck for her meagre possessions. They ignored her. The truck doors slammed. It drove away. Paris, in tears, chased after it down the street. She did not catch it. The next day, she told the press what had happened, concluding succinctly: ‘Before the Olympics it wasn’t so bad. Now they really treat us like dirt’.¹

* * *

The displacement of people from the park at 6th and Gladys was not an isolated incident. Rather, it was one example of a wider set of plans undertaken by the LAOOC, the city, and Angelenos themselves to “beautify” Los Angeles in preparation for the Olympics. Beautification was an expansive and vague term applied to a set of different strategies which, taken as a whole, constituted a concerted effort to rebuild LA as a neoliberal society, an “economically beautiful” space. Beautification was both physical and abstract. In its simplest manifestation, it meant improving the physical aesthetics of the city through “clean-up drives” which cleared litter, planted trees, and covered over unwanted graffiti in areas nearby to Olympic sites. These areas were made up of poor and working-class communities inhabited predominantly by people of colour. In this respect, beautification aimed to mask the physical

¹ Vignette taken from: Kevin Roderick, ‘Derelicts Lose the Precious Little in Sweep by City Crew’, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 August 1984, Part 1, 3.

evidence of those parts of society which did not reflect the tenets of “Olympic LA”. The un-housed, poor, and racialised of LA stood as evidence of the city’s failure to provide for its own, a population long suppressed by capitalism, but also a population made dependent on the state for its welfare.

Beautification programs sought not simply to mask that which their agents deemed ugly or un-beautiful. Taken to its theoretical conclusion, beautification was a process for the privatisation of society. It targeted institutions of social reproduction — from schools to youth services and even hospitals — as educational spaces of ideological “improvement”.² That is, beautification was neoliberal propaganda which instructed the populace in what it meant to “properly” exercise one’s citizenship: economic independence from the welfare state; self-reliance; and consumerism. This ideological instruction was made possible by the private sector, which swept into formerly public spaces and institutions vacated by the state, establishing marketized environments which generated their own income and no longer required funding through taxation. Beautification programs were neoliberal policies which stood to change people’s understanding of what “society” meant, from the economically “ugly” New-Dealism of government spending and welfare, to the beautiful marketization and privatisation of social infrastructure. By definition, then, those people and places which could not stand on their own without government support, were un-beautiful entities targeted for improvement or removal.

The LAOOC’s ambitions, of course, were not so grand in ideological scale. In their most prosaic sense, organisers’ efforts at beautification aimed to ensure the streets looked

² Pierre Bourdieu characterises these sites as forms of capital which allow for the reproduction of social inequality and the maintenance of the economic status quo: Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital’ in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241-58.

good to visitors and television cameras, reflecting their vision of what Olympic LA should be like. Olympic beautification became something more, something darker, when the committee identified beautification as a tool which could help them solve a number of other issues it was experiencing. Most pertinently, Black and Latino people living in and around South Central, nearby to the Coliseum, had begun to make demands for Olympic benefits and voice criticisms of the LAOOC in the press.³ Clean-up drives became a way for organisers to involve these communities in the Games by appearing to be “giving something back” while placating any political unrest which threatened to disrupt Olympic planning. In this respect, then, beautification became another tool of neoliberal encasement. It gave the committee a way to engage local communities in ways which seemed benevolent and reactive to residents’ wishes and feelings, encouraged them to “buy in” to the Games literally and emotionally, while also ensuring they did not detract from profit accumulation.

Beautification helped the committee with another of its responsibilities. As with the Olympic Arts Festival, the LAOOC had inherited expectations that the Games would in some way go beyond just the sporting competition, leaving lasting and tangible benefits to future generations of Angelenos. With this goal in mind, the LAOOC launched a series of programs aimed at the city’s youth centred on an Olympic theme. Initially, this involved the LAOOC acting via schools and community clubs to find volunteer labour for its clean-up drives. The committee found, however, that beautification allowed it to stage its social responsibilities to LA’s young people — traditionally meaning Olympic-themed camps, school trips to the Games, visits from athletes — in ways which got the private sector to pick up the bill. Through LAOOC youth programs, then, children were taught about the Olympic virtues of individualism and competition at activities funded, facilitated, and devised by the Games’

³ Clayton, ‘South Central LA Fears Olympics to Disrupt Lives’.

corporate sponsors. Inevitably, the result was a corporate curriculum which naturalised and rewarded *homoeconomic* behaviour and portrayed as common sense the place of market logics in the social sphere.

Olympic beautification programs became ways in which the LAOOC, its partners, the state, and independent actors used the Games as a vehicle to drive forward the three neoliberal strategies of encasement, marketization, and individual utopianism. They encased profits, placing them beyond the reaches of local communities by placating or diluting local anti-Olympic sentiment. They marketized social spaces like schools and parks, clearing public spaces of economically deviant behaviour, and they championed a pedagogy founded on the virtues of individualism and self-reliance. Through the logic of beautification, LA'84 telegraphed neoliberal ideas about individual citizenship, and provided an opportunity to those who sought to usher in neoliberal practices of exclusion and marketization.

DEVIANTS AND SPECULATORS: THE UN-HOUSED AND THE MARKETIZATION OF PUBLIC SPACES

The arrival of the Olympic Games coincided with the creation by legislators and businesses of an increasingly hostile environment for un-housed Angelenos in downtown areas. The need to make actual Los Angeles look like “Olympic Los Angeles” for television cameras and visitors required the city to do *something* about its ever-growing destitute population for whom the streets and parks were home. Rather than a symptom of the economy, powerbrokers in Los Angeles labelled the un-housed, destitute, addicted, and vulnerable people who frequented run-down areas as the *cause* of undesirable urban spaces and as deviants from proper economic conduct who drained public finances. At the same time, post-Proposition 13 retrenchment meant City Hall had a limited budget with which to spruce-up public spaces

which fell short of desired aesthetic standards. The impending Olympic Games provided both the motivation and the means for local government and businesses to instigate neoliberal change, driving out the economically deviant and transforming tax-draining public areas into self-sufficient, commercial, “beautiful” spaces.

When the LAOOC stepped in to arrange the “cleaning up” of South Central and other areas proximate to Olympic sites, it placed itself into a long history of conflating race with urban space, health, and hygiene.⁴ As Nayan Shah has argued, race is made when the physical characteristics of urban space are conflated with the residents themselves.⁵ By singling out specific areas of the city as requiring beautification, the LAOOC also implicated the people living in those areas as similarly in need of improvement. In Los Angeles, community “clean-up drives” have always had an ideological motivation. Vincent Chabany-Douarre has shown that by the mid-twentieth century, LA clean-ups had shed some of the overt racism which had long featured in panics over urban space and racial hygiene, but remained ‘deeply ethnocentric and acted as springboards for wider public policy which posited self-reliance and individual action as common sense’.⁶ In this respect, the Olympic beautification projects were no different, but what was new by the 1980s was the extent to which a neoliberalising society began to open doors for private corporate interests to supplant white liberal paternalism in matters of social welfare. In LA, the Games gave this opening door a short, sharp kick. The Olympic beautification programs prefigured what followed at later Games, where harassment and “sweeps” of un-housed and vulnerable people has since become common practice.⁷

⁴ Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶ Chabany-Douarre, ‘A Sort of Public Living Room’, 556.

⁷ Lenskyj, *Inside the Olympic Industry*, 108-9.

By the early 1980s, the city's approach to its dramatically accelerating homelessness crisis was to seek punitive changes to legislation.⁸ In 1982, the council passed an ordinance prohibiting 'the use of streets for habitation' and in February 1984, it banned sleeping on benches. During the Olympic year of 1984, the number of people sleeping on the streets in LA County on any given night ranged from 36,800 to 59,100.⁹ Existing detention facilities could only hold so many. Council member Gilbert Lindsay, whose district incorporated downtown and Skid Row, cited the Olympics as a motivating factor in ramping-up punitive approaches to the crisis: 'I want to go all out during the Olympics so we give a good impression to visitors', he said in August 1983. Lindsay suggested that the city's un-housed be sent to a rural camp for the duration of the Games: 'let them sweat it out in the sun, grow vegetables to eat, and learn a trade', he suggested.¹⁰ Without expanding on how exactly a person could "sweat out" poverty, Lindsay's crass comments reveal the extent to which anyone's individual circumstances for being on the streets — fleeing domestic violence, mortgage foreclosure, unemployment, immigration status — could be easily conflated into a stereotype of the quintessential alcoholic "homeless bum" in public discourse.

The attitudes of the police compounded the negative portrayal not of homelessness but of the un-housed human. Commander William Booth of the LAPD voiced his approval of Lindsay's suggestion 'not only for the sake of the city, but for the sake of those indigents and winos who are suffering on the streets', evincing the sorts of attitudes held by those agents of the state whose jobs placed them on the front lines of the crisis.¹¹ Police briefings were

⁸ Gibbons, *City of Segregation*, Chapter 7: 125-51.

⁹ Jennifer Wolch et al., 'Ending Homelessness in Los Angeles,' *Inter-University Consortium Against Homelessness* (2007), accessed 10 May 2022, <https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/uag/37>.

¹⁰ Letters to Editor, *Los Angeles Times*, 7 September 1983, Part II, 4.

¹¹ Wolch et al., 'Ending Homelessness in Los Angeles'.

drenched in a rhetoric of racial hygiene. As LAPD Captain Billy Wedgeworth told the *LA Times* when questioned about the pre-Olympic sweeps of Skid Row and downtown: ‘we’re trying to sanitise the area [...] we want to give the impression we are omnipresent’.¹² To deal with this unclean threat, the LAPD made an extra prison wagon available to officers in the area, which was kept ‘as busy as possible’ in the weeks before the Games, rounding up and displacing those who were deemed to be polluting public space.¹³ That the LAPD kept themselves so busy with this task in the weeks before the Games served only to further blur the line between homelessness and criminality.

The mayor, meanwhile, adopted an increasingly privatised approach to the crisis, mirroring other developments in urban renewal after Proposition 13. Prior to the Olympics, in March 1984, Tom Bradley led efforts to obtain grants from charities and trusts for healthcare provision for the city’s un-housed population. In June that year, the mayor focused on establishing an endowment fund in partnership with the popular singer Kenny Rodgers. By February 1985, however, he had moved beyond liberal paternalism, intent instead on pursuing a public-private-partnership model to fix the homelessness crisis in the wake of slashed city budgets.¹⁴ As the Olympics loomed, then, whether in the form of increased police harassment, callous council members, or encroaching corporations, the victims of the homelessness crisis faced “alleviation” of their condition by the state or the private sector, neither of which had their best interests at heart.

Harassment and removal of LA’s un-housed population, however, were not enough to achieve neoliberal “beauty” by themselves. The Olympics offered the ultimate justification

¹² Keven Roderick, ‘Horse Patrols Rider Herd on Transients’, *Los Angeles Times*, 21 July 1984, Part II, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ ‘Mayor’s Involvement with the Homeless’, Folder 4, Box 1632, Mayor Tom Bradley Administration Papers, Special Collections, UCLA [hereafter MTBAP].

for a range of actors to marketize the environment from which the un-housed had been forcibly vacated by the state. The “cleansing” of public space therefore amounted to another act of state facilitation of private markets, aiming to create commodified public spaces that were self-supporting, revenue-generating entities severed from public funding. Ahead of LA’s Olympics, one downtown area best demonstrated the thought processes behind neoliberal beautification: Pershing Square.

Pershing Square, at the heart of downtown, has been a significant site of civic life in LA since the city’s inception, becoming a formalised area of public space in 1866.¹⁵ Its development has mirrored significant historical changes in LA life ever since. By 1910, the square included a fountain and bandstand, and its pathways were shaded from the relentless sunshine by cypress, bamboo, and palm trees. In 1918, following the First World War, the city renamed the square in honour of General John Pershing, giving the area an additional role as a site of civic memorialisation.¹⁶

In the 1950s, as the private motor car became king of LA, developers reconstructed the park to allow for a three-storey parking garage beneath the square, which had become an established site of public life, hosting political rallies, religious gatherings, and protests. They removed the trees that shaded the area, opening it up to surveillance from all four sides, and the inclusion of entrance and exit ramps to the underground parking area, together with newly fenced-off areas, deterred public gatherings.¹⁷ Local businesses were pleased, having long existed in tension with the “undesirables” — people of colour, socialists, gay people — which

¹⁵ Sophie Gabel-Scheinbaum, ‘Designing Equity: A Case Study of Pershing Square in Downtown Los Angeles’ (2017), accessed 22 December 2022, http://scholar.oxy.edu/uep_student/7, 27-8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31-2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 33-4.

frequented the square.¹⁸ Ironically, the “cleansing” of Pershing Square and its repurposing around the conveniences of car drivers ushered in after-dark an ever-expanding population of drug dealers and un-housed Angelenos, compounding its “undesirability” as a site at the heart of the downtown business area.¹⁹ By 1984, the park was something of an eyesore: ‘beer cans and wine bottles floated in the fountains. Drunks and a plethora of down-and-outers tarnished the square’, noted the *LA Times*.²⁰

For the LAOOC, which was determined not to get dragged into expensive legacy projects that might drain the Games’ profitability, the problem of Pershing Square was something with which it definitely did not want to get involved. However, the square’s location at the heart of downtown and its proximity to high-end hotels jarred with the image of Olympic LA. Crucially, the committee had earmarked the Biltmore Hotel, which opened onto the square, to host the IOC and other VIPs for the duration of the Games.²¹ As such, the committee was doubtless supportive of any measures to do *something* about the square, be they by public or private intervention.

The Olympics provided actors external to the LAOOC a golden opportunity to justify the privatisation of public places like Pershing Square. In late 1983, local government commissioned a detailed report from private consultants The Project for Public Spaces Inc. and David Abel & Associates entitled ‘New Life for Pershing Square’.²² The report stated clearly that the city could use the Games as justification to push through the beautification of the square. The report sets out its ‘innovative entrepreneurial strategy’ for transforming the

¹⁸ Ibid., 34.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Cecilia Rasmussen, ‘The (D)evolution of a Downtown Landmark’, *Los Angeles Times*, 19 August 2007, B2.

²¹ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 396.

²² Project for Public Spaces Inc. and David Abel & Associates, ‘New Life for Pershing Square’, Folder 16, Box 154, LAOOCR.

under-funded public eyesore into a commercial, and therefore self-sustaining, space, in keeping with a growing national trend for such projects as a response to state retrenchment.²³ Once emptied of capitalism's victims, places like Pershing Square could become capitalist entities in their own right.

In contrast to the LAOOC's celebration of a kind of commodified diversity, the Pershing Square report identified the diversity of the park's users as a threat. Eighty-five percent of the downtown employees surveyed for the report said they never used the square and that the worst thing about it was the people who used it: 'undesirables, including transients, senior citizens, unemployed men, and gang members'.²⁴ This unwanted form of diversity translated into security concerns according to forty-five percent of survey respondents, despite the report noting no 'serious crime problem' in the park. What this apparently dangerous form of diversity actually meant, then, was the visibility of extreme disparities of class and wealth between those within the square and those working in the businesses at its edges.

The report translated the physical presence of those people rendered destitute by systemic failures under capitalism in commercial terms, portraying the square's users not as products of the system, but as direct blockages to its smooth operation. The report's authors sought commercialisation and the establishment of markets through securitisation and privatisation: 'clearly if the park were improved, circulation through it would increase dramatically, an important factor for developing concessions in the park'.²⁵ Unregulated street vendors were to be replaced by licensed ones on a fee-paying basis, while oversight of the

²³ Kevin Roderick, 'Growing Trend: Parks That Pay Their Own Way,' *Los Angeles Times*, 17 April 1984, 1.

²⁴ Project for Public Spaces Inc. and David Abel & Associates, 'New Life for Pershing Square'.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

square was to pass to a private management company. Authors noted: ‘While the city of LA and other public agencies have been involved in developing this report, there is an increasing interest by, and role for, the private sector in improving and managing public spaces which are the links among buildings and which contribute significantly to the public impression, image, appreciation, and willingness to work, shop, or visit downtown’.²⁶ The square, then, was simply another commercial space to pass through *en route* from one site of commerce to another, a space which had to look a certain way in order to extract profits from its visitors.

Beauty and security were mutually reinforcing ideas for which the Olympics provided ample facilitation. Identifying the upcoming Games as a crucial moment, the report’s authors planned to transform the square into an ‘arts venue’ with concerts, an Olympic film festival, sculptures, the flying of flags, and live coverage of the Games complete with scoreboards. Meanwhile, to maintain control the square could be policed by placing deliberate points of commercial activity at the entrances to the park and all four corners, kiosks or souvenir stands, for example. These ‘control points’ would provide ‘a dual purpose of providing a security presence, while attracting people’.²⁷ The plans for the Olympic beatification, securitisation, and commercialisation of Pershing Square, then, redrew the boundaries of formerly public space in favour of the affluent. It imposed an Olympic-themed security arrangement. For an individual to gain access, one had to have the means to *trade with* the square. Once inside, permitted activity was, one way or another, only commercial activity, and consumerism defined proper citizenship.

The report’s plans to fully beautify Pershing Square for the Olympics came with not enough time to implement them. With time short, the council stepped in to make an interim

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

“fix” to the area ahead of the Games. Again, the state acted as facilitator to ensure the reality of the city did not interfere with its Olympic rebrand. Despite Angelenos’ sensitivity around paying for Olympic projects, the council undertook a hasty facelift of the park costing in the region of \$600,000 to \$1 million.²⁸ Because public money was now being spent, Angelenos again took to the pages of the *LA Times* to voice their opinions, evincing a public sharply divided over the combined issues of homelessness, the Olympics, and private strategies for public urban renewal. While resident Annis Young labelled the council’s actions ‘sleazy’, Laurie Barlow from Pasadena was thrilled: ‘the spirit of the Olympics may be as ephemeral as its architecture, [but] it could be a means to instigate the development of small public plazas and shops, which not only ameliorates the vast, undefendable public space, but would also provide the city with a greater tax base, and the office workers, executives, and their clients with a place besides desks and conference rooms for meals and relaxation’.²⁹ Angelenos, it seemed, had mixed ideas about the purpose and beneficiaries of public space.

Public spaces like Pershing Square remained, for some, an important site for communicating the meaning of the city. Kaj Mortensen from Venice Beach was horrified by Olympic beautification of the streets on the backs of the un-housed: ‘Los Angeles is trying to look pretty for the Olympic visitors [...] pretty flowers are nice and belong in any city. But these “transients” who are the targets of the cowboy sanitation patrol, these unfortunates are ours. They belong to us, Los Angeles. They are Los Angeles as much if not more than Beverly Hills is Los Angeles. They reflect our conscience, our compassion, our heart’.³⁰ Some Angelenos, then, were sufficiently upset by the LAPD’s “sanitisation” efforts to write to the

²⁸ Mary Ann Milbourn, ‘Dispute Brewing Over Park Project for Olympic Games’, *Los Angeles Daily News*, 15 April 1984, cutting from Folder 1, Box 12, JDWP; Rasmussen, ‘The (D)evolution of a Downtown Landmark’.

²⁹ Letters, *Los Angeles Times*, 28 July 1984, Part II, 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Los Angeles Times, but they were out of step with the recommendations of private consultants, recommendations which fast became public policy. Far better, reasoned austerity-battered city officials, to transform public areas into self-reliant, non-dependent spaces which paid their own way.

Because of the lack of time between the publishing of the Pershing Square report and the arrival of Olympic guests, it never achieved full neoliberal beautification via the Games. In 1992, a private group won a city contract for rehabilitating the square. Designers brought in post-modern sculptures but no trees to shade anyone wishing to view them. The square remained easily surveilled. Despite seeking to evoke ‘elements of California and LA history’, designers failed to inject any sense of purpose or meaning to the square.³¹ Rather, it brought in park rangers backed up by the LAPD and security guards from the nearby Biltmore Hotel to close off the area after 10:30 p.m. To further discourage the use of the square as an overnight refuge, designers omitted public toilets and opted for extensive areas of concrete and granite.³² Meanwhile, LA’s homelessness crisis has continued to escalate.³³

The square remains caught somewhere in the middle of beautification, emptied of those who by their condition stand as physical evidence of a failed system, but with no other role (commercial or otherwise) to demonstrate the purpose of its public space. The Olympic campaign to beautify the square, nevertheless, stands as a complete blueprint for the instigation of a neoliberal strategy of marketization: define and identify that which is deviant or “un-beautiful” and remove it. In its place, establish self-sustaining commercial spaces which deter any activity other than commerce and are therefore self-sustaining. The

³¹ Gabel-Scheinbaum, ‘Designing Equity’, 37-9.

³² Ibid.

³³ Gibbons, *City of Segregation*, Chapter 7, 125-51.

marketization of such spaces acts as its own “security”, policing the types of permissible behaviour within by limiting admission to those whose class position allows them to trade for access.

THE OLYMPIC NEIGHBOR PROGRAM

The LAOOC’s Olympic Neighbor Program (ONP) was a strategy of neoliberal encasement targeted specifically at “un-beautiful” areas of the city. Near to the hub of LA’84, the neighbourhoods of the predominantly Black and Latino area of South Central had grown increasingly critical of the LAOOC as the Games approached, while also feeling that the committee should loosen its purse strings and make lasting investments in the area.³⁴ The ONP stepped in to placate these communities by directly involving them in Olympic-themed events and activities on a hyper-local, racially-specific basis. More than this, the ONP sought to go beyond placation to produce active Olympic consumers in areas which had previously been apathetic at best, sometimes hostile, toward the Games. All the while, the ONP ensured that LAOOC coffers were kept sealed off from the people, encased from the democratic demands of neighbourhoods of colour. The community relations strategies envisaged under the ONP were a form of incipient glocalization: the LAOOC ensured the smooth operation of Olympic capital by adjusting to local contexts. This strategy made sure the Olympic product remained viable by placating dissent, but also that it was competitive in the cultural marketplace.

Race, ethnicity, and “diversity” were key components of the ONP’s encasement strategy. Organisers embraced South Central and East LA communities on a hyper-local, individual basis, in ways which were culturally and ethnically idiosyncratic. Rather than

³⁴ Clayton, ‘South Central LA Fears Olympics to Disrupt Lives’.

simply responding to the city's diversity, the ONP amplified and exaggerated it wherever possible. In doing so, organisers constructed difference for economic ends. The ONP created what Roland Robertson calls 'differentiated consumers around invented traditions' in order to placate and profit from hyper-localism.³⁵ In keeping with festive federalism, the ONP set out to dilute race and concentrate on the market potential of "diversity". Rather than the local existing in tension with the global, argues Robertson, the twin currents of 'Balkanisation in a world of homogenising globalisation' were mutually reinforcing and constitutive. Robertson points to the proliferation of "ethnic" supermarkets across Southern California in the 1980s as an example of this relationship in action. These supermarkets did not simply cater to difference, but rather created and encouraged differentiated consumers defined by ethnic and cultural idiosyncrasies.³⁶ By doing so, capital could get around the idea that assertions of one's local-ness, one's specific identity, ran counter to globalising trends. "Diversity" in this manner was good for business.

As late as February 1984, however, the LAOOC had done little in terms of its community interaction. That changed when the *LA Times* published an in-depth article which allowed South Central residents a significant voice with which to air multiple concerns about the impending Olympics. Residents bemoaned a frustrating lack of communication from the LAOOC addressing invasive plans to change road layouts, manage traffic, the impact on local business, youth services, and saturation of the area by police. Community activist Antonia Ecung summarised the general pre-Games mood in South Central: 'When I was in college and we were going to have a big, loud party, we always made sure to invite everybody on the

³⁵ Roland Robertson, 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity' in *Global Modernities*, eds., Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (London: Sage, 1995), 39.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 42-4.

block so they'd feel part of it and wouldn't complain about the noise. We just feel like the Olympic committee is having a humongous party in our backyard and we're not being invited'.³⁷ By the time a contingent of LAOOC members returned from observing arrangements for the Winter Olympics in Sarajevo, the possibility of a low level of public support and the potential for backlash in South Central was a major concern.³⁸

The committee acted swiftly to bolster its community relations strategy. Internally, the committee acknowledged that it had a challenge 'to overcome preconceived notions that it was a large, monolithic westside organisation with little or no insight to communities in downtown'.³⁹ In the LA idiom, "communities downtown" meant predominantly Black and Latino neighbourhoods. 'How and when would the general public learn to embrace and support the modern-day Olympic movement in Los Angeles?', lamented the committee.⁴⁰ The use of the word "learn" reveals the propagandistic, instructive, and ideological approach the committee adopted to its community-relations strategy from March 1984, which it specifically targeted at the fractious Black and Latino neighbourhoods of South Central.

The LAOOC needed to assuage the concerns emanating from South Central, encasing the smooth operation of Olympic activity from potential disruption by communities that were organised into established activist groups. Compounding the challenge, the committee's community-relations department, established in 1979, remained a relatively small part of overall operations. There had been a high turnover of its small staff, and the department had seen seven different managers in five years.⁴¹ With the potential threat of a community-

³⁷ Clayton, 'South Central LA Fears Olympics to Disrupt Lives'.

³⁸ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 584.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 589.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 584.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

relations crisis, the LAOOC fired Carolyn Van Brunt, who had been head of public relations for South Central, eastern LA, and Inglewood. Van Brunt had gone on-record with comments critical of her bosses at a public meeting: ‘I’ve been saying this for fourteen months, but they don’t seem to realise how much you will be inconvenienced. I’ve been telling them, “you must give these people something!”’. But this is a private corporation and they’re there to put on the Olympic Games’.⁴² On the surface, her sacking by the LAOOC seemed like revenge.

There was, however, more complexity to Van Brunt’s sacking. The press reported that she had been frequently at odds with the committee hierarchy and was ‘not a team player’, while the committee insisted that long-running ‘insubordination problems’, not her public comments, were the reason for her sacking.⁴³ She offered more detail from her perspective: ‘All I tried to do was force some issues for the Black and Hispanic community to get involved in the Olympic Games, to get the whole community a piece of the Olympic pie’.⁴⁴ Her efforts in this regard had involved working through and with established community organisations. Herein lay the foundation for her dismissal. The LAOOC had no intention of dishing out pieces of Olympic pie to the neighbourhoods abutting Olympic venues, particularly not via organisations which based themselves on racial claims as a basis for their identity and politics. The Games were not something from which the LAOOC intended people to *receive* things. They were instead a participatory, market-based event. Van Brunt’s approach of trying to access LAOOC coffers in the interests of people defining themselves collectively by their racial identity would have elevated race over ethnicity and diversity, an acknowledgement of collective, not individual, identity that flew in the face of festive-federal philosophy. Van

⁴² Clayton, ‘South Central LA Fears Olympics to Disrupt Lives’.

⁴³ Janet Clayton, ‘Minorities Aide for Games Fired’, *Los Angeles Times*, 13 March 1984, Part II, 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Brunt had to go.

The committee replaced Van Brunt with Robert Gay, previously an aide to councillor Gilbert Lindsay (who had wanted to ship the un-housed off to internment camps ahead of the Games). Gay was a pro-business establishment choice with his own personal political ambitions.⁴⁵ With his appointment, the LAOOC had cleared a path to do community relations on its own terms and set out to achieve encasement with a strategy of controlled inclusion. By bringing local neighbourhoods into the Olympic party in the “correct” manner, organisers began a revived Olympic Neighbor Program which would, they hoped, make Angelenos of colour finally ‘learn to embrace and support’ LA’84.⁴⁶ This education occurred at a hyper-local level, fusing international homogenisation with ethnic and cultural particularism in the way Robertson described.⁴⁷

The new ONP specifically targeted communities of colour. While community relations across the city remained under a central office, the LAOOC opened two satellite offices in April and May 1984. These offices, which acted as shopfronts for the LAOOC within specific neighbourhoods, existed in the committee’s own words ‘to channel community attitudes potentially damaging to the LAOOC and address troublesome local issues in minority communities near Olympic venues’.⁴⁸ “Channel” and “address” suggest that the LAOOC’s new approach to troublesome communities of colour was to be a one-way, instructional relationship.

The decentralisation of community-relations allowed the LAOOC to adapt its

⁴⁵ Laurie Becklund and Jane Fritsch, ‘Bob Gay: A Lifetime Quest that Fell 200 Votes Short’, *Los Angeles Times*, 9 June 1991, 1; Clayton, ‘Minorities Aide for Games Fired’.

⁴⁶ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 584.

⁴⁷ Robertson, ‘Glocalization’.

⁴⁸ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 589; ‘Role of Community Relations Manager’, Folder 6, Box 123, LAOOCR.

strategies on a hyper-local basis, adjusting events to different race and class contexts as necessary to translate “proper” Olympic messages. In affluent areas like Malibu or the Westside, the committee accessed communities via commercial conduits like homeowner associations and local chambers of commerce.⁴⁹ In poorer areas with predominant populations of colour, the committee sidestepped traditional institutions of community organising like churches or activist groups. Instead, it channelled the ONP via each respective district’s council member, using the state to facilitate community relations between it and neighbourhoods of colour.⁵⁰ With local offices and locally targeted newsletters and events, the Olympics as a *product* could compete commercially by exaggerating difference, cultural particularism, and ‘invented traditions’.⁵¹ Celebrations of diversity were therefore a ‘key objective’ of the ONP.⁵²

The ONP adjusted its celebrations of diversity on a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood basis, running Olympic-themed festivities which were ethnically, linguistically, and culturally specific. In east LA, for example, the local satellite office in Monterey Park ran bilingual events in English and Spanish. Their Olympic Jamboree at East LA College reportedly attracted nine thousand people to engage with local programs of beautification, temporary Games employment, and to visit an ‘historic Latino Olympians exhibit’.⁵³ Other events in East LA included a bilingual Olympic Festival sponsored by the Hispanic Women’s Council of East LA, a Mexican Folklife Festival, the restoration of existing ‘Latino murals’, and the

⁴⁹ ‘Olympic Neighbor Activity’, Folder 10, Box 119, LAOOCR; ‘Olympic Neighbor Program Around UCLA’, Folder 16, Box 121, LAOOCR.

⁵⁰ ‘Olympic Neighbor Program Activity’, Folder 16, Box 121, LAOOCR.

⁵¹ Robertson, ‘Glocalization’; ‘Olympic Neighbor Newsletter’, Folder 10, Box 119, LAOOCR.

⁵² ‘Objectives of Olympic Neighbor Program’, Folder 6, Box 123, LAOOCR.

⁵³ Letter from LAOOC to Frank del Olmo, 7 July 1984, Folder 10, Box 27, FDOC.

commission of ten new murals from local artists.⁵⁴ The ONP, then, had brought people of colour into the Olympic fold in a manner controlled by the LAOOC. It had gone to great lengths to encourage emotional and monetary buy-in to the Games by people of colour through hyper-local particularism, celebrating LA diversity by creating and staging cultural traditions in Olympic terms.

As the Games drew nearer, the LAOOC instigated its “Welcome” campaign, which saturated LA with micro celebrations of diversity. The committee sent out “Welcome” banners, posters, and bumper stickers to drum up anticipation. Such material read “Welcome, LA ’84” or “Play a Part in History” written in sixteen different languages, a deliberate measure which, organisers hoped, would ‘foster goodwill in Los Angeles’ many ethnic communities as well as foreign visitors to the Games’.⁵⁵ The committee sent out ‘more than two million’ of these promotional items, produced in festive-federal colours.⁵⁶ The “Welcome” material not only saturated the city in the run up to the Games, it linked Olympic internationalism directly to local multicultural diversity.

The committee’s messaging permeated Los Angeles via a host of institutions both public and private, cultural and commercial. City government and the police department played their part in disseminating materials, but so too did chambers of commerce, ‘handicapped groups’, hospitals, libraries, parks, and schools, which tasked pupils with making multilingual street banners for their neighbourhoods.⁵⁷ In this way, the LAOOC’s construction of diversity and Olympic tradition suffused daily lives in Los Angeles. As usual, the state had facilitated matters for the committee, with local government and the police

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 590.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 589.

⁵⁷ Ibid; LAOOC Press Release 9 July 1984, Folder 10, Box 27, FDOC.

enthusiastically embracing the “Welcome” campaign. Significantly, though, with weeks to go before LA’84, sites of social and cultural capital from hospitals to schools were all now in some way enmeshed in Olympic promotion. The committee had achieved local cultural hegemony.

The underlying purpose behind projects like ONP and “Welcome” had not, however, been simply promotion. Rather, these were strategies designed to placate. It seems they worked. The residents of South Central did not protest nor disrupt. The Olympic climate in South Central had gone from raucous public meetings at which Carolyn Van Brunt attempted to fuse the Games with race-based community organisations, to at the very least one of indifference. In June 1984, the LAOOC met again with residents local to the Coliseum to discuss developments in local planning. Fewer than twenty residents attended the forums, at which the committee had anticipated up to five hundred people. There were more members of the press in attendance than members of the public.⁵⁸ Residents’ lack of attendance either indicated indifference and surrender, or that they had at last “learned” to support the impending Olympics. Whichever it was, for the committee, its goal of encasement through placation had worked, and “diversity” had been central to its success.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

The spectre of another group about which the LAOOC needed to do something had also appeared in the critical *LA Times* article from February 1984. ‘I know the [LAOOC’s] concern is terrorism, but the little people are going to be some minor terrorists if they have

⁵⁸ Karen Kenny, ‘Olympics-Coliseum Meet Held’, *Los Angeles Daily News*, 13 June 1984, cutting in Folder 1, Box 12, JDWP.

nowhere to go and nothing to do’, said South-Central resident Brenda Nolan.⁵⁹ Hosting an Olympic Games in their neighbourhood threatened to unleash gangs of marauding teenagers whose usual social spaces had been commandeered in the interests of the Games. One local school was about to be taken over by the LAPD as a command post for the Games’ duration, and other local amenities had been earmarked by the committee for Olympic purposes.⁶⁰ While it seemed the LAOOC would happily be taking things *from* South Central — schools, roads, buildings — it had not made clear exactly what it would be giving back to an area in which the median age was twenty-five and where unemployment rates among ‘young minorities’ was twice the ‘standard rate’.⁶¹ Accordingly, the LAOOC and its corporate sponsors launched a series of youth-focused events and employment opportunities that were tied in important ways to the overall beautification program. By staging programs for young people under the umbrella of beautification, the committee’s interaction with the young of Los Angeles was commercial in nature. Taken as a whole, these “Coca-Cola curricula” pushed a neoliberal ideological intervention based on the virtues of *homoeconomic* citizenship and individual utopianism.

The physical conditions of urban space in LA rationalised the LAOOC’s ideological intervention into the minds of young Angelenos. In July 1983, Elizabeth Herdman of Hancock Park wrote to the mayor listing her concerns about the physical condition of LA’s poorer neighbourhoods and their implications for the Olympic Games. Herdman’s letter reflected a public discourse that understood the city’s class-divided urban spaces in racialised terms, the physical condition of streets and buildings a direct commentary about the people who lived

⁵⁹ Clayton, ‘South Central LA Fears Olympics to Disrupt Lives’.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

there. ‘Many people in the low-income area have upgraded their little homes and I find much to applaud as I drive back and forth’, she began in patronising tone. ‘But there is a lot of graffiti, paper, litter, weeds, trash, etc... all of which could be remedied’, she continued, her use of a medical term suggesting that these communities represented a sickness.⁶²

What was needed, Herdman reasoned, was a good old-fashioned clean-up drive, but one which was more suited to the times. Neighbourhood clean-ups should be a matter of personal, not civic, responsibility, she argued. Imploring the mayor *not* to provide tools or materials for an *en masse* clean-up, Herdman instead suggested Tom Bradley appear on every single local television channel to make a synchronised plea to all Angelenos. This plea should ‘inspire the residents to see that their gutters are kept clean, their grass cut, flowers grown if possible and houses freshened up’, she wrote, taking special care to emphasise: ‘this should be an individual project’. ‘Each person must feel a responsibility and a desire [her emphasis] to put forth a good appearance for the Olympics’, she insisted.⁶³ Here, then, was a neoliberal rebrand of the traditional community clean-up drive, one that emphasised an individual’s responsibility to make their streets (and vicariously *themselves*) beautiful in the interests of the Olympic Games. It was an individual responsibility which had to be learned. What was more, it would not cost the city a dime.

