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Building the City of Stars: Creating Landmark Entertainment Venues in Early 20th-Century Los Angeles

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History

Clay Ammentorp hopes to pursue a career teaching college history and considers this project to be good step toward that goal. He initially began research into the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum and became curious about how it and its origin compared to other major venues throughout the city. Receiving a fellowship from the Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURP) gave him the means to continue and broaden his research. Throughout his project, Clay particularly enjoyed the sense of discovery from stumbling on new evidence that changed his earlier views; these discoveries gave him a sense of fully engaging in his subjects' history.

Abstract

With Los Angeles winning the 2028 Summer Olympic Games and two professional football teams, the city's businesses and government investments in entertainment venues to house them have fallen under increasing scrutiny. Using contemporary newspapers and records along with later written histories, this paper examines Los Angeles's extensive history with publicly financed venues to help understand the close association between the construction of these venues and the development of a new cultural identity for the rapidly growing city. The three major case studies reveal different dimensions of this pro-development movement, its motivations, and its long-term effects. The history of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum conveys how publicly financed parks and stadiums could be used as proto-gentrification that altered communities to benefit promoters, boosters, and real estate developers. The case of the Rose Bowl in Pasadena shows how the creation of these spaces helped in creating a new culture that served more to market the region than acknowledge its past. The story of the Greek Theater in Griffith Park illustrates the priorities of L.A.'s elite for the use of public land. The paper assesses how these developments continued to impact the city and what their history reveals about the priorities and methods of L.A. promoters into the modern era.

Faculty Mentor



Clay Ammentorp's "Building the City of Stars" is a first-rate research paper on the significance of entertainment venues to the twentieth-century growth of Los Angeles. As Ammentorp demonstrates, the construction of the L.A. Memorial Coliseum, the Rose Bowl, and the Greek Theater helped to create and then burnish the city's reputation as a leading American metropolis. Beneath the boosters' mythology of these landmarks, however, is a more sordid and underappreciated history of Progressive era racism, greed, and what might be called proto-gentrification. Making use of an array of primary and secondary sources, Ammentorp's work marks an important addition to the scholarship on city building in twentieth-century America.

Key Terms

- ◆ Beaux-Arts
- ◆ Boosterism
- ◆ City Beautiful
- ◆ Community Development Association
- ◆ Griffith Park
- ◆ Progressive Era
- ◆ Tournament of Roses

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Introduction

For over a century, Los Angeles has maintained a prized reputation as a hub of mass market entertainment. Much of this prestige famously stems from the image fostered by the cultural products of the Hollywood film industry. In truth, however, Los Angeles's entertainment industry stretches beyond the silver screen and has had a broad impact on the physical landscape of Los Angeles and the lived experience of its people. The scale of entertainment's impact on Los Angeles is evident when one looks to the many art forms that also thrived in the city for decades and the lasting monuments they have left behind. L.A. carries a long and storied history of music, theater, sports, and other popular entertainment choices of all kinds that collectively trace their origins to the ready crop of talent and sizable consumer market fostered by Los Angeles's exponential population growth in the early twentieth century. Not coincidentally, many of these arts and accompanying "representational imagery" played a role in the "purposes of civic promotion and regional boosterism" that shaped the growing metropolis (Schrenk 435).

The requirement for live entertainment to be experienced in a physical space led to the creation of countless venues designed to host these events, many of which were owned and funded by the local government. Several of these venues, including the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, the Rose Bowl, and the Greek Theater, attracted fame beyond the confines of Southern California and created their own distinct histories and mythologies. Demand alone cannot account for the grandiose scale and high financial costs that many of these venues reached, however. Examining the history behind many of the great theaters, arenas, stadiums, and parks that dot Los Angeles reveals a web of interests from various individuals, political groups, and businesses that reached far beyond benign affection for sports or music. Los Angeles is not unique in possessing large-scale venues that also serve as civic landmarks, and its venues should be viewed in a wider context with the understanding that their presence in the city ties L.A. to wider general trends of urban beautification that defined the American city of the twentieth century (Wilson 1). Yet Los Angeles's entertainment spaces boast a number of key attributes that make them of particular relevance for understanding the region's history.

