

The Road to Inequality

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In the late 2000s in the Inland Empire of Southern California, there was a rise of regional activism in protest to traffic checkpoints by which local police departments (under the auspices of sobriety checkpoints) overwhelmingly stopped and fined undocumented drivers who were at the time unable to register for a license. The presence of traffic checkpoints—in addition to migrant detention centers, regional dependency on commuting, and the criminalization of street vendors through municipal permitting—all point towards the many ways the policing of movement has shaped how different groups experience either a sense of regional belonging or exclusion. This is all part of a long history in the American West wherein vulnerable populations have had their mobility met by state forces to manage those movements. The pattern is especially pronounced in the Inland Empire. As towns throughout the region have attempted to respond to changing socioeconomic realities and increasing racial diversity,¹ spatial mobility has been a racially charged backdrop that casts suspicion on immigrants and communities of color when on the move.

In this paper, I outline the history of a region deeply entangled in conflicts over the ability to move freely. I identify several cases in which the overpolicing of movement has manifested across time. I tie these cases to how restrictions on spatial mobility carry through to the present moment and ask what we might learn about these conflicts by looking to our past.

Policing Mobility in the Inland Empire

The American West, and Southern California in particular, has long been considered a bastion of free movement. The Inland Empire not only sits close to Hollywood, where films about

¹ Juan de Lara, *Inland Shift: Race, Space, and Capital in Southern California* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018).

cruising culture and automotive exploits in the golden state were produced and distributed to the world. It has also eagerly embraced its identity on the Route 66 corridor, as famously recalled in Nat King Cole's rendition of "(Get Your Kicks on) Route 66." Filmmakers, regional boosters, and developers have all produced an image of the Inland Empire as a place of exceptional mobility; however, this key symbolic and material marker of the region has been unevenly distributed. A historical perspective of the Inland Empire reveals that state forces have continuously met the mobility of people of color with surveillance and criminalization. This trend has continued across the 20th century, each time shifting slightly to target different populations. I share a few examples here from my book, *Collisions at the Crossroads: How Place and Mobility Make Race*, and follow them with suggestions about what we might learn from these patterns.²

Contests over mobility have a long history in the Inland Empire. At the turn of the twentieth century, the federal government began investing in the active removal of American Indian children from their families across the Southwest by sending them to far-distanced boarding schools. One of these was the Sherman Institute.³ Relocated from Perris to Riverside in 1903, the Institute was tasked with the systematic elimination of Indigenous cultural practices. It operated with firm schedules, grooming parameters, and uniforms. Student records reveal chronic reports of homesickness among children living under this militarized assimilation campaign. In response, and without many other options, American Indian children often turned to one of the only means available to them in protest of their confinement. They ran away. When caught by local authorities, they were returned to the Institute for reprimand and further displacement, such as enrollment in punitive institutions like the Preston School of Industry, located over 400 miles away.

Through various iterations across the 20th century, the logic that instills state forces with the power to manage Indigenous and nonwhite movement has been persistent. In the 1910s, Japanese immigrants living in the Inland Empire—largely boys and young men—were arrested at inflated rates for bicycling infractions, including everyday behaviors like “speeding” or riding at night without a light. Arrests were accompanied by heavy fees and up to six months imprisonment. At the height of Japanese immigration to Riverside, the city with the largest Japanese-descent population in Southern California, 58 percent of all Japanese arrests were for bicycle violations

² Genevieve Carpio, *Collisions at the Crossroads: How Place and Mobility Make Race* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2019).

³ For detailed histories of the Sherman Institute, see Clifford Trafzer, Jean Keller, and Lorene Sisquoc, eds., *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Clifford Trafzer, Matthew Sakiestewa Gilbert, and Lorene Sisquoc, eds., *The Indian School on Magnolia Avenue: Voices and Images from Sherman Institute* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2012).

(1907-1913).⁴ When riding bicycles in downtown spaces, where restrictions were starkest, or in multiracial neighborhoods, where a lack of infrastructure created incentives for prohibited practices, Japanese American men were particularly vulnerable to traffic laws, which relied upon police discretion for subjective acts like speeding.⁵

If we jump ahead to the 1920s and 1930s, we find Latino boys were sent to state reform schools at elevated rates. Their number one reason for arrest, at twice the frequency of their peers (28 percent), was violation of the Motor Vehicle Act. Specifically, they were arrested for joyriding, an infraction particularly prone to racial profiling, since it is a crime wherein the driver is suspect, not the driving. It is a special kind of irony that it was when driving that Latino youth were so frequently stripped of their freedom of movement. In California, Latina/o/x youth continue to be arrested at higher rates for vehicle related crimes, across gender, than the population at large.⁶