Herdman expanded on the ways in which the city as a set of individuals could be taught to achieve beautification. She set out strategies which were, as it turned out, oddly prescient of those adopted by the LAOOC and its corporate partners. Specifically, Herdman identified schools as crucial sites of ideological intervention: ‘The schools can start impressing upon the children K thru’ 12 the value neatness [sic], order, and beauty. It must be

⁶² Letter from Elizabeth Herdman to Tom Bradley, July 1983, Folder 4, Box 1634, MTBAP.

⁶³ Ibid.

worked on diligently not just mentioned occasionally. I'm sure that our school officials will also cooperate'.⁶⁴ By zeroing-in on schools, Herdman had identified crucial sites of social reproduction where young people could be specifically targeted and inculcated with "proper" knowledge about Olympic citizenship. LAOOC staffers also came to this conclusion when tying together their youth and beatification programs.

Of course, many plush and picturesque neighbourhoods like Herdman's did not require cleaning up. By the end of her missive, perhaps worrying that she had not been specific enough about exactly where — and therefore *who* — needed improvement, Herdman offered more detail: 'I am thinking of the streets around the Coliseum where the crowds will be and will be parking all around'. In case this was still not specific enough, Herdman offered a postscript: 'P.S. Vermont from Santa Barbara to Vernon is deplorable'.⁶⁵ Santa Barbara Boulevard had in fact very recently been renamed in honour of Martin Luther King. It was the main thoroughfare separating Exposition Park from the north edge of South Central, where the village of so-called deplorables began. Beautification was needed here, where poverty had created un-beautiful surroundings and, by association, un-beautiful people. Thus beautification programs were racially coded and racially targeted.

For the LAOOC, truly "beautiful" youth and clean-up programs would be revenue-generating, or at least self-sustaining. With this goal in mind, the committee made a short-lived attempt to form "Los Angeles Beautiful", a public-private partnership with local government. This partnership operated under the auspices of the Olympic Youth Department, ensuring that the committee specifically targeted the city's young people for beautification. Their plan was to distribute 20,000 "Olympiad" roses (the "official rose of the 1984 Olympic

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Games”) for young people to plant in run-down neighbourhoods close to venue sites.⁶⁶ This beautification effort was supposed to be funded by putting the “Olympiad” rose on sale to the general public, but sales were disappointing. The rose was a deep red in colour, not in keeping with festive federalism, and it failed to capture the public’s imagination.⁶⁷ The committee had to look elsewhere for funding.

Los Angeles Beautiful turned to local businesses and corporate Olympic sponsors for help. The resultant injection of funding allowed organisers to offer some temporary, low-paid employment opportunities around beautification, but clean-ups were mostly volunteer efforts. Coca-Cola, one of the biggest sponsors of LA’84, hired local teens for clean-ups, outfitting them in branded t-shirts and caps for the duration of the project. Atlantic Richfield, meanwhile, organised a voluntary labour force of 127 local school children to clean-up the main venue site at Exposition Park.⁶⁸ The committee also used schools to field an army of litter pickers while encouraging them to launch their own individual clean-up projects in their neighbourhoods.⁶⁹ Not only did schools provide legions of free labour, but they also acted as gateways for corporations like Coca-Cola to gain access to a captive target market. Kids could be decked-out in branded clothing on the pages of the national press while the head office basked in the reflected glow of corporate benevolence.

Schools also allowed the LAOOC to make its beautification programs hyper-local and multi-cultural in character, providing a pre-existing network of racial and ethnic enclaves across the city. Once it had identified an appropriately “diverse” group of young people, the

⁶⁶ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 587.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 875.

⁶⁸ David Johnston, ‘Cleaning Up Our Act For Flood of Olympics Visitors’, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 1984, Part V, 1.

⁶⁹ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 875.

committee could funnel modest sums of money in their direction for celebratory beautification projects. It awarded \$39,000 to a Central LA group of young people whom it had selected specifically because they represented the ‘varied cultural dimension of the community’.⁷⁰ In Koreatown, the committee allocated \$2,500 plus commemorative t-shirts, while Chinatown received \$3,000, t-shirts, plus another \$500 for one local school to produce a large “Welcome Olympians” banner in both English and ‘Chinese’.⁷¹ In South Central, the committee went as far as to announce it had successfully used beautification programs to broker a ‘peace treaty’ among rival gangs, recruiting members to paint the fences around the local LA ’84 satellite office.⁷²

It seemed, then, that the benefits of Olympic beautification knew no limits. With its corporate backing, the LAOOC was able to funnel small pots of investment into improving the physical aesthetics of local neighbourhoods, while using the Olympic brand and Coca-Cola baseball caps to engage young people in ways the state, and certainly the LAPD, could not. As Bob Gay, who had taken over from the dismissed Carolyn Van Brunt, told the *LA Times*: ‘We feel we have a good relationship with the kids because we’re not looking down on them but include them in the programs we’re doing’.⁷³ The hyper-local beautification drives were, however, short-term bursts of activity, not long-term solutions for urban renewal. They still relied on a tacitly racialised understanding of urban space. As the director of Los Angeles Beautiful commented: ‘How clean our environment is reflects how we feel about ourselves and others’.⁷⁴ Los Angeles Beautiful targeted neglected and run-down areas with populations

⁷⁰ LAOOC Press Release 9 July 1984, Folder 10, Box 27, FDOC.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Janet Clayton, ‘Rival Gangs to Paint Mural for Olympics’, *Los Angeles Times*, 18 May 1984, Part I, 21.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Johnston, ‘Cleaning Up Our Act For Flood of Olympics Visitors’.

that were predominantly constituted of one racial or ethnic group. By cleaning up the streets, victims of poverty could camouflage the material evidence of that poverty and by doing so, reasoned the LAOOC, learn to lift themselves up (with a little help from the private sector, naturally).

The committee's clean-up drives were short-lived activities, but beautification programs also allowed for youth-focused activities which strove to make a less tangible but long-lasting, ideological improvement in the minds of the city's youth. Olympic youth programs at LA '84 were representative of a wider change occurring since the 1970s which, as Elizabeth Hinton has argued, suffused crime control measures into everyday life for Black urban children.⁷⁵ These programs were pre-carceral, seeking to rein in *potential* law breakers through sites of social capital like schools and employment services which were increasingly wedded to carceral and punitive institutions. Such programs represented an ongoing transfer of social service provision to police and juvenile courts which coded Black youth as criminal. A "troubled teen" industry flourished in the 1980s as a response to federal retrenchment.⁷⁶ By 1984, conditions were perfect for a corporate takeover of the struggling social service sector. In Los Angeles and in wider California, LA '84 opened up new markets in Black children's social spaces, into which Olympic sponsors rushed. The result was a neoliberal *homoeconomic* curriculum which used the Olympic brand to define citizenship as proper economic conduct in the minds of young people of colour, all the while disciplining "deviant" behaviour.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Hinton 'Creating Crime: the Rise and Impact of National Juvenile Delinquency Programs in Black Urban Neighborhoods', *Journal of Urban History* 41, no. 5 (2015): 808-24.

⁷⁶ Celeste Fremon, 'Controversial Company That Profited From The "Troubled Teen" Industry Now Has Millions From The Feds To Open A Lock-Up For Immigrant Kids In Los Angeles', *Witness LA*, 7 January 2020, accessed 5 May 2022, <https://witnessla.com/controversial-company-that-profited-from-the-troubled-teen-industry-now-has-millions-from-the-feds-to-open-a-lock-up-for-immigrant-kids-in-los-angeles/>.

As ever, the LAOOC broke with Olympic tradition. Its private funding model dictated that the committee abandon the usual Olympic summer camps staged for children from around the world in favour of hyper-local activities which, rather than simply existing for the benefit of young people in the city, actually complemented and furthered LAOOC strategy. The committee's abandonment of tradition in this instance created a rift between official LAOOC programs and independent efforts to pursue more traditional Olympic activities. With its corporate backers, the committee suffocated all competition and buried other attempts at running Olympic-themed youth programs. One private travel agent, for example, attempted to organise a traditional camp for children from around the world, but the LAOOC threatened legal action over the use of the world "Olympic" and created 'a saga of complications and confusion' around the event.⁷⁷ The LAOOC achieved a monopoly and snuffed out competitors, maintaining a tight-hold over how the Olympic brand was presented to young people.

Official LAOOC programs, which were well funded by giant corporations like Coca-Cola, cast into sharp relief the struggling efforts of the public sector to use the Games to benefit job seekers and young people with minor criminal records. "The Olympic Experience", for example, ran for two weeks and introduced former Olympic medal winners to 'troubled youths'.⁷⁸ In the afternoons, businessmen from Orange County arrived to give inspiring talks about "making it". The whole program was financed to the tune of \$60,000 by the Jobs Training and Partnership Act of 1982.⁷⁹ Though this legislation traced its roots back

⁷⁷ Tim Gindick, 'Youth Camp Has All the Trappings of the Olympics But Not the Name', *Los Angeles Times*, 2 August 1984, Part V, 1.

⁷⁸ Carmen Ramos Chandler, 'On the Right Track', *Los Angeles Times* (Orange County), 4 August 1984, Part II, 4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

to the New Deal, its 1982 iteration represented a neoliberal re-working of its provisions, partnering with private businesses with an emphasis on “efficiency”. A later study found that the Act, while meeting ‘racial and welfare’ quotas, in fact only benefitted the most able within the scheme, with the most disadvantaged missing out on valuable in-job training.⁸⁰ In the face of federal cuts to programs like this, organisers told the *LA Times* they had no idea if they would run again in 1985.⁸¹ The private sector, then, became an increasingly attractive way of funding such programs.

The LAOOC had no intention of running an international youth program for the sake of it. As LA’84 was not in receipt of public funding, the Games bore no wider social responsibility. Organisers justified the break with tradition differently, of course: ‘What we’re doing is geared primarily to the USA and in that, primarily to Southern California [...] The makeup of LA is so international that even though it would seem to be just Southern California, its impact is tremendous culturally and racially’.⁸² LA was a world city, they reasoned, with a population of multicultural individuals. The city’s apparent diversity had again come in handy as a way of putting encasement in place.

In stark contrast to the Olympic Experience’s paltry \$60,000 of federal grant money, the committee envisaged a much grander program that would leave a lasting impression on the young people of LA. It planned academic, cultural, and sports programs spread out over four years involving ‘one million youths, aged twelve to seventeen [in] activities that would bring [them] into the Olympic movement [...] and keep them interested in, and motivated by,

⁸⁰ Kathryn Anderson et al., ‘Mixed Signals in the Job Training Partnership Act’, *Growth and Change* 22, no. 3 (2006), 23-48.

⁸¹ Chandler, ‘On the Right Track’.

⁸² Gindick, ‘Youth Camp Has All the Trappings of the Olympics But Not the Name’.

the Olympic spirit both during and in the years after the Olympics'.⁸³ The committee and its corporate sponsors were the ones who got to decide what exactly "the Olympic spirit" meant, of course. The youth program was a blank canvas, but whoever painted on it stood to access and influence millions of young people across the city, county, and state.

The committee intended to use this blank canvas to paint something "neoliberally beautiful", bringing its youth events under the auspices of the beautification program. That meant creating something that not only could be financially independent from the state, but profitable as well.⁸⁴ For such a model to work, there needed to be an attractive commercial reason for the private sector to involve itself in the social lives of young people. The LAOOC was clear about the advantages of the youth programs to its corporate sponsors: they offered 'high visibility without major advertising expense' as well as certain rights to use specific Olympic-related words in their marketing campaigns, and for some corporations such as Atari, Levi Strauss, Coca-Cola, and Converse 'the participants in the programs represented a primary age group in their market, hence their eager involvement. The image of the Olympics associated with their products was also positive for sponsors'.⁸⁵ Ultimately, half of LA'84 sponsors involved themselves in the programs in some way.⁸⁶ The Olympic brand facilitated unrivalled access to the lucrative Black consumer market for some of the nation's biggest brands and offered the means to naturalise the relationship between sites of social reproduction and corporate commercialism.⁸⁷

Because the LAOOC intended for its youth programs to achieve encasement, shielding

⁸³ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 868.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 869.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 868.

⁸⁷ On the Black consumer market see Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, 142.

the Games from disruption by, or demands from, local populations of colour, the relationship between sponsors and young people ultimately targeted young Black and Latino people. Of course, the committee did not say as much out loud, but the plans for one of its biggest youth programs “Summerscope ’84” could barely conceal the fact that organisers designed something specifically targeted at Black teenagers in South Central. The program intended to ‘give teenagers around the Exposition Park area something to do this summer while their usual recreational facilities will be used for the Olympics’.⁸⁸ This meant, predominantly, Black teenagers. Despite the ostensible benevolence of the program, the press also noted the potential for disruption by those who frequented the area. Summerscope could keep these ‘kids off the street and out of trouble’, evoking and giving credence to the idea of Black youth as hoodlums.⁸⁹

Press coverage of Summerscope spoke in a raceless language, even as it described something which was quite obviously designed to appeal to Black teens. Coca-Cola, with support from Atlantic Richfield, McDonald’s, and Time Mirror provided \$500,000 in funding. Coca-Cola dispatched its ‘Director of Black Marketing’ Chuck Morrison to LA to unveil the plans for Summerscope, noted the *LA Daily News*. ‘It’s going to be a long, hot summer’, said Morrison, ‘this will give many of these kids [...] something to do’.⁹⁰ Summerscope entailed performances by the Negro Ensemble Co., Les Ballet Africains, and the Dance Theatre of Harlem, and it also offered weekly movie screenings, including talks by Black and Latino movie directors. Summerscope would culminate post-Games in a concert at the Coliseum

⁸⁸ Mary Ann Melbourn, ‘Olympic Sponsors Set Summer Program for Deprived Youth’, *Los Angeles Daily News*, 26 June 1984, cutting from Folder 19, Box 14, JDWP.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

‘featuring Gladys Knight and the Pips and other popular black entertainers’.⁹¹ Organisers put in a great deal of time, money, and effort to curate a program of Black cultural events designed to distract and detain young people in and around Exposition Park.

On the surface, such an obviously race-based program clashed with the LAOOC’s philosophy of individual multiculturalism. Here, after all, was a high-profile celebration of Black culture. However, Summerscope was also about controlling the movement and leisure time of Black youth, channelling them through a program in a controlled manner, targeting them for managed involvement in the Olympics, while Coca-Cola paid the bill. Racially coded understandings about criminality permeated the underlying logic of Summerscope. Chuck Morrison from Coca-Cola told the *LA Daily News* that it would ‘discourage drug use in the community’ through a series of ‘sports camps’ which emphasised health and physical fitness.⁹² Large corporations supplied prizes for the camps, including Adidas, Eastern Airlines, Pacific Bell, 7-up, Worlds of Curls, Jack-in-a-Box, Quaker Oats Co., Molten Industries, and the California Sun Lines Company.⁹³ Not only was this racial targeting of Black youth a means of encasement, then, it could also teach the potentially deviant about the virtues of individual utopianism, individual bodies as sites of capital that must be improved, all while exposing them directly to corporate marketing.

Other corporate programs took place at schools, further suffusing the “Olympic spirit” into the everyday lives of LA’s teens. Levi Strauss’ 1983 “Olympic Spirit” art project sent out ten thousand packages of classroom materials intended to be folded into each school’s art curriculum. It spoke of the virtues of Olympic history and competition. First Interstate Bank

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

also defined the “Olympic Spirit” as competitive individualism. Its art project for twelve- to eighteen-year-olds ran across eleven western states, encouraging students to submit Olympic-themed artwork that would be judged on its merits by the LAOOC in a competition to receive \$12,000 in scholarship funds.⁹⁴ These programs naturalised corporate involvement in young people’s education, while inculcating via the “Olympic Spirit” the apparent virtues of competitive access to social mobility untethered from the state.

The LAOOC’s “Grow with the Olympics” program specifically targeted students whose families were dependent on welfare. Harry Usher, responding to criticism of the committee’s community involvement by South Central residents declared: ‘Why not say “here’s a stool, lets stand on it” instead of saying “How come you didn’t give me a ladder?”’, and this sort of anti-welfare, self-help rhetoric governed how youth programs taught students from low-income families to “grow”.⁹⁵ The LAOOC identified 106 schools with the highest percentage of students whose families depended on state welfare, which were to be “grown” with the Olympics. Under the scheme, sponsors acted as patrons, contributing \$25,000 in return for two tickets per-day to an event of their choice. With the sponsors’ money, the committee provided tickets and transport to Olympic events for fifty students from low-income families.⁹⁶

The distribution of “Grow with the Olympics” tickets was, however, not simply a case of handing them out. Rather, students competed for them. This was, said the LAOOC, ‘an opportunity for youngsters to earn their opportunity to attend the Games’.⁹⁷ Winning students were the ones deemed by organisers to be “deserving”, a category determined by a series of

⁹⁴ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 869.

⁹⁵ Clayton, ‘South Central LA Fears Olympics to Disrupt Lives’.

⁹⁶ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 875.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

tests. These tests examined a student's physical performance, attendance records, and 'citizenship'.⁹⁸ The physical performance aspect required a student to demonstrate improvement in the California Assessment Physical Performance Test over six months, a test which generated an easily quantifiable numerical score. Attendance data could also be easily monitored and recorded by organisers. "Citizenship", however, proved harder to define; the committee described it as 'desirable behaviour'.⁹⁹ Such behaviour, it said, was in keeping with Olympic ideals like fair play, competition, and individual self-improvement.

Across the three assessment areas, "Grow with the Olympics" preached neoliberal citizenship: individual utopianism, *homoeconomicus*, and the social responsibility to be independent of the state. Organisers monitored and recorded students' "citizenship", rewarding "desirable" behaviour which displayed the proper values. Meanwhile, officials fed students' attendance and physical performance data into a central computer system, ranking each student as either gold, silver, or bronze.¹⁰⁰ Here, then, was a hierarchical data-trove of welfare-dependent young people across the state, paid for by private corporations, which ranked each student by their ability to perform neoliberal behaviour.

Through youth programs like "Grow with the Olympics", the LAOOC and its corporate partners *taught* neoliberal values to the young people of Los Angeles. Because of the need to encase the smooth accumulation of Olympic profits beyond the reach of those neighbourhoods of colour nearby to the venue sites, the committee directed its corporate, neoliberal pedagogy predominantly at Black and Latino youth. These young people were thus targeted for beautification by Olympic organisers who set up programs which incentivised

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ LAOOC, 'Grow with the Olympics' pamphlet, Folder 14, Box 119, LAOOCR; LAOOC, *Official Report*, 875-6.

desired economic behaviour among young people of colour, promising everything from free baseball caps to college scholarships to those who most eagerly inculcated this “Coca-Cola curriculum”. For corporate sponsors, meanwhile, the Olympics had facilitated unprecedented access to a key customer demographic.

CONCLUSION

LA’84 made clear the opportunities for corporate investment and involvement in spaces and institutions of social reproduction. The Games’ legacy was the seepage of private business into the social infrastructure of the city, creating a privatised social realm which worked well for businesses, but not so well for people. In the post-Proposition 13 climate, hospitals looked to the private sector’s Olympic activity for inspiration, pursuing competitive marketing strategies to compete for customers, not patients. Since 1981, hospitals nationwide had reported dwindling streams of revenue and responded by switching their emphasis from costly in-patient procedures to cheaper out-patient services and private procedures which generated good returns. As one observer put it: ‘you’re out of the government-paying area and into one in which patients pay their own way’, a beneficial arrangement familiar to anyone who worked on LAOOC programs.¹⁰¹

In the early 1980s, hospitals began to hire marketing executives and the Games offered a natural advertising opportunity. The Centinela Hospital Medical Center — the ‘official hospital of LA’84’ — launched a campaign featuring US Olympic Basketball and LA Lakers star Magic Johnson, while the Sports Med Clinic at Orthopaedic Hospital also used the Games to advertise services. ‘You don’t sell hospitals like you sell cars, but many of the same

¹⁰¹ Bruce Keppel, ‘Hospital Ads Pitch Patience on Services’, *Los Angeles Times*, 5 June 1984, Part IV, 1.

rules apply’, noted one marketing specialist.¹⁰² To survive, hospitals turned to the Olympics to drive marketization, while further cementing the idea that an individual Angeleno had a market choice in all aspects of their life.

Elsewhere, other material legacies of LAOOC’s community involvement failed to deliver public benefits. The McDonald’s Swim Stadium, which had been newly constructed on the campus of the University of Southern California at great expense to the fast-food giant, was one example. USC, as part of its Olympic agreement, promised to reserve times for public access to the pool for the nearby residents of South Central. The pool, built to Olympic specifications, was nearly seven-feet deep at its shallowest end, double the maximum depth allowed by state regulations and therefore unusable by the public.¹⁰³ The elite institution of USC, then, had essentially been donated an Olympic-spec swimming pool by McDonald’s for its own use. For McDonald’s, sponsoring LA’84 allowed the company to use Sam the Olympic Eagle to promote its charitable activities like “Ronald McDonald House” refuges. A 2013 report on the charity found that it allowed the company an opportunity to promote its brand ‘unremittingly’, while passing off customer donations as tax-deductible corporate giving.¹⁰⁴

The “troubled teen” industry also learned lessons from LA’84’s youth programs, it seemed. In 1984, facilities for teen “corrections” were at crisis point, over crowded with young men of colour, sucking in millions of state dollars for rehabilitative programs which cost more than sending someone to Harvard, all the while providing conditions for inter-gang

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Clayton, ‘South Central LA Fears Olympics to Disrupt Lives’.

¹⁰⁴ Michele Simon, ‘Clowning Around with Charity: How McDonald’s Exploits Philanthropy and Targets Children, a Report by Eat Drinks Politics, Corporate Accountability International, and Small Planet Fund’, October 2013, accessed 5 May 2020 http://www.eatdrinkpolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/Clowning_Around_Charity_Report_Full.pdf.

rivalries to fester.¹⁰⁵ For the Games, the private sector had stepped in to police deviant teenagers of colour outside of the carceral system, now it sought to access the market *inside* the system. By 1986 the benefits of privatising a public sector in crisis seemed obvious. Owners of “troubled teen” businesses like youth camps and rehabilitation programs copied the LAOOC’s approach, lobbying Assemblyman Sterling, (who had been so helpful to the committee during its earliest years). With Sterling’s help, business leaders in the teen carceral industry fought to overturn state regulations which were bad for business, even as reports emerged of shocking conditions and even deaths in the private camps.¹⁰⁶

Making the Olympic City beautiful required ideological and physical “improvements”. In its more insidious guise, Olympic beautification was a pedagogic program designed to instil desirable economic behaviour in “deviant” populations, particularly young people of colour. As Manning Marable has argued, schools have been concomitant institutions in the developmental processes of capitalism, ‘oriented toward reinforcing the legitimacy of capitalism’ at each step.¹⁰⁷ As a key part of the social infrastructure, the LAOOC targeted schools as the facilitative mechanism with which to police young people’s behaviour and re-orient them towards Olympic activity. Its promise to “grow” young people through Olympic engagement was pure neoliberal-self-improvement rhetoric dressed up in vague invocations of “citizenship”.

Perhaps most sinister was the committee’s need to be able to quantify students’ desirable behaviour in order to identify those “deserving” of reward: the building of a

¹⁰⁵ BBC, *Real Lives: Gang City* (1984), accessed 2 May 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpMsslpHXcs>.

¹⁰⁶ John Hurst, ‘Delinquents Face Tough Rite of Passage’, *Los Angeles Times*, 3 March 1986, Part I, 3; Fremon, ‘Controversial Company That Profited From The “Troubled Teen” Industry Now Has Millions From The Feds To Open A Lock-Up For Immigrant Kids In Los Angeles’.

¹⁰⁷ Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, 120.

database of welfare-dependent children in which their neoliberal citizenship could be reduced to a set of metrics with which to judge their suitability and reward *homoeconomic* conduct. For these children, the program framed their access to social mobility and further education as a competitive marketplace. The LAOOC's youth programs had prepared the ground ideologically, creating the necessary social and cultural framework for neoliberal capital to open new markets in previously public spaces. The technical infrastructure which administered it presaged the commercial significance which private data has come to hold in the age of the internet.

Beautification also applied economically to public spaces which depended on state funding for their viability. To make something beautiful in a neoliberal sense was to privatise and marketize it. It was a process which naturalised and seemed to make desirable the infiltration of private commercial interests into the social infrastructure. From city squares to hospitals, the Games were a gateway for privatisation and marketization of that which had previously been public. It necessitated the removal of "deviant" populations, which in practice meant the aggressive "sweeping" of vulnerable and racialised people out of public space by the state. In this manner, the state had again acted as a facilitative, punitive mechanism in the interests of the Games and the committee's commercial sponsors. Olympic beautification, then, encapsulated both neoliberal culture's ideological and material dynamics. It was in a very tangible way a vehicle for private interests to further their own capital accumulation, but it was also an ideological transmitter, inculcating its culture in the minds of young Americans.

IV
WELCOME TO THE PLEASUREDOME: OLYMPIC
ENTREPRENEURS AND THE MYTH OF THE FREE MARKET

29 July 1984

Corner of Vermont and Leighton Avenues

2 p.m.

Andy Chakires surveyed his empty parking lot. “They screwed us”, he muttered. *Nuestra Señora, La Reina de Los Ángeles* towered over him, flanked by cherubs. Her eyes were closed, but her brown-skinned hands were outstretched, welcoming the athletes of the world – their many flags unfurled before her – to the city that bears her name. The forty-five-foot-tall mural of the Queen of the Angels, painted by local artists, had been specially commissioned by Olympic organisers to cover the barren bricks of a squat building that marked the boundaries of Chakires’ empty parking lot across Vermont Avenue from the Coliseum. He glanced over at the part-neoclassical, part-Art Deco bowl rising up from behind the brightly coloured temporary fencing surrounding Exposition Park, masking him from the gaze of those inside the grounds. Another bus hissed as it came to a stop beyond the fences, decanting its passengers — and their dollars — on the other side.

A few blocks away, Johnny and Benita Cobarruvas were having problems too. They had been there all day waving American flags at passing motorists, desperately trying to draw their attention to a cardboard sign advertising parking for just five dollars. So far, they had parked just four cars. A little way up Vermont, members of the American Muslim Mission sat patiently behind long tables stacked with Olympic souvenirs, waiting for passers-by who never seemed to pass by. Walter Griffin and his sister-in-law Miriam Bowman could be seen

stringing up fairy lights on their mobile barbecue truck The Pit on Wheels, while Wanda Clemmons, proprietor of Universe Fashions, was removing the window from her store, all the better to direct her patter to an empty sidewalk. Food went uncooked, souvenirs went unsold, cars went un-parked. The Olympics had promised to be a goose that would lay them all a golden egg. For the vendors of Vermont Avenue, however, eggs were off the menu.¹

In March 1983, the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* ran a headline asking ‘whose Games are these anyway?’² It was a pertinent question, one which reflected a widespread suspicion that, rather than being staged for the benefit of Angelenos, the Olympics were someone else’s property. Because the Games were supposedly LA’s own, Angelenos to varying degrees believed they should benefit and be enriched by the event. That was, after all, what LA’s Olympic boosters had preached when they first encountered an apathetic, sometimes negative response from the city’s residents. They preached that the Games would bring a bonanza of capitalism to the city for the benefit of all, especially to small, local businesses. Wealth would cascade down from Olympic sponsors to local businesses to local people in even the most impoverished districts of LA. Legions of tourists were on their way, grasping handfuls of US dollars, ready to spend. At least, that was the idea.³

For business owners and would-be entrepreneurs of colour in South Central, LA’84 business opportunities promised something simultaneously new and familiar. Familiar, in that by reconnecting the local economy to the larger corporations of the private sector, Olympic

¹ Vignette compiled from: Robert Welkos, ‘No Avenue of Gold: Vendors on Vermont Blame RTF, Olympic Panel for Keeping Buyers From Them and Their Wares’, *Los Angeles Times*, 31 July 1984, 3.

² Andrew Jaffe, ‘Whose Games are These Anyway?’, *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 30 March 1983, A1.

³ Ibid.

contracts offered the chance to rekindle an era of late 1960s Black business growth, which had sputtered out by the 1980s after a decade of challenges.⁴ In this way, Olympic opportunities evoked recent historical memories of Black empowerment and self-reliance delivered in an era of successful “Black capitalism”.⁵ At the same time, the Olympics teased at something new altogether, something global in nature and scale. The LAOOC’s pledges to observe affirmative action policies when issuing contracts seemed to offer a new way for Black-owned businesses to achieve parity with what they saw as the “mainstream” sector, a level playing field on which to compete, but also a way to surpass the local and national market, plugging straight into the new global economy.

As the *Herald Examiner* suspected, and as the vendors on Vermont Avenue later discovered, Olympic business transpired differently to the effusive pre-Games predictions. Many shopkeepers, manufacturers, and street vendors were left disappointed by their Olympic experience, some were left in dire financial straits. There was a straightforward answer to the *Herald Examiner’s* question “whose Games are these anyway?”. These Olympics did not in fact belong to everybody. As a private entity barred by law from using tax dollars, LA’84 belonged to the LAOOC, and the LAOOC alone. In this respect, the Games were both property and product, a right to exclude and a lucrative commodity. The unique private funding model for LA’84 and Ueberroth’s fanatical protection of the Games’ exclusivity dictated terms of Olympic business which benefitted a select few, while punishing many others.

LA’84 created a market. For some, the Olympic marketplace was a highly competitive

⁴ Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen’s Crusade Against the New Deal* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009).

⁵ On Black Capitalism and Black Business see: Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*.

and unforgiving free market, operating on the natural logics of supply-and-demand and boom-and-bust, which could rain down riches or devastate on a whim. For others, it was a highly regulated marketplace designed to muscle out and destroy all competition while privileging a few established, already wealthy companies. When it came to “doing capitalism” under Olympic conditions, the LAOOC pursued a neoliberal model which encased Olympic opportunities from encroachment by rivals, while weaponizing state institutions like the legislature and the courts to create optimum conditions for Olympic business. At the other end of the scale, would-be entrepreneurs among LA’s communities of colour found a litany of broken promises when the predicted Olympic bonanza failed to materialise. They too appealed to the state, in this instance to intervene in the market in the interests of what they saw as economic justice, pursuing claims against the LAOOC in court. At the heart of Olympic business in early 1980s LA, then, lay one of the foundational questions of neoliberal economics: the proper role of the interventionist state. The reality of the “free market”, far from the colourblind gateway to post-racial utopia, was in fact an un-level playing field, refereed by the logic of racial capitalism.

The LAOOC found the state to be, mostly, a useful ally and market facilitator. When, on occasion, it failed them, the committee turned to other methods to create optimum business conditions in the city. At times, the LAOOC used extra-judicial intimidation and violence to scare off would-be rivals. It also altered the city’s spatial and temporal norms of commerce by changing the physical commercial geography of the streets to its benefit through road closures and transport systems, as well as controlling the hours in which non-Olympic business could be conducted. Olympic business was global in scale, involving some of the world’s biggest corporations but, as the experience of business-minded Angelenos — especially those of colour — reveals, it was also an acutely local affair, facilitated by the state and by changes to

the very rhythms of commercial life in Los Angeles.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

The Olympic market promised to be good for Black-owned businesses. The LAOOC went to great lengths to emphasise the affirmative-action plan underpinning its approach to dishing out Olympic contracts to local firms.⁶ However, Black entrepreneurs and business owners lost out the most when it came to profiting from the Games. By putting the short-term excitement amongst Black businesses about the Olympics into the longer context of Black commerce in LA, it is clear that the Games promised more than just a fast buck. The Games offered to rekindle the sense of empowerment and self-reliant dignity which came with business ownership, harking back to the achievements of the civil rights struggles of the 1960s.⁷ The promise of an Olympic boost to Black business tapped into something historical and emotional. As such, engagement with the LAOOC's neoliberal model seemed to hold progressive egalitarian potential.

In June 1983, the Shindana Toy Company of South Central Avenue went out of business. Its passing marked the end of an era in which, since the Rebellion of 1965, local Black-owned businesses in South Central had blossomed. These businesses were the products of Operation Bootstrap, a community-organised training and education scheme geared towards jobs promotion, inward investment, and improved social conditions. Federal commitments to the area in the wake of the Watts uprising proved to be short-lived, but the

⁶ Letter to Readers from Peter Ueberroth, *Black Enterprise*, October 1983, 143; and July 1984, 61.

⁷ Nadra Little, 'Operation Bootstrap: Empowering the African American Community through Entrepreneurship', *KCET*, 19 November 2019, accessed 10 March 2022, <https://www.kcet.org/shows/lost-la/operation-bootstrap-empowering-the-african-american-community-through-entrepreneurship>.

spirit of Bootstrap endured.⁸ When federal austerity threatened the program, community organisers switched to entrepreneurial collaboration with the private sector to ensure its future. Activists' change of approach, as Mike Davis and Jon Wiener argued, had ramifications for their politics: 'the private sector suddenly became a possible saviour, and many activists trimmed their once-radical sails to become acceptable supplicants to local corporations'.⁹ To nurture Black capitalism in the inner city, then, required redefining Blackness not as radicalism but as entrepreneurialism.

Whatever the political implications of switching focus to the private sector, money flowed into the neighbourhood. Shell Oil for example, set up a training program for gas station attendants, while toy giant Mattel provided seed capital for Shindana.¹⁰ The company flourished, a community success story for over a decade. There was, then, historical precedent for a good relationship between small, Black-owned businesses and the larger private sector. This relationship had allowed South Central business owners to weather federal retrenchment's assault on their neighbourhoods. Moreover, the relationship enabled neighbourhood projects at the most local of levels and when short-term, tangible results emerged, the strategy seemed all the more empowering.

By the early 1980s, with the ascendancy of globalised capitalism, the relationship between local businesses and global corporations had changed. Shindana was not impervious to this external pressure. At its closing down event, the company's president Herman Thompson remarked to the *LA Times*: 'This is a sad occasion but we just couldn't obtain enough financing. That's the way it is with minority businesses now. It's no longer

⁸ Davis and Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire*, 277.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jack Jones, 'Negro Training Center Struggling to Survive', *Los Angeles Times*, 30 August 1970, 31.

fashionable for corporations to invest in them'.¹¹ The *Times* concluded that Shindana had been the latest victim of increased competition with bigger firms.¹² There was, though, more than fashion and competition involved. What happened to South Central businesses in the early 1980s was indicative of what Melinda Cooper has argued was the triumph of one form of capitalism over another: the publicly-traded, shareholder-owned corporation versus the private, unincorporated, family-based business.¹³ For Black business owners in South Central, the impending Olympic Games promised to repair this relationship, rekindling the local economy by reconnecting its manufacturing businesses to the wider world of capital. The restoration of this relationship went beyond business, tapping into a long history of Black capitalism which associated enterprise and individual self-help with alleviation from racism.¹⁴

However, unlike the state-backed approach to nurturing business which had shaped Lyndon Johnson's "great society" after 1965, the LA business culture was deeply conservative. As Kim Phillips-Fein has shown, the 1970s was a time of evolution for the Reagan-voting conservative businessman for whom the corporate paternalism of Operation Bootstrap amounted to nothing more than loathed liberal New-Dealism in disguise.¹⁵ Two months after the closure of Shindana, Ronald Reagan spoke at the Biltmore Hotel in downtown LA at a luncheon for entrepreneurs and professionals from the city's Latino business community. Just as cuts to welfare policies had stoked resentment between the city's Latino and Black communities in the late 1960s and 1970s, so too did Reagan now seek to court the Latino vote in a cynical ploy to counteract the expected overwhelming opposition by

¹¹ Steve Harvey, 'Shintana [sic] Toy Co.: Blues for the Brown-Eyed Dolls', *Los Angeles Times*, 26 August 1983, Part II, 1.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Melinda Cooper, 'Family Capitalism and the Small Business Insurrection', *Dissent* (Winter 2022).

