



A GENTRIFICATION CAUTIONARY TALE



The Garcetti-fication of Los Angeles: A Gentrification Cautionary Tale



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Housing Is A Human Right, based in Los Angeles, is the housing advocacy division of AIDS Healthcare Foundation—the world’s largest HIV/AIDS medical-care organization, serving more than one million people in 43 countries. Throughout the U.S., AHF patients have been negatively impacted by rising housing costs and gentrification, which threatens their health. Housing Is A Human Right advocates for stronger tenant protections, fights gentrification, and advances progressive housing policies. For more information, go to the website housinghumanright.org.

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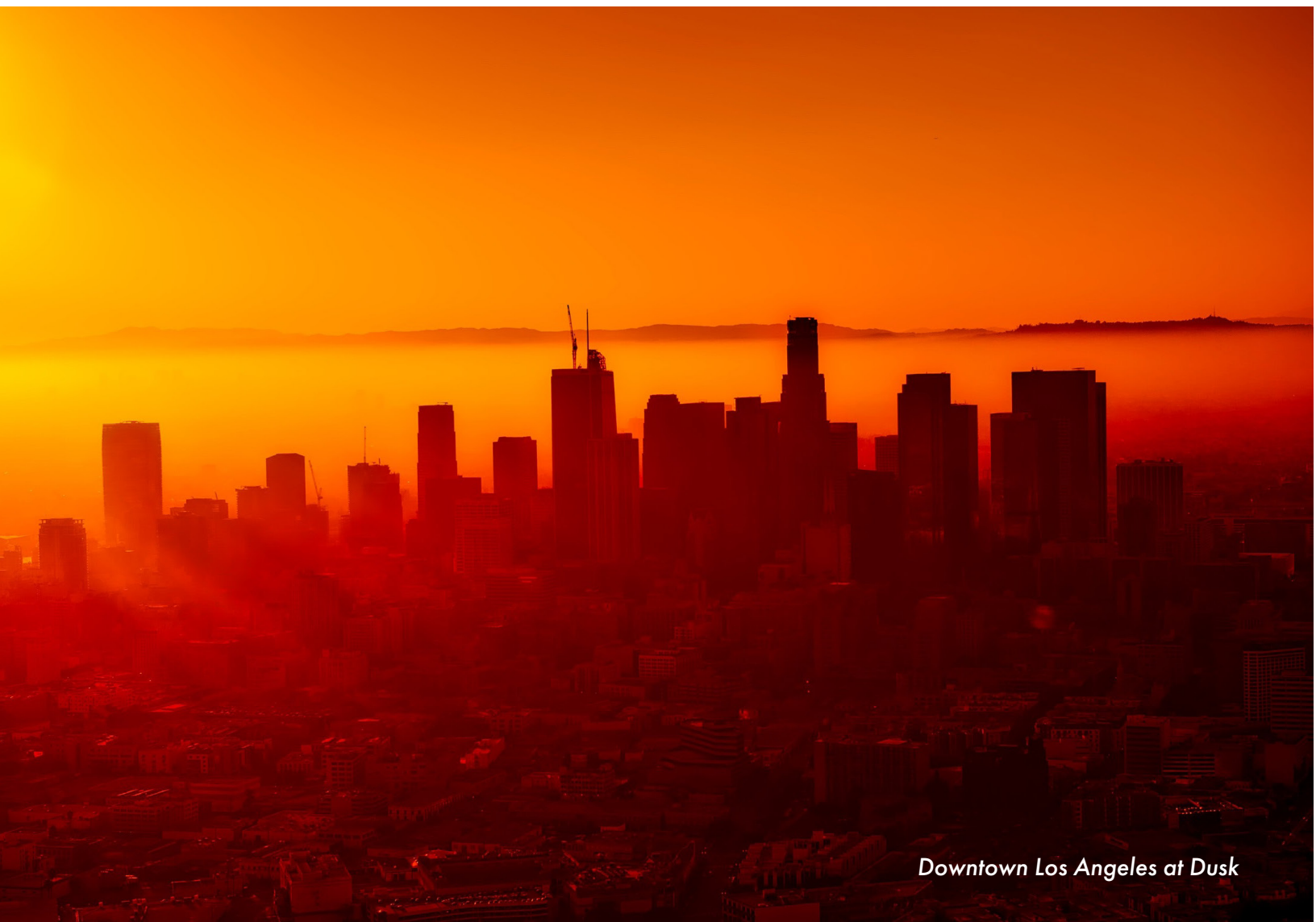
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I.

Los Angeles as a Cautionary Tale



Downtown Los Angeles at Dusk

Outside Los Angeles City Hall, on an overcast summer evening in 2017, Mayor Eric Garcetti stood on a blue-carpeted stage, flanked by City Council members, and smiled broadly. It was a big day. In front of several thousand people, with a right hand raised, Garcetti had just been sworn in for a second term as mayor of the nation's second largest city. AECOM, a multinational engineering firm, and Westfield Property Management, a global real estate company, each [contributed \\$50,000 to help pay for the high-powered ceremony](#). In the audience, Garcetti's political patrons stood clapping, many of them snapped pictures. The mayor acknowledged the crowd with a quick thumbs up, and then [launched into a florid, 20-minute speech](#).

Eyeing a teleprompter, Garcetti spoke grandly. L.A., according to the mayor, was now "freer, safer, prouder." The public's faith in L.A. government had been restored. The self-centered, self-serving culture at City Hall had been changed. Homelessness and rising rents were problems, he acknowledged, but building up L.A. would provide many solutions, making "our dreams" come true. "Los Angeles," Garcetti said with a grin, "we are builders, and we have begun that work—and we mean to keep at it." It was perhaps the most accurate claim in his entire inaugural address.

Of all the promises Garcetti had uttered over the years, unleashing [a tidal wave of high-end development](#) was the one pledge he had most made good on. By repeatedly indulging in a controversial practice known as "spot zoning"—ignoring

the city's land-use regulations and then approving developers' requests for general plan amendments, zone changes, and other entitlements—Garcetti and the City Council had turned [L.A. into a lucrative paradise for real estate investors](#) and developers, where they could construct anything they wanted, wherever they wanted.

"The planning process in the city of L.A. has gotten out of balance," former [L.A. City Planning Commissioner Mike Woo told the Los Angeles Times](#) in 2017. "There shouldn't be so many requests for discretionary decisions moving through the system."

With spot-zoning approvals in hand, upscale developers such as Colony Holdings, Kanon Ventures, Carmel Partners, and Merlone Geier Partners were free to build immense luxury-housing complexes in middle- and working-class neighborhoods in Koreatown, South L.A, and the San Fernando Valley, where a [chain reaction of skyrocketing rents, displacement, and gentrification](#) would undoubtedly explode.

"By 2018, L.A.-area renters shelled out a staggering \$40.4 billion to keep roofs over their heads"

It was as if City Hall had reverted to a Wild West outpost, where deep-pocketed developers with high-priced lobbyists routinely shelled out campaign cash to the mayor and council members while the

politicians returned the favor with spot-zoning approvals—a sketchy arrangement known as “pay-to-play.” In 2019, an [FBI corruption probe, which first focused on L.A. Councilman and Planning and Land Use Management Committee Chairman Jose Huizar](#) and then expanded to other government officials, would rock City Hall.

During Garcetti’s first mayoral term, glass-and-steel luxury-housing towers and [gigantic, market-rate apartment complexes started to pop up all over L.A.](#)—and developers and real estate investors, who had [contributed millions in campaign cash to Garcetti and City Council members](#) over the years, were raking in billions. By 2018, [L.A.-area renters shelled out a staggering \\$40.4 billion](#) to keep roofs over their heads. Curbed L.A., a real estate site, noted, “By comparison, that’s more than 423 of the companies on the most recent Fortune 500 list earned in yearly revenue.”