Let us return to traffic checkpoints. In the Inland Empire from the 1990s forward, blue and red lights trapped long lines of residents as they waited for police officers to confirm their sobriety, proof of insurance, and identity. While a 1990 Supreme Court decision had upheld the constitutionality of traffic checkpoints for the purpose of identifying drunk drivers, the line between sobriety checkpoints and immigrant checkpoints became porous when this practice was combined with a 1993 law prohibiting undocumented immigrants from receiving a California driver's license. That is, sobriety stops functioned as unofficial immigration checkpoints. Regionally, citizenship status was used to impose heavy fees on undocumented drivers, to impound vehicles to the profit of towing companies, and to foster a state of fear among all drivers when navigating their everyday movements between home, work, and school along Latina/o/x majority corridors.⁷ Although undocumented immigrants are now able to attain California driver's licenses, as a result of AB 60 (2013), the federal requirement for a REAL ID beginning in October 2020 threatens to temper these advances by differentiating authorized from unauthorized California

⁴ See further Genevieve Carpio, "When Police Clamped Down on Southern California's Japanese-American Bicycling Craze," *Zócalo Public Square*, August 26, 2019.

⁵ Asian immigrants, among other communities of color, continue to experience elevated arrest rates and criminalization for cycling. Do J. Le, et al., "Delivery (in)Justice: Food Delivery Cyclists in New York City," (Taylor and Francis, forthcoming);

⁶ A report by the California Department of Justice found that Latinx juveniles comprise 56 percent of all arrests for motor vehicle theft, 61 percent of hit-and-run arrests, and 62 percent of DUI arrests. Latinx youth comprise 53 percent of all arrests in the State of California. Kamala D. Harris, et al., *Juvenile Justice in California* (California Department of Justice, 2015).

⁷ See also Genevieve Carpio, Clara Irazábal-Zurita, and Laura Pulido, "Right to the Suburb: Rethinking Lefebvre and Immigrant Activism," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 33, no. 2 (May 2011).

residents.⁸

These are among many examples of how Indigenous, immigrant, and nonwhite communities have been unevenly policed when on the move. Recovering the historic and spatial contexts that shape the lives of aggrieved communities provides important insights into regional identity and how it shapes mobility and immobility today. As noted by transportation scholars Evelyn Blumberg and Madeline Brozen, “equity is both backward and forward looking.”⁹ Where the exact tools of criminalization have varied over time and impacted diverse groups in specific ways, the impulse of powerbrokers to manage how people of color move in the Inland Empire, both permissions and prohibitions, has been steadfast.

Lessons for Mobility Justice Moving Forward

A historic perspective supports the idea that government leaders have often supported policies that criminalize the movement of people of color and foster fear in everyday activities. But this need not be the case. The remainder of this paper makes the case for advocacy efforts that place alternative histories and mobility at the center of their agendas.

Narratives about the Inland Empire’s past do much more than shape the ways the region’s history is understood. They are powerfully operative in the present. Prevailing historic narratives about the Inland Empire continue to glorify those with power, legitimize the present order, and point towards a future that maintains the social and economic status quo. For instance, throughout the Inland Empire there has been a rise of private and public investment in the Route 66 corridor since the 1990s, from city-backed regional festivals to streetscape design. While at first glance these efforts may appear benign, the centering of Route 66 heritage above all other migration stories—like those from the Pacific Rim, Latin America, and the American South—deemphasizes people of color and Indigenous populations’ stories, as well as their (and their descendants’) claims on space, planning, and infrastructure in the present. Even if without mal-intent, these agendas erase the consistent conflicts over mobility that aggrieved groups have faced and replace them with honorific histories, largely, of Anglo-American drivers.

Furthermore, the honorific celebration of car culture continues to romanticize a form of transportation planning that does not necessarily serve inland residents. In the absence of sufficient

⁸ State of California Department of Motor Vehicles, “Fast Facts About Federal Real ID: Driver Licenses and Identification Cards,” September 2019, <https://realid.dmv.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/DL-1010-Fast-Facts-About-Federal-Real-ID.pdf>

⁹ Evelyn Blumberg and Madeline Brozen, “Routes to Opportunity: Preface from the Symposium Organizers,” UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies, 2019.

and affordable public transit, inland residents will remain car-dependent in a region with high commute times that contribute to considerable stress and time lost in traffic. For 19 percent of the population, commute times of two or more hours essentially comprise an uncompensated “part-time job.”¹⁰ The freeways themselves represent some of the most dangerous legacies of uneven mobilities. The Interstate-10 freeway, for instance, is a scar that actively separated historic Mexican communities from one another, such as those in North Redlands. Each time a car passes through the 6th Street freeway on-ramp, it passes over the remains of Concha Yglesias’s home, once located on a now demolished portion of Pearl Street. Yglesias is one of any number of Mexican-descent people whose existence along the Interstate-10 corridor was sacrificed in the name of progress.¹¹