¹⁴ Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, 129.

¹⁵ Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*.

Black voters at the 1984 election. Reagan's anti-welfare rhetoric attacked the idea of federal 'handouts', calling for 'opportunity not welfare', a line which garnered much applause from the Latino audience, even as protestors gathered outside the hotel in Pershing Square to protest the president's financial support of the junta government of El Salvador.¹⁶

Olympic business opportunities, then, generated widespread business interest. For some firms, a Games contract could potentially connect their small business to major corporations who, as part of their commercial agreement with the LAOOC, would stimulate the local economy by funnelling contracts to them for merchandise like coasters, mugs, and t-shirts with Sam the Olympic Eagle printed on them. For the Black business community in South Central, where collaboration with the private sector had seemed to deliver degrees of empowerment and opportunity, a lot was at stake. At the same time, for the neoliberally minded or conservative businessperson, the Games represented the distillation of entrepreneurial spirit, the ultimate vehicle to get ahead on one's own, to build wealth from scratch, to compete in the "free market" of Olympic business and ultimately "make it" through self-reliant hard work.

To ensure the Games were a success, the LAOOC needed the support of the local business community. The committee needed them to not only "play ball" during the Games, when the influx of visitors and traffic would likely cause major disruption to normal commerce, but also to "buy in" to the Games emotionally and financially. To make it happen, the LAOOC cultivated strong relationships with chambers of commerce and businesses by emphasising and exaggerating the vast riches which the Games were about to disperse to them. A 1983 report commissioned by the LAOOC concluded that as much as \$3 billion

¹⁶ George Skelton, 'Latinos Applaud Reagan Praise of Hard Work', *Los Angeles Times*, 26 August 1983, 1.

would be spent locally as a direct result of the Olympics.¹⁷ ‘Just imagine you are having a Super Bowl not once, but twice, maybe two-and-a-half times a day for fifteen straight days, and you have an idea of what kind of demand there will be’, the LAOOC Vice President of corporate relations told the *Herald Examiner*.¹⁸ In no uncertain terms, the committee was adamant that the Games would trigger a local economic boom.

Some members of the press went even further in predicting an Olympic business bonanza. One observer wrote at length in the *LA Times* about how the LAOOC’s neoliberal Olympics, with the private sector front-and-centre, would benefit all:

When the Coliseum’s Olympic flame is extinguished on August 12th, I think each of us will have the satisfying realisation that community spirit and the expertise of private enterprise have joined forces in rolling out the welcome mat without imposing any immediate or future burden on tax payers [...] we have the added bonus of \$3 billion to \$4 billion into the local economy. The XXIII Olympiad will provide a benchmark for future Olympic organisers, particularly for those who wonder how “Capitalist Games” can be successful.¹⁹

Here, again, was the invocation of a link between community and private-enterprise capitalism. With startling predictions of a local Olympic windfall in the billions of dollars, the business community seemed to be appropriating the initially derogatory label “Capitalist

¹⁷ LAOOC, Olympic Newsletter March 1983, Folder 5, Box 1629, MTBAP.

¹⁸ Andrew Jaffe, ‘Those Five Little Rings Mean Big Profits For LA Businesses’, *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 4 February 1983, cutting in Folder 14, Box 27, FDOC.

¹⁹ ‘Will LA or Only a Handful of Firms be a Winner at the Olympics?’, *Los Angeles Times*, 22 July 1984, Part V, 3.

Olympics” and wearing it with pride.

Not only would big business benefit from the Games, organisers seemed determined that they would channel wealth through small minority businesses and into the communities around them.²⁰ The Black press, whose interests have always been tied to the success of a Black business elite, was similarly optimistic.²¹ *Black Enterprise* — a monthly magazine covering Black business which appealed to would-be Black entrepreneurs — parroted that billions of dollars were up for grabs and that corporate sponsors like American Express and McDonald’s would offer a ‘cornucopia of lucrative subcontracts, many of which can be obtained by successful black entrepreneurs’.²² Earl Walker, president of the Black Business Association of Los Angeles, agreed, issuing a call to arms among Black businesses: ‘what we can do with this unique opportunity is largely going to depend on us’.²³ Civil rights icon, ex-Olympian, and LAOOC community relations officer John Carlos concluded: ‘The possibilities are real. People just have to get together and work out a game plan’.²⁴ Wherever one looked, then, the message was one of endless possibilities for the Black business community.

The LAOOC licensee program had the blessing and support of the state via the Mayor’s Office for Small Business Assistance (SBA), which acted as a conduit to facilitate business relationships between small minority businesses and the LAOOC. The committee needed businesses that were actually viable to come forward and turned to the SBA to do the leg work. Tom Bradley, who had campaigned so determinedly for the Games to come back to

²⁰ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 236.

²¹ Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, 130.

²² Janet Clayton, ‘Going for the Gold’, *Black Enterprise*, April 1983, 65-8.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

the city, was on a mission to push LA's status as global city state. In the manner of an international statesman, the mayor had taken to embarking on trade missions on behalf of the city's business community, particularly to Japan, whose economy was becoming ever more closely entwined with that of LA. Bradley wanted the city's minority businesses at the heart of LA's new global economy.²⁵

Despite federal austerity, SBA Director Wilfred Marshall successfully secured half-a-million dollars in federal funding to support the SBA in connecting minority businesses to the LAOOC and its sponsors. The committee was only too happy to have the SBA filter the list of potential minority licensees and in return adopted City Hall Directive 1B, stipulating that a certain percentage of all LAOOC contracts would be reserved for minority firms.²⁶ A recommendation from the SBA became an essential licensee selection criterion for the committee.²⁷ With the Mayor firmly behind them, would-be minority licensees were given supreme confidence to invest in the LA'84 entrepreneurial party, whether through official affiliation with the LAOOC and its sponsors, or indirectly as a result of the billions of dollars that everyone predicted would be spent on souvenirs, travel, accommodation, food, drink, and anything else one cared to imagine. The latter option was open to anybody, while the process to become an official licensee was highly competitive.

Among the chorus of pro-Olympic articles, however, lurked one or two dissenting voices. Shopkeeper Morrie Notrica was suspicious, noting that the street closures that had occurred during a 1981 Rolling Stones concert at the Coliseum cost her twenty thousand

²⁵ Interview of Wilfred Marshall, Director of Business and Economic Development for Mayor Tom Bradley's Office of Small Business Assistance, 10 July 2013, COHR.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 236.

dollars in lost revenue. ‘What do you think two weeks will do?’ she wondered.²⁸ Richard Close, who had led the No Olympic Tax campaign, warned on the pages of the *LA Times* that traffic congestion would impede deliveries, that the three-day working weeks which the LAOOC planned to ask firms to voluntarily impose during the Games would decrease revenues and production, and that businesses without the existing capital to stockpile goods would need to make contingency plans to weather the storm.²⁹ Sociologist Harry Edwards, the architect of the Olympic Project for Human Rights in the 1960s, was damning in his criticism of what the Olympics were bringing to the city: ‘We’re in a situation again where the only role for blacks is that of gladiators on the field serving as the central attraction. When it comes down to sharing of wealth, benefits, and concessions [...] blacks are left out’.³⁰ Many of these critiques turned out to be accurate, but as the LAOOC released details of its licensing program, LA’s Black entrepreneurs readied themselves to get involved.

What all the hype about Olympic business actually translated into was relatively limited, available only to established companies which could meet upfront costs. Regardless, competition to become an official licensee of the LAOOC and its sponsors was fierce. Licensees were the third tier in a hierarchical funding scheme that was essential to the Games, made up of sponsors, suppliers, and licensees.³¹ At the top tier were the sponsors, who paid a minimum of \$4 million in cash, goods, or services. These were large multi-national corporations responsible for the majority of LAOOC funds. The second tier was made up of sixty-four suppliers — companies like Adidas and Levi Strauss — which provided smaller sums of cash in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, goods, and services. Levis, for example,

²⁸ Clayton, ‘South Central LA Fears Olympics to Disrupt Lives’.

²⁹ ‘Will LA or Only a Handful of Firms be a Winner at the Olympics?’.

³⁰ Scott Ostler, ‘There’s Some Real Trouble Ahead’, *Los Angeles Times*, 17 September 1981, Part III, 3.

³¹ Wenn and Barney, *The Gold in the Rings*, Chapter Five.

supplied uniforms to the US athletes. Unlike sponsors, suppliers were granted the right to use only the Star in Motion logo for marketing purposes in return for their contributions. Official licensees constituted the final tier, the level at which the committee believed it would leave a lasting impact on the city. The LAOOC authorised licensees to manufacture and sell souvenir products featuring all the LA'84 symbols in return for a ten percent royalty, a portion of which was payable upfront to the LAOOC before a single product had been sold.³² The scheme guaranteed a base level of revenue for the LAOOC and secured a share of any future profits but assumed none of the risk.

The LAOOC did not, then, simply hand out licenses as a benevolent act to charitably lift-up struggling local economies or leave a legacy of newly established businesses. To stand a chance of winning an official licensee designation a business needed to have seed capital to handover to the LAOOC at the start of their relationship as a down-payment on future royalties. The committee underlined that this upfront cost had been minimised as much as possible for minority firms.³³ While some established businesses could meet this cost, they also had to demonstrate they had the infrastructure and resources to make good on their promises. Nevertheless, with the affirmative action rule in place, the LAOOC granted sixty-five licenses, eight of which were channelled through Adidas to sub-contract as they saw fit. Of the remaining licenses, the committee granted forty-nine to Californian companies, of which forty-three were LA based. Organisers designated twenty-six of these LA companies as 'minority businesses' under 'Black, Hispanic, Asian American, and Native American' owners.³⁴ Rather than plant the seeds of a new minority business community and thriving new

³² Ibid.

³³ Jaffe, 'Those Five Little Rings Mean Big Profits for LA Businesses'.

³⁴ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 236.

marketplace in South Central, Olympic licensee contracts were subsumed by already established companies which could meet upfront costs. Nevertheless, some Black-owned firms seemed to have secured their own piece of the Olympic pie.

The lucky twenty-six were ready to use their Olympic licenses to boost employment in the area. One such licensee was Melvyn Richardson, owner of Action Headwear. The committee, through Adidas, awarded Richardson a \$1 million contract to manufacture caps and visors bearing official Olympic symbols. Despite being required to pay a further royalty of six percent to Adidas, 'his business will quadruple in the next two years and his staff will double', celebrated the *Herald Examiner*.³⁵ Panama Glove Co. planned to expand their staff of ten employees to sixty in order to meet the terms of their newly awarded licence to make Olympic tote bags.³⁶ Businessman Tyrone Hicks won a contract to produce LA'84 seat cushions, while ex-professional boxer Ken Norton acquired exclusive rights to sell the official Olympic key ring. Cal Burton, a Hollywood producer, secured a contract to produce the official Olympic calendar.³⁷ 'In the Olympic game of entrepreneurship, Panama Glove Co. and its employees have come out winners', concluded the *LA Times*.³⁸ Olympic licensee contracts promised to stimulate employment in the manufacturing areas of the city, but also show corporations what small firms could achieve if given the chance.

Licensees shared the opinion that Olympic contracts were just the beginning and would ultimately lead to future business because becoming "official" represented acceptance into the mainstream economy. Richardson reported he had 'prospects' of contracts from

³⁵ Jaffe, 'Those Five Little Rings Mean Big Profits for LA Businesses'; Clayton 'Going for the Gold'.

³⁶ Nancy Rivera, 'Minority Firms in Running for Olympic Gold', *Los Angeles Times*, 20 November 1983, Part VI, 1.

³⁷ 'Norton, Others Licensed to Sell Games' Tourist Items. Hope to Make Big Profits', *Jet*, 16 July 1984, 87.

³⁸ Rivera, 'Minority Firms in Running for Olympic Gold'.

government and major corporations.³⁹ Hicks, who had invested \$17,000 dollars in the seat cushion contract by April 1983, said that, while he had yet to make a dime back, he had been in ‘talks’ with US football and the 1984 New Orleans World’s Fair. Similarly, Norton was unconcerned about immediately profiting from his business relationship with the LAOOC, citing ‘political networking’ opportunities as significant. The possibility — but not guarantee — of future business symbolised Black business’ assent to the ‘mainstream’, according to Hicks.⁴⁰ Licensees were confident that LA’84 could re-establish the link between large private corporations and local companies, reinvigorating the local business climate that had long been in decline, culminating most poignantly in the shutdown of Shindana just as the LAOOC began granting licenses in 1983.

Many of the business opportunities brought by LA’84 were in fact unaffiliated ones, which required faith and upfront investments. Minority businesses or individuals that were unsuccessful or unable to achieve official status still had the opportunity to indirectly benefit from the Games by exploiting the volume of tourist trade expected on the streets. Without the supposed guarantees that accompanied official licensee status, entrepreneurial individuals across the city’s communities of colour gathered all their eggs and placed them in the Olympic basket. Chuck Johnson invested \$15,000 renting out Skip’s Market on Vermont Avenue and stocking it with Olympic paraphernalia and twenty video games. Johnson was working on the expectation that he could reach the \$2,500 per day intake needed to make a profit.⁴¹ James T. Jones, proprietor of a local restaurant, anticipated a fifteen-to-twenty-percent increase in trade and planned to open an extra temporary facility and hire more

³⁹ B. J. Palermo, ‘Minority Firms Look For Share of Olympics-Related Business’, *Los Angeles Daily News*, 13 January 1984.

⁴⁰ Clayton, ‘Going for the Gold’.

⁴¹ Welkos, ‘No Avenue of Gold’.

workers in order to accommodate the international crowd of visitors, predicted to be as many as a quarter of a million per day.⁴² Fellow merchants invested the thousands of dollars needed to secure permits, locations, and upgrade stock based on assurances from the city and LAOOC they had read in the press.⁴³ Many small companies with no official contractual relationship to the Games had heavily invested ahead of summer 1984 and faced ruin if those investments did not generate returns. Nevertheless, with the stories of Olympic riches permeating the press, confidence was high. Indeed, it almost seemed a risk *not* to prepare one's business for the Games.

Even for those aspiring entrepreneurs without a shop or stall, opportunities still existed. Residents near to the Coliseum were used to large crowds during football season, reported *Black Enterprise*. 'Some have taken to flagging down fans in their cars and offering their driveway for parking for between \$5 and \$10 a space [...] their value would increase during the Olympics'.⁴⁴ Bennett & Bennett Housing '84 Inc., a pop-up business geared specifically towards Olympic visitor accommodation, approached South Central homeowners to rent out their houses and spare rooms during the Games. Unlike the many similar opportunistic accommodation start-ups in more affluent areas of the city, Bennett & Bennett was minority-owned and offered returns of seventy-five percent to homeowners. Ten percent of their profits would be given to churches, non-profit agencies, and other local civic organisations, they promised. The company secretary Ruth Hayles told *Jet* magazine: 'Billions of dollars are being distributed during the Olympics and we wanted to make sure that minorities living close to the site of the most events get a portion of the benefits'.⁴⁵

⁴² Clayton, 'Going for the Gold'.

⁴³ Welkos, 'No Avenue of Gold'.

⁴⁴ Clayton, 'Going for the Gold'.

⁴⁵ 'Blacks Part of Group to House Olympic Guests,' *Jet*, 16 July 1984, 88.

Despite the community-mindedness of some of these programs, the ability to profit still relied on having a sellable asset, like a drive, beforehand, not to mention somewhere else to live for the duration of the Games.

Rather than cautioning unaffiliated companies against becoming too involved with the Games, the LAOOC actively encouraged the pursuit of Olympic-adjacent business opportunities. LAOOC Corporate relations vice president Daniel Greenwood told the readers of *Black Enterprise*: ‘I’d be contacting sponsors right now. That kind of thing requires no relationship to us’.⁴⁶ Ueberroth even wrote twice to the magazine’s readers to illustrate the Games were a trusted space for the Black community. His letters, published in full, described how the Olympic spirit would leave a lasting legacy in communities and explained all the affirmative action work the LAOOC had undertaken, emphasising that Black people were employed throughout the organisation.⁴⁷ ‘Excitement is already beginning to build in South Central where most of the Games will be staged. An estimated one third of the residents live in poverty and hopes are high that the Games will bring some economic relief, even if temporary’, *Black Enterprise* concluded in April 1983.⁴⁸

There was, then, mass excitement and mass expectation swirling around the LAOOC’s neoliberal approach to the licensee program. The committee’s talk of trickle-down wealth and job creation promised to enrich and empower the neighbourhoods of South Central. The press’ assurances that the Games were a “sure thing” imbued the entrepreneurially minded with the confidence to invest in good faith. For established business owners struggling through another recession, their class interests lay with the success of the LAOOC’s

⁴⁶ Clayton, ‘Going for the Gold’.

⁴⁷ Letter to Readers from Peter Ueberroth.

⁴⁸ Clayton, ‘Going for the Gold’.

neoliberal model. There seemed to be untold gold at the end of the rainbow for anyone who acted now. It was a time, it seemed, for those hustlers bold enough to dream and single-minded enough to win. By embracing the individual utopianism of the LAOOC's trickle-down, neoliberal model, not only could South Central be lifted out of poverty and joblessness, it could achieve economic parity with the rest of LA. Moreover, for those individuals who bought into the model, the sky appeared to be the limit.

BROKEN PROMISES

The LAOOC's licensee program failed to deliver on its lofty expectations. It was, in many ways, corrupted from the start, the victim of the Games' unique private funding model which necessitated a situation in which LA '84 was the property — the right to exclude — of a private group operating as a business. To attract the many millions of dollars of sponsorship needed to fund the Games, the LAOOC had to offer an opportunity to large multi-national corporations that was worth their investment. Ueberroth therefore designed a business environment in which sponsors, suppliers, and licensees were first and foremost purchasing exclusivity and access (the right to not be excluded). LAOOC marketers sold Olympic affiliation under the notion of "official-ness". Official-ness meant exclusivity, the rare privilege to be formally linked to LA '84, and it governed all the LAOOC's business relations.

Ueberroth's plan was to heavily restrict the right to official status, creating an exclusive buzz around LA '84 affiliation. It was, essentially, supply-side economics, manipulating the supply of official LAOOC contracts to drive up the price of buying into the Games. The need to protect official-ness and appease corporate sponsors, however, meant that smaller producers and local companies were aggressively denied the right to partake in Olympic profits. The promise of racial uplift which "minority" business owners identified in

their Olympic contracts failed to materialise as a result. In the increasingly bitter Olympic business climate which ensued, Olympic licensees and other unofficial, Olympic-adjacent entrepreneurs looked to the court system as a means of delivering state-regulated economic “justice”. The LAOOC, however, also turned to the courts to again subvert state institutions to its needs.

Ueberroth’s approach contrasted sharply with the corporate policies of earlier Olympics, necessarily so; state support to varying degrees and the absence of a “do-or-die” profit motive had allowed previous organisers to set low targets for sponsorship income. Montreal’s financial disaster in particular was fresh in everyone’s memories.⁴⁹ At both Montreal and Munich, the total number of sponsors, suppliers, and licensees combined had exceeded 150. The Lake Placid Winter Games had more than 300.⁵⁰ LA’84 had less than one hundred. The Olympics in Montreal and Moscow had raised only \$17 million dollars each in total from their sponsorship, supplier, and licensee programs. For LA’84, Coca-Cola alone paid \$15 million dollars to be a sponsor and was just one corporation out of twenty-nine contributing vast sums for the exclusive right to be directly associated with the Games.⁵¹ By not saturating the market with hundreds of sponsors, as had been the case at earlier Games, Ueberroth’s plan successfully achieved vastly more funding from corporations which competed for the right to official status as either sponsors or suppliers. These companies then would effectively outsource contracts to specific local licensees identified by the committee for everything from key rings to t-shirts.

In spite of the governing principle of exclusivity, the requirement for the LAOOC to

⁴⁹ Wenn and Barney, *The Gold in the Rings*, 98; Barney, Wenn, and Martyn, *Selling the Five Rings*, 193.

⁵⁰ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 29.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 232-33.

generate as much revenue as possible from selling official affiliation with the Games led to a vast array of Olympic merchandise. In April 1984, LA resident Ruth Susan contributed a poem entitled “The Importance of Being Official” to a *Los Angeles Times* piece poking fun at the LAOOC’s unelected status as gatekeepers of official-ness:

Official Olympic Wan-Ton Soup

Official Olympic nincompoop

LA the Olympic City

Chosen by an elite committee

Tell me how is it so beneficial

When one becomes “The Official?”⁵²

On KNX radio, meanwhile, DJ Morey Safer also teased the LAOOC: ‘Can you imagine it? An official Olympic tire? There may or may not be an official Olympic contraceptive, but there should be just to make things thoroughly absurd’. ‘Sounds good to me!’, wrote an LAOOC staffer on the show transcript.⁵³ The fact that the committee monitored and recorded these sorts of comments suggests it was concerned about a public backlash to the volume of official merchandise available, despite the staffer’s comedic retort. Regardless, the production of official Olympic this-and-that should surely have been great news for the licensees, who had won the right to produce it all.

Events quickly began to prove otherwise. The shortcomings of the SBA when it came to LAOOC contracts presaged a wider subversion of affirmative action policies. The SBA failed to anticipate the realities of taking a small, local businesses and connecting it to global

⁵² Ruth Susan, ‘The Importance of Being Official’ in Jack Smith Column, *Los Angeles Times*, 15 April 1984, Part IV, 1.

⁵³ Transcription, 26 January 1980, Folder 5, Box 107, LAOOCR.

markets. The SBA program was subsumed by middlemen who prevented small businesses accessing seed capital to secure their investments in Olympic manufacturing. The SBA was, in reality, just another neoliberal public-private partnership. The SBA mishandled its \$500,000 of federal money, diverting most of it away from minority businesses and into the pockets of just one consultant, rather than using it as seed capital to kick-start a licensing relationship between small firms and the LAOOC. The SBA awarded \$324,000 of the federal pot to Slaughter & Associates, a management consultancy in Woodland Hills, San Fernando Valley. Its owner Leonard Slaughter, also acting on entrepreneurial gumption, had made an unsolicited approach to the SBA to act as a consultant to Olympic licensees.⁵⁴

The remaining federal dollars went to the SBA to pay for staffing costs. ‘These grants allow us the latitude and flexibility to create opportunities for a firm to develop. We don’t know all the answers. We’re looking for guys like Slaughter to bring something to us’, commented an SBA official. The arrangement represented, said the SBA, a three-pronged program, a ‘co-operative effort between the federal government, local government, and the private sector’ that aimed to ‘create a business climate that’s going to last after the Olympics’.⁵⁵ As ever, this public-private partnership took from the public and gave to the private, in this instance entirely missing the opportunity to stimulate small business growth in the city’s communities of colour in favour of bolstering the financial health of one management consultant.

The LAOOC’s minority licensees might have thought that, through affirmative action policies, their Olympic contracts now placed them on a level playing field under “free market” conditions. Those conditions were unevenly “free” and never level. In the interests of

⁵⁴ Palermo, ‘Minority Firms Look For Share of Olympics-Related Business’.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

protecting the official exclusivity of those largest sponsors who had contributed the most to LAOOC coffers, organisers built a market that at times was heavily regulated, while at other times deliberately un-regulated. An individual business' upfront contribution to the Games — their performative and monetary investment — determined the extent to which favourable regulation and deregulation applied to their economic activity in the Olympic marketplace. For major sponsor corporations like Adidas or McDonald's, selective regulation where it existed worked in their favour, while purposeful non-regulation of other areas of the market also protected their rights to profit at the expense of those businesses lower down the pecking order. Meanwhile, those entrepreneurs which held no official status whatsoever — those seeking to jump on the Olympic bandwagon with a burger stand or an unofficial t-shirt stall — found themselves actively punished by attempting to engage in the market.

The uneven nature of this market undid the LAOOC's affirmative action policies, which had historically benefitted the Black capitalist class.⁵⁶ The LAOOC found itself unable to extend affirmative action beyond the initial awarding of the license. It could not induce or enforce a relationship between sponsors and licensees and was reluctant to insist that its sponsors adopt affirmative action stipulations, wishing to avoid imposing any 'impractical' requirements in this regard that might disrupt profitability.⁵⁷ The regulations that the LAOOC did put in place between sponsors and licensees had no teeth. Sponsors were obliged to use official licensees for the manufacture and distribution of merchandise — McDonald's/Olympic baseball caps, for example — wherever possible.

However, sponsors were free to source from elsewhere, even outside of the US, if the same products could be found more cheaply at a price differential of ten percent or more.

⁵⁶ Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, 121.

⁵⁷ Clayton, 'Going for the Gold'.

‘Quite simply’, said the LAOOC’s Daniel Greenwood, ‘the sponsors have found better prices than the licensees’. Moreover, corporate sponsors opted to stick with their own established suppliers and logistic lines, with which they could be assured of delivery on time. Out of the twenty-nine sponsors, just one — Trans America — opted to use licensees despite increased costs. The committee’s affirmative action policies, which Peter Ueberroth had boasted about so proudly to the readers of *Black Enterprise*, were aspirations at best, which could never stand up under free market conditions of globalised manufacturing. Corporate sponsors, then, enjoyed “free market” conditions when it came to selecting and organising their production lines, unencumbered by regulations which, in any event, were unenforceable. For licensees, exposure to global “free market” conditions was disastrous, a forum run on economies of scale in which they could not hope to compete.

Accordingly, those licensees for whom the free market had proven punitive appealed to the state for intervention to protect their financial interests. The court system was the state institution which, they hoped, could impose some authority over the market in the interests of economic justice. For licensee Melvyn Richardson, owner of Action Headwear, his business relationship with Olympic sponsors Adidas and McDonald’s had been entirely negative. Before the Games had even begun, Richardson sought \$30 million in punitive damages and \$450,000 in compensatory damages claiming he had been given ‘the fast shuffle’ by the LAOOC and McDonald’s.⁵⁸ He alleged that McDonald’s never intended for his firm to manufacture baseball caps, which they had instead farmed out to a cheaper labour market in Taiwan. Adidas, who had sub-contracted Action Headwear directly, also used foreign manufacturing labour in Korea instead of Richardson’s workforce.⁵⁹ Confusingly, one

⁵⁸ Peter McAlevey, ‘The War of the Trinkets’, *Newsweek*, 11 June 1984, 65.

⁵⁹ <https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/274883159736?hash=item40005026b8:g:jBAAAOSwX5RhAWgh>, accessed 13

Olympic cap design did feature “Action Headwear, California” on its label, but also stated clearly: “Made in Taiwan”.⁶⁰ Sponsor Anheuser-Busch, under its “Natural Light” beer brand, kept its LA ’84 cap manufacturing in the US, but did not go through Action Headwear.⁶¹ With a dearth of lucrative contracts, any caps manufactured by the company would have to sell on the retail market or not at all. For Action Headwear, the cap debacle had been a severe introductory lesson on the nature of globalised capital and manufacturing.

The retail market, however, was where the LAOOC’s selectively “free” market suddenly became heavily regulated, secured for large companies which had paid for the right to exclusivity. An LAOOC license to manufacture, it turned out, did not equate to a license to sell. Again, minority business owners with burned fingers turned to the state, in the form of the courts, for alleviation. In July 1984, a consortium of six other minority licensees, including Ken Norton (key rings) and Panama Glove Co. (tote bags), took the LAOOC to court citing fraud, unfair business practices, and breach of contract. The judge rejected the consortium’s application for a court order granting them permission to sell their merchandise at all twenty-three Olympic venues. Their lawyer argued that, had the companies known they were barred from selling at the sites themselves, they would not have spent thousands of dollars to expand inventories and workforces, adding that the LAOOC had reportedly given ‘assurances’ in this regard. The LAOOC legal team countered that the lack of a contractual right to sell inside Olympic venues had always been clear in black and white.⁶² The spurned licensees were left with the option to spend a further \$7,500 each on purchasing an official concession booth near the Coliseum from the LAOOC.

January 2022.

⁶⁰ <https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/174718658292>, accessed 13 January 2022.

⁶¹ <https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/313734628711>, accessed 13 January 2022.

⁶² Louis Sahagún, ‘Olympic Panel Sued by Minority Firms’, *Los Angeles Times*, 18 July 1984, Part IV, 1.

In 1985, the LAOOC was trying to wind up its affairs and was keen for disgruntled licensees to disappear. In January, Ken Norton was one of a handful of licensees who received undisclosed out-of-court settlement payments that went towards paying off creditors, with further pay-outs pending discussion, including with Panama Glove Co.⁶³ The experiences of LA'84's minority licensees exposed the lies about celebratory entrepreneurialism in pre-Games rhetoric. "Entrepreneurial spirit" may have spread across the city, but in reality, exclusivity was what counted. The licensees, who had entered into Olympic agreements in good faith, found that they had not in fact purchased the same exclusivity that McDonald's or Coca-Cola had. Instead, they had bought themselves only the opportunity to compete in a globalised market in which their small size and relatively limited capabilities worked against them.

The disappointment of those people of colour who sought to "make it" in the LA'84 market stemmed from an understanding of what "free enterprise" meant that differed fundamentally to what the LAOOC and its sponsors thought it meant. Artists Alfredo Bayon and Larry Day, who were denied a license to make Olympic jewellery by the LAOOC, felt that the committee's commitment to free enterprise should translate into better opportunities in the community: 'They have a charter to organise the Olympics, and anyone who comes out the fabric of the community (with a proposal), they have the duty to give them serious consideration in the spirit of free enterprise'.⁶⁴ For the LAOOC, however, free enterprise did not mean anyone could have a free shot at a contract. Committee members denied the pair's application on the basis that they could not prove adequate financing to kickstart the project. Without the license, countered Bayon and Day, they could not attract initial investment

⁶³ Kenneth Reich, 'LAOOC Settles With 4 Souvenir Firms', *Los Angeles Times*, 29 January 1985, Part IV, 3.

⁶⁴ Rivera, 'Minority Firms in Running for Olympics Gold'.

(which might have come from the SBA, but which had instead been spent by them on consultancy fees). One observer commented: ‘It was all by design. They said we’re going to get the community involved, but if you don’t have money, you’re out, period’.⁶⁵ The LAOOC used exclusivity and official-ness to generate excitement about the Olympic marketplace, but real exclusivity to profit was reserved for a select few companies that could afford to buy it. Once gained, instead of turbo charging the local business climate and generating trickle-down wealth for the benefit of everyone, official status placed small businesses at the mercy of major corporations and the unforgiving torrents of globalised capital. In the end, then, it simply maintained the economic status quo.

Those would-be entrepreneurs outside of the licensee program who sought to operate independently in the informal, Olympic-adjacent market also failed to benefit from the Olympic bonanza. The committee organised and policed a spatial arrangement of protected capital, a regulated marketplace that protected the exclusivity its official partners had purchased. Those local merchants and hustlers who, buoyed by the proclamations about an Olympic windfall coming to South Central, had endeavoured to enter into the entrepreneurial spirit, who sought to “do capitalism” under Olympic conditions in Los Angeles, found themselves shut out from accessing the adjacent market by the exclusive spatial arrangement the LAOOC imposed.

By the early 1980s, fuelled by an ever expanding immigrant population, LA’s “underground market” of street vendors was booming.⁶⁶ In many ways, the city’s street vendors were the ultimate “neoliberal entrepreneurs”, operating on their own guile and self-

⁶⁵ Welkos, ‘No Avenue of Gold’.

⁶⁶ ‘Proposed Legislation Aims at LA’s Underground Market’, *FPC Digest*, unknown date, clipping in Folder 4, Box 1634, MTBAP.

reliance, holding a commercial interest in maintaining an unregulated market place and — given that the majority of street vendors were immigrants and Angelenos of colour — possessed of a certain aspirational drive to “make it”, to realise the age-old American-Immigrant Dream. The history of street vendors in LA is entwined with the history of race, law, and immigration in the city.⁶⁷ Street vending, a cultural expression of ethnicity and community as well as a job, has served as a lifeline to generations of immigrants. As such, efforts to ban, criminalise, or regulate this informal economy are as old as the city itself, with “bricks-and-mortar” businesses often leading the campaign for the state to step in and instigate economic order (and where there are bricks and mortar, there are the interests of the real estate industry).⁶⁸ By the early 1980s, street vendors spoke of harassment, even brutality, at the hands of the police.⁶⁹

LA’84, with its protectionist mission to ensure sponsor exclusivity in the Olympic market place, arrived just in time to coincide with a renewed drive by industry to crackdown on the ‘overwhelming proportion’ of unregulated entrepreneurs in the informal LA economy.⁷⁰ Private industry was in the process of pushing legislative change through the house in Sacramento, lobbying lawmakers to pass a Bill to fund a punitive “solution”: more enforcement officers on the streets. Nowhere did the idea of public income through taxation inform the debate. Lobbyists framed their ‘aggressive’ push for legislative change in a racially-coded language of hygiene that focused on the supposedly unsanitary, non-standard

⁶⁷ Rocío Rosales, *Fruteros: Street Vending, Illegality, and Ethnic Community in Los Angeles* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Alan Maltun, ‘Baldwin Park Bans Sidewalk Vendors’, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 1983, 9; H.G. Reza, ‘Street Vendor Tells of Beating by Policeman’, *Los Angeles Times*, 3 December 1983, Part II, 1.

⁷⁰ ‘Proposed Legislation Aims at LA’s Underground Market’.

packaging used by street vendors.⁷¹ Standardised packaging was a colourblind way of targeting the informal market and thus formed the main target of the legislation: ‘we want everyone playing on the same playing field and everyone playing by the same rules’, remarked one industry lobbyist, invoking the colourblind “level playing field” metaphor.⁷²

Also left unsaid in the debates over standardisation and regulation of the street-vendor economy was any mention of the port at Long Beach. By 1980, with improved relations between the US and China, Long Beach accrued even greater economic significance and the China Ocean Shipping Company made Long Beach its primary US port. Expansion followed in 1988 to ensure the port could continue to welcome the world’s biggest container ships.⁷³ Long Beach was a key site of globalised trade and containerisation was the format of that trade: standardised containers that transported commodities from the factory to truck to ship to truck again, seamlessly linking production to the market place.⁷⁴ Industry operated on the commercial logic of such homogenisation and now brought it to bear in weaponised fashion on the “underground” street trade. Street vendors in LA thus bore the local-level impact of global-scale commercial logic.

Industry, via the state, exacerbated tensions between bricks-and-mortar shopkeepers and street vendors and relied on creating an unevenly regulated market, one which imposed homogenisation and standardisation on those at the bottom, but maintained a free-flowing spatial apparatus for global-scale corporate interests. In its dealings with the informal economy which sprang up adjacent to the official Olympic marketplace, the LAOOC

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Society of Architectural Historians, ‘History of the Port of Long Beach’, accessed 18 February 2023, <https://sah-archipedia.org/buildings/CA-01-037-0084>.

⁷⁴ David Jaffe, ‘Neoliberal Urbanism as “Strategic Coupling” to Global Chains: Port Infrastructure and the Role of Economic Impact Studies’, *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 37, no. 1 (2019): 119-36.

established a set of practices with which to punish and shut-out the deviant, “wrong kind” of entrepreneurial behaviour. These practices sought to work through state institutions — predominantly the court system — to facilitate corporate interests, but also reverted to extra-judicial encasement when necessary.

The “wrong kind” of entrepreneur could be controlled by altering the spatial geography of city commerce.⁷⁵ One spatial arrangement which inordinately harmed independent merchants came from another one of the LAOOC’s encasement ideas: traffic management. The committee drew up a plan with local bus networks to ferry visitors around venue sites on a park-and-ride system, alleviating traffic jams on surrounding streets like Vermont Avenue. In doing so, the committee could insulate events from potential disruption by local residents disgruntled by high traffic levels and ensure as trouble-free movement across the city as possible for visitors. For those cars still using Vermont, new road layouts introduced especially for the Games forced drivers to make a right turn every two blocks, drawing traffic away from the Coliseum area. The new road layouts and bus service resulted in dramatically low footfall through regular commercial areas. John Webster, a local pre-school teacher, observed frustrated motorists giving up on looking for parking spaces and leaving altogether.⁷⁶

Matters were exacerbated by the busses carrying tourists to venue sites like the Coliseum, which entered through fences that had been erected to maintain the exclusivity of those businesses which had paid to sell inside venues as official Olympic partners. In the interests of aesthetics, to shield visitors from the less picturesque vista of the north-edge of South Central, the fences had been rendered opaque by sheet covers in the colours of festive

⁷⁵ Francis-Kelly, ‘We Must Not Let These Stores That Trade on Human Misery Proliferate’.