Garcetti’s “build, baby, build” agenda was eagerly embraced by City Council President Herb Wesson, Councilman Huizar, and nearly all of the other council members. But it wasn’t executed without devastating consequences. The mayor didn’t use his inauguration to go into the disastrous details, but housing justice and tenants rights groups knew what was happening. Even [City Hall databases, created by the mayor’s “innovation team,” showed what was emerging](#). Middle- and working-class Angelenos, particularly people of color and immigrants, were getting slammed by a citywide gentrification crisis. And with that came soaring rents, [record-high](#)

[evictions](#), unwanted displacement, and sudden homelessness. People’s worlds were collapsing—and a humanitarian crisis was unfolding.

“Los Angeles has proven that it is not yet able to practice development without displacement,” the [Los Angeles Tenants Union declared 2017](#). “Imagined housing construction of the future relies on today’s practices of mass eviction and harassment.”

By the end of 2017, the median rent for a one-bedroom in L.A. was a whopping \$2,200, ranking the city sixth among the [top 10 U.S. metropolises with the highest median rents](#). Between July 2013 and July 2017, during Garcetti’s first term in office, landlords utilized a little-known state law, the 1985 Ellis Act, to [evict tenants in 4,869 rent-controlled units](#), according to the Coalition for Economic Survival and Anti-Eviction Mapping Project. With an average household size of 2.8 persons in L.A., that’s at least 13,633 people who were forced out of their homes.

Overall, the *L.A. Times* found that between 2001 and 2016, [a stunning 20,000 rent-controlled units had been yanked off the market](#). “Looking to cash in on a booming real estate market,” the *Times* reported, “Los Angeles property owners are demolishing an increasing number of rent-controlled buildings to build pricey McMansions, condos and new rentals, leading to hundreds of evictions across the city.”

From 2016 to 2017, [L.A.’s homeless population spiked by 16 percent](#): 33,138

“Gentrification was ravaging Los Angeles ... and Garcetti and the City Council were aggressively fueling it”

men, women, and children were living on the streets—and [homeless advocates believed the real number was much larger](#). The Los Angeles Community College District, for example, found that [19 percent of its 230,000 students had been recently homeless in 2017](#). Even worse, [more than 1,200 homeless people had died on the streets](#) of L.A. County between 2017 and 2018.

Gentrification was ravaging Los Angeles—in 2018, the Downtown L.A. ZIP code [90014 was ranked by RENTCafe as the most gentrified neighborhood](#) in the entire nation. And Garcetti and the City Council, through their backroom land-use policies, were aggressively fueling it. They were, in fact, engaging in government-sanctioned gentrification. It was something the media often overlooked, and many Angelenos didn’t fully understand.

In L.A., and other U.S. cities, younger people looking for a cheap neighborhood to live are no longer the underlying force in gentrifying middle- and working-class communities. The media still frames gentrification that way, but noted scholars, such as the [late Neil Smith, the prominent anthropology and geology professor](#), think that’s outdated. Smith and author

Peter Moskowitz, who wrote the well-regarded book [How to Kill A City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood](#), argue that developers and real estate investors are now leading the gentrification charge.

“To explain gentrification according to the gentrifier’s preferences alone,” Smith wrote in his landmark book [The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City](#), “while ignoring the role of builders, developers, landlords, mortgage lenders, government agencies, real estate agents—gentrifiers as producers—is excessively narrow. A broader theory of gentrification must take the role of the producers as well as the consumers into account, and when this is done it appears that the needs of production—in particular the need to earn profit—are a more decisive initiative behind gentrification than consumer preference.”

Lured by favorable local and state government policies such as tax subsidies, zone change approvals, and entire rezoning of neighborhoods, developers and [real estate investors jump into inexpensive urban areas](#) before younger people gentrify a community—after all, properties will be less expensive. Developers, with the help of local and state politicians, then fire up gentrification themselves with their luxury-housing complexes and top-dollar rents. Other landlords in the neighborhood invariably follow suit, [jacking up rents—one way or another](#)—at their apartment buildings.

“The policies that cause cities to gentrify

are crafted in the offices of real estate moguls and in the halls of city government,” Moskowitz writes in *How to Kill A City*. “The coffee shop is the tip of the iceberg.”

The author could have added the corridors of state government. In late 2018, California State Sen. Scott Wiener introduced SB 50, a statewide, real estate deregulation bill that housing activists fear will worsen gentrification crises in cities. Activists have long been wary of [Wiener, who relies heavily on campaign contributions from developers, landlords, and other real estate players](#) to get elected and stay in power. He consistently pushes a “trickle-down,” luxury-housing agenda, spinning it as a way to address California’s housing affordability crisis, although Big Real Estate stands to gain the most benefit. Despite activists’

gentrification fears, although not surprisingly, Garcetti seems amenable to Wiener’s legislation.

But the battle over SB 50 was more than a year away. At the end of his inauguration speech, as the sky grew dark, Garcetti boasted that Los Angeles is a “paradise.” In truth, the nation’s second largest city had become a high-profile cautionary tale about modern-day gentrification in California and throughout the United States—and how politicians vigorously push it through. It’s a story that took place over years and often behind closed doors, but can no longer be ignored. Too many lives—in L.A. and across the country—hang in the balance.

II.

The Foundation for a Gentrification Crisis



Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti

Like many big cities, Los Angeles is run by Democrats. In 2001, Eric Garcetti, a 30-year-old assistant professor of diplomacy and world affairs at Occidental College, decided to run for L.A. City Council in District 13. The young candidate had long been active in Democratic circles—his father, Gil Garcetti, was a well-known Democrat who had served two terms as the Los Angeles County District Attorney. For the race, [Eric billed himself as a strong progressive](#) with the soul of a community activist. He promised to fight for affordable housing; overhaul the Los Angeles Police Department; and practice a new kind of politics that would steer clear of City Hall's insider ways.

It was all the right messaging. District 13, at the time, was a distinctly eclectic area: home to working-class families, artists, activists, and union members. Located northwest of Downtown L.A., the district included Hollywood, East Hollywood, Silver Lake, Echo Park, Atwater Village, and Elysian Valley. The majority of the population was Latino, followed by whites and Asian Americans. Eighty percent of the residents were renters, and 22 percent of households lived below the poverty line. Over the decades, prominent progressive figures, including gay rights icon Harry Hay, *The Nation* magazine editor Carey McWilliams, and Chicano rights activist and teacher Sal Castro, gravitated towards District 13.

Garcetti appeared to have the right kind of politics, but his upbringing was not working class. He was born and raised in [Encino, a mostly white, affluent neighborhood in](#)

[the San Fernando Valley](#). His father rose steadily through the ranks at the L.A. County District Attorney's Office, and his maternal grandfather, [Henry Roth, was a men's clothing magnate](#). Eric went to the best schools: the elite L.A. prep school Harvard-Westlake; Columbia University in New York; and The Queen's College, Oxford, as a Rhodes Scholar. The L.A. media became smitten with Garcetti's youth, pedigree, and academic credentials—years later, he would be tagged the “hipster mayor.” By the end of the 2001 race, he narrowly defeated one-time L.A. councilman Mike Woo. Garcetti, who lived in a [meticulously restored mid-century house in Echo Park that was featured in Dwell magazine](#), was re-elected in 2005 and 2009.

“Garcetti quickly landed a reputation as pro-development, with a fondness for luxury-housing mega-projects”

As a council member, Garcetti quickly landed a reputation as pro-development, with a fondness for luxury-housing mega-projects, especially in Hollywood—the world-famous, yet largely working-class neighborhood. He backed the massive, high-end W Hotel at Hollywood and Vine, which included 296 rooms, 350 apartments, and 145 condominiums. And he supported the [upscale redevelopment of Columbia Square at Sunset and Gower](#), where a 20-story residential tower with 200 luxury units now stands. Outside of District 13,

Garcetti approved of many other luxury-housing developments in L.A.