It is communities of color that continue to pay the highest cost for “more mobility.” It is well known that private automobiles that rely on fossil fuels are an unsustainable transportation practice with dire environmental impacts. Consider the residents of Mira Loma, a largely Latina/o/x community near Ontario that shares significant space with the diesel trucks that move goods to and from inland warehouses. In Mira Loma, children exhibit the slowest lung growth and weakest lung capacity in southern California. A longitudinal study of fourth graders reveals that long-term exposure to ambient pollution, such as emissions of acid vapor and elemental carbon, effects the development of small airways in the lung that may persist into adulthood.¹²

The goal, then, is not necessarily to increase movement throughout the region, but rather to justly distribute the costs and benefits of movement, especially among those who have habitually been on the losing end of this equation. From both the public sector and the grassroots, there are echoing calls to address racial inequity as experienced through uneven mobilities. Unraveling the consequences of discriminatory practices and allied narratives discussed throughout this paper, and their “us” and “them” ideologies, will require both concentrated policy agendas and activism by marginalized groups. So where do we start?

Disadvantaged groups have been dealing with barriers on their mobility (as well as their right to stay in place) for a long time. When facing these challenges, they have often come up with their own solutions: Japanese cyclists excluded from local leagues in the early 1900s created their

¹⁰ Barbara Sirotnik, “2018 21st Inland Empire Annual Survey,” California State University San Bernardino Institute of Applied Research and Policy Analysis. San Bernardino, CA. August 24, 2018, 29.

¹¹ Antonio Gonzalez Vasquez and Genevieve Carpio, *Mexican Americans in Redlands* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012).

¹² W James Guarderman, Frank Gilliland, et al., “Association between Air Pollution and Lung Function Growth in Southern California Children: results from a Second Cohort,” *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, 166 (no. 1, July 1, 2002), 76-84.

own athletic track with aid from the Japanese Association, and earned recognition from middle class white Americans; Mexican citrus workers implemented the earliest forms of ride-sharing, carpooling to groves together by the 1920s, while Mexican women earned income by selling food to workers in transit; and multiracial prisoners in Chino tapped into their limited mobility options by staging a walkout when faced with increasingly oppressive conditions after passage of the Uniform Determinate Sentencing Act of 1976.¹³

These tactics were not implemented into policy decisions, nor recipients of any form of state support. This raises the question: Rather than thinking in terms of implementing solutions from the top-down, what if we were to amplify what people are already doing? In what ways are people of color managing mobility in order to increase their economic opportunities today? What are people doing to make transportation culturally and socially meaningful? And, how can we support them?

For instance, I think of immigrant entrepreneurs who convert their cars and trucks into mobile kitchens. When night falls, they transform empty parking lots and sidewalks into a culinary center. Families from across the region gather on State Street in Muscoy, an unincorporated community near San Bernardino, where *vendedores* sell tacos from trucks as hungry buyers sit under the soft glow of string lights that disappear each morning. Although the criminalization of street vendors remains a pressing problem, recent updates in sidewalk vending permitting, sparked by community-based advocacy and statewide shifts in policy, now provide more allowances for vending than has previously existed.¹⁴ This is one example of how policy makers, activists, and community can come together through decriminalizing and supporting homegrown solutions in efforts to amplify mobility justice.

In thinking about mobility justice, I am drawn to the words of the Untokening, a multiracial collective of mobility justice-oriented advocates:

“Mobility justice demands that we fully *excavate, recognize, and reconcile* the historical and current injustices experienced by communities—with impacted communities given space and resources to envision and implement planning models and political advocacy on

¹³ See Carpio, *Collisions at the Crossroads*.

¹⁴ In 2018, Governor Brown signed Senate Bill 946, which limits the criminalization of vendors by local authorities. This generated changes in prohibitions on street vending in San Bernardino, but to the maximum extent allowed by the statewide bill. For further, see staff report, Rita Conrad and Telicia Lopez, “City of San Bernardino Request for Council Acton,” May 1, 2019.

streets and mobility that *actively work to address historical and current injustices experienced by communities*” (emphasis in original).¹⁵

In determining the next steps necessary for transformative regional change, we will need to look to our past as much as our present. Only then can we recognize the deep roots of regional inequity and the ways contests over mobility, as well as the right to stay put, have shaped the Inland Empire. Social movements across the globe—from those of street vendors in unincorporated San Bernardino County to Metro riders in Santiago, Chile—are continuing to define new forms of belonging. And, it is one insistent on the ability to be in control of one’s own space, story, and movement.

¹⁵ Untokening Collective, “Untokening 1.0—Principles of Mobility Justice,” November 11, 2017, available at <http://www.untokening.org/updates/2017/11/11/untokening-10-principles-of-mobility-justice>; see also Mimi Sheller, *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes* (Verso, 2018).