⁷⁶ Welkos, ‘No Avenue of Gold’.

federalism.⁷⁷ Visitors, therefore, were dropped off and collected by busses within the Olympic sites, bypassing local traders. Once inside the venues, street vendors selling souvenirs or refreshments were not visible to potential customers.

The LAOOC quickly and markedly rowed back from its earlier predictions about visitor levels. 'I don't see why it's supposed to be a golden egg. Because it's the Olympics, people were talking about millions of visitors. That just isn't so', said LAOOC spokesman Richard Levin. As for the fences, Levin continued: 'that was done for the aesthetic look of the Games. You can't please everybody'.⁷⁸ Contrary to its plans to spread wealth around South Central, the LAOOC found that in order to run a smooth Olympics not impeded by the gridlock of everyday life in LA, while also maintaining exclusivity for its sponsors, the people of colour living nearest to the heart of LA'84 had to not just be encased but rendered invisible. To protect its official partners' right to profit and to minimise disruption to the Games, the LAOOC, in cooperation with the city council and local transport infrastructure, had reconfigured the spatial arrangements of the city in its favour.

Besides the spatial arrangements that fences, road layouts, and park-and-ride systems provided, the LAOOC also relied on intimidation and violence with state support. The committee was overtly hostile to anyone trying to profit from the significant, unofficial souvenir industry. Organisers were fully aware of this market growing up around them, with many 'rather innovative' manufacturers designing products that skated as close to the line of copyright infringement as possible, sometimes going over it.⁷⁹ To ensure the exclusivity of major corporations which had paid for protected access to the Olympic market, the LAOOC

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 233.

responded to unauthorised souvenir peddlers — predominantly people of colour — with intimidation that was facilitated and legitimised both judicially and legislatively by institutions of the state.

Vendors on Vermont Avenue reported aggressive handling by mysterious security guards whenever they crossed over the road towards Exposition Park. ‘Here we are only 200 yards from the Coliseum and there’s not a car in sight. There are more cops than there are tourists’, one complained.⁸⁰ He was right. These were no mere security guards but rather a squad of seventy-five off-duty police officers on the LAOOC pay roll. The state had facilitated this constitutionally troubling employment opportunity by passing SB185 (Beverly) through the House in Sacramento specifically for the LAOOC.⁸¹ Moreover, heavy financial penalties would be imposed on any intellectual property infringers under legislation AB1565 introduced by Assemblyman Gary Davis (D-Beverly Hills).⁸²

The job of these ‘peace officers’ was an aggressive crackdown on counterfeit use of the Olympic and LAOOC copyrights.⁸³ Henry Ealy, a Black professor of African American studies at a local college, reported being verbally abused by one such officer when observed to be unloading unofficial t-shirts and hats with “Los Angeles Olympiads” designs from the back of his car: ‘They were like the Gestapo. They threatened me and were using profanities, I said to them that they didn’t have to talk to me that way. One of them called to a friend and said, “Help me, Harry, before I blast this (obscenity) into the Coliseum”’.⁸⁴ The LAOOC was

⁸⁰ Welkos, ‘No Avenue of Gold’.

⁸¹ ‘Olympic-Related Legislation Introduced in Sacramento this Session’.

⁸² Mary Ann Melbourn, ‘New Law Aimed at Hitting Bogus Olympic Products’, *Los Angeles Daily News*, 27 August 1983.

⁸³ ‘Crackdown on Unauthorised Souvenirs’, *Los Angeles Times*, 27 July 1984, 3.

⁸⁴ William Overend, ‘Judge Scolds Investigators for Treatment of Souvenir Peddlers’, *Los Angeles Times*, 31 July 1984, 3.

unapologetic. LAOOC second-in-command Harry Usher argued that legislation to tackle souvenir peddlers was overdue and that allowing the committee to go into court ‘without notice to get an order’ would leave a useful legal legacy after the Games, preventing ‘fly-by-night entrepreneurs’ cropping up at sporting events.⁸⁵ Celebratory entrepreneurialism did not apply evenly. The wrong sort of entrepreneur needed to be quashed aggressively.

The hostile enforcers had not overzealously interpreted their job roles. Their conduct was systemic. Intimidation experienced by vendors around Olympic sites was pre-planned and specifically designed. With the Games approaching, the LAOOC looked to multiple institutions of state, private bodies, and the media for institutional encasement. Using the 1978 Amateur Sports Act, the committee applied successfully to the court and achieved ‘unusually broad powers’ which were ‘broader than [those of] the police’ to seize counterfeit goods.⁸⁶ The committee put the message out with a sustained public information campaign, warning any would-be infringers of the protected status of LA’84 symbols.⁸⁷ By late 1983, it openly described its enforcement activities as ‘heavy’, ‘determined, and ‘aggressive’.⁸⁸

The LAOOC actively conspired with independent agencies and institutions of state to put robust enforcement measures in place. An April 1984 internal LAOOC memo laid out plans to coordinate with the USOC and share the expenses of pursuing legal action against infringers. Ahead of summer 1984, it planned to approach local courts in order to ensure ‘immediate access to appropriate forums for injunctive relief’. The memo even emphasised the need to have the evening telephone numbers of judges and court clerks, and for the court to recognise the priority of all LAOOC cases. To rehearse its enforcement procedure, the

⁸⁵ Melbourn, ‘New Law Aimed at Hitting Bogus Olympic Products’.

⁸⁶ Overend, ‘Judge Scolds Investigators for Treatment of Souvenir Peddlers’.

⁸⁷ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 237.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 238.

committee planned a real-life “test case” to make a very public example of an infringer. This had to be someone with a large inventory of counterfeit goods, but the committee warned of the need to avoid targeting someone who was likely to evoke public sympathy, ‘like a Mom and Pop operation’, because they planned to ‘fully exploit’ the chosen target in the cooperative press. Finally, they planned to hire a trademark lawyer by June 1984 to train the enforcement officers in how to conduct a legal seizure of goods. The seizure personnel were to have drivers and pagers to facilitate communication and ensure they did not get stuck looking for a parking space.⁸⁹ As the locals trying to rent out their driveways could attest, the committee need not have worried about this last one.

LAOOC enforcement actions were not only limited to the streets. The committee worked closely with US Customs to ensure it prevented unauthorised merchandise from entering the country.⁹⁰ It also targeted companies and individuals alike. Pioneer Chicken restaurants spent \$600,000 on Sam the Eagle figurines and advertising spots featuring O.J. Simpson, promising a free Sam with every meal. The LAOOC took Pioneer to court for violating McDonald’s right to claim the title of official Olympic fast-food restaurant.⁹¹ Individuals, companies, and even those outside the borders of the US were put on notice that the LAOOC would be policing the boundaries of exclusivity with no sympathy whatsoever. Not only was Exposition Park a commercial fortress but, facilitated by the state through the courts and the legislature, its walls were patrolled and its environs surveilled for anyone violating the exclusive rights of the corporations within.

The LAOOC’s use of the courts as an institution of encasement was an uneven one at

⁸⁹ ‘Enforcement Action Outline 13 April 1984’, Folder 2, Box 119, LAOOCR.

⁹⁰ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 238.

⁹¹ ‘Judge Won’t Pluck Ads with Eagle Sam from Air’, *Los Angeles Daily News*, unknown date, cutting from Folder 19, Box 14, JDWP.

times, but generally worked in its favour. In the Pioneer case, however, the court found no grounds to intervene as the restaurants were giving away the figurines for free. The same judge appeared reluctant to enforce the earlier powers he had granted to the LAOOC to seize unauthorised merchandise. In early August, Judge Gadbois scolded the LAOOC for the verbal abuse and over zealotry of its investigators.⁹² More often, the court came down heavily on infringers in defence of the “free” market. LA company B.J. Design Concepts had been making t-shirts with “LA ’84” and motion lines inspired by the Star in Motion on them. In court, the judge ruled the company was violating the ‘insured exclusivity’ of sponsors stating he could not allow the ‘delicate financial structure’ of the Games to be destroyed.⁹³

Just as local business owners, betrayed as they saw it by the LAOOC, had appealed to the court system to help them “do capitalism” under Olympic conditions, so too did the committee turn to the court in the hope of using it as an institution of encasement, a means of protecting its business from the people. In the increasingly acrimonious atmosphere of Olympic business, with the LAOOC and its corporate sponsors on one side and small business-owners of colour on the other, Olympic entrepreneurs of all stripes used the courts to establish where the state’s duty to intervene in markets began and, crucially, where it ended. Selective regulation of the Olympic marketplace coupled with punitive enforcement at street level defined what “free markets” meant in their neoliberal form.

CONCLUSION

Olympic business opportunities held powerful racial and social resonance. With the excitement about an influx of Olympic wealth in the press and in the statements of both the

⁹² ‘Investigators Must be Nicer to Vendors’, unknown publication, 1 August 1984, Folder 18, Box 15, JDWP.

⁹³ Melbourn, ‘New Law Aimed at Hitting Bogus Olympic Products’.

LAOOC and the state, commercial engagement with — and investment in — LA’84 powerfully signalled the myth that anyone could, if they adopted the correct entrepreneurial mindset, “make it” within the existing socio-economic order, regardless of race.⁹⁴ Winning a contract to conduct Olympic-affiliated business promised the realisation of the individualistic, entrepreneurial utopian dream, a post-racial capitalism in which entrepreneurially-minded Angelenos of colour could join the “mainstream” global economy.

LA’84 was a market, the regulatory dynamics of which revealed the racial limits of utopian entrepreneurialism. For all the promise of a truly colourblind “free” market, the reality was an economic environment heavily skewed towards the encasement of white, corporate capital, which had bought exclusive affiliation with the Games and, in doing so, funded the whole affair. The LAOOC *had* to protect the Games as exclusive property, seeking at every turn to police and exclude those ventures which sought to profit from Olympic capitalism without first investing their already-existing wealth. Regulation could encase and assist profits, but it could also mercilessly punish.

Both the LAOOC and the individual entrepreneur recognised the un-free nature of the Olympic marketplace. Each party, rather than wishing to see no state involvement in the economy whatsoever, turned to the state and implored it to intervene in the marketplace in their interests. The LAOOC identified the courts as a crucial facilitative mechanism for the encasement of its capital, while the spurned owners of small businesses appealed to them to administer economic justice. Both parties found the institutions of state to be an unreliable and uneven regulatory presence. Organisers turned to extra-judicial means of encasement through violence, intimidation and, crucially, through the altering of the spatial and temporal dynamics of the city. With altered working hours, changes to usual patterns of commerce, and

⁹⁴ Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, 123.

a transport system redesigned in its interests, the LAOOC changed the spatial and temporal norms of commerce in Los Angeles in favour of a smoothly running and, therefore, profit-generating Olympics. Olympic business opportunities, then, were an early case study in on-the-ground neoliberal practice, a forum in which agents contested and shaped what they saw as the proper role of the interventionist state in a neoliberal economy.

V

BLUE THUNDER: POLICING THE OLYMPIC CITY

13000 Block, Louvre Street

Pacoima, Los Angeles

6 February 1985

7:30 p.m.

Dyvon Brown was just nine years old on the night LAPD Chief Daryl Gates crashed through his kitchen wall in an armoured car. Outside, a phalanx of LAPD SWAT men bristled with helmets, masks, and rifles. Two photographers were also there to cover the events about to unfold in this anonymous home in Pacoima, a low-income, un-famous community of colour at the eastern edge of the San Fernando Valley. Dyvon left the kitchen and was eating ice cream in the living room when the flashbang grenade exploded. Dyvon's mother screamed. The kitchen disappeared. Riding shotgun in his new acquisition the "LAPD rescue vehicle", Gates had arrived looking for guns and hard drugs. He found no guns and only a small trace of marijuana. The raid was supposed to have been a dramatic public unveiling for the LAPD's motorised battering ram, a converted V100 military-spec armoured personnel carrier which the department had acquired as part of its security planning for the Olympic Games. Since then, the department had retro-fitted it with a fourteen-foot battering ram.

"Where are the drugs, Chief?", enquired journalists. 'I suspect they're sold out. That happens all the time', replied Gates, no doubt through gritted teeth. No matter; Gates was experienced in doubling-down. 'The message has to go out: If you don't want a battering ram breaking down your wall and SWAT coming through your doors, don't deal dope', he said.

The police who, had they timed the raid just moments earlier would have crashed in on top of Dyvon as he was serving himself ice cream, arrested his mother Linda for child endangerment and took his five-year-old brother into protective custody. The community and the NAACP voiced their outrage, but the Black residents of Louvre Street would just have to swallow this latest injustice, for now.¹ Six years later and a ten-minute drive away from Dyvon's devastated home, police officers pulled over a Black man by the name of Rodney King.²

* * *

The Olympic Games turbo-charged the militarisation and expansion of the city's police forces and was a watershed moment for redefining the role of the state as a punitive institution concerned above all else with maintaining order and market conditions. When it came to policing the Olympic Games, the actors involved never expressly nor clearly worked out exactly what their desired goal was. Of course, public safety was the main concern that coloured the language and informed the debate around Olympic security. Underlying the discourse, however, was the unspoken logic that the police were there to ensure safe market conditions for the business of having a for-profit Olympic Games. For the LAOOC, a properly policed Olympics meant smooth-running events unimpeded by risk factors which would be bad for business, anything from traffic jams to terrorist incidents.

For the police, the Games represented a once-in-a-generation opportunity to redefine the meaning of policing in Los Angeles, to cement its reputation and secure its place as a

¹ Vignette compiled from: Patricia Klein, 'LAPD Draws Fire for Ramming Home in Raid', *Los Angeles Times*, 8 February 1985, 3; Patricia Klein and Stephanie Chavez, 'Pacoima Leaders Protest Police Use of Motorized Ram', *Los Angeles Times*, 9 February 1985, Part II, 1; Daryl F. Gates, *Chief: My Life in the LAPD* (New York, Bantam: 1993), 320-4.

² Hector Tobar and Leslie Berger, 'Tape of LA Police Beating Suspect Stirs Public Furor', *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 1991, 1.

central — maybe *the* central — component of the neoliberal state. For Angelenos, the meaning of policing in the nascent neoliberal era was complicated and varied by race, class, and political persuasion. Some residents were critical of the hyper-securitisation of the city and militarisation of the police as a direct result of the Olympics; others saw within an expanded police force the opportunity to secure their own market conditions, locating social uplift within a neoliberal model of privatisation and securitisation.

More than just guaranteeing public safety, then, what it meant to police the Olympic City was complex, contested, and intricately entwined in contemporary attitudes about the proper role of the state in the neoliberal era. When they debated policing, communities strove to find common-sense solutions to a set of local challenges and found they could be best answered with neoliberal ideas. Policing the Games was, then, a forum for the establishment of neoliberal common sense, a place where neoliberal ideas about race and punishment, capitalism, and the state found a foothold. The passing of the Games without major incident served only to telegraph to the world the apparent efficacy of these strategies.

The debates around policing LA '84 problematise neoliberal scholarship which focuses on nation state actors like Reagan or Thatcher, locating the spread of neoliberal ideas at the local level. At the same time, these local actors did not consider themselves to be pursuing ideas *because* they were expressly or coherently “neoliberal”. Rather, the apparent failures of redistributive liberalism in the inner city made local people receptive to new ways of thinking about policing and urban investment, particularly when the LAOOC's approach had seemed to work so well. The LAOOC model appeared to offer new solutions to a range of hyper-local, racialised issues like crime, drugs, and gang culture, which they sought to replace with economic activity.

At the local level, attitudes towards policing reflected attitudes toward state provision.

Max Felker-Kantor has argued that by the early 1980s, in light of government austerity, the police were the primary point of contact between residents of colour and the government, and that law enforcement had become what Ruth Wilson Gilmore has called the “anti-state state”: ‘people and parties who gain state power by denouncing state power’.³ Jordan T. Camp has argued that the relationship between race and neoliberal security regimes is an intimate one. Racialisation had been ‘essential to the legitimation of neoliberal state formation’ recasting the anxieties of the age into ‘racist consent to security, law, and order’.⁴ In this framework, the neoliberal state was one which interacted with its citizens via its police forces, enforcing consent to the neoliberal security regime through violence.⁵ However, as the response to Olympic policing among some in LA’s Black community demonstrates, there was also public enthusiasm for more policing in their neighbourhoods, of the “saturation” kind experienced during the Games.

Recent scholarship has further explored the relationship of policing, race, and neoliberal capitalism after the 1960s.⁶ Both Camp and Stuart Schrader argue for the post-colonial nature of counterinsurgent policing, a model which emerged concurrently as a response to the civil rights movement domestically and decolonisation abroad.⁷ ‘In a new global situation of decolonisation and self-determination, up-to-date policing techniques would be the means to contain revolution; the same would be true of a domestic situation of

³ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 10; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, ‘In the Shadow of the Shadow State’ *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 13, no. 2 (2016), <https://sfonline.barnard.edu/ruth-wilson-gilmore-in-the-shadow-of-the-shadow-state/>.

⁴ Camp, *Incarcerating the Crisis*, 4-5.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Murch, ‘The Color of War’; Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*; Hinton, *America on Fire*; Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, Schrader, *Badges Without Borders*.

⁷ Camp, *Incarcerating the Crisis*, 42; Schrader, *Badges Without Borders*.

implacable Black freedom demands', argues Schrader.⁸ If counter-insurgent policing both at home and abroad was a response to decolonisation and struggles for racial equality, then it was also part of the wider neoliberal project to ensure orderly conditions for business. As Slobodian has argued, neoliberals imagined globalised capitalism as a means of ordering the post-colonial world, and in this framework, the role of counter-insurgent policing is as foot soldiers for neoliberal change.⁹

Olympic policing speaks directly to unexplored areas in the existing historiography. Schrader's analysis of policing from an imperial perspective ends in the 1970s. Camp's focus on incarceration over the quotidian experience of frontline policing skips over the 1980s to get to the 1992 Rebellion, leaving out the crucial Olympic moment at which the LAPD equipped itself with an arsenal of new weaponry, the material evidence of police psychology which increasingly could only understand its job in the language of combat. Felker-Kantor's recent work on the LAPD's Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program has shown that militaristic impulses and economic logics governed non-carceral police initiatives in the 1980s.¹⁰ Although scholars have in passing identified the Olympics as a cause of police militarisation, there has been no in-depth exploration of the relationship between policing LA in the 1980s and the Olympic Games.¹¹ The Olympics provide a side-window on historical processes in an era which, as Donna Murch argues, historians have yet to understand: how

⁸ Schrader, *Badges Without Borders*, 11.

⁹ Slobodian, *Globalists*.

¹⁰ Max Felker-Kantor, 'DARE to Say No: Police and the Cultural Politics of Prevention in the War in Drugs', *Modern American History* 5, no. 3 (2022): 313-37; Felker-Kantor, 'Arresting the Demand for Drugs: DARE and the School-Police Nexus in Los Angeles', *Journal of Urban History* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/00961442221142062>.

¹¹ The relationship between the police and the Olympics is noted in: Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*; Viator, *To Live and Defy in LA*.

communities of colour responded to the neoliberal punishment regime; how people of colour understood and reacted to the “drug wars”; and the lack of social histories of Black urban communities in the 1980s.¹² In the build-up to LA ’84, the relationship between the police and the policed in communities of colour was not the simple antagonistic binary one might imagine it was.

THE OLYMPICS AND THE POLICE

The Olympic Games and LA law enforcement are institutions which have enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship since 1932. In the late 1970s, the promise of the Olympic Games provided a reputational and economic lifeline to a scandal-hit LAPD that was, like the rest of local government, reeling from the pecuniary aftershock of Proposition 13. The LAPD was the police department most intricately bound up in the Olympics, but the LA County Sherriff, the California Highway Patrol, federal agencies, and local forces all felt the impact of the Games. To pull itself out of the crisis of the late 1970s, the LAPD adopted a supply-and-demand logic to secure its own future viability. It exaggerated the scale of threat to the Games, using LA’s world-city ambitions as a rhetorical tool for locating global threats on street corners, collapsing scales between the global and the local. The department rationalised its exaggeration of the demand for its services in racialised terms, then emphasised the supply-side of the equation by arguing that it could not adequately supply the required services without massive investment.

The global nature of the threats supposedly bearing down on LA ’84 influenced the type of strategies the LAPD said it needed to adopt to be able to meet the challenge. The department seized on Olympic funding to build up the sort of military arsenal and technical

¹² Murch, ‘The Color of War’, 169.

surveillance capabilities associated with a nation state. Over the course of Olympic planning, the LAPD's supply-and-demand manipulation evinced a department attempting to impose itself as a market regulator in the field of public safety. By 1984, the LAPD had successfully seized on the Olympic opportunity to secure its ongoing viability as a state institution; it had become an entrepreneurial police force.

The histories of the LAPD and the city's Olympic Games are entwined. There has been a mutually beneficial relationship since 1932, but one that has been largely unexplored by historians of Los Angeles and its police department.¹³ For Olympic organisers, successful collaboration with the police has been essential. For the police, the Games have repeatedly served as a reputational lifeline, even during the Games' fifty-two-year absence from the city. In 1932, the LAPD provided nearly one thousand officers to support the Games.¹⁴ The department's contribution was essential. Working under 'a very restricted budget', the Chief of Police made an appeal to his officers 'first, to work twelve hours per day instead of the regulation eight, second, to postpone vacations. The men generously agreed to this'.¹⁵ The organising committee praised the police effusively for making the 1932 Olympic Games a success.¹⁶

For the LAPD, the 1932 Olympics had material as well as reputational benefits. Olympic organisers chose the police shooting range at Elysian Park to serve as the site for their shooting competitions, outfitting it accordingly. To meet IOC shooting regulations, organisers modified the range to designate distances in metres instead of yards and upgraded

¹³ Joe Domanick's history of the LAPD, for example, makes no mention of the Games: Joe Domanick, *To Protect and Serve: The LAPD's Century of War in the City of Dreams* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994).

¹⁴ Xth Olympiade Committee of the Games of Los Angeles, USA, 1932 Ltd., *The Games of the Xth Olympiad, Los Angeles, 1932, Official Report* (Los Angeles: Wolfer Printing Company, Inc., 1933), 149.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

the facility in general.¹⁷ From 1932 onwards, then, the LAPD trained to shoot people with Olympic accuracy. As a permanent reminder of its status as an Olympic venue, an ornamental brick monument remained on-site, at least twelve-feet tall, with the Olympic Rings at its centre. As Elysian Park morphed into the LAPD's main training academy, the Rings provided a backdrop to new recruits' passing-out parades for decades thereafter, instilling in its officers the relationship between the Olympics and the police from the very beginning of their careers **[Figure VII: Police Academy Class 1973]**.¹⁸

In 1967, police organised the California Police Olympics athletics competition at a time when, noted the *Los Angeles Times*, 'police officers did not enjoy a warm relationship with the public'.¹⁹ That was putting it mildly. Just two years earlier, a police traffic stop of a Black motorist had provided the spark necessary to ignite the Watts Rebellion.²⁰ In the aftermath of a wave of national uprisings, local police budgets expanded and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), established in 1968, funnelled federal money into state and municipal crime control programs. The LAPD invested in 'military equipment, riot control, and elite tactical training'.²¹ The California Police Olympics offered a softer "hearts and minds" strategy to complement militarisation and improve community relations by presenting the "lighter side" of the LAPD.²² LAPD initiatives often got picked up by other departments nationally, sometimes even internationally, and the Police Olympics

¹⁷ Ibid., 74.

¹⁸ 'LAPD Academy Class March 1973', Folder 1, Box 1, Iain Hamilton Collection, Urban Archives, California State University, Northridge [hereafter IHC].

¹⁹ Michelle Markel, 'Worldwide Police Olympics Gear Up', *Los Angeles Times*, 20 September 1984, Part V, 23.

²⁰ On Watts and Policing in the 1960s see: Davis and Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire*.

²¹ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 44.

²² Ibid.

were no different, becoming a national event in 1974.²³ Its founder, ex-LAPD detective Bob Burke, organised a national police relay run to Montreal in 1976 to make the ‘official presentation’ of the city of Los Angeles to the Olympic Committee.²⁴ In doing so, police signalled their intention to be at the centre of LA’s Olympics once again.

For the police, the high standards of excellence associated with the Olympics was a useful brand with which to identify and one which it sought to maintain throughout the 1970s. At one passing-out parade in 1973, standing alongside recently elected Mayor Tom Bradley (himself a twenty-one-year veteran of the force), LAPD Chief Ed Davis stood in front of the Olympic Rings to announce the rollout of the latest initiative to keep the department on the cutting-edge of law enforcement. A futuristic, hi-tech ‘command, control, and communications system’ would, he said, connect two-hundred ‘radio cars’ to a modern, centralised computer system.²⁵ This combination of fast-response policing and modern technology represented the fruition of Davis’ “instant cop” vision, in which police could arrive at an incident anywhere in LA’s 450 square miles with maximum efficiency.²⁶ Complementing the cars, the development of law enforcement’s helicopter programs “Sky Knight” and “ASTRO” provided police new forms of aerial surveillance, while enjoying a certain psychological edge with the choppers’ “night sun” search lights and loudspeakers. The LAPD’s ASTRO program covered seventy-eight percent of the city by 1977.²⁷ Here were the beginnings of what, argues Felker-Kantor, was ‘an efficient police force aimed at pre-empting

²³ Douglas Jehl, ‘Montreal to L.A. - It was a Run for the Bold’, *Los Angeles Times*, 27 July 1984, 1; The LAPD DARE program was internationalised, see: Felker-Kantor, ‘Arresting the Demand for Drugs’

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ ‘Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Academy and Los Angeles Police Academy Graduations’, 13 July 1973, P5245, FTA.

²⁶ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 56.

²⁷ Ibid.

crime' through its use of surveillance, computer databases, and technology.²⁸ Then came Proposition 13.

The resulting cuts to city revenue threatened police budgets.²⁹ Reagan's "get tough" law-and-order politics and "war on drugs" coincided with cuts to city aid budgets, placing city government under immense pressure when it came to meeting apparent demand for policing.³⁰ The LAPD decreased in size from 7,500 in 1978, to 6,900 in 1984.³¹ The pride, stature, and future nature of the department was at stake. To weather the threat of cutbacks and pursue growth, law enforcement sought federal grants by envisioning special projects like the LA County Sheriff Department's anti-gang initiatives Operation Hickory and Operation Safe Streets, or LAPD's DARE programme.³² Police departments were incentivised to "think big" about their roles in order to capture federal dollars.³³

For the LAPD, 1978 was a pivotal year. Not only did Proposition 13 pass in a landslide, heaping enormous pressure on traditional funding sources, the force welcomed a new chief, the infamous Daryl Gates. He inherited scandals, then caused a few himself. The department's Public Disorder Intelligence Division (PDID) was facing a lawsuit it would eventually lose brought by, amongst others, the Campaign Against Police Abuse and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). PDID had been caught spying on civil liberties groups, radicals, even the mayor. In all, the lawsuit contained allegations of spying by PDID

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 121.

³⁰ Ibid., 7.

³¹ Frank Clifford, 'Gates Speaks Out on Deployment', *Los Angeles Times*, 17 January 1985, Part II, 1.

³² Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, 'Our History', accessed 25 June 2021, <http://shq.lasdnews.net/pages/PageDetail.aspx?id=203>; Felker-Kantor, 'Arresting the Demand for Drugs'.

³³ Murch, 'The Color of War', 137.

on twenty-three groups and over one hundred individuals which it deemed subversive.³⁴

In 1979, LAPD officers shot and killed Eula Mae Love, a Black, crisis-stricken single-mother of three, in an incident which escalated over an unpaid gas bill.³⁵ In 1981, a Black college football player named Ron Settles died while in police custody under suspicious circumstances. Settles ostensibly hanged himself in his cell, but a coroner's inquest found his death did not occur by suicide, rather at the hands of 'another person'.³⁶ In May 1982, Tom Bradley joined the chorus of voices condemning Gates over his comments in an interview about the LAPD's controversial "chokehold" method of detainment. A disproportionate number of Black men had died as a result of being put in a chokehold by his officers. 'We may be finding', concluded Gates, 'that in some blacks when it [the chokehold] is applied, the veins or arteries do not open up as fast as they do in normal people'.³⁷ Gates brushed aside calls for his resignation. More than two decades after the Watts Rebellion, such was the climate of scandal and racism in which the LAPD continued to operate.

The pivotal year of 1978 also offered a reputational lifeline for the scandal-mired LAPD: the Olympic announcement. LA'84 allowed Gates to brush scandal or introspection aside and declare the police's ongoing centrality to the safety of the city. More than this, LA'84 was the means by which the department could secure its own growth; if elaborate special projects were the way to secure investment, surely there was no project more elaborate than the Olympics. Despite challenges to its funding models and its reputation, the Olympics were about to bring the world to Los Angeles, and the LAPD needed to ensure its safety.

³⁴ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 261.

³⁵ 'The Report of the Board of Police Commissioners Concerning the Shooting of Eulia [sic] Love and the Use of Deadly Force', Box 2209, Records of the Police Commission, City Archive, Los Angeles [hereafter RPC].

³⁶ 'Jury Reaches Verdict in Coroner's Inquest', 2 September 1981, UPI Archives, accessed 21 June 2021, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1981/09/02/Jury-reaches-verdict-in-coroners-inquest/5050368251200/>.

³⁷ David Johnston, 'Bradley Orders Probe of Statements by Gates', *Los Angeles Times*, 11 May 1982, 1.

Once again, the relationship between LA law enforcement and the Olympic Games came into play.

When it came to assessing potential threats to LA '84, enemies were everywhere, within and without. Cold War tensions were high, amplified by the Reagan administration. Ongoing decolonisation destabilised borders and made international terrorism a defining feature of the 1970s. Bombings, kidnappings, and hijackings were commonplace. More directly, the terrible events at the Munich Games in 1972 were still fresh in everyone's memory.³⁸ Since the Montreal Games in 1976, Munich provided the beginning and end of any discussion about the need for a massive security operation at all future Olympics.³⁹ What was more, terrorism had come home in January 1982 with the assassination of the Turkish consul general in his car on Wilshire Boulevard, just a few blocks from the LAOOC offices at UCLA. Suspicion fell on LA's Armenian population.⁴⁰ One did not have to look too far to justify the need for a comprehensive security and surveillance operation ahead of the Games, unprecedented in its scale.

For LA law enforcement, mounting and funding such an operation demanded that outside agencies — the LAOOC and the local and federal government in particular — take them seriously. It was in police interests to tap into a latent fear of foreigners and terrorism, but this narrative went against everything the LAOOC was trying to communicate about internationalism and borderless fraternity. Tension between the two camps remained unresolved throughout LA '84 planning.⁴¹ Both organisations wanted to emphasise the idea of

³⁸ Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 109.

³⁹ Dominique Clément, 'The Transformation of Security Planning for the Olympics: The 1976 Montreal Games', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 1 (2017): 27-51.

⁴⁰ Gene Blake, 'Turkish Consul Gunned Down Near Wilshire Boulevard', *Los Angeles Times*, 28 January 1982, 1.

⁴¹ Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 114.

porous borders, but for different reasons. For the committee, the Games were supposed to supersede nation states, speaking to a global citizenry. For law enforcement, the idea of weakened national borders allowed them to emphasise and exaggerate the idea that LA was under threat. In both cases, the rhetorical invocation of a neoliberal world without borders served economic goals.

The LAOOC convened a security committee comprised of local police forces and federal agencies whose individual scopes, naturally, ranged from the immediately local, to the national and domestic, up to the international and foreign. As such, when the security committee compiled a list of all the potential threats to the Games, the result was a long and wide-ranging who's-who of the sorts of characters which stalked the fevered dreams of American conservatives. The list of 'nefarious groups' included the United Freedom Front, the Revolutionary Fighting Group, Armed Resistance Movement, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, Young People's Republic, Women Against Imperialism, November 29 Coalition, May 19 Communist Organisation, the Jewish Defence League, Black Liberation Army, Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional, various anti-Castro exile groups, and Armenian terrorists.⁴² Here was a strange amalgamation of communists, feminists, terrorists, anti-racists, anti-imperialists, and freedom fighters from around the world whose ideas had infiltrated the borders and taken root in US soil. These supposed threats evinced the tension at the heart of trying to acquire "world city" status. LA was symbolic of national economic and cultural strength and yet, by being simultaneously *supra* national, it engaged with the world in a global register that was completely dissimilar to the majority of the nation's cities.

The list of threats to the Olympics, then, was essentially a list of leftist organisations.

⁴² Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 123.

It tarred all the groups with the same brush, allowing the police and security services to collapse any differentiation between them. In this way, Women Against Imperialism (WAI) became the equivalent of Black September. The security committee targeted WAI specifically because it had been vocal in its criticism of the LAPD, especially as the Games drew nearer. WAI — the feminist wing of socialist organisation The Prairie Fire Organising Committee — had correctly identified what was at stake in the Olympic security build up. In its *Breakthrough* journal in 1984, Prairie Fire warned: ‘Under the guise of providing "security against a possible terrorist threat," the government is developing a police state apparatus in the sun and smog of Southern California’.⁴³ ‘Counter insurgency goes for the gold’, the article continued, expressly setting out the links between Olympic security planning and the anti-left activities of local police forces and federal entities.⁴⁴

In a move that likely further enraged the security committee, Prairie Fire published the names of the committee members in full together with a short biography setting out each of their right-wing and militaristic credentials.⁴⁵ The real threats to peace and security in LA, stated Prairie Fire, were a resurgent Ku-Klux-Klan, all-white juries, police terror, and the ‘rogues gallery of right-wingers and war mongers’ planning Olympic security. It called out the use of the Olympics to justify the expansion of militarised policing: ‘If the U.S. can sell Twinkies, McDonalds, and Buicks to the huge audience watching the Games, why can't they sell the FBI SWAT team or the new Los Angeles police anti-terrorist unit?’⁴⁶ The article also claimed leftist groups and “everyday” people of colour in LA had experienced a harsh

⁴³ ‘Counter-Insurgency Goes for the Gold,’ *Breakthrough: The Political Journal of the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee* (Summer 1984): 20-6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

escalation in policing in recent months. In this sense, the police and government's list of threats to the Games was the latest instalment in a long state campaign against civil rights activists and the domestic left stretching back to Red Squads, HUAC, COINTELPRO, and the targeting of the Black Panthers and the Weather Underground.⁴⁷ On the surface, then, nothing new was happening in law enforcement because of the Games.

However, underlying the construction of threats to the Olympics was something new and very much of its time: an economic logic of supply and demand with which police could not simply weather the economic challenges of the current moment but *thrive* in a new neoliberal world. Even as the Reagan administration rolled back the state with smaller government, lower taxes, and welfare retrenchment, its punitive powers could not only remain intact, they could expand. Rather than responding to a demand for escalated levels of policing because of the Games, law enforcement agencies were the architects of that demand. Crucially, on the supply side of this framework, police and government agencies emphasised their inability to do the job that was asked of them and called for increased funding and resources.