The real estate industry returned the favor. Between 2001 and 2013, his entire time representing Council District 13, Garcetti received at least \$452,908 in campaign cash and other [political monies from developers and real estate heavies](#), according to the city's Ethics Commission. Leading developers such as Jeffrey Worthe of Worthe Real Estate Group, William Witte of Related California, and Jerome Snyder of J.H. Snyder Company sent sizable checks. Abandoning his campaign promise to be a new kind of politician, Garcetti was playing the insider's game at City Hall.

Then, in 2006, Garcetti came into real power: his colleagues elected him City Council President, one of the most predominant figures in L.A. government. The council president works closely with the mayor, moves (or stops) legislation going through the system, and chooses chairpersons for the City Council committees, such as the influential Planning and Land Use Management Committee (PLUM). If Garcetti, for example, disapproved of land-use decisions by PLUM that stoked gentrification, he could replace the chairperson with a different council member. (That never happened.)

Throughout his six-year reign as council president, Garcetti handled the public and media with an outgoing, upbeat personality, always trying to make a friendly connection. But the smiling face and sunny disposition masked, in a way, a politically-calculating,

detail-oriented mind. Known for his caution, Garcetti never undertook something without figuring out the political risks. Hollywood activist Ziggy Kruse once said about Garcetti: "The only time he goes with the community is when it's a politically smart move."

The former Rhodes Scholar, in other words, can't plead ignorant about L.A.'s gentrification crisis—or claim that he didn't know his policies were fueling gentrification. It's been quite the opposite. Garcetti and his colleagues, quietly and with little public knowledge, helped to trigger citywide gentrification.

California law requires that a city continually updates its "general plan," a kind of land-use constitution that sets the rules for developers, city officials, and residents. In a substantive way, a general plan protects residents—from runaway luxury development and bad or corrupt land-use decisions made by politicians. But in October 2005, the L.A. City Council, including Garcetti, discreetly [approved a repeal of the municipal code that required the politicians to update the general plan](#) on a schedule. It would be a game changer for City Hall leaders and developers for years to come—and it continues to fuel L.A.'s gentrification crisis today.

It's the kind of low-profile chicanery pulled off by local politicians that Peter Moskowitz describes in *How to Kill A City* as a "preparatory phase" of gentrification. "[It] is rarely seen or talked about because it happens so long before most people witness gentrification in action," he writes, "but this stage is crucial for understanding gentrification." This has happened at City

Halls all over America, including San Francisco, New Orleans, and New York. In L.A., the preparatory phase worked this way.

By not requiring themselves to update the general plan, City Council members gave themselves a public excuse for delivering spot-zoning favors to developers. Since the general plan and its rules are outdated, L.A. politicians say, the city needs to keep up with the times and they must spot zone. The City Council and mayor ignore the general plan and approve a zone change or general plan amendment for mega-projects that are not normally allowed to be built. Community activists abhor spot zoning – a luxury-housing tower can be suddenly dropped into a middle- or working-class neighborhood, with gentrification soon snowballing.

Unsurprisingly, developers and other real estate players are among the [top contributors of campaign cash and other political money at City Hall](#). Between 2005 and 2017, the real estate industry forked over at least \$4.4 million in campaign contributions to L.A. candidates, according to the city's Ethics Commission. Alice Callaghan, a well-known, longtime homeless advocate in L.A.'s Skid Row neighborhood, noted: "Developers are reaping huge profits by lining the pockets of City Council members and the mayor while taxpayers are being asked to foot the bill to shelter those made homeless by these greedy developers and politicians."

Spot zoning was getting so out of hand during Garcetti's time as council president

that former [L.A. Planning Department Director Gail Goldberg said candidly in 2008](#): "In every city in this country, the zone on the land establishes the value of the land. In Los Angeles, that's not true. The value of the land is not based on what the zone says... It's based on what [the] developer believes he can change the zone to. This is disastrous for the city. Disastrous. Zoning has to mean something in this city."

Spot zoning, an effective tool for government-sanctioned gentrification,

"The foundation for a gentrification crisis had been laid—and Garcetti, always ambitious, had bigger plans for himself and the city"

also fuels "soft corruption" or "pay-to-play." Since City Council members have something to sell to developers – zone changes and general plan amendments – developers have something to buy from City Hall. Corruption and gentrification, in other words, are intertwined—and middle- and working-class residents suffer the bad consequences.

In 2017, Coalition to Preserve L.A., a sister organization of Housing Is A Human Right, released an [investigative report that detailed the widespread pay-to-play culture at City Hall](#). The findings, culled from City Hall documents, showed that upscale developers

and their lobbyists repeatedly meet behind closed doors with City Council members and their staff and the Mayor's Office; routinely shell out campaign contributions to numerous council members, particularly those serving on the Planning and Land Use Management Committee; and consistently receive the spot-zoning favors they sought—or, in a sense, bought.

The report concluded: "While non-transparent meetings and dinners between developers, elected city leaders, and their staffs take up an enormous amount of elected leaders and their staffs' time (and

even draw in the staff of the City Planning Department), these public officials almost never meet with voters and residents who question the non-transparent meetings and developer plans."

During Garcetti's six-years as City Council president, L.A.'s general plan was never updated, the secretive 2005 vote was never fixed, and [substantive campaign finance reform was never passed](#). The foundation for a gentrification crisis had been laid—and Garcetti, always ambitious, had bigger plans for himself and the city of Los Angeles.

III.

A Gentrification Template for a New L.A.



Crossroads Hollywood Luxury Mega Project

Conceptual Rendering

In 2013, at the age of 42, Eric Garcetti was determined to become the 42nd mayor of Los Angeles. He promised to be a “back-to-basics” leader, touting himself as a “problem solver” with “proven results.” Those results largely involved his work in Council District 13, particularly the “revitalization” of Hollywood, the neighborhood. Among activists, revitalization is a code word for gentrification. *L.A. Weekly*, the award-winning alternative newspaper, took a deep dive.

For a [2013 investigation into Garcetti’s development record, titled “Hollywood’s Urban Cleansing,”](#) the *Weekly* found that 12,878 people—mostly Latinos—left Hollywood and East Hollywood between 2000 and 2010, largely due to gentrification. Garcetti represented those neighborhoods between 2001 and 2013. As Garcetti pushed aggressively for more luxury-housing development, the mass departure took place almost entirely under his watch. It was a shocking revelation.

What was also disturbing, the *Weekly* reported, was that Garcetti publicly declared, at a mayoral candidates’ forum, that Hollywood would be his “template for a new Los Angeles.” Put another way, Garcetti planned to apply the same gentrification formula he utilized in Council District 13 to the entire city.

That would include forcing luxury-housing mega-projects through City Hall’s approval process by using spot zoning—one of the key political tools in L.A. to gentrify. Years later, in a [2017 article about L.A.’s](#)

[upscale high-rise boom](#), the *New York Times* reported that, as mayor, Garcetti “planned to eliminate regulations that stymie innovation.” He admitted, “We’re writing the rules as we go ... that can be very disruptive to people.” Garcetti said some Angelenos may be resistant, but insisted: “We need to get with it.”

Garcetti sounded a note reminiscent of Robert Moses, the arrogant and tyrant-like public official who presided over “urban renewal” in New York City after World War II. He, too, wrote his own land-use rules, flattening city blocks and displacing thousands of people. Talking about his work, Moses said that one “can’t make an omelet without breaking some eggs.”