The LAPD's non-Olympic activity in the early 1980s also displayed this supply-and-demand logic. As Max Felker-Kantor has shown, the department's DARE programme, which it launched in 1983, portrayed LAPD as the indispensable solution to the drugs crisis in the city. Under DARE, police officers attached to schools taught pupils about the dangers of

⁴⁷ The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) led by Senator Joseph McCarthy sought to purge communists from the US; COINTELPRO was an FBI surveillance campaign mounted against civil rights activists, most notably Martin Luther King. See: Hinton, *America on Fire*, 107; Thomas Doherty, *Show Trial: Hollywood, HUAC, and the Birth of the Blacklist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Dan Berger, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2006); Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

drugs and, in doing so, attempted to reduce the demand for them. Crucially, argues Felker-Kantor, this switch of focus to tackle demand did not replace the punitive supply-side operations of militarised anti-drug task forces on the city's streets. Rather, by 'fusing the simplistic distinction between supply and demand reduction strategies, DARE [...] demonstrated that any so-called alternative or preventative approach to the drug crisis would still involve the police'. In this way, he concludes, 'DARE was less an alternative to punitive policies than a complementary program that reinforced racialised constructions of criminality and personal responsibility'.⁴⁸

With DARE, the LAPD could generate income by proving their indispensable social role. So successful was the DARE model that KFC and Olympic sponsors McDonald's and Coca-Cola stepped in to sponsor it, and police forces around the world adopted the program.⁴⁹ DARE, then, demonstrated the LAPD thinking in neoliberal ways about its function in society. Not only did the program create investment through a corporate-funded, self-sustaining public-private partnership, it allowed the LAPD to operate across both sides of the drugs market. The department became, in essence, market regulators of the underground economy. What was more, DARE put corporations and the police in a position to teach "proper" civic behaviour, emphasising neoliberal tenets of personal responsibility and the moral supremacy of the nuclear family.⁵⁰

When it came to Olympic security, the LAPD used its successful DARE model, swapping out the figure of the drug user for the international terrorist to attract inward investment from the state and the private sector. The department hyped-up the demand for its

⁴⁸ Felker-Kantor, 'Arresting the Demand for Drugs', 16.

⁴⁹ Felker-Kantor, 'DARE to Say No'.

⁵⁰ Ibid; Cooper, *Family Values*.

services by identifying the global nature and scale of threats to Olympic security.

Simultaneously, it used the Games to emphasise that it was unable to supply the services now in demand and would require significant investment to do so. In this way, the LAPD in particular placed itself at the centre of securing a safe and secure Olympic marketplace, an indispensable facet of what it meant to be a world city.

Gates purposefully blurred the boundaries between the international terrorist threat and the local issue of gangs. He cited the potential for international terrorists to recruit gang members to their ranks, using this flimsy reasoning to “sweep” the streets near to the main Olympic site at Exposition Park: ‘six weeks before the Olympics, we would send our gang details out to clean up the streets around the Coliseum. We would run the gangs right out of the area with a few well-chosen words and post enough police officers to discourage them from returning too soon’.⁵¹ Gates’ recollections expose the flimsiness of his belief in the link between international terrorists and the local gangs. Had the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, to take one example, sought to stage a recruitment drive among the local Crips or Bloods, it was hardly likely to do so in the middle of Exposition Park. When it came to Olympic venues, the police just wanted Black youth to disappear from the sight.

Unlike DARE, the global scale of the Olympic security project and the plethora of threats from abroad allowed the LAPD to think in international terms about its role, authority, and jurisdiction. When in 1979 Daryl Gates boasted of wanting to send LAPD SWAT to Iran to rescue the American hostages, he displayed the global nature of his thinking, a culture which had been developing among police chiefs in general since the late 1960s.⁵² When he

⁵¹ Gates, *Chief*, 277.

⁵² Tom Wicker, ‘Carter’s SWAT Team’, *New York Times*, 14 December 1979, A, 31; Schrader, *Badges Without Borders*, 5.

spoke of policing Los Angeles like ‘foreign territory’, he again collapsed geographic boundaries and scales, finding the global on the streets of South Central.⁵³ Gates rallied his officers for the Games with suitably global rhetoric: ‘we will have shown the world what kind of police department we are’. ‘We even had bumper stickers made up: LAPD — World Class, with the Olympic logo and LAPD badge’, he recalled.⁵⁴ If Los Angeles was to be a “world city”, its police force needed to be prepared to do its job at that scale by acquiring the capabilities of a military force and intelligence agency.

What might have been a relatively innocuous bit of promotion reflected more serious ambitions. Gates refused to agree to cede responsibility to the FBI in the event of an ‘international incident’.⁵⁵ With this in mind, it only required a small logical jump to get to the point where the LAPD resembled, in the words of the journal *Workers Vanguard*: ‘a semi-bonapartist paramilitary operation which fantasies itself the civilian equivalent of the Army Rangers or 82nd Airborne’.⁵⁶ The Olympics, as the cultural embodiment of LA’s world-city ambitions, drove the hyper-militarisation of the city’s police forces on the underlying principle that its concerns and jurisdiction were global in scale. With the potential extent of impending danger laid out, the security committee and the LAOOC turned its attention to how to pay for security.

Like all other Olympic costs, security is normally funded by the state. The LAOOC’s promise to not use taxpayer money for any Olympic costs placed it in a bind. It had to have a safe and secured Games which were adequately policed and resourced, but this expectation put extra strain on local law enforcement at a time when the fallout from Proposition 13 had

⁵³ Gates, *Chief*, 126.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁵⁵ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 599.

⁵⁶ ‘LAPD Martial Law Olympics’, *Workers Vanguard* no. 347 (February 1984): 1.

slashed city budgets.⁵⁷ The issue of security costs threatened to undo all the LAOOC's hard work in winning over Angelenos who had railed against the idea that the Games would take even one dime from the public purse. Adding to Ueberroth's problems, No Olympic Tax leader Ira Reiner had become City Attorney and was directly involved in the negotiations over Olympic security.⁵⁸ In October 1982, the LAOOC signed an agreement which guaranteed full reimbursement for all police costs related to the Games.⁵⁹

LA'84 created a situation in which police services were for sale. The LAOOC's model for funding security was an early example of privatised public services, one in which a private group (LAOOC) awarded a contract to a public body (the police) to perform a public service (Olympic policing) paid for with a mix of public and private money. Despite the strangeness of this situation, the semi-privatisation of LA's police forces for the duration of the Games proved to be financially beneficial for the providers, most notably the LAPD, while the LAOOC was mostly powerless to rein-in costs. The committee was compromised in its dealings with law enforcement chiefly because there could be no trading on public safety, nor could an emergency response to international terrorism be conducted as a business negotiation. As became clear later when the receipts started to stack up, public safety was the last issue on the minds of the police, but it gave them the upper hand when it came to hammering out a deal with the LAOOC over funding.

There was, however, some good news for the committee. Public service austerity did not apply when it came to policing, despite the fact that forces like the LAPD no longer thought in the language of public service. The federal government under Reagan's leadership

⁵⁷ Chapman, 'Proposition 13'.

⁵⁸ Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 121.

⁵⁹ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 599-600.

was far more positive about LA'84 than it had been under Carter. At a White House meeting in January 1982 between Reagan, IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch, and Ueberroth, Reagan gave his personal assurances that the federal government would provide 'whatever assistance was needed by local government' in terms of security.⁶⁰ Accordingly, the Olympics that famously did not cost the taxpayer a cent in fact involved a \$50 million federal handout to local police departments to meet Olympic costs. These included 'logistical support equipment', one hundred helicopters, and a 'state of the art' security coordination centre.⁶¹ The state stepped in with public money under the guise of public safety to create and securitise a safe market for the private interests of the LAOOC and Olympic business.

The \$50 million federal grant was not enough on its own to meet ballooning equipment costs as well as more prosaic expenses like overtime pay and administration. In 1978, faced with an obstinate population that had formally banned the LAOOC from using public dollars, the committee and the city council set up an Olympic trust fund which immediately began collecting a 0.5% hotel tax. Later, a tax on Olympic tickets augmented the security fund. All in, the fund raised \$19.3 million specifically for security costs. A large proportion of Olympic policing costs were, then, technically paid for through public taxation, but crucially in a way which had not levied a tax directly on Angelenos.

If the almost \$20 million in the trust fund proved to be insufficient, the LAOOC would pick up the bill for remaining costs itself using private money from its corporate sponsors.⁶² Ueberroth therefore kept a close eye on security developments, determined to only pay for what was needed, remaining suspicious of all police requests. Under his watch, Ueberroth

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid; Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 121.

⁶² LAOOC, *Official Report*, 600-2.

insisted, LA would not be turned into an armed camp, nor would the LAOOC write blank cheques for 'exotic security equipment'.⁶³ Nevertheless, when Ueberroth walked into the first meeting of the security committee, he recalled, 'I could hear the cash registers ring like church on Sunday morning'.⁶⁴

Apportioning the security trust fund proved a relatively straightforward task, with the exception of the intractable Daryl Gates, who engaged in one-on-one brinkmanship with Ueberroth to secure the vast majority of funds for the LAPD.⁶⁵ All the other regional police forces in the city, including the County Sheriff and the California Highway Patrol, signed final memorandums of agreement over costs with the LAOOC in 1983. In the manner of two Cold War strongmen, however, Gates and Ueberroth held out until the eleventh hour. With the Games imminent, Ueberroth blinked first. They finally reached an "agreement" over costs on 9 July 1984 with just three weeks to go until the opening ceremony.⁶⁶ Under the terms of this agreement, the LAPD received \$15 million of the \$19.3 million trust fund. Additionally, Gates announced that, after an internal review, the LAPD had determined it needed a further \$9.4 million to meet its Olympic commitments. The LAOOC had no option but to agree and paid this out of its private coffers, funnelling corporate sponsorship money to a public police department. Gates was still not done. He also got the LAOOC to reserve an emergency fund of \$2.75 million to go to the LAPD in the event of a major incident occurring at the Games.⁶⁷ He was part military general, part businessman: 'I was operating as a CEO managing a \$1 billion-a-year organisation', he said.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 113.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Gates, *Chief*, 270.

⁶⁶ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 602.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Gates, *Chief*, 219.

As the majority of Olympic activity occurred under its jurisdiction, perhaps the LAPD was justified in staking claim to 78 percent of the trust fund, plus an extra \$9.4 million. However, the LAPD's combined total of nearly \$25 million was wildly disproportionate when considered in terms of population size. The police forces for the counties of Ventura, San Bernardino, and Orange, together with Anaheim, received a combined total of \$546,536.28 from the trust fund despite being responsible for policing a population of nearly fourteen million people between them.⁶⁹ The City of Los Angeles had a population of just over three million in 1984.⁷⁰ Even if Olympic visitors amounted to a temporary doubling of LA's population, meaning the LAPD oversaw six million people, the figures were still not proportionate. Public safety, then, was not the overriding factor which determined how much policing cost. Rather, Gates' neoliberal reimagining of what the LAPD's role should be — a regulatory, counter-insurgent force global in its scale and outlook — drove his approach to securing vast amounts of Olympic funding. With this outlook, and with \$25 million to spend, the LAPD went shopping.

The LAPD seized on the Olympics as its moment to transform into a regulatory force befitting of a global city state, with omnipotent powers over the citizenry. The broad array of equipment requested by various LAPD sub-units paints a picture of a city at war with its citizens. The Olympic arsenal stood to turn the LAPD into a quasi-state power with its own military force and intelligence agency. How many of the equipment requests charged to the Olympic account were actually acquired is not clear. However, the fact that the requests were indeed made for the sorts of equipment and weaponry usually in the hands of a federal agency or military unit reveals the scale of ambition within the LAPD in the run-up to the Games.

⁶⁹ Ibid; Population data taken from US Census (<https://www.census.gov>).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Even a small proportion of the equipment requested for the Olympics would equip the LAPD with significant military, intelligence, and surveillance capabilities far beyond its supposed social and municipal function. Although the department had pursued military capabilities since the late 1960s, the Games were the turning point. As Gates recalled: ‘it wasn’t until the 1984 Olympics that the city of Los Angeles agreed to equip SWAT properly’.⁷¹ Once the Games were over, equipment sourced to secure the Olympic market was quietly retained by the LAPD as everyday policing technology.

LAPD requests for equipment fell into two categories: weapons and technology, with supporting infrastructure for each. State-of-the-art surveillance technology was top of the list. The disgraced PDID unit asked for four new surveillance vans at \$19,000 per vehicle, each fitted with almost \$30,000 of surveillance technology, photo binoculars, and night-vision scopes.⁷² The Scientific Investigation Division asked for a laser for its laboratory, arguing that to wait for the FBI to process evidence in the event of an emergency would lead to unnecessary delay.⁷³ Far better, they reasoned, for the local police department to obtain the forensic capabilities of a federal agency. Likewise, the Detective Support Division requested a \$7,700 underwater communications system.⁷⁴ Another request noted that the Olympic Planning Group were buying microcomputers, which the division would like to use once they became available after the Games.⁷⁵ Such capabilities, and the equipment with which to hold them, did not represent a one-off cost. There would be, of course, future costs involved in maintaining and updating the equipment. This would add to future police budgets and place

⁷¹ Gates, *Chief*, 133.

⁷² Equipment Requests, Box C-654, RPC.

⁷³ Intra-departmental Correspondence, 20 September 1983, Box B-2209, RPC.

⁷⁴ Intra-departmental Correspondence, 20 October 1983, Box C-653, RPC.

⁷⁵ Intra-departmental Correspondence, 27 May 1983, Box B-2209, RPC.

politicians in the unenviable position of either agreeing to inflated funding, or telling the public why they were apparently endangering the population by making cuts to police budgets and capabilities.

The LAPD's ambition to hold a full spectrum of state-like powers did not necessarily translate into compassion for the people it claimed to want to protect. A culture of callousness was instilled from the very top and mobilised by increased Olympic funding. On more than one occasion, Gates lent his weight to requests for covert listening devices for the SWAT team. The Chief had read a newspaper clipping headlined 'In the name of religion, eight people die in Memphis', an article which told the story of a botched hostage rescue in which police, who used listening devices to interpret the situation inside the house where the hostages were held, stormed the 'modest residence of a former mental patient' with the loss of eight lives.⁷⁶ Apparently missing the point that the raid had ended in disaster, Gates underlined the words 'electronic eavesdropping devices' and inked-in: 'Does SWAT have this capability? If not, let's do something about it'. The department referred costs for this equipment to the Olympic trust fund.⁷⁷

The department encouraged a culture of militarisation across its divisions. It invited any officers who were also members of reserve armed forces to attend special military tactics courses.⁷⁸ It fitted its helicopters with \$210,000 of new radio equipment and \$171,600 of infrared cameras to provide 'discreet covert night surveillance of field ground operations'.⁷⁹ New transmission equipment to the tune of \$63,800 would allow the department to transmit

⁷⁶ 'Internal Memorandum, Chief of Police, 20 January 1983', Box B-2209, RPC.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Intra-departmental Memo, 26 May 1982, Box C-653, RPC.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

live pictures from the cameras across its fleet, argued Division heads.⁸⁰ Despite its new helicopters and surveillance capabilities, the LAPD used a blimp to monitor the Games as it allowed for long-term surveillance without the need to refuel. Bosses argued that this capability would be invaluable in the event of a ‘major unusual occurrence and events related to the 1984 Olympics’.⁸¹ In the end, both the LAPD and LAOOC flew a blimp each, with the costs of this near permanent surveillance offset by Fuji Film and Goodyear, whose sponsorship was declared on the sides of each one. Invoking the blimps’ use for security allowed both groups to get around IOC rules banning this sort of advertising at competition sites.⁸² By the time the Games began, then, the LAPD had eyes and ears everywhere.

With the potential for so much information gathering, the LAPD and other partner agencies modernised their IT systems to cope with the processing and storage of more and more data on its citizens. The Sheriff’s Department proudly showed off its new “mass arrests system” in a promotional video. The computerisation of the arrests process, explained one Deputy, accompanied plans to accommodate ‘spillover’ from Men’s Central Jail in the event that ‘mass arrests occurred’ during the Games. The computer system produced an individual report on each arrestee which would allow the courts to process them with greater efficiency, the Department claimed.⁸³ Other government agencies followed suit. Despite Ueberroth’s concerns about law enforcement taking advantage of the LAOOC, one committee memo underlined the need for the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) to address the capabilities of its LA office which was ‘chronically understaffed and under equipped’. It

⁸⁰ Operation HQ Bureau Purchase Request, Box C-653, RPC.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Nancy Yoshihara, ‘Fuji Says “Farewell” to Blimp’, *Los Angeles Times*, 6 January 1985, Part V, 4.

⁸³ ‘LA Sheriff Department Explain the Mass Arrest Procedures for 1984 LA Summer Olympics’, accessed 25 June 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAz8hTuLZV4>.

recommended the LA office be tripled in size and upgraded with modern computer equipment.⁸⁴ The INS did not take long to recognise the opportunities for expansion represented by LA '84, sending Ueberroth one of the 'more outrageous requests' he received in the name of security. For years the INS had been lobbying Congress for a multi-million-dollar inspection station at Otay Mesa on the California-Mexico border. During pre-Games planning it approached the LAOOC to build this station as an Olympic expense, a tactic Ueberroth described as 'pulling a fast one'.⁸⁵ The INS obtained its new border facility, though Ueberroth later insisted it had nothing to do with the Games.⁸⁶

Perhaps the most infamous pieces of equipment that the LAPD linked to Olympic security were its "armoured emergency rescue vehicles". The SWAT team had been seeking such a vehicle ever since its battles with the Black Panthers and Symbionese Liberation Army.⁸⁷ These military vehicles came with a hefty price tag of \$90,000, but the Metro division said they were 'essential'.⁸⁸ Perhaps recognising it might be difficult to sneak the purchase of what were effectively tanks without the guns under the noses of the LAOOC, the police got creative. Shortly before the Games, the LAPD discovered the Department of Energy selling two suitable vehicles for a dollar apiece. According to Gates, they had been used to guard nuclear power stations. Prior to this role, the vehicles had been Vietnam-War-era V100 Cadillac Gage Commando armoured cars. The department bought the vehicles without permission. Worried about how it might look that the police now owned military vehicles, Gates recalled 'what we need to do is to put this in the mode of being not an assault

⁸⁴ LAOOC Memorandum to Harry Usher from David Simon, 1 December 1981, Box 63, LAOOCR.

⁸⁵ Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 114.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Gates, *Chief*, 320.

⁸⁸ 'Essential Equipment Requests', Box C-653, RPC.

weapon but a vehicle of mercy. A vehicle that would *rescue* people'. With that, 'we painted them a nice blue to cover up their military look. And then we printed RESCUE VEHICLE on the side and slapped the city seal on the door' before converting one of them to hold the fourteen-foot battering ram [Figure VIII: Daryl Gates Introduces LAPD's New Battering Ram, 1985].⁸⁹

Recent special forces operations by national militaries in post-colonial contexts informed the other types of weaponry requested by the LAPD. The department based its argument for acquiring raiding equipment like stun grenades on a list of recent examples in which they had proven useful: by the Special Air Service during the Iranian Embassy Siege in London, by the Israelis at Entebbe Airfield in Uganda, and by the Dutch against the South Moluccans.⁹⁰ Reflecting on his time as chief, Gates recalled it was 'like keeping an army ready to invade everyday'.⁹¹ The ongoing acquisition of this kind of military materiel seeped ever deeper into the police's psyche. The threats to the Games it had conjured with its global, counter-insurgent focus made LA's neighbourhoods of colour, in Gates' own words, 'foreign territory'.⁹²

The military-industrial complex turned inextricably inward. LA's defence industries had powered counterinsurgency abroad for decades, and the LAPD's domestic counterinsurgency drive ahead of the Olympics proved to be good for defence businesses large and small.⁹³ A local supplier in Northridge sourced new SWAT helmets from the Israeli military, while the police contracted US communications giant Motorola to supply all the new

⁸⁹ Gates, *Chief*, 320.

⁹⁰ 'Essential Equipment Requests'.

⁹¹ Gates, *Chief*, 217.

⁹² *Ibid*, 126.

⁹³ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 54.

communications equipment, including a \$285,000 Digital Voice Privacy system.⁹⁴ In keeping with the police's statist ambitions, one Motorola employee noted: 'If this system were given to a third-rate world power, it would make them a second-rate world power'.⁹⁵ Motorola's fortunes had risen in line with the expansion of technology in policing around the world. It made a name for itself in the 1930s as a police supplier when it developed radios capable of connecting police cars in both the urban canyons of New York City and the vast expanse of Los Angeles.⁹⁶ By 1984, the corporation's global sales stood at an estimated \$5 billion.⁹⁷ Counter-insurgent policing against racialised people was good for business, but by the 1980s, could be bad for a corporation's image. Motorola's success in apartheid South Africa had begun to generate a public relations backlash so it "sold" its \$15 million-per-annum operations in the country to a subsidiary for \$2 million, putting distance between it and the negative associations of trading with an apartheid regime, while still profiting from the technology of racialised policing.⁹⁸

The international terrorist incidents of the 1970s coupled with the "law and order" policies of Richard Nixon helped to rationalise the expansion of heavily armed police forces, creating a lucrative new market in which businesses were quick to act. At the same time, fear of crime drove a booming civilian gun market. With big money came a new politics to protect gun wealth. In 1975, the National Rifle Association established its "political victory fund",

⁹⁴ 'Essential Equipment Requests'.

⁹⁵ *Time*, 17 October 1983, 74.

⁹⁶ Motorola Police Cruiser Brochure (1936), accessed 16 June 2021, https://www.motorolasolutions.com/content/dam/msi/docs/en-xw/static_files/history-police-cruiser-brochure-1936-3p86mb-11.pdf.

⁹⁷ Michael Parkes, 'Motorola Sells Subsidiary in South Africa', *Los Angeles Times*, 9 October 1985, Part IV, 2.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

the moment at which ‘the NRA became more than a rifle club. It became the Gun Lobby’.⁹⁹ One year earlier, West German arms manufacturer Heckler & Koch established a separate branch dedicated to law enforcement technology, and in 1976 opened an entirely separate division to serve the booming US market.¹⁰⁰ Heckler & Koch was the LAPD SWAT’s manufacturer of choice for their all new Olympic arsenal, regardless of the fact that the corporation’s G3 rifle had proven woefully unsuitable during the Munich hostage crisis of 1972.¹⁰¹ SWAT ordered sixty-six new weapons, from sub-machine guns to sniper rifles, to replace its ageing stock of non-standardised weaponry which it had cobbled together from seized street guns.¹⁰²

Prior to the Olympics, the LAPD SWAT team had been a ‘gutter little ragtag outfit’.¹⁰³ With local funding squeezed by Proposition 13, the department turned to the federal government to maintain growth, struggling to justify special projects like SWAT. The Games changed all that, providing the ultimate excuse for the acquisition of war-fighting equipment in the name of anti-terrorism. In a final Olympic windfall for the department, in October 1984 the LAOOC handed over its own now-unneeded equipment, ‘a gift of more than \$1 million in communications and transportation equipment [...] The gift included more than 225 pieces of security communications equipment and 162 motorcycles used during the Games’.¹⁰⁴ Of course, the Games passed without incident other than on the day after the closing ceremony,

⁹⁹ Ronald C. Shaiko and Marc A. Wallace, ‘Going Hunting Where the Ducks Are: The National Rifle Association and the Grassroots’ in *The Changing Politics of Gun Control*, eds., John M. Bruce and Clyde Wilcox (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 158.

¹⁰⁰ Rieke Havertz, ‘Gun Violence: Heckler & Koch in the USA’, *Pulitzer Center*, 24 June 2013, accessed 16 June 2021, <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/gun-violence-heckler-koch-usa>.

¹⁰¹ Simon Reeve, *One Day in September* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), 124-47.

¹⁰² ‘Essential Equipment Requests’; Gates, *Chief*, 132.

¹⁰³ Gates, *Chief*, 132.

¹⁰⁴ LAOOC, *Official Report*, 38.

when an LAPD officer staged a bomb scare on the Turkish team bus in an apparent stunt to gain recognition from his superiors.¹⁰⁵ Having no need of its anti-terrorist equipment, the department nevertheless retained its new arsenal and surveillance capabilities as part of frontline policing, which it brought into service to wage the “war on drugs”.

The military build-up of the LAPD’s arsenal did not go unnoticed. In 1983, Hollywood was the first to culturally respond to what hi-tech policing and massive firepower could all mean. The 1983 blockbuster *Blue Thunder* starred Roy Scheider as an LAPD helicopter pilot suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder from his service in Vietnam.¹⁰⁶ The movie centred LA’84 preparations in its plot, which revolved around the development and testing of a hi-tech, heavily armed “super-chopper” that the LAPD had acquired specifically to counter the terrorist threat to the 1984 Olympics. Scheider’s character is troubled by the intelligence gathering and surveillance capabilities of the helicopter, as well as its firepower, telling his co-pilot ‘you could run the whole country from up here’.¹⁰⁷ When he stumbles upon a dastardly plot involving the chopper, Scheider battles the corrupt officials above him, ultimately destroying the machine. *Blue Thunder*, then, framed the Olympic militarisation of the LAPD as part of a narrative of rehabilitation for the Vietnam War veteran, but it had also reassured its audience that all was well: in the face of uncertainty and change, with corrupt powers-that-be and dastardly international terrorists, one could always rely on the individual judgement and impeccable morals of the LAPD cop.

By the eve of the Olympic opening ceremony, the LAPD had seized the unique opportunity of LA’84 to rebrand itself out of a reputational and pecuniary crisis. The Games

¹⁰⁵ Bill Farr, ‘Hero Cop Jailed, Admits Olympic Bus Bomb Hoax’, *Los Angeles Times*, 14 August 1984, 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Blue Thunder* (Columbia Pictures, 1983).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

allowed the department to think in global terms about its social purpose, emphasising that the streets of the city were under threat unless the police accrued the materiel, funding, and capabilities of a quasi-military force with hi-tech surveillance technology. Economic logics of supply and demand had allowed the LAPD and its partner agencies to definitively link the supposedly central and ongoing importance of policing to the pursuit of world city status. Gates used the Olympics to transform his police force into one which, he felt, befitted such a city. Across the city, as *Blue Thunder* hit movie theatres, Angelenos also began to think anew about what kind of police department they wanted and what its purpose was.

THE SOUTH CENTRAL ORGANISING COMMITTEE AND THE “PERMANENT OLYMPICS”

The Olympics drove police expansion in Los Angeles. While this growth was good news for the LAPD, the department was not the only entity pushing for more police powers and greater resources. Police militarisation and growth had a wider social purpose beyond guaranteeing the future of the force. While some activists like the Campaign Against Police Abuse fought against expansion, other groups identified an expanded police force as the first step towards wider social change and the alleviation of poverty.¹⁰⁸ The South Central Organising Committee (SCOC) and its east-LA ally the United Neighbourhood Organisation (UNO) wanted the police to make possible a version of neoliberal utopia fashioned by local communities. The groups’ campaign for more police was part of a wider push towards transforming their neighbourhoods in neoliberal ways. In calling for more police to guarantee safe spaces for capital in South Central, the SCOC revealed neoliberal impulses in its strategies and values, impulses which differentiated it in marked ways from other activist

¹⁰⁸ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 152.

groups. The Olympics were central to how the SCOC defined what the role of the police, and the state in general, should be.

The SCOC, then, spoke to the bigger question of where “neoliberal common sense” emerged. Neoliberal strategies like privatisation and anti-welfarism complemented SCOC plans to reduce the state’s involvement in the economy, re-casting its role via saturation policing as a punitive institution whose job was to ensure safe market conditions. It enjoyed influence in the community and in local government, its rhetorical proximity to law-and-order advocates in the LAPD and world-city-liberals in local government increased its reach and impact beyond the borders of South Central.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, the group seemed to play well in the press. Over the Olympic summer of 1984 and into the autumn, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote about the group on a near-weekly basis, amplifying its voice still further.¹¹⁰ Its members were not neoliberal fanatics nor ideologues. Rather, the SCOC found neoliberal ideas offered “common sense” solutions to a set of persistent hyper-local problems affecting the Black

¹⁰⁹ Murch, ‘The Color of War’.

¹¹⁰ Sandy Banks, ‘Police Deployment Policy Attacked’, *Los Angeles Times*, 1 July 1984, Part II, 1; Sandy Banks, ‘Gates Supports Call for Study of How Officers are Deployed’, *Los Angeles Times*, 21 August 1984, Part II, 1; Sandy Banks, ‘Gates Agrees to Fund Police Deployment Study’, *Los Angeles Times*, 23 August 1984, Part II, 8; Andy Furillo, ‘Police Propose Task Force for Crime-Ridden Housing Projects’, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 September 1984, Part II, 1; Andy Furillo, ‘New Police Task Force Will Patrol 2 Projects’, *Los Angeles Times*, 5 September 1984, Part II, 1; ‘Crackdown at Nickerson’, *Los Angeles Times*, 6 September 1984, Part II, 4; Andy Furillo, ‘A Formula for Debate’, *Los Angeles Times*, 7 October 1984, Part II, 1; Andy Furillo, ‘LAPD to Transfer 9 Officers From Valley, Westside to South Central’, *Los Angeles Times*, 10 October 1984, Part II, 1; Marita Hernandez and Sandy Banks, ‘Supervisors Call for Tough New Laws to Stem Gang Violence’, *Los Angeles Times*, 17 October 1984, Part II, 1; Michael Seiler, ‘Plan to Field 1,500 More Police Gains’, *Los Angeles Times*, 17 October 1984, Part II, 1; Marita Hernandez and Michael Seiler, ‘Gates’ Pledge on Gangs Criticised as “Too Little”’, *Los Angeles Times*, 19 October 1984, Part I, 28; Michael Seiler, ‘South-Central LA Group Battles Crime, Politicians’, *Los Angeles Times*, 28 October 1984, Part II, 1; Louis Sahagún, ‘Boys Market Seeks Help of UNO’, *Los Angeles Times*, 22 November 1984, Part IV, 1; Grace Trejo, ‘South Central LA Fights Crime Itself’, *Los Angeles Times*, 23 November 1984, Part II, 7.

community, problems like gangs, drugs, and unemployment, which the state had not only historically failed to fix but seemed to have actively made worse.¹¹¹ The group found inspiration in, and derived their strategy directly from, the LAOOC's Olympic playbook.

The SCOC's many press appearances in the early 1980s granted it a large archival presence, which historians have only recently begun to analyse.¹¹² These studies, however, have underplayed or omitted the centrality of the 1984 Olympic Games to the group's belief system, and the extent to which it sought to emulate what the LAOOC had done in South Central for the brief duration of the Games. By focusing on the group's campaign for a 'permanent Olympics', its neoliberal impulses become clear.¹¹³ As Felker-Kantor has argued, the police served as most citizens' primary point of contact with the state.¹¹⁴ In the early 1980s, when the state was largely absent from so many other areas of social life due to Reaganite austerity, the meeting point between the police and the policed became the place where "everyday" people produced and reproduced the meaning of the state, and of citizenship within it. The SCOC's Olympic-centred campaign, then, reveals contemporary responses to police and punishment, as well as how the language of crisis fostered what Donna Murch has called a 'grassroots politics of personal responsibility', particularly through Christian churches which, as Murch has noted, remains largely unexplored in scholarship.¹¹⁵ More than this, though, the campaign offers a side-window on changing understandings among "everyday" people of the proper role of the state — economically and socially — during the early neoliberal period.

¹¹¹ SCOC, 'Report on South Central Los Angeles'.

¹¹² Murch, 'The Color of War'; Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*; Francis-Kelly, "We Must Not Let These Stores That Trade on Human Misery Proliferate".

¹¹³ SCOC, 'Report on South Central Los Angeles'.

¹¹⁴ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 4.

¹¹⁵ Murch, 'Crack in Los Angeles', 168; Murch, 'The Color of War', 141.

The SCOC and UNO were well suited to the age of Reagan. Born in the early 1980s, both groups traced their roots back to Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). This white-led organisation emerged in the 1940s trumpeting community-led, "professionalised" activism. The group's "pull yourself by your own bootstraps" ethos appealed across the political spectrum; New Right ideologue William F. Buckley Jr. called Alinsky an 'organisational near genius'.¹¹⁶ Alinsky, described by the IAF as a 'social entrepreneur', died in 1972, but the organisation continued training new groups like the UNO and the SCOC in the value of personal responsibility as a motor for social change. Its core tenet was: 'Never do anything for someone that they can do for themselves. Never.'¹¹⁷ The SCOC tapped into the local network of churches to establish an organisational base, commanding a yearly contribution between \$1,000 and \$5,000 from each.¹¹⁸ It favoured direct-action 'hardball' rhetoric and tactics.¹¹⁹

IAF values were easily co-opted by neoliberal ones. Self-reliance, personal responsibility, law-and-order politics, and an end to 'welfare colonialism', which had supposedly cemented Black dependency on federal welfarism, all featured in its manifesto.¹²⁰ In LA, the SCOC's projects mixed what Murch has called 'law and order politics with maternalist advocacy for social welfare and youth programs'.¹²¹ What glued its programs together, however, was a critique of redistributive liberalism and welfarism. The SCOC identified the neoliberal promise of privatisation and marketization in a colourblind society as

¹¹⁶ Industrial Areas Foundation History, accessed 30 June 2021, <https://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/history>.

¹¹⁷ Helena Lynch, 'Industrial Areas Foundation', *New York Law School Review* 50, no. 2 (2006): 571-8.

¹¹⁸ Eric Onstad, 'Community Group Succeeds in "Hardball"', *Los Angeles Times*, 18 May 1983, Part II, 1.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Charles Silerman, *Crisis in Black and White* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 123.

¹²¹ Murch, 'The Color of War', 140.

something that could replace government programs which had failed to improve everyday lives in South Central since the late 1960s. Members recognised the opportunity for wealth-generation which the Olympics posed and greatly admired what the LAOOC had done in South Central in preparation for the Games.¹²² LA '84 formed the basis for SCOC's project to rejuvenate the area along neoliberal lines.

The SCOC was determined to brand itself as something fresh and new. To the irritation of established centres of community activism in the male Catholic clergy and groups like CORE and the NAACP, the SCOC actively distanced itself from traditional forums of Black community organising.¹²³ While those civil-rights-era groups wore race on their sleeves — Congress of *Racial* Equality, the advancement of *colored* peoples — the SCOC's place-based moniker was colourblind. When LA Congresswoman Maxine Waters attacked SCOC for its white IAF origins and leadership, a spokesperson retorted in ethnic-multicultural terms: 'The leaders of this organisation are tri-racial. Of the 400 people who make leadership decisions in various committees, roughly 65% are black, 35% are Hispanic, and 5% are Anglo'. "Anglo" in particular evinced a lot of effort to avoid saying "white". It therefore existed, at least ostensibly, not for racial justice for people but rather for some kind of geographic advocacy. It pursued the social, economic, and political benefit of a particular inner-city area. The SCOC's lack of overt race-consciousness explains the group's wide appeal to some local politicians and other advocates of a colourblind system in LA.

At the same time, however, despite the area's growing Latino population, "South Central" clearly meant "Black" in the LA idiom. Regardless of the group's colourblind overtures, it recognised — and wanted to protect — South Central as a uniquely Black space

¹²² SCOC, 'Report on South Central Los Angeles'.

¹²³ Seller, 'South-Central LA Group Battles Crime, Politicians'.

and market. It anticipated that the rapidly growing ‘Hispanic’ population would equal the Black population by 1990.¹²⁴ Its choice of “Hispanic” over the more common “Latino” invoked a hyper-local vernacular in which “Latino” meant established communities in east-LA, “Chicano” meant older generations of Mexican-Americans, and “Hispanic” meant newly-arrived, “illegal” immigrants, who were threatening to disrupt the unity of the area and instigate a ‘cultural transformation’.¹²⁵ At the same time, labelling some of its own leadership as Hispanic allowed the group to present as multi-ethnic, “tri” racial, and multicultural, a community which reflected and represented LA as a world city.

On the 23 July 1984, five days before the opening ceremony, the SCOC published a report which marked the culmination of its efforts since the start of the decade. In it, the group laid out their case for a ‘permanent Olympics’ in South Central LA.¹²⁶ Permanent Olympics did not mean interminable athletics but instead the establishment of enduring Olympic conditions in their neighbourhoods, of the kind experienced in the build-up to the Games: clean streets, covered-over graffiti, police patrols, low crime, private sector investment, excitement, even a sense of momentum. Permanent Olympic conditions meant the imposition of the LAOOC’s neoliberal environment on a long-term basis, with the state, police, and private sector all given well defined roles to undertake.

The SCOC’s Olympic campaign, then, offers a glimpse of how some Black community organisers, in contrast to their more-established forebears in the NAACP and CORE, responded to the Olympic climate in the city by seeking to build a neoliberal neighbourhood on their own terms. In the words of Harry Wiley of St. Raphael’s Church:

¹²⁴ SCOC, ‘Report on South Central Los Angeles’, 1.

¹²⁵ Seller, ‘South-Central LA Group Battles Crime, Politicians’.

¹²⁶ SCOC, ‘Report on South Central Los Angeles’.

‘we’ve got to put our money together and make this capitalistic society start working for our good for a change’.¹²⁷ The permanent Olympics campaign by a group of aspiring middle-class Black property owners and businesses was designed to cement their precarious class position, but it also aimed to “raise all boats” by stimulating the local economy.¹²⁸ The SCOC embraced neoliberal thinking as a means of arresting the decline of the area and to build for a better future under conditions of globalised capitalism. Policing was central to its plans.

Under permanent Olympic conditions, the state should limit itself to two purposes only: context and security. In all other aspects it should remain absent. The report opened with a quote from Abraham Lincoln, with which the group signalled its intent to break with the ways of the past and forge something entirely new. At the same time, the invocation of Lincoln gave the campaign for a permanent Olympics historical association with a grand narrative of emancipation and emphasised the significance of what was now at stake:

The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves.¹²⁹

Lincoln’s speech here was taken from his concluding remarks to Congress in December 1862, just one month before the emancipation proclamation and now so too would the SCOC break from the inadequacies of the past and act anew for the alleviation of suffering. As was evident at the Olympic Arts Festival, the neoliberal agenda of the SCOC had use for the state as a

¹²⁷ Marita Hernandez, ‘Blacks, Latinos Pledge United Front in South-Central LA’, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 February 1981, Part II, 1.

¹²⁸ Danielle Wiggins’ research on 1980s Atlanta demonstrates a similar class dynamic: Danielle Wiggins, “‘Save Auburn Avenue for Our Black Heritage’: Debating Development in Post-Civil Rights Atlanta’, *The Journal of African American History* 107, no.1 (2022): 79-104.

¹²⁹ SCOC, ‘Report on South Central Los Angeles’.

cultural invocation, a facilitative context to give a sense of continuity and reassurance about their bold break with the status quo.

The state also had a very tangible role to play; the police were central to the SCOC's plans to develop capitalism in its neighbourhoods. The first step to take before the local economy could be opened up to the private sector was to provide 'adequate police protection'.¹³⁰ 'High crime drives out employers and increases unemployment. High unemployment results in higher crime', the report concluded. The SCOC pushed the city relentlessly and targeted Gates in particular to increase the number of officers allocated to the area and to reduce response times. Canny politicians recognised the benefits of aligning with the SCOC and its membership base. At an August 1984 SCOC meeting with local merchants and the LAPD, at which Gates was in attendance, city controller James Kahn received 'rousing applause' when he told the Chief: 'we want to feel safe all year 'round. We want the Olympics 365 days a year'.¹³¹ Gates received a standing ovation in recognition of how his force policed the area during the Games: 'The Olympics put more officers on the streets than we have ever seen before', said president of the merchants' group Virginia Taylor Hughes, adding that the meeting was taking place earlier in the day because now people are afraid to be out after dark.¹³²

Olympic saturation policing informed the debate moving forward. By October 1984, council members asked the LAPD directly how much manpower it would need to 'permanently deploy the number of officers who were in the field during the Summer Olympics, a period that saw a marked drop in crime in some areas of the city'.¹³³ The police

¹³⁰ Ibid., 17.

¹³¹ Banks, 'Gates Supports Call for Study of How Officers are Deployed'.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Michael Seller, 'Plan to Field More Police Gains. Commission Back \$390 million Proposal, Send it to

commission approved plans to spend \$390 million to boost the force from 6,900 to 8,400 by 1990.¹³⁴ Of course, Angelenos in the early 1980s routinely refused to allow any taxes to actually fund the expansion of the police force.¹³⁵ The Olympics proved a valuable means of guaranteeing the perpetual growth of policing regardless of state retrenchment in other areas.

For the SCOC, the purpose of saturation policing was to make a safe environment in which to do capitalism. To bolster its campaign, the group leaned heavily on imagery which reinforced connotations of Black people with the ghettoization of their neighbourhoods. In doing so, members invoked coded understandings of race — Blackness as criminality — to try and attract more police resources: ‘A burning Watts...looting...drug dealing...prostitutes on street corners...abandoned buildings and vacant lots...gang killings...drug-related killings...shady characters hanging out around liquor stores’, began their profile of the area.¹³⁶ As George Francis-Kelly has documented, the SCOC’s first campaign was to tax liquor stores in order to pay for more police.¹³⁷ It was a campaign imbued with morality politics, which saw poverty as pathological, a set of behaviours like alcoholism which, rather than symptoms, were the *cause* of a lack of prosperity. The police could deliver the cure by securing conditions for capitalism.

Again, when it came to locating suitable investors, the SCOC found inspiration in the LAOOC. ‘For years, programs financed by public dollars have been thrown at South Central with negligible impact’, stated the report, citing state involvement as a history of ‘band-aid solutions [...] To the credit of Mr. Ueberroth and other LAOOC officials, the purpose of their

Council’, *Los Angeles Times*, 17 October 1984.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ SCOC, ‘Report on South Central Los Angeles’.

¹³⁷ Francis-Kelly, “‘We Must Not Let These Stores That Trade on Human Misery Proliferate’”.

enterprise remained clear: To run the 1984 Games successfully and without cost to the taxpayer'.¹³⁸ The SCOC determined that during the planning of the Olympics, corporate and community leaders had 'proven their ability and willingness to make even the most far-fetched dreams come true'.¹³⁹ Making the assurances necessary for the Games to succeed involved the city's public and private sectors taking political and economic risks 'inherent in all venture capital enterprises', said SCOC, and 'similar risks will be required if LA's inner city is to be rebuilt'.¹⁴⁰ For the SCOC, the rehabilitation of South Central should be an exercise in venture capitalism, an act of faith in neoliberal privatization and not a state-managed affair.

Rather than rely on the 'debilitating bureaucracy' that came with state involvement in urban renewal, the SCOC proposed a cooperative strategy between the community and businesses, with local political leadership cast in a facilitative supporting role: 'Securing corporate sponsors was one of the first priorities of the LAOOC. Corporations were approached to invest not only their money, but also tie ideas, their staffs, and their energy into supporting the Games'. Moreover, 'corporate presence helped keep the Games outside the direct control of any political entity, probably averting certain disaster'. The only desired state intervention was to run the 'interference necessary to cut through red tape'. Big corporations should want to get involved in the social infrastructure of South Central, argued the SCOC, because it was 'good for business', an under-exploited market. A privatised, corporate approach concluded the SCOC, 'worked to make the Games a success, and it will work to rebuild South Central Los Angeles'.¹⁴¹ Instead of a state-managed renewal, then, here was a

¹³⁸ SCOC, 'Report on South Central Los Angeles', 9-11.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

strategy for a state-facilitated relationship between communities and the private sector.

By 1985, the SCOC had successfully invoked the Olympics to get increased police numbers on the ballot.¹⁴² The group did not stop there, however. LA'84 had since announced a 'surplus' profit of \$225 million, and the SCOC jumped at the chance to seize as much of the fund as possible for South Central. That summer, one year on from the Games, the SCOC and UNO held a joint rally at a downtown college campus. The *Los Angeles Times* reported ten-thousand residents attended, as well as Mayor Bradley and other dignitaries, whose help the SCOC sought to enlist in pressuring the LA'84 Foundation (successor to the LAOOC, entrusted with the profits) to meet its demands for \$10 million in funds, coupled with a package of tough-on-crime bills which would create 'combat zone' teams from several police departments to 'crack down' on gangs and drug trafficking in the neighbourhood.¹⁴³ The group's demand for this type of aggressive anti-drug policing came five months after the Pacoima raid, which had apparently not affected its thinking in this regard.

The Games were over, but their memory was still powerful. The SCOC now invoked that memory by staging their own Olympic torch run. Turning to the mayor as the runners approached, SCOC chair Edith Nealy announced: 'Just as in Ancient Greece the torch was passed from runner to runner, we want to pass our torch to you... The only difference is that our torch won't be lit until our Olympic package is approved. We pass you the torch of our Olympic legacy and with it the hopes and aspirations of all our children'.¹⁴⁴ At its core, the SCOC's campaign for a permanent Olympics consisted of two strands closely weaved together: private sector investment in the social infrastructure and local economy of South

¹⁴² Seller, 'Plan to Field More Police Gains'.

¹⁴³ Edward Boyer, 'Dual Goal Told at Rally: Strike at Crime, Win Olympic Funds', *Los Angeles Times*, 21 July 1985, Part II, 1.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Central, and the creation of a heavily policed environment which would drive out the material evidence of poverty, enticing businesses to spread wealth in the community. The plan was a neoliberal strategy, refusing public funding and reducing the state's role to that of a punitive enforcer and market facilitator, while opening up new markets in the everyday lives of Black Angelenos. The Olympics had provided the SCOC not just with inspiration, but also the emotive language and political weight to push for neoliberal change. Neoliberalisation, for the SCOC, was not a concrete ideology to be imported wholesale and plugged in to South Central. Rather, it was a set of impulses and ideas which seemed to offer common sense solutions to a set of hyper-local challenges, challenges which the state had long failed to solve.

The SCOC's position on policing was certainly not representative of the Black community as a whole. Many Black residents of South Central criticised and resisted what they saw as an 'occupying army' in the form of the LAPD.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the SCOC was significant and, together with the UNO in the east of LA, reportedly represented '200,000 families'.¹⁴⁶ Through churches it held influence across South Central neighbourhoods as well as in local government. The SCOC appealed to a specific tradition of Black activism, neither radical nor accommodationist. While the SCOC sought to work with and through local government and capitalist structures, the group eschewed "accommodationist" labels in the Booker T. Washington sense. Indeed, Charles Silberman, who had written in praise of Alinsky back in the 1960s, derided the lack of nuance around the "accommodationist" debate. Booker T. Washington had, said Silberman, 'indissolubly linked the idea of self-improvement

¹⁴⁵ Furillo, 'New Police Task Force Will Patrol 2 Projects'.

¹⁴⁶ 'Promising Partnership', *Los Angeles Times*, 2 July 1988, Part II, 8.

to that of accommodation and submission'.¹⁴⁷

Rather, the SCOC's lineage was that of the tradition of elite Black capitalism. Marable's 1983 work *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* argued that this tradition had been born in colonial space when colonisers in administrative capacities employed a stratum of oppressed peoples to aid them in extracting wealth. This 'non-white elite [...] is the non-white mouthpiece of the new order, articulating in the media and in various aesthetic forums the ideals of the masters', argued Marable.¹⁴⁸ This elite stratum bridged the divide between "nationalist" anti-colonialism and "integrationist" efforts to internalise the economic and social worldview of the colonisers.¹⁴⁹ A similar dynamic governed the SCOC's campaign for a permanent Olympics. The group was "nationalist" in the sense that it was motivated by protecting and growing a unique Black market in South Central in the interests of racial and social justice. At the same time, the group was "integrationist" in as much as it located the furtherance of social mobility within capitalist structures, structures which it hoped to push away from state interference toward the private market. It had inculcated the changing economic discourse, placing its faith and its future in neoliberal "common sense" processes.

For the SCOC, the expansion of policing it had seen at the Olympics was the means by which to secure a renewed future for Black capitalism. The group admired the LAOOC's ability to generate private investment while eschewing regulatory oversight by the "excessively bureaucratic" state. All that was holding South Central back from attracting the kinds of corporate investment in social infrastructure and local businesses witnessed during

¹⁴⁷ Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White*, 125-9.

¹⁴⁸ Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, 120.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

the Games was the immediate return to “normal” by the police, who no longer saturated the streets of South Central in the manner which they had done during the Games. If the police could be made to return and drive out those whose existence, as the SCOC saw it, *caused* poverty, then the future would be bright for a neoliberal marketization of the area. Neoliberal strategies, it seemed, provided common-sense solutions to local problems.

CONCLUSION

The 1984 Olympics was a watershed moment in the history of Los Angeles policing. Standing between the establishment of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration in 1965 and the era of mass incarceration, private prisons, and the city’s crack cocaine crisis in the late 1980s, the Games were, in the words of Chief Gates, the LAPD’s ‘finest hour’.¹⁵⁰ The Games directly shaped the ways in which the city waged its “war on drugs” in the following years, as a counter-insurgent operation conducted with military-grade equipment. The materiel the LAPD acquired in the name of international Olympic security facilitated a war-fighting culture within its ranks with which it targeted the city’s poorest communities of colour. In 1988, as part of its anti-gang initiative “Operation Hammer”, the police stormed and utterly destroyed an apartment at 39th and Dalton, just a few blocks from the Coliseum. Even Gates had to admit police officers had gotten ‘out of hand’.¹⁵¹ Hammer rested on colonial logics, with some in law enforcement equating South Central with Vietnam. Mike Davis observed: ‘like the Marines hitting the beach at Danang in the beginnings of LBJ’s escalations in Vietnam, the first of the thousand-cop blitzkriegs made the war in Southcentral look

¹⁵⁰ Gates, *Chief*, 290.

¹⁵¹ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 275.

deceptively easy'.¹⁵²

The Games' international status had allowed the LAPD to realise its ambitions to consider itself in global terms, collapsing the boundaries between international terrorism and the streets of South Central. Hammer, said Gates, was specifically targeting 'the predators who are *terrorising* law-abiding citizens'.¹⁵³ At the same time, Gates praised the city in terms that suggested he had fully signed up to LAOOC messaging: 'Its diverse population gives residents and visitors the ability to drive its streets and experience the cultures of distant lands — China, Korea, Japan, Mexico and Iran, to name just a few'.¹⁵⁴ LA was, then, a world city at last, and the LAPD was a police force on that scale.

The Games' impact on the police went deeper than militarisation for its own sake. It was a financial and reputational lifeline that steadied the LAPD ship in the uncertain waters of the early 1980s after the passage of Proposition 13 and the increased reliance on special federal grants. Through its Olympic planning and the development of its DARE program, the LAPD thought of itself not just in statist military terms but also in economic terms. By 1988, with Operation Hammer in full swing, the impact of the Games in this respect was still evident. Chief Gates was still dining out on his Olympic accomplishments. In that year's introduction to the LAPD annual report, the chief stated: 'During the 1984 Olympics, funds from the Olympic Organising Committee enabled us to deploy our officers on extended shifts, adding significantly to the number of sworn personnel on our streets. We proved that additional police officers can add to the LAPD's effectiveness in the war against crime. Elected officials got the message. This year, a budget increase allowed us to hire over 400

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ [My italics] 'Los Angeles Police Department Annual Report, 1988', Box 2209, RPC.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

more officers'.¹⁵⁵ The beneficial relationship between the Olympics and the LAPD appeared stronger than ever before.

DARE became the LAPD's 'number one export' around the world.¹⁵⁶ A gala dinner for the program, at which Jay Leno supplied the entertainment, netted \$760,000 for the LAPD, and the total contributions from Kentucky Fried Chicken now stood at \$4 million.¹⁵⁷ The reputational prestige afforded it by its successful policing of the Games seemed enough to convince law makers that policing was the best way out of the drug crisis. With city residents allergic to taxation to pay for the war, the state passed legislation in 1984 to incentivise asset forfeiture from narcotic seizures, netting the LAPD \$33 million, 234 vehicles, and a 'courier aircraft' in 1988 alone.¹⁵⁸ "Growth" was always the point. The police incidents which followed the Games remained "low tech" — Rodney King was beaten not with some exotic new piece of equipment, just standard batons, while all the advanced communications equipment did not seem to assist a bewildered and disorganised LAPD in the early hours of the 1992 Rebellion.¹⁵⁹ The point was just to *acquire* and expand. The LAPD was now an entrepreneurial police force.

The SCOC, meanwhile, gradually distanced itself from calls for Olympic-style policing in South Central. Before the raid on 39th and Dalton, policing was still very much on its agenda. After the summer of 1988, the group was still making regular appearances in the press but had switched its focus toward education, community housing initiatives, and connecting public schools to private businesses.¹⁶⁰ It may have shed its police-led approach to

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ *LA92* (National Geographic Documentary Films, 2017).

¹⁶⁰ Rodolfo Acuña, 'Trojan Horse Cozies Up to Schools', *Los Angeles Times*, 28 August 1990, B7; 'Promising

social rehabilitation of the urban environment, but it seemed the private sector was still a desired partner. The SCOC never succeeded in establishing permanent Olympic conditions in South Central, at least, not in the matter it had envisaged. Nevertheless, the campaign showed how neoliberal impulses coloured common-sense responses to a set of local crises, casting “more capitalism” as the answer to systemic problems.

Partnership’, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 July 1988, Part II, 8; Paul Feldman, ‘Private Groups Plan Own Low-Cost Housing Project’, *Los Angeles Times*, 23 March 1989, Part II, 3.

VI

THE BOYS OF SUMMER: CARL LEWIS, MICHAEL JORDAN, AND THE BORDERS OF NEOLIBERAL UTOPIA

Time magazine, 7 January 1985:

They saw an American carrying a torch, running across America. But also, it may be, they saw an American running out of a long Spenglerian gloom heading west for California. Toward the light. Running away from recession, Americans might almost subconsciously have imagined, away from Jimmy Carter's "malaise", away from gas shortages and hostage crises and a sense of American impotence and failure and limitation and passivity, away from dishonoured Presidents and a lost war. Away from what had become an American inferiority complex. Away from a decadent history. Running away from the past, into the future. Or away from the bad past anyway, the recent, misbegotten past, and into a better past, all myths and sweetly vigorous, into that America where the future was full of endless possibility. Into an America where, as Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "The only sin is limitation".

The roadside scene was a little dramatisation of the American theme of 1984: an extravagance of renewed national self

confidence and pride. By a collusion of timing and chemistry and artful television technique and happy economics, the nation fell into a spirit of coalescence and optimistic self-assertion not seen for a generation [...] The land was acrawl with entrepreneurs and Emersonian yuppies sounding the official cheer of 1984: “Go for it!” The belief was reborn that Americans can do — well, *anything*.¹

* * *

Despite the LAOOC’s strenuous efforts through festive federalism to disassociate LA’84 from the nation state, when it came to the sporting elements of the Games there was no getting away from some good old-fashioned displays of patriotic fervour. The Olympic torch run across America, described so evocatively by essayist Lance Morrow for *Time* (above), was one such display. The triumphant feats of US athletes on the track and in the field provided many others, among them the soon-to-be world conquering Michael Jordan. Before the Games, though, no American superstar shone brighter than Carl Lewis, who left Los Angeles in 1984 with an astounding haul of four gold medals. What the torch run had started, the athletes completed: a rehabilitation of the “American spirit”. After the social “dislocations” of the 1960s, the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the crises of the 1970s which had done so much to tarnish the nation’s sense of itself, America, it seemed, was back.

There was, according to *Time*, a ‘new American mood’.² Rather than something new, however, what defined this mood seemed to be first and foremost something *reclaimed*, an interregnum brought to its end at last. LA’84, Morrow seemed to be arguing, had done

¹ Lance Morrow, ‘Feeling Proud Again’, *Time*, 7 January 1985, 6.

² *Ibid*, 12.

nothing short of restore naturally American, Emersonian, transcendental self-reliance. The Games had rekindled the frontier spirit, imploring Americans everywhere to throw off the shackles of limitation and head west in search of gold — medals or otherwise. LA'84, then, seemed to have restored the era of classical American liberalism. While one might conclude that to make such a claim Morrow had surrendered journalistic restraint and been swept up in the emotion of the occasion, the point is that *Time* magazine — hardly a peripheral publication — made Morrow's essay its main feature for its new-year issue.³

The framing of LA'84 as something timelessly American which had been rediscovered helped to cushion the neoliberal encasement, marketization, and individual utopianism which had delivered the Games in a comforting re-telling of American history. At the same time, Morrow allowed for the idea that something about LA'84 was new: a redefinition of what it meant to be patriotic. 'The new patriotism and commercial energy of the nation', he argued, were spectacularly dramatized at the Games, and the driving force behind them was Ueberroth. 'Not since Neil Armstrong's walk on the moon has America had such an opportunity to lift its best face to the world. Ueberroth arranged the showing. He took over the stage of the global village'.⁴ Morrow cited Ueberroth's ruthless individualism and entrepreneurial spirit as a new form of American patriotism, what it *meant* to be American in 1985, simultaneously folding the "new patriotism" into the annals of American history alongside other surpass-ers of the frontier like Armstrong. Joining past winners Ronald Reagan, "the computer", and "the terrorist", *Time* made Ueberroth its "man of the year" for 1984.⁵

³ Robert Ajemian, 'Master of the Games', *Time*, 7 January 1985, 14-19.

⁴ Morrow, 'Feeling Proud Again', 8.

⁵ 'A Letter from the Publisher', *Time*, 7 January 1985, 5.

Morrow's *Time* article posed a question about the kind of neoliberal patriotism embodied by Ueberroth which did not go fully articulated nor answered. Surely, the forced marriage of two ostensibly mutually exclusive ideas — rampant individualism and a collective national identity — could not work. Morrow, however, seemed not to be troubled by any contradiction: 'clearly there is some relationship between doing well personally and feeling good about one's country'.⁶ *Time* had already grappled with this idea in October 1983, when it presaged the entrepreneurial character of the "new patriotism" taking hold over the Games, despite the LAOOC's great efforts to distance itself from national imagery: 'In the most remarkable private business deal in the history of free enterprise, patriotism is seeing nationalism, and raising the bet outrageously'. The article quoted senior LAOOC staffer Dan Greenwood discussing the matter: 'It is akin to patriotism, but a patriotism of businessmen [...] commercialism is not a bad word either, though some may disagree'.⁷ Despite Ueberroth's insistence that 'we [LAOOC] are not a nation and we have no statement to make. We are celebrating sport', the press had nevertheless rendered Ueberroth the very definition of the individual American dream, redefining "proper" citizenship as entrepreneurialism.⁸ An ex-colleague of Ueberroth agreed, telling the *Los Angeles Times*: 'The Olympics is a cause and, right now, Peter is the Olympics. It's like criticising motherhood and apple pie'.⁹ Ueberroth's global-facing, neoliberal Olympics had suddenly become quintessentially American.

The "new patriotism", then, was simply the neoliberal celebration of individual utopia dressed up in red, white, and blue. It was an attempt to rehabilitate American national identity

⁶ Morrow, 'Feeling Proud Again', 12.

⁷ Tom Callahan, 'Eve of a New Olympics', *Time*, 17 October 1983, 72-81.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Bella Stumbo, 'Ueberroth: "Ruthless and Shy"', *Los Angeles Times*, 24 June 1984, 1.

by fusing its meaning to the tenets of ascendant neoliberal ideas. “America”, when framed as a neoliberal utopia, was merely the facilitative context which allowed the entrepreneurial individual to thrive. In such a place, the only markers of success were entrepreneurial drive, individualism, and competition. There were to be no limits, no regulations, no borders to the imaginary nor the possible. American utopia, taken to its logical conclusion, was to be a post-racial, colour-blind, yet multi-cultural space. It was also, however, a paradox. As Slobodian argues, from the outset neoliberal thinking was about creating the social conditions for capitalism to persist in a decolonising, democratising world, encasing the free operation of capitalism from the demands of the people.¹⁰ It was an extension of, not a revolution against, racial capitalism. The global neoliberal economy could not encase capitalism while at the same time be serious about the virtues of post-racial individualism. Racial capitalism’s starting critique is, after all, that capitalism *requires* the existence of inequality enshrined by race.

Individual utopianism gave rise to the powerful myth that anyone can “make it” under the neoliberal system regardless of race, or any other category by which one can be oppressed: gender, sexuality, religion etc. *Time* magazine agreed, finding no reason for cognitive dissonance in its redefinition of collective American identity as the individual, self-reliant pursuit of profit. What went unsaid in the accolades bestowed on Ueberroth was that, as well as the embodiment of the new individual patriotism, he was also a white, heterosexual man in his forties, a father, and a husband. These categories were, however, crucial. As Carl Lewis discovered during his bruising experience at LA ’84, the borders of individual utopia did indeed exist and were heavily policed by race, gender, sexuality, and conservative notions of respectability.

¹⁰ Slobodian, *Globalists*, 17-21.

Carl Lewis' Olympic experience in 1984 reveals the limitations capitalism imposed on neoliberal utopianism, its most pervasive cultural trope. Utopianism, more than encasement or marketization, was the neoliberal format that eloquently seduced people, in the words of Paul Gilroy, 'to enter its hall of distorting mirrors seeking the hope that by buying in rather than selling out, their lives and the world will become better'.¹¹ It was *the* central promise which allowed neoliberal culture to take root, promising a level playing field where one could *choose* one's identifiers, rather than have one's race, gender, or sexuality held against them. However, as Lewis found out, the ways in which the press interpreted his race, gender, sexuality, and general behaviour accumulated in a negative backlash against him, a backlash with economic outcomes. His popularity, at least with sponsors, diminished in spite of his gold medals. He left Los Angeles with question marks over his American-ness, his sexuality, and whether he even deserved his accolades, and he left without a major corporate sponsorship deal.¹² He may have embodied neoliberal utopianism in his demeanour and his post-racial, androgynous style, as well as in his ruthless single-mindedness to compete and to win, but crucially, these were not the *right kind* of signifiers to make Lewis a commodity that would sell in the American market place. Lewis at LA'84 marked the capitulation of neoliberal egalitarian potential to the demands and logics of racial capitalism. Nationalism was the complicating factor.

Carl Lewis' Olympic experience witnessed neoliberal utopian ideology clash with other American sentiments: the politics of blackness, whiteness, "respectability", and social conservatism. This clash between Lewis' idiosyncratic individualism and more traditional social and cultural mores exposed the nationalist paradox at the heart of neoliberal

¹¹ Gilroy, 'We Got to Get Over Before We Go Under', 49.

¹² Trip Gabriel, 'The Runner Stumbles', *New York Times*, 19 July 1992.

utopianism. Carl Lewis, as a Black man and as an athlete was a powerful cultural signifier, his ‘visual politics’ generated social, racial, and national meaning.¹³ In the early 1980s, athletes had also taken on unprecedented commercial value as commodities. Not only did they generate meaning about race and nation, but they also generated wealth — a *lot* of it.¹⁴ At LA’84, then, the figures of Carl Lewis and Michael Jordan became wider forums for ideas about race, nation, and the future of capitalism. Race, gender, and sexuality delineated and guarded the borders of neoliberal utopia and denied access on terms which protected white, male, heteronormativity.

Carl Lewis failed to marry his outstanding sporting achievement at the Games to the kind of unprecedented wealth and status of Michael Jordan who, having impressed on the US Olympic basketball team, signed a contract with Chicago Bulls later that year and went on, in partnership with Nike, to conquer the world.¹⁵ As such, Jordan has dominated scholarship on Black male athletes and the rise of sporting commercialism in the 1990s.¹⁶ There was, however, nothing inevitable about Jordan’s rise to the very top. Viewed from 1984, it was Carl Lewis whom the media tipped as standing on the precipice of sporting and commercial greatness. Nevertheless, it was Jordan who, in the words of Amy Bass, ‘complete[d] the

¹³ I have borrowed the term ‘visual politics’ from C. Keith Harrison’s analysis of Michael Jordan in the foreword to: David L. Andrews, ed., *Michael Jordan Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), ix.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁵ Walter LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999).

¹⁶ Amy Bass, ‘Sports History and the “Cultural Turn”’, *Journal of American History* 101, no. 1 (2014): 148-72; LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*, Andrews, *Michael Jordan Inc.*; Jordana Matlon, ‘Branded’ in Donna Murch, ed., *Racist Logic: Markets, Drugs, Sex* (Cambridge, MA: Boston Review, 2019), 75-84; Robin D.G. Kelley, ‘Playing For Keeps: Pleasure and Profit on the Postindustrial Playground’, in *The House that Race Built*, ed., Wahneema Lubiano, (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1998), 195-231; Michael Eric Dyson, *Reflecting Black: African-American Cultural Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

project of Reaganism’, becoming the ultimate proof that anyone can “make it”.¹⁷ Jordan became the ultimate athlete of the neoliberal era because of what he *was*, but just as important is what he *was not*. Jordan’s visual politics were the *right kind* to market in both American and foreign markets, Lewis’, quite simply, were not. Focusing not on Jordan and the 1990s, but on Lewis in the 1980s reveals how the neoliberal possibility of a post-racial, utopian future crumbled in the face of older ideologies upon which capitalism relied.

CARL LEWIS AND THE LEGACY OF JESSE OWENS

The press widely anticipated that LA’84 would be Lewis’ “big moment” and during the Olympic build-up they set about establishing a narrative in which to couch his impending success on behalf of the nation, a story with which Americans could understand the meaning of this Black athlete. Lewis, however, pushed back against this typecasting at every turn, presenting himself as the physical embodiment of the LAOOC’s pictogram: a race-less gender-less, individual competitor, a global citizen of neoliberal utopia. In the pre-Games media coverage of Lewis, America’s great expectations for him sat uneasily alongside Lewis’ individualistic self-presentation, an identity which overtly rejected the virtues of “masculinity”, grace, and gratefulness that the press and public thought he should adopt. This tension lit the fuse for a backlash over the sort of Black male athlete Lewis was, and the one the nation demanded.

America expected Lewis to adhere to the popular memory of Olympian Jesse Owens, who had died in 1980. In both the “mainstream” and Black press, Owens was an American hero who represented the best of national masculinity and virility, patriotism and apoliticism, and selective racelessness. In 1984, a TV biopic entitled *The Jesse Owens Story* formed part

¹⁷ Bass, *Not the Triumph But the Struggle*, 348.

of the Olympic build-up and cemented the press' expectations of Lewis. In it, Owens was Black when he challenged Nazi eugenics at the Berlin Olympics of 1936, but left his race on the track, overcoming Jim Crow racism on an individual basis.¹⁸ The movie bolstered the idea of sport's colourblind meritocracy, celebrating the overcoming of adversity as an individual. Owens was no radical in this biopic, as one speech attributed to him illustrated: 'There's a lot to be learned from athletics. Living by the rules of the game and by the rules of society. Otherwise, you don't have a good game and you don't have a good society. But if you play by the rules, you'll be a winner. Believe me, I know. Everybody can be a winner'.¹⁹ This narrative pervaded the entertainment industry in the early 1980s erasing stars' identification with a collective Black consciousness in the interests of achieving "crossover" appeal.²⁰

The biopic presented Owens as a comfortably conservative character. Christopher Rounds has argued that athletes like Owens, and the articulate, well-educated Jackie Robinson appealed to conservative sensibilities, standing as evidence of the nation's racial progressivism and the "right way" to be a Black athlete.²¹ As Dyson argues, beating white men in the ring served as a substitute to actual social equality.²² Owens' apparently moderate temperament allowed him to be easily framed in patriotic terms, an idealistic reference point for anyone seeking to achieve acceptability and respectability as the Games approached. The supposed apolitical character of the Olympic movement, together with Harry Edwards'

¹⁸ Lindsay Parks Pieper and Andrew D. Linden, 'Race but not Racism: *The Jesse Owens Story* and Race', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 10 (2020): 853-71.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 853-4.

²⁰ Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 127.

²¹ Christopher Rounds, 'The Policing of Patriotism: African American Athletes and the Expression of Dissent', *Journal of Sport History* 47, no. 2 (2020): 111-27.

²² Michael Eric Dyson, *Race Rules: Navigating the Color Line* (New York: Perseus Books, 1996), 18-19.

warning about the dangers of protesting, made the pre-Games mood one of moderation.²³ Tommie Smith and John Carlos were in the employ of the LAOOC.²⁴ Even the once radical Muhammad Ali had caught the Olympic fever, running the torch through his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky.²⁵ LA'84, then, was not generally seen as a forum for race-based activism or making claims of racial collectiveness. When the Soviet Union announced it would boycott, supporting the Games became nothing short of supporting America in the Cold War.²⁶

The press expected Lewis to be the star of LA'84, the inheritor of the laurels of an ancestry of Black sporting excellence, the latest evidence of America's supposed in-built racial progressivism. The LAOOC had built this ancestry into the Games' pageantry. Organisers had kept secret the identity of the person who would bear the torch into the Coliseum for the lighting of the Olympic flame atop the stadium's peristyle. Owens' granddaughter Gina Hemphill had been given this great honour by the committee, and commentators were effusive about the emotional weight of the occasion when she burst into the arena holding the torch aloft for a lap of the track. Hemphill then handed over to Black Olympian Rafer Johnson, another example of a Black athlete who had achieved mainstream acceptability through individual sporting success.²⁷ In a physical performance of individual ascent over great adversity, Johnson ran the torch up the specially constructed, extremely-

²³ Paul Farhi, 'Games Demonstrations Ill Advised', *Los Angeles Times*, 25 May 1984, 6.

²⁴ 'Sports Expert Edwards Pushed for '68 Boycott, Predicted Russian Pullout', *Jet*, 16 July 1984, 34.

²⁵ Ueberroth, *Made in America*, 327.

²⁶ Dusko Doder, 'Soviets Withdraw from Los Angeles Olympics', *Washington Post*, 9 May 1984, 1.

²⁷ Rafer Johnson went on from his Olympic career to become a successful actor. He was also closely involved in Robert F. Kennedy's presidential campaign and was present at the Ambassador Hotel in LA on the night R.F.K. was assassinated. See Scott Wilson, 'Olympic Gold Medalist Rafer Johnson, Who Helped Bring Summer Games to L.A., Dies at 86', *Los Angeles Times*, 2 December 2020.

steep steps and set light to the beacon.²⁸ For the press, it was clear who would now take up the mantle of Black sporting excellence: “Carl Lewis, over to you”. Safe in the assertion that this was going to be the “Carl Lewis Olympics”, *Time* devoted its Olympic opening-week cover to an image of Lewis, jumping in triumph next to that ultimate symbol of striving, white-ethnic America: The Statue of Liberty.²⁹

Lewis, however, was not the cultural reincarnation of Owens, nor did he intend to be. His career reference points were crossover megastars Michael Jackson and Prince. In their commercial success, and in their avant-garde, individualistic style, Lewis sought to emulate these two musicians.³⁰ He knew the career of a professional sportsperson was a short one, and in the run up to LA’84 he put in place a strategy to maintain a high-profile once his track days were over, either through acting, music, or politics. The Games were the golden opportunity for Lewis to establish himself as a national celebrity. Accordingly, his manager told *Sports Illustrated*, he aimed to saturate the sports press: ‘Accept virtually every appearance offer in LA and NYC for maximum media attention; Transcend track and field and gain access to a diversity of Americans through stories in magazines such as *Esquire*, *Ebony*, *Newsweek*, *GQ*; Limit endorsements and wait until after the Olympics to bag the big one [...] We want Carl to be identified with one major company, the way O.J. Simpson is with Hertz’.³¹ “Transcend” and “diversity” all had neoliberal, post-racial overtones in keeping with the LAOOC’s festive federalism, and Lewis’ plans to limit the supply of his brand was exactly the same as Ueberroth’s approach to LA’84 sponsorship, protecting an air of exclusivity around the

²⁸ Bill Dwyer, ‘The 1984 Olympics had Rafer Johnson to Light the Way’, *Los Angeles Times*, 28 July 2009.

²⁹ *Time*, 30 July 1984.

³⁰ Carl Lewis with Jeffrey Marx *Inside Track: My Professional Life in Amateur Track and Field* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 91.

³¹ Gary Smith, ‘I Do What I Want To Do’, *Sports Illustrated*, 18 July 1984, 22-39.

“product”.