“The City Council over the past several years has completely ignored tenants... and are pushing forward a landlord’s agenda”

Uncritical, the *Times* appeared to accept the mayor’s anything-goes philosophy for development. But rewriting the rules, usually behind closed doors, in favor of real estate investors and developers can be disastrous, especially for the less affluent. In the *Weekly* cover story, Mercedes Cortes, a 61-year-old mother and housekeeper, who had been pushed out of her Hollywood apartment because of rising rent, pointedly asked, “When they start to build something, why

does the middle class have to suffer for that?"

L.A. Weekly also revealed that at least 150 residents of a Hollywood apartment building were threatened and harassed by a landlord who wanted them gone. Most of them were Latino. A resident contacted Garcetti, but he did nothing. Under threat of being reported to federal immigration officials, the tenants fled their longtime, affordable apartments, which were then demolished to make way for a luxury-housing complex proposed by Watt Commercial Properties. The firm's employees had shelled out at least \$6,850 in campaign cash to Garcetti.

For a follow up to "Hollywood's Urban Cleansing," L.A. Weekly examined the housing and tenants rights records of 2013 mayoral candidates Garcetti, Wendy Greuel, and Jan Perry. In the article, ["Rent Activists Hit Greuel and Garcetti,"](#) L.A. advocates sounded off.

"The City Council over the past several years has completely ignored tenants," Becky Dennison, then co-director of the Los Angeles Community Action Network, an anti-poverty group, told the Weekly, "and are pushing forward a landlord's agenda."

Larry Gross, executive director of Coalition for Economic Survival, a renters' rights group, said tenants were constantly calling for help. "Our phones lit up in terms of people trying to deal with condo conversions," said Gross, referring to the practice of developers taking affordable apartments off the market through the

controversial Ellis Act to build luxury condominiums.

Barbara Schultz, then directing attorney of the housing unit at the Legal Aid Foundation of L.A., emphasized the importance of preserving L.A.'s affordable housing stock. "You can never build your way out of an affordable housing crisis," Schultz explained.

Dennison added that the City Council had shown "no political will to move forward" on a comprehensive plan to preserve rent-stabilized units.

In fact, Garcetti and the City Council were more interested in finding ways to subsidize developers or give them tax breaks—tools for government-sanctioned gentrification. Such as the [\\$52-million taxpayer subsidy for billionaire developer Eli Broad](#), who got the money to build parking for his Downtown L.A. art museum. There are many more examples – Garcetti and his colleagues approved a [\\$30-million loan to developer CIM Group](#), which used the cash to retrofit the former Kodak Theater on Hollywood Boulevard. L.A. politicians handed over hundreds of millions to developers.

In the Weekly article, Garcetti downplayed his role as council president – one of the most powerful politicians in L.A. He told the paper it was up to the mayor, not him, to create the political will to push forward a pro-tenant housing agenda. It was a dodgy statement. But six months later, Garcetti won the mayoral election. His time had come to do what he supposedly couldn't do.

IV.

A Wave of Gentrification



Mayor Eric Garcetti with L.A. City Council

Between 2001 and 2013, [tenants in 17,290 rental units in L.A. had been subjected to the Ellis Act](#), according to the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project and Coalition for Economic Survival. Landlords and developers had increasingly used the state law to evict renters and then convert the apartments to condominiums or boutique hotels—luxury housing and accommodations for the affluent. Given L.A.’s average household size of 2.8 people, roughly 48,000 tenants had been evicted through the Ellis Act during Garcetti’s 12 years as a City Council member.

The Eviction Defense Network, the Los Angeles Tenants Union, Santa Monica’s Renters’ Rights, and other housing activists throughout California have long criticized the Ellis Act as a ruthless tool used by developers and landlords that helps fuel the gentrification of neighborhoods and the displacement of middle- and working-class residents. The Ellis Act is another devastating example of government-sanctioned gentrification.

But Garcetti and the City Council never strongly advocated for the repeal of the Ellis Act as people were getting evicted by the thousands. Why? As advocates Becky Dennison and Barbara Schultz told *L.A. Weekly*, the City Council was simply not interested in preserving L.A.’s affordable housing stock.

Which raises a number of disconcerting questions. Why was the City Council uninterested in preserving affordable housing for seniors on fixed incomes,

teachers, and working-class families? Was that lack of interest part of a larger plan to gentrify as much of L.A. as possible? Was the City Council more interested in the financial well being of developers, who are key campaign contributors, than middle- and working-class residents, many of whom are people of color? Were L.A. politicians, always looking for ways to beef up the city’s coffers, determined to replace lower-income Angelenos with richer residents in order to boost tax revenues? These questions not only pertain to L.A. politicians, but state and local elected officials up and down California.

Yet now that Garcetti, a self-described progressive Democrat, was elected mayor, he could change things, according to the logic he shared with *L.A. Weekly*. He was the “back-to-basics” mayor who finally held the power to build up the political will to improve the lives of hard-working Angelenos. Garcetti, the leader of a world-class city, could help fix an inherently unfair, broken housing market.

“When the housing market is as dysfunctional as it is in many parts of California,” Dr. Stephen Barton, a former housing director for the city of Berkeley and co-author of a [UC Berkeley research brief on rent control](#), noted, “tenants are effectively subsidizing landlords with rent payments above what a fully competitive market would allow landlords to charge.”

What did the mayor do?

Despite community activists’ continual calls for action, Mayor Garcetti, City Council

President Herb Wesson, and the rest of the City Council still did not aggressively advocate for the repeal of the Ellis Act. Instead, during Garcetti's first mayoral term, another 4,193 evictions took place through the state law. That's roughly 11,740 Angelenos forced out of their apartments to make way for luxury condominiums and boutique hotels.

In addition, that number only includes official evictions through the Ellis Act documented by the city of Los Angeles. Tenants rights activists say illegal and unreported evictions happen all too often. In the [Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Evicted*](#), sociologist Matthew Desmond points out that for every documented eviction taking place through the court system, there are two unreported evictions. With the 2017 homeless count just over 33,000 homeless people in L.A., it should be no surprise that the city's homeless crisis spiked an outrageous 16 percent from 2016.

As an excuse, Garcetti and the City Council often say that their hands are tied—the Ellis Act is a state law; therefore they can't change it. That's not good enough, especially for politicians who represent the largest city in California with nearly four million people.

Garcetti, a well-known jetsetter, frequently took five-hour flights across the country to Washington D.C. to lobby Congress, in person, for goodies. He undertook a very public, and time-consuming, crusade to bring the 2028 Summer Olympics to Los Angeles, flying to Switzerland and

other destinations. And Garcetti constantly traveled to China, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, and other places for "trade missions" of one kind or another. In 2017, the [L.A. Times raised eyebrows when it uncovered that the "mayor logged 112 days, or nearly one-third of his time, away from California over the last 12 months, according to his public calendar."](#)

"A crisis of this level demands 100 percent of [his] attention, not 66 percent," [activist Anne Orchier told L.A. Weekly](#), referring to L.A.'s homeless crisis and Garcetti's endless traveling.

Housing activists believed Garcetti could surely use that same energy, time, and high profile as mayor of L.A. to lobby hard and often in Sacramento on the behalf of some 59,000 victims of the Ellis Act. By traveling 380 miles to the state's capital, he could do the opposite of government-sanctioned gentrification. He could push for government protection of millions of renters in L.A. and other cities throughout California. It would be a significant accomplishment.

To his credit, Garcetti endorsed Proposition 10, a 2018 ballot measure that sought to repeal another harmful state law, the 1995 Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act. It places severe, statewide restrictions on local rent control ordinances. (Corporate landlords and developers shelled out [\\$77.3 million to successfully defeat Prop 10](#) in November 2018.) But his trips to Sacramento to fight for stronger tenant protections were few, if they took place at all. Instead, he took [out-of-state trips in pursuit of his own political](#)

“Garcetti first waved off the valid connection between the Olympics and gentrification, saying only a handful of critics were bringing it up”

agenda: to explore a 2020 run for the White House.

Garcetti rarely utters the word “gentrification” in public. One international trip was especially telling about how Garcetti handles gentrification—and how he and other big city politicians in the U.S., especially Democrats, act awkwardly, almost guiltily, when the issue comes up.

In Lausanne, Switzerland, in 2017, Garcetti met with the International Olympic Committee—the mayor desperately wanted to bring the Summer Games to L.A. But even there, he couldn’t escape L.A.’s gentrification crisis. At a press conference, a European reporter asked Garcetti to address Angelenos’ concerns that the Olympics would create a wave of gentrification—that luxury-housing developers and City Hall politicians would use the Summer Games as an exceedingly profitable opportunity to build, build, build all over L.A., forcing middle- and working-class residents out of their longtime neighborhoods. The mayor stumbled in his answer.

Garcetti first waved off the valid connection between the Olympics and gentrification, saying only a handful of critics were

bringing it up. It was a slight to the numerous grassroots organizations—L.A. Tenants Union, Black Lives Matter, Union de Vecinos, the Democratic Socialists of America, and others—that make up the “NOlympics” movement in L.A. Garcetti then rambled through the rest of his remarks, mentioned he was a Rhodes Scholar, and refused to say that he would try to keep gentrification forces in check. By the end of his response, Garcetti uncomfortably spun the notion that the Olympics would help fight gentrification.

“If we want to address issues of gentrification,” he said, in a rare instance of publicly using the g-word, “if we want to address issues of social cohesion, if we want to address homelessness...whether it’s the tax base that comes from the economic jobs that are created by the Olympics, whether it’s the spirit of that moment of pulling together or whether it’s the legacy that we want to have of universal access to sports—that’s how we combat poverty; that’s how we address the gentrification; that’s we address those issues that today all cities face.”

The one-time Rhodes Scholar knew better. L.A. housing activists have been telling Garcetti for years what strategy to take to stem the tide of gentrification—and it hasn’t involved the Olympics. In essence, it requires a three-pronged approach: protect renters by strengthening tenant protections; preserve existing affordable housing such as rent-controlled units; and produce truly affordable housing for middle- and working-class people.

Yet Garcetti has been inclined to pursue more of a “trickle-down” housing agenda, which pushes for mass construction of luxury housing, to address L.A.’s housing affordability crisis. It’s popular among city and state politicians in California and throughout the U.S., but housing activists believe it’s a disaster.

In 2015, for example, Garcetti was warned by his own housing department chief, in a [2015 Housing and Community Investment Department report](#), that L.A.’s luxury-housing overkill had created a huge 12 percent vacancy rate (5 percent is considered healthy) in all housing built in L.A. since 2005. The housing department found that city officials had approved “150 percent of the units needed” by high-earning residents and “only 37 percent of the housing needed for low-income earners.” (Judging by those numbers, one could say Garcetti and the City Council were hell bent on turning L.A. into a gentrified, luxury city.)

Urged to create a “more equitable and sustainable housing market,” Garcetti was further warned by the housing department: “The severe lack of affordable housing is a pervasive problem facing the majority of City residents.”

[Zillow, the real estate site, backed up the housing department’s assessment](#), noting that in L.A. and other cities “very high demand at the low end of the market is being met with more supply at the high end, an imbalance that will only contribute to growing affordability concerns for all renters.”

Trickle-down housing is based on supply-and-demand theory: flood the market with more apartments and eventually rents will drop. What’s more, proponents say, as new apartments age, the rents for those units will decrease, too. A trickle-down housing approach conveniently allows Garcetti and other politicians to give developers free rein to build as much luxury housing as they want, shamelessly using the housing affordability crisis as political cover to build more high-end housing.

Trickle-down housing, though, is seriously flawed. First, it’s common sense that building luxury housing doesn’t directly address a housing affordability crisis that’s unfolding right now. Second, building more luxury housing in middle- and working-class neighborhoods brings a rush of speculative investment that drives up rental costs in an impacted area. Third, there’s no guarantee that luxury housing will diminish in price. According to the California Legislative Analyst’s Office, it will take some 25 years for the possibility that luxury housing will become more affordable. Many activists believe trickle-down housing is a scam to help developers rake in more billions.

Even Richard Florida, a kind of urban planning guru for city politicians like Garcetti, recently wrote that “the markets—and neighborhoods—for luxury and affordable housing are very different, and it is [unlikely that any increases in high-end supply would trickle down to less advantaged groups.](#)”

Trickle-down housing is the main thrust of California State Sen. Scott Wiener's agenda. Wiener, a Democrat who represents San Francisco, styles himself as a housing expert. Similar to Garcetti, Wiener has taken [boatloads of campaign cash from developers, landlords, and other real estate honchos](#) since he first ran for office, as a candidate for San Francisco supervisor, in 2010.

For his [2020 re-election campaign for the state senate](#), Wiener has so far hauled in [\\$68,650 from real estate players](#) such as Spieker Realty Investments; Build, Inc; the California Apartment Association, which sponsored the main committee to stop Proposition 10; and many more. With such [political patrons, it was hardly surprising that Wiener refused to endorse Prop 10](#), even though more than 525 grassroots organizations and civic leaders supported it. Supporters included the California Teachers Association, the California Democratic Party, California Labor Federation, the Sierra Club, the ACLU, and U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders.

Wiener is now pushing a statewide bill known as SB 50, or the More HOMES Act. It's a reboot of the bill SB 827, which was [killed in committee in the spring of 2018 by a coalition](#) of social justice, housing justice, and tenants rights groups. They were deeply concerned that the legislation would fuel gentrification up and down California.

In a 2018 letter opposing SB 827, the [Los Angeles-based Black Community, Clergy, and Labor Alliance \(BCCLA\)](#), wrote:



California State Senator Scott Wiener

"Private interests and practices intended to reclaim urban space to profit a global investor class and real estate speculators are direct threats to our right to the homes and communities that we built in the face of their oppression."

"Unfortunately, public policies like SB 827 are not a defense, but rather an aid for these oppressive and discriminatory policies and interests. And there is nothing courageous, new, or innovative about advancing land grabs and economic exploitation."

The Democratic Socialists of America - L.A., who also opposed the bill, [stated](#): "SB 827 will result in luxury housing exclusively for the wealthy while displacing and dispossessing the poor and working class."

SB 50 and SB 827 have both been sponsored by California YIMBY, a [fake](#)

“Trickle-down housing is the main thrust of California State Sen. Scott Wiener’s agenda”

[grassroots group that receives major funding from Big Tech executives](#) and political support from developers. (Wiener is also backed financially by tech companies or their executives, such as Lyft, Twitter, and Stripe.) Like Wiener, California YIMBY refused to endorse Prop 10. Understandably, housing activists have been leery of the YIMBY movement.

That distrust only deepened in 2018—months before California YIMBY sat on the sidelines for Proposition 10. Outside San Francisco City Hall, in April 2018, a peaceful crowd of activists, seniors, and working-class residents—many of whom were people of color—gathered for an anti-SB 827 rally. Speaking in front of reporters, people explained how the bill would ruin their neighborhoods and force them out of the city. Suddenly, [YIMBY members, who are widely known for using bullying tactics on social media, showed up—and went off](#). They combatively shouted down the speakers. Things got so out of hand that a 77-year-old senior citizen fainted and was taken to the hospital.