Despite giving the impression he was too busy being Carl Lewis to be Black as well, he did occasionally speak about race. He had been born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1961, and had moved with his parents to New Jersey to escape the racist violence in the South.³² He was clear about his place as a Black athlete when asked: ‘Because of Jesse [Owens], I’m going up the front elevator, not the service elevator like he had to’.³³ Nevertheless, for Lewis, at least in the press, such problems were in the past. Sports stars like O.J. Simpson had overcome the obstacles of race and cleared the way for a new, post-racial generation, as Lewis’ manager told *Sports Illustrated*: ‘Everyone identifies with him. When he goes to Japan, he’s Oriental. He’s not black, he’s not white, he’s Carl Lewis’.³⁴ The Lewis camp was keen he acquire the crossover racelessness which Simpson had pioneered.³⁵ Lewis was to be, first and foremost, a brand and a commodity, perfectly suited to multicultural, colourblind, Olympic Los Angeles. His anticipated success at LA’84 would raise the bar in terms of what endorsements and opportunities he could expect. With this in mind, Lewis turned down the opportunity to kickstart his acting career by playing Jesse Owens in the 1984 biopic and held off signing an endorsement deal with Coca-Cola, believing the price of his stock would rise exponentially with a few gold medals to his name.³⁶

On the eve of the Games, then, Lewis seemed to personify the “new patriotism”: the fusing together of national pride and single-minded individualism in the pursuit of success. This individualism, however, not only manifested in Lewis’ on-track prowess and off-track

³² Lewis, *Inside Track*, 17-25.

³³ ‘One on One: Carl Lewis’, *Al Jazeera*, accessed 31 October 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6XwnUKX_UU&t=967s; Lewis, *Inside Track*, 38.

³⁴ Smith, ‘I Do What I Want To Do’.

³⁵ Dyson, *Race Rules*, 19.

³⁶ Smith, ‘I Do What I Want To Do’.

business strategy, it influenced the ways in which Lewis presented himself to the world. Ahead of LA'84, Lewis' idiosyncrasies around race, gender, and sexuality came to the fore, colouring his press coverage and hinting at the potential for tension between his individually chosen expressions of identity and his impending coronation as an American hero. As the Games progressed, this tension proved too much to keep the twin strands of new patriotism from separating. His individuality barred Lewis from achieving the status of national icon, illustrating in the process what kinds of neoliberal individualism could be associated with the nation, and those which could not.

The press sexualised Lewis during their pre-Games coverage as a response to their own confusion about his identity. The *Sports Illustrated* preview, the most significant pre-Games profile of him, was laced with homoeroticism: 'Lewis wears gray running shoes, silver, skin-hugging elastic tights, grey-striped briefs that show through the tights, and a shiny silver jacket — unzipped halfway down his shirtless chest, collar flipped up, name across the back — along with a gold wrist chain, gold watch, neck chain and two gold rings, one of them diamond-studded...and no sweat at all'.³⁷ Two-thirds of one page devoted itself to a photo of Lewis sitting on the edge of a swimming pool wearing nothing but trunks, jewellery, aviator sunglasses, and a Stetson hat. Through its overt sexualisation, the image subverted the most classic representation of "traditional" American masculinity: the cowboy [Figure IX: Carl Lewis]. The image channelled the gay subtext of the Village People — a band which unapologetically championed gay rights — in the video for *Macho Man*. Lewis' pose on the edge of the pool directly reflected that of George Michael in the 1983 video for Wham's *Club Tropicana*, which also featured men in their underwear, complete with Stetsons and

³⁷ Smith, 'I Do What I Want To Do'.

sunglasses.³⁸

The profile set the tone for the media's understanding of Lewis as someone overtly sexual and therefore promiscuous.³⁹ *Time*, days later, described his body as 'hard like mahogany, but carved in unusually clear detail, including rope-like muscular definition'.⁴⁰ Lewis had to repeatedly deny that he was gay.⁴¹ Regardless, articles fleshed out the idea that *something* about him did not quite "fit", picturing him posing in his elegant, tasteful house surrounded by his collection of French crystal, or with his white show dog "Sasha" (reportedly, his answerphone message ended with: "and Sasha thanks you"). He embodied, surmised the press, a new 'soft masculinity': a gentler attitude towards 'life and styles of living'.⁴²

Lewis did not shy away from his "soft masculinity". On the contrary, he unapologetically owned it. One member of the Lewis camp told *Time*: 'There is a depth of vulnerability in Carl. A lot of athletes create a partition on their emotions. It's that masculine, fixed idea that men don't cry [...] It was not hard to get Carl to touch the more fragile interior'. Lewis concurred, adding: 'Men — athletes especially — have to be like King Kong. When we lose, we can't cry and we can't pout. We're not supposed to be touched. We have to be carved in a certain way just to be men — chest of steel and all. I think it's disgusting'.⁴³ In

³⁸ The Village People, *Macho Man* (New York: Casablanca Records, 1978), accessed 22 February 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AO43p2Wqc08>; Wham, *Macho Man* (UK: Innervision Records, 1983), accessed 22 February 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYX0sjP6Za8>.

³⁹ On race and sexuality see: Kendall Thomas, "'Ain't Nothin' Like the Real Thing": Black Masculinity, Gay Sexuality, and Gender' and Rhonda M. Williams, 'Living at the Crossroads: Explorations in Race, Nationality, Sexuality, and Gender' in *The House that Race Built*.

⁴⁰ Tom Callahan, 'Olympics: No Limit to What He Can Do', *Time*, 30 July 1984.

⁴¹ Lewis, *Inside Track*, 68.

⁴² Smith, 'I Do What I Want To Do'; Callahan, 'Olympics'.

⁴³ Callahan, 'Olympics'.

Sports Illustrated, Lewis said ‘I didn’t have to develop the macho side a lot of boys did [...] My dad was a very strong personality, but if I was playing with a doll [...] he wasn’t the type to take it away and say “be a man”’.⁴⁴ For Lewis, individualism meant defying expectations and pursuing one’s own sense of expression.

Lewis’ defiance manifested elsewhere, most notably in his eclectic dress sense. Press appearances included him wearing skin-hugging clothes in bright colours, shiny tracksuits, a Robinson Crusoe costume, exaggerated cowboy hats and cashmere overcoats, a warm-up suit which matched his skin colour and made him appear naked, and another designed to look like a tuxedo.⁴⁵ He took to wearing makeup in public and the *Los Angeles Times* argued that his new flat-top afro haircut channelled androgynous star Grace Jones.⁴⁶ Shortly after the Games, Lewis got a nose job.⁴⁷ His appearance was provocative and incomprehensible to the mainstream press. Black popular press outlets like *Jet* celebrated Lewis’ sporting achievements alongside those of the artist Prince, whose *Purple Rain* was enjoying great crossover success in the white rock charts. Crossover appeal, stated *Jet*, ‘now *that’s* success’, without mentioning anything to do with either Lewis or Prince’s “eccentric” appearances.⁴⁸

On the eve of the 1984 Olympics, then, Lewis had rejected the Jesse Owens trope laid out for him by the press. Instead, Lewis was the living embodiment of the figure in the LAOOC’s pictogram, the real-life realisation of neoliberal individual utopianism. He broke through adversity with self-reliance. He transcended languages and borders and strove to shed his race as he flaunted his global, multi-cultural credentials. Raceless and androgynous in his

⁴⁴ Smith, ‘I Do What I Want To Do’.

⁴⁵ Ibid; Skip Hollandsworth, ‘Athlete of the Century: Carl Lewis’, *Texas Monthly* (December 1999); Gabriel, ‘The Runner Stumbles’.

⁴⁶ Fashion Section, *Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 1984, Part V, 11.

⁴⁷ Lewis, *Inside Track*, 108.

⁴⁸ *Jet*, 27 August 1984, 46.

self-presentation, through the selling of his image Lewis was a self-commodifying product for sale in the free market of athletic competition. He had the sporting talent, and, at the LAOOC's Olympics, he had the perfect neoliberal, individual-utopian credentials with which to succeed. Despite the seeds of conservative rumblings in the press, nothing, it seemed, could stop him now.

BACKLASH

The media's discourse surrounding Lewis' achievements at LA '84 policed the borders of his national identity. He faced a backlash in the press whenever he did anything which they deemed unbecoming of an American sports icon. His individualism came across as arrogant, his idiosyncrasies deemed offensive or incompatible with his attempts to display his patriotism. The press derided any displays of individualism which it deemed "un-American", and in turn this limited Lewis' ability to profit from lucrative endorsements. Lewis' attempt to harness neoliberal individualism for his own wealth accumulation failed as a result of his refusal to kowtow to demands that his brand be that of the respectable Black athlete. As a commodity, Lewis struggled to compete in the American market.

Lewis' off-the-track experience at LA '84 got off on the wrong foot almost immediately and his relations with the press were strained for the duration of the Games. His pre-Games comments about confidence crossed into arrogance: 'Failure doesn't loom in me. I could lose and still get so much publicity I could do whatever I want. The headlines could say "Lewis chokes" in August, and I'll still be making a movie in the fall. I'd be rich and I'd be beating people even without track because I don't put limits on myself'.⁴⁹ From the outset, reporters looked for confirmation that Lewis was indeed a cocky character who placed

⁴⁹ Smith, 'I Do What I Want To Do', 22-4.

material gain above his duties to the nation. His decision not to stay at the athletes' village at the University of Southern California in favour of individual, private accommodation singled him out as someone who thought he was deserving of special treatment. Then he was late to the first press conference. He maintained he had not been told about a change to his diary, but for the assembled press he left waiting, his tardiness smacked of arrogance: 'Carl Lewis, who hates wasting time unless it's someone else's, kept 1,000 of the world's journalists waiting an hour', reported the *Los Angeles Times*.⁵⁰ Even before he had begun, Lewis seemed to be violating some unwritten rules about respectful and dutiful behaviour.

Despite Lewis' astounding athletic achievements on-track, the press still found his character lacking. At his first event, the 100 metres, Lewis demolished the competition and claimed his first of four gold medals. The crowd went wild. An ecstatic Lewis spotted a large US flag in the hands of a nearby spectator, he jogged over, took the flag, and took off on a victory lap of the Coliseum. It was the perfect start to his Games. The next morning, however, a media backlash to Lewis' patriotic display was underway. 'An apostle of arrogance', railed the *Los Angeles Times*, 'he won the 100-meter dash by the widest margin in Olympic history and ran his victory lap with the largest American flag he could find. It wasn't endearing. It was vainglorious'.⁵¹ Med Flory, a resident of North Hollywood, was incensed by Lewis enough to write to the paper: 'He grabbed that flag to promote his own image. If he had any respect for what it stands for he wouldn't let it drag on the ground [...] O.J. [Simpson, who was commentating] spotted it immediately: "come on, Carl, get it up!"'.⁵² Lewis had also, then, violated some unwritten rules around tasteful patriotism. Either that, or people like Flory

⁵⁰ Rick Reilly, 'Lewis Says He's Playing the Waiting Game', *Los Angeles Times*, 17 November 1984, Part III, 1.

⁵¹ Steve Jacobson, 'America's Apostles of Arrogance', *Los Angeles Times*, 9 August 1984, Part VIII, 38.

⁵² Letters Section, *Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 1984, Part VIII, 38.

had inculcated the post-national ideals of festive federalism to a remarkable degree.

Across the country, Americans speculated about the integrity of Lewis' patriotic display of his American-ness. Was the flag planted at an accessible place by his manager? Was this display of patriotism in fact just a cynical marketing ploy? The *New York Times* thought so, citing a source 'close to the US Olympic Committee'.⁵³ Others argued that the flag run was spontaneous but criticised Lewis' behaviour anyway.⁵⁴ Whatever the truth of the matter, the damage had been done by the act of posing the question about his patriotism in the first place. Comparisons to Jesse Owens, which had framed so much of Lewis' pre-Games press coverage, inevitably resurfaced. 'Lewis came across as a package — no more, no less — bloodless, lacking the endearing humanity that drew us close to Owens, a man whose fight to maintain his dignity helped give meaning to the world', said the *Los Angeles Times*, 'yes, he likes to wrap himself in the flag, but flag waving alone does not a patriot make'.⁵⁵ These comments revealed the extent to which white expectations of Black athletes had not changed. Lewis should, in this framework, have been striving for his own dignity and humanity, a graceful — and grateful — display of respectful American-ness. The pattern continued, noted Lewis: 'win a gold medal, get blasted in the papers'.⁵⁶ Lewis' relationship to his national identity, and his apparent distance from the Jesse Owens character, was now a matter of immense interest.

The flag incident revealed the closely entwined relationship between Lewis' race and his national identity. The almost hysterical reaction to the patriotic display contrasted sharply

⁵³ Lewis, *Inside Track*, 79-80.

⁵⁴ 'The Flag Run Wasn't Staged', *Los Angeles Times*, 5 August 1984, 12.

⁵⁵ Mike Littwin, 'Real Heroes? Decker Falls and Lewis is a Long Jump Away', *Los Angeles Times*, 14 August 1984, Part VIII, 2.

⁵⁶ Lewis, *Inside Track*, 80.

when compared to Black British athlete Daley Thompson's display of national pride upon winning the decathlon. Thompson celebrated not with one large Union Flag, but with *two*. Ahead of the medal ceremony, Thompson pulled on a t-shirt bearing a slogan that aimed to make fun of recent complaints in the global press about the hyper-patriotic bias of ABC's Olympic TV coverage. 'Thanks America for a good games and a great time', read the slogan on the front of the shirt. Then, on the back: 'But what about the TV coverage?'.⁵⁷ Rather than blast Thompson as some audacious, jumped-up foreigner, the press laughed off his behaviour as the jocular playfulness of a well-liked, "cheeky" character: Lewis was 'cold and calculating', whereas Thompson was 'mugging in the Daley Thompson fashion. He can joke, but more than that, he can compete'.⁵⁸ White athlete and former gold-medallist Bob Mathias told the press: 'I like the Daley Thompson attitude versus the Carl Lewis attitude'.⁵⁹ Both were Black men, both had made displays which made them stand out for commentary in the American press, but Lewis had not displayed the requisite humbleness required of a Black American athlete to claim his national identity.

Among spectators, the idea of Lewis as a commodity had taken hold. At his second event, the long jump, a capacity crowd waited to see if he would not only win the gold but set a new world record. On his second attempt out of six, Lewis placed himself in first but was suffering with a sore hamstring in the cooler evening temperatures. He was experienced enough to know when to quit while ahead. Weighing up the likelihood of his jump being beaten versus the risk of injury, Lewis declined his further four opportunities to jump, and with it the chance to set a new world record. Experience paid off and Lewis took the gold.

⁵⁷ 'Notes Section', *Los Angeles Times*, 12 August 1984, Part VIII, 30.

⁵⁸ Mike Littwin, 'Daley Still Reigns in Decathlon', *Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 1984, Part VIII, 1.

⁵⁹ 'Notes Section'.

The crowd, though, who had paid \$50 apiece to watch him in action, loudly booed.⁶⁰ ‘The long-jump competition Monday proved one thing’, wrote one reporter, ‘whatever Lewis earns (legally, of course) in track and field, you can be sure he is not paid by the jump [...] He is battling a bit of a PR problem...prima donna. And now the fans have turned on him. They probably figure Michael Jackson wouldn’t quit a concert after the first song, why shouldn’t Lewis finish the show they came to see?’⁶¹ Across press reports, Lewis’ new status as a double gold medal winner had been overshadowed by his status as commodity which, on this occasion, was bad value for money.⁶²

Lewis’ status as a commodified Black athlete made the Coliseum track a market. As the *Los Angeles Times* noted part-way through the Games: ‘Lewis is losing the contest for warmth in the marketplace’.⁶³ Some Angelenos seemed to agree. ‘This athlete will win many gold medals — but not the one for popularity’, opined Bill Retchen from Pacific Palisades, and Brad Elkins from Woodland Hills concurred: ‘King Carl...what a perfect nickname. He’s too good to sleep in the village with the other US athletes, too good to talk to the press after the 100m and long-jump finals, and too good to take off his sweats and try to break Bob Beamon’s incredible record [...] The fans at the Coliseum will not remember Lewis winning the gold but will always recall his failure to compete’.⁶⁴ Lewis as a commodity, it seemed, was something Americans, at least white Americans, were reluctant to invest in.

However, it was not just the white press and its readers which objected to Lewis’ appearance and behaviour. As the Games progressed, Black members of the US Olympic

⁶⁰ Lewis, *Inside Track*, 80-1.

⁶¹ Scott Ostler, ‘Lewis Doesn’t Know that a Win Isn’t Good Enough,’ *Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1984, Part VIII, 9.

⁶² ‘It Was the Fans Who Paid a Price’, *Los Angeles Times*, 8 August 1984, Part VIII, 16.

⁶³ Jacobson, ‘America’s Apostles of Arrogance’.

⁶⁴ Letters Section, *Los Angeles Times*, 9 August 1984, Part VIII 38.

team found that he dominated the public conversation through his antics both on and off track and that their own achievements were under-appreciated while they were expected to offer their own opinions about Lewis. Edwin Moses had had enough, bluntly stating that Lewis had violated expectations of respectability: ‘a little humility is in order. That’s what Carl lacks’.⁶⁵ Lewis’ relay team mate Sam Graddy pointedly stood up and walked out of the post-race press conference, apparently frustrated at being made to feel ‘less than Carl’. This event, at which Lewis took his fourth gold medal, was framed by the press in terms of intra-team (and intra-racial) angst.⁶⁶

Four gold medals and yet Lewis *still* could not compete with the press’ demands that he replicate the popular memory of Jesse Owens. ‘Jesse would have gone over it on two broken ankles’, commented a journalist, ‘there’s more to being Jesse Owens than just four gold medals [...] This may be the “Carl Lewis Olympics,” but for it to be the “Carl Lewis Era” in the years ahead may require a whole new outlook’.⁶⁷ Lewis had made no claims to Owens’ memory but the press and the public continued to demand it. Steve Palaro from Buena Park summarised the situation succinctly: ‘You’re great Carl, but you just don’t make “cents”’.⁶⁸ Palaro was right. Lewis’ individualism and apparent androgyny failed to fuse with his patriotism, rendering him uncompetitive as a commodity in a marketplace, even as he won one gold medal after another.

The 1984 Games should have been the making of Lewis. He emerged clutching four gold medals, but he also left Los Angeles with a devalued personal brand and a battered

⁶⁵ Lewis, *Inside Track*, 65.

⁶⁶ Mike Littwin, ‘Lewis Makes Fourth a Gold Record’, *Los Angeles Times*, 12 August 1984, Part VIII, 1.

⁶⁷ Jim Murray, ‘You Won’t See the Equal of Owens’, *Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 1984, Part VIII, 1.

⁶⁸ Letters Section, *Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 1984, Part VIII, 38.

popularity.⁶⁹ An economic backlash followed the media backlash. Coca-Cola rescinded the lucrative pre-Games offer to which Lewis had chosen not to commit beforehand.⁷⁰ The *Los Angeles Times* pondered the question: ‘does Carl Lewis have a bad rap with America?’.⁷¹ The media span Lewis’ attempts to be commercially savvy as greedy. On Halloween night in 1984, *Late Night with David Letterman* featured a segment in which children dressed up as celebrities arrived to “trick-or-treat” the host, including a Black child representing Lewis in sports gear, complete with four gold medals. ‘I’m not sure who you’re supposed to be’, said Letterman sarcastically. ‘Give me twenty bucks and I’ll tell you’ came the reply.⁷² Meanwhile, Lewis’ biography, entitled *Carl! The Incredible Story of an American Hero* (published four days after the Games) failed to cash in on his success. By November 1984, the book had yet to sell out its first run of 125,000 copies.⁷³ Meanwhile, other stars of LA ’84 like Mary Lou Retton, Greg Louganis (who did not come out as a gay man until 1994), and Florence Griffith Joyner signed lucrative endorsement deals with companies like Wheaties, McDonalds, and Apple.⁷⁴

It was no secret that Lewis’ perceived arrogance and “deviant” self-identification were directly responsible for a post-Games economic backlash. ‘If you’re a male athlete, I think the American public wants you to look macho’, said a Nike representative, ‘He was arrogant. I would always think he’s making a statement. By being late’.⁷⁵ Sports agent Brad Hunter later

⁶⁹ Gabriel, ‘The Runner Stumbles’.

⁷⁰ Reilly, ‘Lewis Says He’s Playing the Waiting Game’.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *Late Night with David Letterman*, 31 October 1984, accessed 22 February 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfvdypKbXIM>.

⁷³ Reilly, ‘Lewis says He’s Playing the Waiting Game’.

⁷⁴ Gabriel, ‘The Runner Stumbles’.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

opined that ‘I don’t think the sporting press, and that’s where your image starts, wanted the Olympic hero to be Michael Jackson. They wanted the Olympic hero to be Jesse Owens, who up until that time was the symbol of Olympia, the man who did it for the glory of the country and the thrill of participation. The press still laps that up’.⁷⁶

In the Olympic marketplace, then, Lewis’ individualism was an un-competitive product. His apparent arrogance and lack of deference to the press, the US flag, and to the sanctity of the kind of Blackness represented by the popular memory of Jesse Owens all resulted in a backlash against Lewis’ attempts to fuse his idiosyncratic signifiers with his American national identity. “Soft masculinity”, for corporations like Nike, was not a marketable brand and Lewis paid the price for his displays of an incomprehensible racelessness, a lack of “masculinity”, and a “disrespectful”, unapologetic post-racial identity of his own making.

PATRIOTISM, RESPECTABILITY, AND THE LIMITS OF UTOPIA

Carl Lewis was in many ways the Olympic pictogram, the ultimate expression of individual, neoliberal utopianism and yet he was not marketable as a commodity to anywhere near the same extent as Michael Jordan. His LA’84 exploits were a battleground between the ideology of individual utopianism and other powerful forces. To fully understand why Lewis went wrong where Jordan succeeded, race, gender, and sexuality are essential analytical lenses, but so too is the complicating factor of national identity. Because Lewis was an athlete and, as such, an embodiment of the nation, his eclectic and idiosyncratic style and behaviour were stubborn economic barriers.

The racial-capitalist critique of Black athletes like Jordan centres on their

⁷⁶ Ibid.

‘commodifiable blackness’, with their status as totemic representations of “traditional” masculinity central to the analysis.⁷⁷ Jordana Matlon has argued that the extreme success of Jordan speaks to a history of the twin demands of Black patriarchy and labour, i.e. the ability of Black men to fulfil their “role” as male breadwinner in the capitalist system has depended on their inclusion in a labour market, a market from which they have historically been excluded. Figures like Jordan who have “made it”, argues Matlon, overwrite this exclusion: to be Black, male, and “making it” is ‘like winning a rigged game against all odds’, proving that racial uplift is possible within the capitalist system. Indeed, Matlon continues, ‘for many they suggest an alternative to market fundamentalism: if conventional routes to masculine worth via virtuous breadwinning are unavailable, the freedom to make money any way possible and spend it with abandon emerges as a generalizable expression of manhood’.⁷⁸ In his rejection of the tropes which had come to define this Black manhood, Lewis placed himself outside of cultural comprehension.

The Black athlete as a commodity and as a cultural success story shaped two views on political economy. Intra-racially, the figure of Jordan bolstered a conservative Black politics of respectability, a politics which policed the ‘*right kind* of [...] consumption practices as the way to achieve black uplift. Such approaches have identified black capitalism as the source of black liberation’ or, put another way, success for Black men under capitalism could only come in the form of a patriarchal, familial trope. At the same time, the very existence of the Jordan figure legitimised the economy which produced him, perpetuating its existence rather than challenging it.

Jordan, then, “made it” because his visual politics aligned with a Black politics of

⁷⁷ Malton, ‘Branded’.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

respectability which located racial uplift within a patriarchal, heteronormative trope of “masculinity”. Extra-rationally, argues Douglas Kellner, Jordan typified the ‘paradigmatic figure of the “hardbody” [...] the ideal male image of the Reaganite 1980s, a model of the powerful bodies needed to resurrect American power after the flabbiness of the 1960s and 1970s’.⁷⁹ As a national symbol, Jordan exuded the virtues of hard work, individualism, and competitiveness as the ingredients of success.⁸⁰ ‘In the welcome resurgence of writing about racial capitalism’, concludes Matlon, ‘the integral role of patriarchy in upholding ideological and economic domination is often missed’. This domination ensured that, rather than the egalitarian potential of individual utopia and the “new patriotism”, national identity continued to succumb to socially conservative demands and expectations.

However, by focusing not on Jordan but on Lewis, it is clear that national identity (however contested and contingent a category) also played a crucial role in buttressing the neoliberal utopian fantasy and the continuance of racial capitalism. Lewis, of course, eschewed all the tropes in Matlon’s analysis and it cost him, but outside of sports, androgynous appearance or “soft masculinity” were certainly not barriers to commercial success in the culture market of 1984. That year, moustachioed *and* mascara-wearing Prince released the smash hit single and film *Purple Rain* to widespread acclaim and crossover commercial appeal. Black lifestyle magazine *Jet* indulged the artist’s eccentricity, dubbing him ‘the outrageous monarch of punk rock’.⁸¹ One year earlier, the softly spoken, diminutive Michael Jackson released the stratospherically successful *Thriller*. Similarly, Grace Jones’ celebrity status was escalating rapidly by 1983, with *Jet* commenting: ‘[her] mystique, strong

⁷⁹ Douglas Kellner, ‘The Sports Spectacle: Michael Jordan, and Nike: Unholy Alliance’, in *Michael Jordan Inc.*, 47.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁸¹ *Jet*, 27 August 1984, 46.

but soft, masculine but feminine, catapulted the statuesque Jamaican beauty to superstar status'.⁸² All of these celebrities had found alternative strategies to the labour market without adopting the tropes of “respectable” blackness.

Lewis' status as an athlete — a gold medal-winning US Olympian, no less — was the complicating factor in his commodification. He embodied all the neoliberal values of hard work, self-reliance, and competitiveness which defined the “new patriotism”, but his signifiers clashed with the demands of a more conservative patriotism which could only celebrate these neoliberal virtues when they came packaged in a more “traditional” format. Prince, Michael Jackson, and Grace Jones could express their individualism, androgyny, or “soft masculinity” because these could be explained away as the eccentricities of artists who did not hold the status of national symbols. Lewis offended everybody. He refused to adopt the sanctioned Black trope of the patriarchal breadwinner. He also refused to adopt the white-friendly mantle of Jesse Owens, whose apparent graciousness in overcoming historical racism was the only format in which, as far as the mainstream press was concerned, Black male athletes were permitted to function. When he grabbed the stars-and-stripes to perform and celebrate his American-ness, the act was incoherent.

As these cultural pressures bore down on Lewis' neoliberal utopianism, economic logics were also at play, logics which presaged a fast-approaching conservative backlash and the Reagan administration's handling of the AIDS crisis.⁸³ When it came to matters of sexuality in the 1980s, neoliberals found themselves aligned not with conservatives but with the left. The neoliberal view was, after all, that a person's self-selected sexuality did not

⁸² *Jet*, 16 May 1983, 62.

⁸³ Mary G. McDonald, ‘Safe Sex Symbol? Michael Jordan and the Politics of Representation’, in *Michael Jordan Inc.*, 155.

preclude them from economic conduct and, indeed, that ‘normative judgements about sexual deviance or perversion were counter productive to the smooth functioning of markets’.⁸⁴ As Melinda Cooper has shown, neoliberals ‘rejected the disciplinary and regulatory institutions of the twentieth-century welfare state as so many barriers to the efficient functioning of market logics [and they] were methodologically indifferent to the normative categories of the twentieth-century social sciences’.⁸⁵ In their rejection of (or indifference toward) identity categories, neoliberals displayed what Michel Foucault called a ‘radical anti-normativity’: the egalitarian potential of neoliberal, individual utopia.⁸⁶

The anti-normative egalitarian promise floundered in the late 1980s when the AIDS crisis suddenly ascribed an economic risk to the state derived from homosexuality. As more and more men became sick, they turned to state-subsidised health care for treatment, creating what neoliberals in government and think tanks called ‘perverse incentives’: the welfare state, such as it was, incentivised high-risk behaviour and endorsed economically “irresponsible” lifestyles.⁸⁷ It was economically imperative that responsibility for risk be returned to the individual and not passed on to the state. As Cooper argues, neoliberals sought to counteract the social costs of unsafe sex by promoting marriage. The Fordist family model, it seemed, could limit the economic costs of the crisis: ‘the recognition of same-sex marriage would return at least some of these externalities to the private household [...] turning public risks into private responsibilities’.⁸⁸ Lewis’ repeated denials of rumours about his sexuality isolated himself outside of structures in which he could be comprehended socially, culturally, or

⁸⁴ Cooper, *Family Values*, 170.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

economically. The neoliberal economic model could work when it channelled homosexuality through traditional structures but had no means of dealing with the utopian figure of someone like Lewis who eschewed all attempts at definition.

Through the promotion of same-sex marriage legalisation, neoliberal utopia could still exist in a form, appearing to be sexually progressive and liberal. At the same time, it required that “non-normative” relationships be channelled into the pre-existing legal system of marriage, dressed in the language of equality. However, equality was not radical nor utopian when it fixed all displays of queerness into a binary taxonomy of straight or gay and contained them within the legal-economic institution of marriage. The state could not, argued neoliberals, recognise “deviancy” — Carl Lewis’ androgynous haircuts and his mascara — in any other form. The radical social politics of queerness, argues Yuvraj Joshi, were thus eclipsed by the much-diluted issue of marriage equality, occluding matters of gender through a focus on sexuality.⁸⁹ In this way, neoliberal utopia succumbed to market logics.

CONCLUSION

The public and media backlash which denied Carl Lewis’ attempts to perform his American patriotism presaged what was to come. As Laurent Berlant argues, the Reagan era was one in which the separate spheres of the political and the personal collapsed in on one another, and overlapping but incoherent understandings of pornography, abortion, sex, personal morality, and family values all came to define ‘what America stands for and how its citizens should act’. Sex, she continues, increasingly bore the burden of defining proper citizenship through ‘an increasingly monopolistic mass media’ acting as a ‘national culture industry whose mission is to micro-manage how any controversial event or person changes the meaning of

⁸⁹ Yuvraj Joshi, ‘Respectable Queerness’, *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 43, no. 2 (2012): 415-67.

being American’.⁹⁰ In the figure of Carl Lewis at LA’84, neoliberal culture collided with race and nation, shaping and limiting its egalitarian possibilities. James Baldwin put it more succinctly in his 1984 essay *Freaks in the Reagan Era*, in which he argued the overlapping of sex, race, and nation had made it ‘virtually forbidden — as an unpatriotic act — that the American boy evolve into the complexity of manhood’.⁹¹ His attempts to marshal neoliberal utopianism for his own ends clashed both with who America wanted — *expected* — him to be, and with what capitalism *demand*ed he be.

The centrality of national identity in defining neoliberal utopia was underscored by Lewis’ experience outside of the US. As his manager had told *Sports Illustrated* during the pre-Games build-up, he enjoyed significant popularity in Japan where he was not Black, nor white, ‘he’s Carl Lewis’.⁹² When he followed his ambitions to transcend athletics for a music career and recorded a single in 1987 entitled “Break it Up”, he did not even bother to release it in the US. However, the single achieved gold sales in Sweden, and a Japanese company agreed to finance a follow-up album. Increasingly, Lewis looked to Japan for commercial deals, calling it his ‘home away from home [...] I was accepted more readily in Japan than in my own country’.⁹³ Although he seemed competitive in foreign markets, securing endorsement deals with European and Japanese companies, Carl-the-commodity would not sell in America.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Laurent Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 8.

⁹¹ James Baldwin, ‘Freaks in the Reagan Era’, *Playboy* (January 1985), see: Joseph Vogel, *James Baldwin and the 1980s: Witnessing the Reagan Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 49.

⁹² Smith, ‘I Do What I Want To Do’, 34.

⁹³ Lewis, *Inside Track*, 93-4.

⁹⁴ Dan Geringer, ‘A Better Deal This Time? Carl Lewis Hopes to Add to His 1984 Haul of Four Gold Medals While Shucking the Image Problems That Reduced His Market Value’, *Sports Illustrated*, 14 September 1988.

The idea that Lewis was an un-sellable product had stuck. Ahead of the next Olympics in Seoul in 1988, *Sports Illustrated* checked back in with Lewis, giving its article the headline: ‘A better deal this time? Carl Lewis hopes to add to his 1984 haul of four gold medals while shucking the image problems that reduced his market value’⁹⁵. The promise of a colourblind, genderless, egalitarian utopia at the end of the neoliberal, multicultural rainbow, then, was gone, washed up on the rocky shores of America where national identity and racial capitalism required that Carl Lewis be something he simply was not. Lewis’ sporting career continued in glittering fashion; he won his last Olympic gold medal at the Atlanta Games of 1996. Despite a gradually softening public and media attitude toward him (*Sports Illustrated* named him its “Olympian of the Century” in 1999), controversy about his attitude on and off the track — however confected — followed him still.⁹⁶

In 1993, the divergence between Lewis and Jordan in the intervening years since their star turns at LA’84 was starkly laid bare at a Chicago Bulls game. In an orange suit (naturally), Lewis took to the basketball court to try once more to assert his American credentials by performing an acapella rendition of the national anthem, as was customary before such games. Once again, it misfired, this time excruciatingly. Lewis, it seemed, was never going to emulate Michael Jackson. Starting his rendition at too high a pitch, Lewis had left himself nowhere to go for the high notes on “rocket’s red glare” and choked. The crowd gasped. Lewis panicked. The camera panned round and caught, just for a moment, the figure of Jordan: unfazed, stoic, head bowed, focussed: the idealised rendering of American masculinity.⁹⁷ Ever defiant, one year later, Lewis posed for photographer Annie Leibowitz in

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ ‘US Olympian of the Century’, *Sports Illustrated*, 13 December 1999; *Track and Field News* 49, no. 10 (October 1996), 36.

⁹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BW4qLBLPVMs>, accessed 31 October 2021.

a black leotard, bent over in the “set” position, his backside pointing up to the sky, in a pair of shining red stilettos.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ <https://www.fondazionepirelli.org/en/activities/power-and-control-in-one-shot-and-what-a-shot/>, accessed 31 October 2021.

CODA:
NEVER ENDING STORY?

12 August 1984

Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum

Just before midnight

It was party time. The 1984 Olympics were over — and what an Olympics they had been. All that remained was to close out the most “successful” Olympics of the modern era in style. Enter Lionel Richie bedecked in a glittering blue sequined jacket, followed by an army of break dancers. Over a nine-minute rendition of his hit *All Night Long*, Richie whipped up the audience in the stands — and the world’s athletes on the field — into a celebratory frenzy. Then, on the Coliseum’s two giant scoreboards, the Olympic Rings and “LA’84” burned brightly in festive federal colours while in the darkness overhead, fireworks lit up the sky on a scale befitting the home of special effects. As a choir took up *Auld Lang Syne*, a voice boomed out: ‘You have shared one of the most inspiring events in the history of human endeavour, a moment to be remembered. From the people of the United States, we bid farewell to the athletes of the world and to the millions who have shared their dreams’.¹ With that announcement, it was over. The LAOOC — nay, *Los Angeles* — had achieved spectacular deliverance for itself, for the country, and for the Olympic Games. In many ways, though, the closing ceremony signalled not an ending, but a beginning. The sporting events were over in just sixteen days but the legacies and legends of LA’84 lingered on.

* * *

¹ Footage of the Closing Ceremony, accessed 15 March 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flK7gSF7D6I>.

The 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games arrived in a city whose residents were still processing the social dislocations of the preceding decades. They were born into a racialised urban geography which was the product of a century of racial capitalism in the city. Furthermore, the Games came to a place the very idea of which held powerful meanings; to some: the capital privileges of whiteness which must be defended at all costs, to others: the possibility and hope of “making it” in America. The anti-tax sentiment of white homeowners in middle-class enclaves impacted significantly on what would become LA’84, ensuring it would run on a for-profit basis, and that it would happen in — and to — the city’s communities of colour.