SB 50, which activists say should be more accurately called the “More LUXURY HOMES Act,” isn’t much different from its predecessor. Wiener has conceded that. It will override local planning rules that protect middle- and working-class neighborhoods

from runaway luxury development and allow upscale developers to build dense, market-rate—or luxury—housing near transit stops. It also has a somewhat mysterious provision allowing developers to construct near so-called “jobs rich” areas, a seemingly broad term that Wiener has yet to define. Additionally, SB 50, so far, does not provide the percentage of affordable housing units that developers must build. Activists believe Wiener will ultimately propose a wildly insufficient figure that won’t come close to fixing California’s housing affordability crisis.

In an attempt to overcome opposition from housing and social justice activists, Wiener has included temporary (note, temporary) protections for “sensitive communities” under threat of gentrification. But, once those protections expire, the sensitive communities—middle- and working-class neighborhoods—will be open territory for developers seeking to utilize SB 50. Tellingly, the fact that Wiener included temporary protections is a tacit acknowledgment that the housing policies in SB 50 will cause a gentrification nightmare.

Garcetti, though, appears to be joining forces with Wiener, tentatively supporting a bill that has government-sanctioned gentrification written all over it. SB 50 would not only impact L.A., but Oakland, San Diego, and other California cities.

The media, often unwilling to seriously acknowledge the gentrification threat inherent in SB 50, often write glowing articles about Wiener and the bill—as

though it were a magic bullet to solve a housing affordability crisis. Garcetti, Wiener, and many reporters—either purposefully or with little awareness—refuse to consider the ethics of gentrification. In other words, they fail to take into account who will be hurt by trickle-down housing bills, spot zoning, and other tools politicians and developers use to push forward policies and projects that harm middle- and working-class people.

In response to the grassroots uproar over Amazon's plans to build a headquarters near a low-income housing area in New York City, which activists believed would hyper-gentrify the neighborhood, [Penn State University Professor Alexandra Staub wrote in a persuasive essay:](#)

"Amazon's move to Washington and New York along with an influx of well-paid employees brings us back to the question of how we might apply the ethical concept of utilitarianism to understand the greatest balance of happiness over suffering for the greatest number of people.

"In my view, this number must include the poor and working class. In an area threatened by gentrification, the economic and social costs for displaced residents is typically high.

"To make ethical decisions, we must consider the people who suffer the consequences of rapidly rising costs in the area they call home as part of the ethical question."

Garcetti, Wiener, and many politicians, in California and across the U.S., have consistently failed to do what Staub suggests. Perhaps because their political patrons—developers, landlords, lobbyists—would vigorously object. Instead, Garcetti, Council President Herb Wesson, L.A. Councilman and Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee Jose Huizar, and the City Council kept handing over spot-zoning favors to luxury-housing developers, who shelled out campaign cash to L.A. politicians.

At L.A. City Hall, all spot-zoning and other land-use requests from developers went through Huizar and PLUM. Once that committee granted approvals for a project, the development went to the full City Council for a vote. Rarely, if ever, did the City Council oppose a project once it went through PLUM. After the council gave its



L.A. City Councilman José Huizar

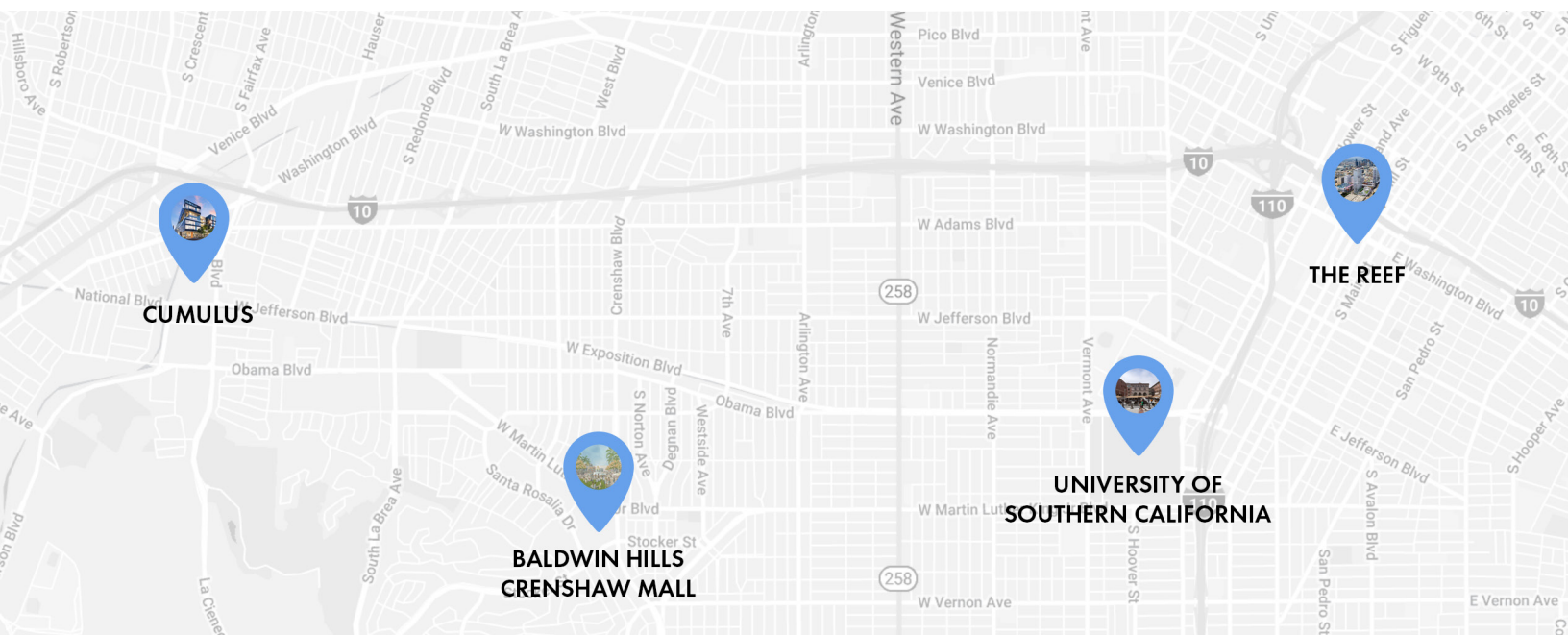
blessing, the mayor got the final say. It's hard to think of a project that Garcetti opposed after the City Council approved it. Everyone, from the City Council to the mayor, was involved in spot zoning—and continues to be.

As a result, developer Carmel Partners, armed with its spot-zoning approvals, can build a luxury-housing mega-project known as Cumulus in a working-class neighborhood in South L.A. Merlone Geier Partners and Goldstein Planting Investments can construct a sprawling [luxury-housing complex called NoHo West next to a middle-class neighborhood in North Hollywood](#). Developer Kanon Ventures received spot-zoning favors from Garcetti and the City Council to build The Reef, a

\$1-billion luxury-housing mega-project in Historic South-Central.

Longtime, [working-class residents—most of whom are Latino—were up in arms about the development](#). They believed it was only a matter of time that gentrification will take over the neighborhood. “This is modern ethnic cleansing,” said a young South L.A. resident at a City Planning Commission hearing for The Reef.

In Koreatown, for developer Colony Holdings, Garcetti and the [City Council rammed a 27-story luxury-housing tower, proposed for a working-class neighborhood, through City Hall’s approval system](#). At a 2016 press conference, community activist and



Map of notable Gentrification anchors in South Los Angeles

CUMULUS (In Development)	CRENSHAW PLAZA (Re-evelopment)	USC VILLAGE (Completed)	THE REEF (In Development)
Est. Cost: Unknown	Est. Cost: \$700 million	Est. Cost: \$700 million	Est. Cost: \$1.2 Billion

attorney Grace Yoo said: “It will have a domino effect on the rest of the area. All of these mom-and-pop apartment buildings will be swept up by developers. The working families living in them will be evicted, and the developers will put up luxury housing.”

Such precedent-setting, spot-zoning approvals from Garcetti and the City Council opened the door for more [luxury-housing projects in other middle- and working-class neighborhoods](#). That wasn’t lost on Garcetti—or Council President Herb Wesson. It helped another upscale developer get what he wanted in working-class South L.A.

Capri Capital Partners, a Chicago-based developer, aimed to build a luxury-housing redevelopment—551 condominiums and 410 apartments—at Baldwin Hills Crenshaw Plaza. The shopping center in L.A.’s Crenshaw District has long catered to the African American community. Except for a handful of affordable units, the housing will go for exorbitant prices. But the developer needed spot-zoning favors.

Working-class residents in the area—most of whom are African American and Latino—were [deeply concerned that the luxury redevelopment would spark gentrification](#). At a City Hall hearing, one African American activist warned of a “gentrification tsunami.” Unworried, Garcetti and the City Council approved the spot-zoning requests in 2018.

wasn’t an exaggeration. Baldwin Hills Crenshaw Plaza, The Reef, Cumulus, and USC’s ever-growing campus have become upscale anchors for a massive, rectangular gentrification zone in South L.A. One only needs to look at a map to see it coming—it’s almost perfectly set up.

Just south of the 10 Freeway, real estate speculators have been flipping homes in the West Adams neighborhood. The Reef sits to the east at Broadway and Washington Boulevard. USC is located less than two miles away to the south. Cumulus stands to the west at La Cienega and Jefferson boulevards. Baldwin Hills Crenshaw Plaza, at Martin Luther King Jr. and Crenshaw boulevards, acts as a kind of southern border for the gentrification zone. Everything in between will feel the pressure of gentrification courtesy of City Hall’s spot zoning.

During his first term as mayor, Garcetti didn’t drum up the political will to help middle- and working-class renters. If anything he kept steady, or most probably ramped up, the political will to spot zone—to rewrite the rules for developers—and aggressively induce a luxury-housing boom. Between 2000 and 2016, the L.A. Times found, the [City Planning Commission, whose members are appointed by the mayor, approved spot-zoning favors 90 percent](#) of the time.

But the “gentrification tsunami” comment

V.

A Gentrified Los Angeles



Protesters at L.A. City Council hearing

Perhaps the most damning evidence of a citywide gentrification crisis in Los Angeles comes from an unlikely source: the Mayor's Office. In 2016, with support from Bloomberg Philanthropies, Garcetti's Los Angeles Innovation Team, or "i-team," created two databases: The [Los Angeles Index of Displacement Pressure](#) and the [Los Angeles Index of Neighborhood Change](#). They clearly show where gentrification is overwhelming neighborhoods (Downtown, Hollywood, Venice, for example) or where displacement and gentrification are taking root (South L.A., the San Fernando Valley, the Los Angeles Basin). Garcetti's 2013 pledge to turn L.A. into a gentrified Hollywood is coming true.

The displacement pressure and neighborhood change databases have not been highly publicized by the Mayor's Office, although Garcetti often makes a point of publicly unveiling the city's newest tech gadget, such as the "Shake Alert L.A." app, which warns residents of an impending earthquake. If carried out properly, the displacement pressure and neighborhood change databases, which need to be updated annually, could be used the same way: to notify city and community leaders, who can then move into action to protect middle- and working-class neighborhoods from gentrification.

The i-team's databases show not only neighborhoods that have been gentrified or are going through gentrification, but also what neighborhoods are under a looming threat of gentrification and displacement. Chris Bousquet of [Data-](#)

[Smart City Solutions, a governance and innovation site sponsored by Harvard University](#), wrote that the i-team's data can "inform interventions" by both residents and elected officials. L.A. could be a forerunner in the use of technology to slow down, and possibly stop, gentrification.

Each database presents an interactive map with a color key that shows low to very high displacement pressure and "neighborhood change"—another City Hall code word for gentrification. The i-team, however, doesn't provide analysis of the data – that's left to the public. The neighborhood change index measures gentrification while the displacement pressure index predicts displacement.

"Lower- and middle-income people of color and immigrants are suffering the worst in L.A.'s most extremely gentrified areas"

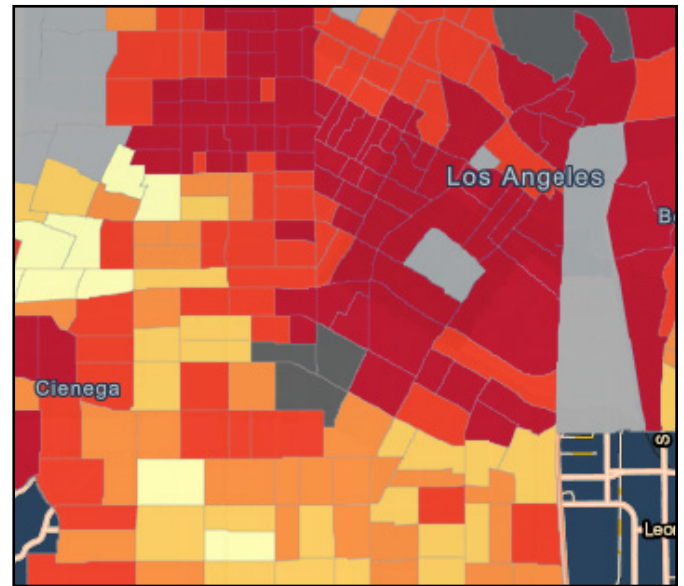
The [displacement pressure index is a street-level snapshot of L.A. comprised of essentially real-time information](#) and future projections. Garcetti's i-team looked at U.S. Census tracts and considered "change measures" such as change in housing price projections; percent of households that rent; percent of households that are extremely rent burdened; and the number

of affordable properties and housing units that are due to expire by 2023. The i-team notes that “displacement pressure factors capture areas with a high concentration of existing residents who may have difficulty absorbing massive rent increases that often accompany revitalization.” Again, “revitalization” is City Hall code for gentrification.

The displacement pressure index shows that every section of L.A.—Eastside, Westside, South L.A., the Harbor area, the Valley, the L.A. Basin—will experience low to very high displacement pressure. Predictably, the database closely reflects the findings in the neighborhood change index. “Very high” displacement pressure shows up in the gentrified neighborhoods of Silver Lake, North Hollywood, Downtown, and the Eastside, for example. “High” displacement pressure also appears in South L.A.—smack in the middle of its gentrification zone with the luxury development anchors of Cumulus, The Reef, USC, and Baldwin Hills Crenshaw Plaza.

The [neighborhood change index shows the degree to which L.A. neighborhoods experienced gentrification](#) between 2000 and 2014—almost the entire time Garcetti has served in public office. Using ZIP codes, it provides gentrification rankings for 111 neighborhoods/areas across the city—number one is the neighborhood with the most change/gentrification (described by the i-team as “very high change”) and number 111 is the neighborhood with the least amount of change/gentrification (“no

change”). Since sections of neighborhoods such as Hollywood and Downtown L.A. have different ZIP codes, those communities appear more than once in the rankings.



Los Angeles Index of Neighborhood Change

L.A. politicians may say the neighborhood change index isn’t, in fact, a gentrification database. That would not be true. The i-team very clearly states that the rankings are based on “six demographic measures indicative of gentrification.” Those measurements include percentage change in low/high IRS filer ratio; percentage change in median household income; percentage change in median gross rent; percentage change of white residents; percentage change of residents 25 years or older with a college degree or higher; and percentage change in average household size. From here on out in this report, the neighborhood change index will be given its proper name: the gentrification index, or gentrification database.