Between 1978 and 1984, the planning of a for-profit Olympics in Los Angeles required organisers to instigate neoliberal processes of encasement, marketization, and individual utopianism. To place the free accumulation of Olympic capital beyond the democratic reach of Angelenos of colour, organisers translated the meaning of the Games into specific racial and cultural contexts in ways which promised an ascent into the utopian American “mainstream”. The new Olympic markets which the LAOOC and its corporate sponsors opened in the formerly public spaces and social infrastructure of east LA and South Central had a pedagogical role which sought to inculcate the virtues of entrepreneurialism and self-reliance. When Angelenos of colour interacted with, resisted, or made demands of the Olympics in their neighbourhoods, they too shaped the character of LA’84. Through festive federalism, through policing, through schools, and through businesses, the LAOOC carefully adapted the racial, ethnic, and social dynamics of new neoliberal cultures in ways which emphasised their egalitarian, post-racial possibilities.

LA’84, then, was first and foremost a hyper-local event, a mediation between the LAOOC and its sponsors on the one hand and the city and its residents on the other. Over the course of six years, the requirements of the Olympics came above all other civic

considerations. In the name of the Games, the LAOOC, its corporate partners, and local politicians subverted the mechanisms and institutions of the state to Olympic business requirements while creating new markets in increasingly privatised social and cultural public spaces. The LAPD was the exception to state retrenchment, using the Olympics as a reputational lifeline and golden opportunity to demonstrate growth, swelling in stature and capabilities as a punitive regulatory force with an entrepreneurial outlook. The LAPD militarised itself with Olympic funding and guaranteed its central place on the frontline between the people and the new neoliberal state.

By developing a profit-led approach to LA'84, the LAOOC inculcated a neoliberal culture in Los Angeles — a private, free-market, anti-statist common sense which coloured myriad responses to the political, social, cultural, and economic challenges which “everyday” Angelenos confronted as the 1970s ended and the “Reagan Revolution” began.² Racial and national identity were the key elements in defining the character of LA'84, which spoke of transcending race and nation while simultaneously subverting both ideas to the demands of globalised capital and white patriarchal heteronormativity. As Carl Lewis discovered to his detriment, the demands of nationalism and patriotism — themselves buttresses of racial capitalism — collided with the deviant potential of neoliberal utopia. As such, anti-normative displays of race, gender, and sexuality foundered and became channelled by economic demands into normative frameworks which did not challenge capitalism, or by a press core which took upon itself the role of policing the politics of patriotism.

For Angelenos of colour, neoliberal solutions seemed to offer both reassuring continuity and egalitarian progressive change, as well as common-sense solutions to a set of local questions about crime, the economy, and the role of the state. Rather than a singular

² Troy, *Morning in America*.

hegemony, neoliberal ideas proved adaptable to context on a hyper-local level. There were, then, multiple neoliberal cultures, all of them built around core tenets like individualism, anti-statism, and entrepreneurialism. By locating the history of mass consent to neoliberal ideas at the local level, an alternative story emerges of the US at the end of the Cold War, one which de-centres nation-state actors like Reagan and problematises the very idea of a “Reagan Revolution” in which a coherent neoliberalism descended on America from above uncontested.³ To account for the extent to which Americans have or have not inculcated *homoeconomic* values since the late 1970s, and the extent to which the hegemony of neoliberal ways of thinking can be undone, local-level social and cultural histories of race and identity are essential.

The neoliberal legacy of LA’84 did not end in 1984 when the Games concluded. Its impact rippled outward in the decades which followed. In Los Angeles, the most tangible legacy of the Games was the \$232.5 million in profit (the LAOOC preferred the term “surplus”) they generated.⁴ The LAOOC split the money between the USOC and national sports federations while retaining forty percent for the city of Los Angeles.⁵ Rather than hand over the money to City Hall for local government to disperse, the LAOOC created a private 501(c)(3) non-profit entity that was exempt from federal income tax: the LA’84 Foundation. To maintain their tax advantages, foundations such as this have to disperse only five percent of their total funds per year. They were a tax-efficient place to horde capital.⁶ The LA’84 Foundation describes its role as ‘a grant making and educational foundation’.⁷ Yet as private

³ Ibid.

⁴ Early estimates were lower, but this was the ultimate figure. Wenn and Barney, *Gold in the Rings*, 113.

⁵ Lenskyj, *Inside the Olympic Industry*, 96.

⁶ INCITE!, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* (Boston: South End Press, 2007), 6.

⁷ ‘Our Story’, accessed 16 March 2023, <https://la84.org>.

surrogates for state responsibilities, the proliferation of 501(c)(3)s beginning in the early 1980s was a reflection of a neoliberalising society and a retreating state, creating what scholars have termed a ‘non-profit industrial complex’ which through professionalisation and bureaucratisation blunts and diverts social activism.⁸ As Donna Murch has noted, scholars increasingly view the 501(c)(3) non-profit entity as ‘the domestic analogue’ to global-facing Non-Governmental Organisations that have driven neoliberal restructuring around the world.⁹ These types of organisations legitimise holes in the neoliberal social fabric by appearing as common-sense solutions to filling them, existing to supply ‘extra economic values’ where the market has failed to generate them.¹⁰

Some foundations with tax-exempt status have become adept at diverting public money into private hands while granting corporate interests a mechanism for social philanthropy with which to promote their image.¹¹ The anti-LA-2028 campaign group “NOlympics LA” has reported that the LA’84 Foundation invested the 1984 Olympic profits in, among other places, private equity funds and real-estate corporations like Blackstone, the biggest owner of single-family rental properties in Los Angeles.¹² In 2019, the president of the LA’84 Foundation received a salary of \$390,674.¹³ By stepping in (to the sum of five percent) to fill gaps in state provision and through investing large sums of capital in corporate

⁸ INCITE! *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*; Murch, ‘The Color of War’, 143-4.

⁹ Murch, ‘The Color of War’, 143.

¹⁰ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, ‘In the Shadow of the Shadow State’: 4; Jennifer Wolch, *The Shadow State: Government and the Voluntary Sector in Transition*, (New York: The Foundation Center, 1990)

¹¹ Murch, ‘The Color of War’ 144.

¹² Accessed 16 March 2023, <https://nolympicsla.com/2019/04/15/non-profits-taxes-and-plutocracy-how-the-olympics-brings-them-together/>; LA’84 Tax Return, accessed 16 March 2023, https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/display_990/953792725/download990pdf_09_2021_prefixes_93-99%2F953792725_201912_990T_2021092018961831.

¹³ Accessed 16 March 2023, <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/953792725>.

real estate, 501(c)(3) non-profits, as Gilmore has noted, often reinforce the negative effects of the very structures they proclaim to stand against.¹⁴ Ultimately, the profits from LA'84 went full circle, back to where the idea of Olympic Los Angeles started in 1932: the interests of the real-estate industry.

For local government, LA'84 provided a bold vision of a neoliberal future for Los Angeles. In 1985, Tom Bradley commissioned a 'Blue Ribband Committee' of city elites to author *Los Angeles 2000*, a wide-ranging statement about the type of world city LA could be by the year 2000. The report wore its Olympic-scale ambitions on its sleeve, stating:

The 1984 Summer Olympics offer an excellent illustration. We envisioned an entirely new way to conduct an Olympics, and the City of Los Angeles rose to that vision. The Los Angeles Olympics never would have happened if somebody had not built that vision, leaped over the possibilities, and then worked to make that vision real.¹⁵

LA 2000 stated that Angelenos were its central focus, but according to Mike Davis the public-private partnership behind the report was 'formulated under the leadership of a vice president of Bankamerica [sic]' and then led by a former Chief Executive Officer of defence corporation Lockheed.¹⁶ Invoking the coded neoliberal language of the Olympic Neighbor Program, *LA 2000* boasted that LA had 'the resources, the leadership, and the wherewithal to make our City *beautiful*'.¹⁷ Couching its vision in LA's nebulous "Olympic spirit", the *LA 2000* group channelled the kind of corporate infiltration of the city's social infrastructure,

¹⁴ Gilmore, 'In the Shadow of the Shadow State': 1.

¹⁵ 'Los Angeles 2000', File 1, Box 872, MTBP.

¹⁶ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 97 footnote156.

¹⁷ [My italics] 'Los Angeles 2000', 2.

public spaces, and urban planning pioneered by the LAOOC.

Across a spectrum of urban policies, *LA 2000* sought to instigate its own permanent Olympics in the style of the South Central Organising Committee, reintroducing the sorts of neoliberal social programs run by the LAOOC and its corporate partners in preparation for the Games. The report stressed the need to build a diverse and multi-lingual work force which could compete in a globalised world of capital, celebrating the city's status (per *Time* magazine) as the "New Ellis Island".¹⁸ The city should, it argued, 'continue to foster public/private cooperation to achieve neighbourhood revitalisation'.¹⁹ In terms of state provision, the report emphasised the importance of personal responsibility: 'Parents must be made to realise that they are responsible for the type of education their children receive. Quality public education can be provided only if the parents shoulder their share of the burden'.²⁰ The report's authors were concerned about young people in general. To help 'increase social consciousness', they stated:

Los Angeles will experiment with a civic service program requiring all high school youth to work on community-improvement projects as part of their education. Students who perform six months of public service work could receive free or reduced tuition at state colleges and universities.²¹

In doing so, *LA 2000* quoted almost verbatim from the LAOOC's "Grow with the Olympics" program which instructed young welfare dependent Angelenos in the virtuous ways of personal responsibility and individual self-improvement, and rewarded them with controlled

¹⁸ Anderson, 'Los Angeles'.

¹⁹ 'Los Angeles 2000', 6-8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

access to social mobility.

Lastly, *LA 2000* emphasised the crucial importance of a large, self-sufficient police force as a central part of the city's neoliberal future. It voiced its support of planned increases to the size of the force:

The City of Los Angeles must expand its Police Department and develop reliable funding sources to assure that the public safety agencies grow to keep pace with the City's population and needs. Enactment of the 1,000 new officers plan on the June 1985 ballot is an important first step.²²

The report failed to expand on what exactly 'reliable funding sources' were, but as Gates had demonstrated so effectively over the course of the LAPD's Olympic planning, the department was adept at pursuing entrepreneurial strategies based on racial logics to ensure its financial viability. The authors coupled an expanded police department with greater community involvement in its own safety: 'the public will realise that it must assume some responsibility for protecting itself'.²³ Once again, the report had watered down state provision in a language of personal responsibility. Using the LAOOC's neoliberal blueprint, *LA 2000* linked personal responsibility, punitive policing, and what Mike Davis called "corporate multiculturalism": 'an attitude that patronises imported diversity while ignoring its own backyard', struggling to find room for Black Angelenos in its fetishized presentation of "diversity".²⁴ As the Olympic Arts Festival had shown, vague invocations of multicultural diversity were to be celebrated, race was not. The *LA 2000* report, published by Bradley in 1988, set out a path to a permanent

²² Ibid., 10.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 81.

instillation of the LAOOC's Olympic Los Angeles, demonstrating the extent to which LA'84's neoliberal strategies had permeated local government's attitudes toward urban planning and policing.

Neoliberal ways of thinking also spread at the community level after 1984. When Ueberroth took charge of Rebuild Los Angeles (RLA) in 1992 and went looking for both corporate partners and community support, he did not struggle.²⁵ His deliberate hitching of RLA to the memory of the Olympic Games translated LA's reconstruction on a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood basis, invoking a "can do spirit" and the need for a business-led approach to urban rehabilitation. In the Black community, RLA seemed to offer opportunities for Black capitalism on a scale unmatched by the Olympics. Through public-private partnerships, "enterprise zones" in which firms enjoyed tax advantages, and the restoration (at last) of South Central's manufacturing sector, leaders in LA's Black community looked forward to hailing the return of Black business.²⁶ RLA offered the chance to realise the dream of a new class of Black entrepreneur, which LA'84 had tantalisingly hinted at but failed to deliver.

Backed by paternal corporate support and state facilitation, leaders across LA's Black community argued that RLA could make capitalism work for everyone. Enthusiasm for a business-led reconstruction went beyond Black business leaders. LA's Urban League, the Black press, Christian churches, gang members, and the Nation of Islam all agreed on the sanctity of Black business and championed the rhetoric of self-help entrepreneurialism as a means of accessing the "mainstream".²⁷ More than that, there was evidence of a deeper

²⁵ Davis, 'Who Killed Los Angeles? Part Two: The Verdict is Given', *New Left Review* 1, no. 199 (1993): 49.

²⁶ Peterson and Lee, 'Ueberroth Says Calls to Aid Rebuilding Are Flooding In'.

²⁷ Costa Vargas, *Catching Hell in the City of Angels*, 192; Murch, 'The Color of War', 140-1; Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, 120.

emotional connection to the neoliberal possibilities that RLA represented. South Central community leader Tony Bogard said: ‘We’re going to use them like they use us, the difference is we’re going to put the money back into our community’.²⁸ A neoliberal reconstruction seemed to promise a renewed, entrepreneurial, independent Blackness in South Central, the seeds of a new Black capitalism.

Simultaneously, neoliberal reconstruction seemed to chart a path for Black businesses and the surrounding communities to access “mainstream” American capitalism. Black urban planning consultant Marva Smith Battle-Bey characterised entrepreneurialism in the racialised enclaves of Los Angeles as quintessentially American. The Black and Latino people of LA, she argued, were ‘asking for their share of the American dream’ but cautioned: ‘until our people have more knowledge of really who they are, until we understand and can accept self-reliance, self-respect, I don’t think any of the programs will work’.²⁹ Reverend James Stern added: ‘It’s straight economics. I make money off of you, you make money off of me. It’s either join the system or get rolled over by it. That’s the American way’.³⁰ As the would-be Olympic entrepreneurs had already discovered nearly a decade earlier, however, the dream of a uniquely Black capitalism coupled to but distinct from “mainstream” American capitalism could not work. Nevertheless, there was widespread enthusiasm for Ueberroth’s neoliberal strategies in the wake of the 1992 Rebellion, showing how deeply into community consciousness the LAOOC’s “beautification” had penetrated.

²⁸ Hinton, *America on Fire*, 252.

²⁹ Peterson and Lee, ‘Ueberroth Says Calls to Aid Rebuilding Are Flooding In’.

³⁰ Dunn, ‘Gang Members Test Capitalist Waters’.

NEOLIBERAL CULTURE BEYOND LOS ANGELES

LA'84's neoliberal culture spread beyond the borders of Olympic Los Angeles. LA's success re-gilded the Olympic brand, bringing increased competition among bidding nations to secure the Games. LA'84 had 'altered the trajectory' of the Olympic movement and re-empowered the IOC, and civic officials seized on the chance to use "the Ueberroth effect" to revitalise their own cities and vie for a place in a globalised economic order of city states.³¹ The next summer Games went to the rapidly modernising economy in Seoul, South Korea. Amsterdam, Paris, Belgrade, Brisbane, Barcelona, and Birmingham (UK) all bid for the 1992 Games. The winner, Barcelona, transformed from a neglected backwater of the Franco era into one of Europe's most popular tourist cities, yet both the 1988 and 1992 Olympics featured massive human displacement.³² Then, in September 1990, the IOC announced the winner of the 1996 bid: Atlanta, Georgia, a relatively unknown city outside of the US. It had been an audacious project to bring the Olympics to Atlanta but from 1990, "Olympification" arrived in the South.

As they did for Billy Garland in late 1920s LA, real-estate interests drove the Atlanta '96 bid. It was the brainchild of Billy Payne, a local real-estate lawyer. Payne exploited his connections early on to forge a close partnership between the Atlanta Committee for the

³¹ Barney and Wenn, *Gold in the Rings*, 113-4.

³² Barcelona 1992: A model of Olympic Legacy, 14 June 2019, accessed 19 March 2023, <https://olympics.com/ioc/legacy/barcelona-1992/barcelona-1992-a-model-of-olympic-legacy>; Adam Taylor, 'How the Olympic Games Changed Barcelona Forever, 26 July 2012, accessed 19 March 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-the-olympic-games-changed-barcelona-forever-2012-7?r=US&IR=T>; Rutheiser, *Imagining Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams*, (London: Verso, 1996), 282; Sukjong Hong, 'The Heinous Olympification of Seoul', *The New Republic*, 21 August 2016, accessed 19 March 2023, <https://newrepublic.com/article/136167/heinous-olympification-seoul>.

Olympic Games (ACOG) and the city's own world-famous mega-brand; Atlanta '96 was quickly dubbed the "Coca-Cola Olympics" by detractors. Deaf to protestations, organisers set out not just to copy the LAOOC, but to improve on its model.³³ ACOG pursued the Ueberroth playbook but wedded the LA'84 model to a program of urban redevelopment, shunning the LAOOC's "no build" austerity regime in favour of \$3 billion of new construction and the pursuit of world-city status funded by a mix of public and private bodies.³⁴ ACOG also achieved the private autonomy of the LAOOC while maintaining public backing. Organisers and local government established the committee as a complex public-private partnership in which ACOG accepted financial liability and therefore ruthlessly pursued a for-profit Games in the manner of the LAOOC. It was an uneven partnership; the state held no real influence over Olympic development.³⁵ Atlanta '96 organisers, inspired by all that the LAOOC had achieved, pursued the same neoliberal strategies as LA'84 yet on a grander scale.

Atlanta's troubled racial history was more overt than that faced by the LAOOC. Planning for the 1996 Games occurred at a time when the white press hotly debated what "Southern-ness" meant three decades on from the Black freedom struggles of the 1960s, as George Rutheiser has noted: 'The rapid growth and modernisation of large swathes of the former Confederacy, and the immigration of millions of Yankees, Midwesterners, and even more exotic "foreigners" over the last thirty years had led many to question whether the South remained a distinctive region at all'.³⁶ The city's status as "capital of the South" brought pressure on ACOG to ensure that Atlanta '96 made a statement not just about the city and its place in the world, but also about the South as a unique region.

³³ Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 228, 232.

³⁴ Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 231; Burbank, Andranovich, and Heying, *Olympic Dreams*, 87.

³⁵ Burbank, Andranovich, and Heying, *Olympic Dreams*, 88; Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 234.

³⁶ Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 242-3.

Regionality proved a much stronger force in Atlanta than it had in Los Angeles, where “Southern California” did not evoke the same pull of identity. Until recently, of course, Atlanta’s regional uniqueness had been centred around undisguised white supremacy and massive resistance to civil rights. The press decried what it saw as ACOG’s attempts to distance itself from its Southern heritage.³⁷ This was not a heritage that Atlanta bidders felt would have been attractive to the IOC, however. To place its Games beyond local and regional demands, ACOG needed to find a way to incorporate “the South” within a bold new vision it could sell to the IOC. Just as they had done a century earlier at the Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895, Atlantan boosters used the mega-event of the Olympics to fashion a ‘*New New South Creed*’.³⁸ Atlanta bidders used this new creed to escape the binds of place, race, and history.

ACOG’s treatment of Southern history became its own version of festive-federal culture, a re-narration of the meaning of the local while at the same time, an aesthetic which looked forward to a post-racial future. Bidders could not run away from history, but they could decide how to present a story. They narrated the city as America’s birthplace of civil rights. A redevelopment of the Martin Luther King Historical Site formed part of bidders’ promises of the myriad benefits the Games could bring. Additionally, Atlanta’s ascendancy to Olympic City status would, they argued, make it a shining beacon of *global* civil rights, a piece of symbolic capital which was, argued Rutheiser, attractive to IOC members.³⁹ In this way, history served as a facilitative story for the dreams of real-estate men while providing a global-level narrative about what Olympic Atlanta supposedly meant. The success of this

³⁷ Ibid., 242.

³⁸ Ibid., 231; Cardon, *A Dream of the Future*, 20.

³⁹ Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 229, 283.

branding was such that the Olympic tennis games took place — in the world’s new “capital of human rights” — at the Ku Klux Klan’s old ceremonial pulpit Stone Mountain National Park, as the stony faces of Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson gazed down upon proceedings from the Confederate memorial hewn into the mountain side as recently as 1972.⁴⁰

The Atlanta “look” was the result of a compromise between trying to say the “right things” about both the city’s past and its desired future. Civil rights branding, however spurious or celebratory, did not sell. ACOG had to offer something bold and future-facing to attract the corporate support it needed. To this end, organisers attempted to pursue both selective notions of Southern identity like “hospitality” as well as ‘neutered technopolitan fantasies’ that sold Atlanta as a hi-tech communications hub, a futuristic, state-of-the-art city of tomorrow.⁴¹ ACOG chose a mascot that would not please either those who wanted to push Atlanta’s Southern identity or those calling for a futuristic symbol. The much-derided mascot, named “Whatizit”, was an amorphous blue blob with legs and a face.⁴² Unlike the imperfect Sam the Olympic Eagle, Atlanta’s mascot did not communicate *anything*.

The “official motto” was similarly meaningless. ACOG and local government debated the motto at length, outsourced it to focus groups, and then held a public consultation which resulted in suggestions including “Watch Atlanta Transmogrify”, “Atlanta: An Island in a Sea of Rednecks”, and “Atlanta: A City Too Stupid to Find its Ass with Both Hands If Its Life

⁴⁰ Burbank, Andranovich, and Heying, *Olympic Dreams*, 119; Khushbu Shah, ‘The KKK’s Mount Rushmore: The Problem with Stone Mountain’, *The Guardian*, 24 October 2018, accessed 19 March 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/ng-interactive/2018/oct/24/stone-mountain-is-it-time-to-remove-americas-biggest-confederate-memorial>.

⁴¹ Burbank, Andranovich, and Heying, *Olympic Dreams*, 86; Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 242.

⁴² The Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, *The Official Report of the Centennial Olympic Games* (Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, 1997), 130.

Depended on It". Recognising the potential for public backlash, organisers settled on "Come Share Our Dream".⁴³ The committee chose a subdued colour scheme centred around a deep "Atlanta green" that supposedly evoked Southern regionality but contrasted awkwardly with the notion of a bright, futuristic metropolis.⁴⁴ Compared to festive federalism, with which the LAOOC communicated clearly what it thought Los Angeles was and was not, the Atlanta look was the absence of commentary.

The purpose of festive federalism had been to achieve cultural encasement by evoking individual utopianism. In the same way, despite its confused central message, the Atlanta design scheme sought to navigate race by replacing it with vague nods to diversity and multiculturalism. Designers manipulated the colour scheme into a patchwork quilt motif, another nod to Southern identity based on the idea that such quilts were a long-standing Southern tradition. The patchwork quilt metaphor also easily supported claims to multicultural racial harmony, embodying 'the concept of unity within diversity'.⁴⁵ The aesthetics of Atlanta '96 lacked the ideological coherence of the LAOOC's neoliberal festive federalism, but they demonstrated that global ambitions and capitalist dreams still had to respond to local context and culture to shape conditions for Olympic business to go ahead.

ACOG struggled to copy festive federalism, but it succeeded in its ambition to surpass the LAOOC's achievements and use the Games to bring about a private, neoliberal reconfiguration of the city. In the building sites of early 1990s Atlanta, where neoliberal beautification efforts sought to redefine public space as commercial space, the legacy of LA'84 endured. Olympic development in Atlanta had a devastating effect on the city's un-

⁴³ Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 247.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

housed population, displacing people from the downtown area and closing single-room occupancy residences and shelters.⁴⁶ Echoing LA's concerns about Pershing Square, the Games saw the renovation of Woodruff Park into an anti-homeless space complete with sleep-proof benches, sprinklers, and no public toilets. The state also facilitated the Olympic campaign against the city's un-housed by introducing legislation which effectively criminalised homelessness.⁴⁷ In a final act of indignity, under the auspices of a pre-Games beatification program called "Operation Homeward Bound", local government offered un-housed residents one-way bus tickets out of town.⁴⁸ The city's unhoused — perceived by authorities to be living outside the economy — did not warrant the famed Southern hospitality which ACOG had been at pains to emphasise.

ACOG actively pursued the same policing model imposed by LA ahead of the Games and ensured that the police had a central role in the privatisation and patrolling of public spaces like Woodruff Park. Organisers wanted the best man for the job so they hired William Rathbun, the ex-LAPD commander whose duties had included heading-up Chief Gates' Olympic security liaison team ahead of LA'84.⁴⁹ Rathburn brought all his LA'84 experience to Atlanta's public spaces, erecting perimeter fences and informing the press that 'This will not be a public park. We will establish the conditions of admission'.⁵⁰ Vague construction of threats served to define what criteria governed access to public spaces. Rathburn stretched the definitions of terrorist to cover 'terroristic behaviour' which he extended to include anyone acting in an unruly fashion, including teenagers.⁵¹ On the 27 July 1996, half-way through the

⁴⁶ Burbank, Andranovich, and Heying, *Olympic Dreams*, 112; Lenskyj, *Inside the Olympic Industry*, 135-6.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Tom Gorman, 'Olympian Effort to Handle Homeless', *Los Angeles Times*, 31 January 2002.

⁴⁹ Gates, *Chief*, 269.

⁵⁰ Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 267.

⁵¹ Ibid., 268.

Games, an actual terrorist incident did occur. It was not the act of an un-housed Atlantan or an unruly teenager, nor did terror strike in black or brown skin from overseas. Rather, it was white domestic terrorist Eric Rudolph who killed two people and injured over 100 others when he exploded a pipe bomb in the middle of Centennial Olympic Park — the focal point of Olympic Atlanta.⁵² Atlantan police, like the LAPD, had absorbed the idea of an international terrorist threat to the Olympics in racialised forms which made sense to them, forms which motivated officials to write blank cheques for police expenditure.

To the north of Centennial Olympic Park, meanwhile, Coca-Cola had been busy making the most of Olympic opportunities. For the soft-drink colossus, who had been a major sponsor of LA'84, Atlanta '96 was both a local and global event which brought its customers from around the world to its own backyard.⁵³ The company spent \$20 million building the “Coca-Cola Olympic City” on the edge of the park. This “city” was an eight-acre outdoor entertainment space featuring amusements, hi-tech video games, and an amphitheatre, all of which required paid admission while piggybacking on the footfall of nearby Olympic customers. In spaces like the Coca-Cola Olympic City, Atlanta's formerly public areas were colonised by corporate capital. As Rutheiser concluded, these were ‘conjured realms in which the boundaries between advertisement, entertainments, and education have been permanently effaced by a more profound pecuniary truth’.⁵⁴ The terms of admission were not only those set by Rathburn. Just like boosters' visions of what LA's Pershing Square could become back in 1983, Olympic Atlanta required a person to trade with it.

⁵² Burbank, Andranovich, and Heying, *Olympic Dreams*, 114.

⁵³ Dr John Smith Pemberton created what would become Coca-Cola in Atlanta in 1886. The company has maintained its corporate headquarters there ever since: ‘The Birth of a Refreshing Idea’, accessed 19 March 2023, <https://www.coca-colacompany.com/company/history/the-birth-of-a-refreshing-idea>.

⁵⁴ Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*, 267.

By 1996, Atlanta's "neoliberally beautiful" spaces were both revenue-generating and pedagogical, enticing consumers to part with cash while inculcating the naturalness of the corporate-provided public realm. Developers identified other areas of downtown ripe for new construction, striking a deal with the INS to designate these places as "special districts". The federal government promised green cards to any overseas investor who stumped up the capital to fund the redevelopment.⁵⁵ Atlanta's Olympic boosters, with the support of government at all levels, took the LAOOC's strategies and targeted the city's public parks and "blighted" urban spaces for neoliberal improvement. Atlanta '96 reflected broader neoliberalisation across the US during the 1990s, which since 1984 had crept into political imaginations across partisan divides.

At the national level, both Reagan and Bill Clinton spotted the political capital they could accrue by co-opting the narrative of LA '84. In 1984, Regan had misinterpreted the Games as evincing the strength of "the melting pot", smelting difference into one idealised American citizen. When this citizen embraced the free market, as they had at LA '84, they were unstoppable. At least, that was Reagan's interpretation, one which mistook the careful and deliberate post-racial multiculturalism which the LAOOC had developed. Regardless, Reagan centred the Olympics in his re-election campaign to great effect.⁵⁶ Jesse Jackson, who vied with Walter Mondale that year for the Democratic nomination, pursued a rhetorical approach more akin to the "patchwork quilt" version of multiculturalism. The attempts by Jackson's "Rainbow Coalition" to link together racial justice, multicultural consciousness, and an expanded welfare state won millions of votes, but lost out to the establishment-friendly

⁵⁵ Ibid., 265.

⁵⁶ Kruse and Zelizer, *Faultlines*, 127-8.

Mondale.⁵⁷ In 1984, then, millions who had voted for Jackson had rejected the logics that underpinned festive federalism.

In 1992, however, Americans elected Bill Clinton, who understood the political potential of festive federalism. He actively and pointedly distanced himself from Jackson's talk of multiculturalism and the welfare state.⁵⁸ As Gerstle has argued, Clinton's presidency demonstrated that neoliberal economics could be compatible with 'a multicultural republic of many colors, religions, and creeds [...] Now it carried a message of racial reconciliation and patriotism. It celebrated diversity as the essence of Americanism'.⁵⁹ Neoliberal logic underpinned this multicultural liberalism: 'Clinton grasped that his version of the multicultural creed was perfectly suited to a neoliberal vision of a world without borders [...] indifferent to the hierarchies of race, religion, and nationality [...] a way of living that celebrated robust exchanges not just of goods but of cultures across various racial, ethnic, religious and national divides'.⁶⁰ The logic of festive federalism had taken root in the White House. At the same time, in an effort to demonstrate his "tough on crime" credentials, Clinton signed into law a \$30 billion 1994 crime bill which turbo-charged mass incarceration, disproportionately locking away young Black men while funnelling public money to an increasingly private and profitable prison-industrial complex.⁶¹ In both respects, LA '84 had presaged these twin dynamics of the Clinton 'third way' presidency, an era in which as Gerstle argues, neoliberal ideas went from political movement to bipartisan common sense.⁶²

⁵⁷ Ibid., 130.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 200.

⁵⁹ Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, 182.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 182-3.

⁶¹ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 56-7; Gilmore, *Golden Gulags*.

⁶² Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, 149.

LA '84 REDUX? THE 2028 LOS ANGELES OLYMPICS

No one could argue that the post-racial utopian promise of LA '84 became a reality. Just eight years after the Games, the 1992 Rebellion exposed the truth, that the door to an egalitarian post-racial future under capitalism, which the Games had seemed to promise to open, remained firmly shut. Three decades on, neoliberal thinking has pervaded all realms of social policy. Crisis after crisis has shown the inability of the globalised “free market” to deliver equality, justice, and the pursuit of happiness. Los Angeles remains riven by the same inequalities that Ueberroth and his committee faced in 1978 when they took responsibility for bringing the Olympics, and with it the world economy, to their city. Yet this most “Olympic” of Olympic cities will soon join a club inhabited by just two other world metropolises which have hosted the Games three times: London and, in 2024, Paris. The planning for LA 2028 is nascent and neither organisers nor the city have made public much information about how these Games will be funded, how they will benefit Angelenos, or how they will withstand the ever-mounting pressures bearing down on the institution of Olympism in the post-COVID world. The experience of the Tokyo 2020 Games laid bare these challenges in dramatic fashion.⁶³ Nevertheless, the history of LA '84 lies waiting for organisers. If they chose to go looking for it, they would find a blueprint for running an Olympic Games in spite, and at the expense of, the people and the world around them.

If the “how” of LA 2028 has yet to be decided, so has the “why”. The return of the Games to LA was the pet project of sports promoter Casey Wasserman, who is married to the granddaughter of LAOOC Chairman Paul Ziffren.⁶⁴ Wasserman received the full backing of then-Mayor Eric Garcetti in pursuing the bid. Besides family tradition and the opportunity for

⁶³ Louisa Thomas, ‘The Tokyo Olympics’ Unquiet Moment of Silence’, *The New Yorker*, 24 July 2021.

⁶⁴ David Davis, ‘A Well Nourished Mogul’, *Los Angeles Times*, 27 October 2002.

political boasting, it remains unclear *why* LA needs the Olympics again, or what exactly “success” will look like to organisers. In the late 1970s, when Tom Bradley and the Southern California Committee for the Olympic Games successfully lobbied the IOC, world city ascension was on the table. Now, LA *is* a world city, a global destination for tourism and commerce, an economic and cultural powerhouse. The money, power, and status that surround the Olympics, however, remain motivational ends in their own right. The deficit of a clarity of purpose around LA 2028 is exacerbated by the absence of the “do or die” nature of LA’84’s private financing. The city and state governments have promised to act as financial ‘backstops’, each pledging \$250 million in the event that costs exceed the planned \$7 billion to be sourced from sponsors.⁶⁵ As such, LA 2028 will lack the ideological coherence and utter clarity of purpose which governed, however ruthlessly, the LAOOC’s operations. It remains to be seen to what extent LA 2028 will be a reanimated version of LA’84.

Since the announcement of LA’s successful bid, Mayor Karen Bass — the first woman of colour to hold the office — has replaced Garcetti. Bass has long experience of the nature of organising in LA and the apparent intractability of its homelessness crisis. As Murch has noted, Bass cut her teeth organising on the streets of post-Olympic LA. Her roots lie in the Community Coalition for Substance Abuse, Prevention, and Treatment, a movement which in many ways reflected the South Central Organising Committee’s preference for morality and temperance politics pursued within existing structures. In the era of RLA, Community Coalition focused its efforts on preventing the re-opening of South Central liquor stores destroyed in the Rebellion. In terms reminiscent of Olympic beautification, Murch notes: ‘modelling their efforts on homeowner associations, the Community Coalition sought to

⁶⁵ David Wharton, ‘New Poll Suggests LA Residents Concerned About Hosting 2028 Olympics’, *Los Angeles Times*, 9 October 2018.

organise neighbourhood residents to “clean up” the streets of South LA’.⁶⁶ While it is unfair to assume her politics have remained static since the early 1990s, Bass has signalled her support for LA 2028 almost immediately by hiring a former senior vice president of LA 2028 as her chief of staff.⁶⁷ There is, then, a very real possibility that Bass’ premiership will again expose the limits of “diversity” and the politics of representation when they are channelled through — and subsumed by — the requirements of racial capitalism.

Perhaps LA 2028 will stand as the ultimate legacy of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games. The LAPD has already submitted a request for \$1 million in Olympic-related expenses.⁶⁸ Branding work has begun in earnest, with one recent newsletter stating: ‘Los Angeles is more than a city. It’s a mindset. A movement. Millions of people speaking hundreds of languages coming together under two iconic letters: LA’.⁶⁹ The successors of Ueberroth are, it seems, already dusting off the language of festive federalism for a new generation.

⁶⁶ Murch, ‘The Color of War’, 143.

⁶⁷ Julia Wick, ‘Mayor-Elect Bass Names LA28 Executive Chris Thompson as Chief of Staff’, *Los Angeles Times*, 29 November 2022.

⁶⁸ Dakota Smith, ‘Bass’ Chief of Staff Says He’ll Avoid Olympics Issues for a Year’, *Los Angeles Times*, 12 February 2023.

⁶⁹ LA 2028 Email in Author’s Possession.

FIGURES

Figure I: Sam the Olympic Eagle

[Page 80] LAOOC, *Official Report*, 246, LA'84 Foundation Digital Library Collections.



Figure II: The Star in Motion

[Page 82] LAOOC, *Official Report*, 244, LA'84 Foundation Digital Library Collections.



Figure III: Festive Federalism

[Page 83] LAOOC, 'A Preview of the Design for the 1984 Olympic Games', Box 95, MGP.



Figure IV: Festive Federalism in Situ

[Page 85] LAOOC, *Official Report*, 259, LA'84 Foundation Digital Library Collections.



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Figure V: Olympic Pictograms Rendered in Festive Federalism

[Page 88] LAOOC, *Official Report*, 248, LA'84 Foundation Digital Library Collections.



Figure VI: Olympic Gateway

[Page 104] Photograph from author's collection.



Figure VII: Police Academy Class 1973

[Page 200] Box 1, IHC.



Figure VIII: Daryl Gates Introduces LAPD's New Battering Ram, 1985

[Page 219] Mike Mullen, Los Angeles Herald Examiner Photo Collection, No. 00045575, Los Angeles Public Library.



Figure IX: Carl Lewis

[Page 252] Gary Smith, 'I Do What I Want to Do', *Sports Illustrated*, 18 July 1984, 37, Sports Illustrated Vault, <https://vault.si.com/vault/1984/07/18/44475>.



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