For anyone following [L.A.'s gentrification crisis in the news](#), the rankings are not a surprise. The data not only confirms what L.A. Weekly found in 2013, but also what L.A. City Hall has been ignoring: lower- and middle-income people of color and immigrants are suffering the worst in L.A.'s most extremely gentrified areas. Lower- and middle-income white residents are also taking a hit.

The following list shows L.A.'s most gentrified neighborhoods. The demographics below come from the [L.A. Times' "Mapping L.A." database](#), which used data from the 2000 U.S. Census:

1. Downtown (ZIP code 90014): in 2000, lower-income Asians, Latinos and African Americans made up the majority of the population;

2. Downtown/Arts District (90013): in 2000, lower-income Asians, Latinos and African Americans made up the majority of the population;

3. Westlake and part of Downtown (90017): in 2000, lower-income Latinos and Latino immigrants overwhelmingly made up the majority of the population;

4. Pico Union and part of Downtown (90015): in 2000, lower-income Latinos and Latino immigrants overwhelmingly made up the majority of the population;

5. Silver Lake/Echo Park and part of Westlake (90026): in 2000, lower- and middle-income Latinos, Asians, and

whites made up the population; where Eric Garcetti served as councilman for District 13;

6. Hollywood (90028): in 2000, lower-income Latinos and whites largely made up the population; another area where Garcetti served;

7. Chinatown and part of the Arts District (90012): in 2000, lower-income Asians and Asian immigrants overwhelmingly made up the population;

8. Another section of Hollywood (90038): where Garcetti once served;

9. Venice (90291): in 2000, middle-income whites, African Americans, and Latinos made up the population;

10. East Hollywood and another section of Silver Lake (90029): in 2000, lower-income Latinos overwhelmingly made up the population, along with lower-income Asians and whites; another area once represented by Garcetti.

11. Silver Lake/Atwater Village/Elysian Valley/Echo Park (90039): in 2000, middle-income Latinos, whites, and Asians made up the population; where Garcetti once served.

Other neighborhoods at the top of L.A.'s gentrification rankings include:

12. North Hollywood/Valley Village/Toluca Lake (ZIP code 91601)

13. Los Feliz (90027)

14. Highland Park/Montecito Heights (90042)

15. East Hollywood/Larchmont Square (90004)

16. Koreatown/Windsor Square/Hancock Park (90020)

17. Elysian Valley/Lincoln Heights/Montecito Heights (90031)

18. Pico Union/Harvard Heights (90006)

19. Glassell Park/Cypress Park/Mt. Washington (90065)

20. Koreatown/Mid-Wilshire (90005)

The gentrification index shows that [L.A.'s gentrification crisis is citywide](#). Also, as councilman, Garcetti represented five out of the top 11 most gentrified neighborhoods in L.A. On top of that, in 2018, RENTCafe ranked the [Downtown L.A. ZIP codes of 90014 and 90013 as the first and twelfth most gentrified neighborhoods](#), respectively, in the nation. L.A., in other words, is facing one of the worst gentrification crises in the U.S.

The gentrification index reveals something else. The first, second, and fourth most gentrified neighborhoods (areas in Downtown and Pico Union) are located in Council District 14, represented by Councilman Jose Huizar, the former

Planning and Land Use Management Committee chairman who's the focus of an FBI corruption probe.

Huizar is—or was—very powerful. The Real Deal, a real estate site, described him as the [“ultimate arbiter of what was and wasn't built in Downtown](#). And for the most part, he operated by the ‘Build, baby, build’ ethos.” But in November 2018, FBI agents raided Huizar's home and council office, looking for evidence, according to the *L.A. Times*, “of [possible bribery, extortion, money laundering, and other crimes](#)” [related to Downtown real estate development projects](#). The feds were looking at political monies from developers to Huizar. Raymond Chan, one of [Garcetti's deputy mayors, was another focus in the probe](#), among others. City Hall's pay-to-play, spot-zoning culture—a key aspect of government-sanctioned gentrification in L.A.—was under federal investigation. Huizar has since lost his PLUM chairmanship.

Garcetti, who traveled the country to explore a 2020 presidential bid, recently said [he will not run for the White House](#). At a press conference, he told reporters, “My work is right before me. Who knows what the future is?” When the announcement came, [housing justice groups instantly jumped on social media](#), urging him to stop traveling, roll up his sleeves, and fix L.A.'s housing affordability and homeless crises—but with solutions that will help working people, not just luxury-housing developers. Will Garcetti listen?

VI.

An Opportunity to Lead



Fueled by City Hall's land-use policies, Los Angeles' gentrification crisis is real. There's no disputing that. Even Councilman Jose Huizar, now mired in scandal, once said that numerous parts of the city have experienced a "mass-scale change of demographics"—more code for gentrification. Middle- and working-class residents in New York, Detroit, New Orleans, San Francisco, and many other cities in the U.S. and California are dealing with similar issues of government-sanctioned gentrification.

Today, gentrification doesn't just happen organically. It is, more often than not, guided by local and state politicians—Mayor Eric Garcetti, L.A. Councilman Jose Huizar, California State Sen. Scott Wiener, and others—who work closely with upscale developers and other real estate insiders. This is something that the media, academics, and the public must understand—and acknowledge. Or else gentrification will keep roaring, devastating lives and fueling housing affordability and homeless crises throughout the country.

Gentrification is not good. It may improve a neighborhood for the affluent people who move in, but it destabilizes the lives of many more—the middle- and working-class—who long lived in the community and are forced out. And once a neighborhood is gentrified, middle- and working-class residents can no longer enter. Gentrification doesn't solve the larger problems—housing affordability and homelessness—that must be addressed in order to have a healthy, just society.

Garcetti, no longer a presidential candidate, now has an opportunity. Armed with data from his own i-team, he can become an innovative leader among big city mayors by growing a metropolis in a way that protects its senior citizens, immigrants, teachers, people of color, and many others from displacement and gentrification. Progress is not progress if everyone is not included in that progress.

Among community leaders and activists, it's widely believed that ways to combat gentrification include stronger tenant protections; preserving affordable housing stock; and producing truly affordable housing. To do these things, the Ellis Act and Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act must be repealed.

Also, government should implement some form of rent control. Prominent experts at the University of Southern California, UCLA, and UC-Berkeley agree that [rent control is a key tool to stabilize California's housing affordability crisis](#). It should be utilized by politicians in other cities and states.

"The housing crisis requires a range of strategies, [and] moderate rent regulation is a useful tool to be nested in broader strategy," wrote [USC Professor Manuel Pastor, co-author of a highly regarded report titled *Rent Matters*](#). "It has fewer damaging effects than are often imagined, it can address economic pain, and it can promote housing stability. And housing stability matters because it is associated with physical, social, and psychological

well-being; higher educational achievement by the young; and benefits for people of color.”

In L.A., Garcetti can also drum up the political will to quickly update the city’s general plan, with residents and community groups deeply involved in the decision-making process; build more truly affordable and homeless housing more quickly; bring more transparency to government; reform campaign finance law; and change City Hall’s culture—especially in the city’s planning department—from one of developer-focused to resident-focused.

The L.A. City Council president, whether it’s Herb Wesson or someone else, can champion the same things, along with creating a Planning and Land Use

Management Committee that is operated with integrity and transparency. PLUM committee members, for example, who have taken political money from a developer who seeks an approval from PLUM should recuse themselves from voting on that project. The same should go for other council members.

Garcetti and other big city mayors speak grandly about the sunny, prosperous futures of their cities, but those futures too often don’t include the middle- and working-class—the janitors, construction workers, single parents, college students with huge school loans. Garcetti, as the mayor of the nation’s second largest city, can lead by example—and change that. The time for florid speeches is over. He must act.



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