First, several venues in Los Angeles built in the 1920s hold a legitimate claim to having affected L.A.'s long-term maturation. These structures fostered artistic productions and long-lived sports franchises, celebrated new cultural

traditions, and dramatically reshaped the physical urban landscape. The 1932 Summer Olympics that many of these venues both hosted and helped to win is particularly notable in this regard, having been attributed by early twentieth-century Angelenos and later historians as one of the first events that attracted international attention to Los Angeles beyond its proximity to the burgeoning film industry in neighboring Hollywood (*Companion* 200, 305–306). These stadiums and arenas presented an attractive and entirely new image for Los Angeles as a home for art and culture that could be enjoyed by the predominantly white middle class that the growing metropolis' promoters catered to. They also altered the prior nature of the existing communities to better fit with these new Angelenos' vision for a modern, Anglo-dominated American city.

These venues' contemporary relevance is also notable. The deliberate action of creating recognizable entertainment spaces to serve as civic landmarks has gained prominence in recent years. L.A.'s political and business leaders have supported the creation of numerous sports facilities in order to host new National Football League (NFL) teams and to successfully win a third Summer Olympics to Los Angeles for 2028. The relatively unique practicality of its venues also helps to set Los Angeles apart from other cities. Many Olympic hosts have struggled to justify the costs poured into the construction of new, modern sporting arenas that go unused for much of the year or lose their primary tenants quickly; Los Angeles, conversely, has seen financial success from both of its prior games, helped in part by the demonstrable profitability supported by its well-used arenas (Wharton).

This paper analyzes the histories of several landmark entertainment venues constructed in early twentieth-century Los Angeles in order to evaluate the root causes behind their creation and the extent to which they should be recognized as part of a deliberate and effective movement in the city's growth and promotion. It also examines the impact that these structures had on their surrounding communities. This analysis weighs the claims of the buildings' developers to be serving the interests of the public against the actual presence of community uplift and pay particular attention to how these stadiums and amphitheaters served the private interests of Los Angeles's real estate developers and other promoters. Ultimately, this study illustrates how a highly visible and expensive urban development movement both capitalized on and fostered L.A.'s burgeoning middle class and reputation as a center of the arts, celebrity, and entertainment, with complicated ramifications for the city's future. This movement's success in shaping the cultural and

physical landscape of the city ultimately sacrificed public land and funds that could have directly benefitted L.A.'s working class and minority citizens, as well as parts of the region's cultural history that did not align with promoters' vision for a new Los Angeles.

William Bowen's City Beautiful and the L.A. Memorial Coliseum



Figure 1

The Los Angeles Coliseum under construction. Image courtesy of Water and Power Associates, [http://waterandpower.org/museum/Early_LA_Buildings%20\(1900%20-%201925\)_Page_3.html](http://waterandpower.org/museum/Early_LA_Buildings%20(1900%20-%201925)_Page_3.html)

The Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, located in Exposition Park in South Los Angeles, was designed to serve numerous public and private interests, from providing a civic landmark that memorialized America's contributions to World War I to hosting lucrative and well-attended events, most famously the University of Southern California's football games. Beyond the Coliseum's memorable lineage of sporting events, concerts, and political rallies, the stadium served many other interests of L.A.'s promoters and land developers. These groups built the Coliseum as part of a larger effort to beautify Los Angeles in a manner that rejected historically popular working-class preferences and fit into the wider trends and upper-middle class norms that increasingly defined major American metropolises in the early twentieth century, largely with the purpose of expanding their consumer bases and profits.

The Coliseum's home, Exposition Park, was the brainchild of William M. Bowen, a lawyer and community activist who campaigned for the reform of a site that he viewed as a blight upon the moral character and reputation of L.A.'s University District. Since 1872, a board of land developers named the Southern District Agricultural Society had operated a 160-acre parcel of unincorporated land on the outskirts of Los Angeles as a private, pay-for-admission site called Agricultural Park. This park's location outside the jurisdiction of local ordinances enabled it to host institutions like saloons, brothels, and racetracks commonly viewed as socially unsavory but immensely popular among many citizens, particularly those from the working class. Tensions increased between the owners of Agricultural Park and members of the rapidly growing middle-class community as Los Angeles's accelerated urban sprawl and the opening of the nearby Methodist University of Southern California brought the once relatively secluded location closer to the city's physical and cultural center. In 1899, Bowen, an adjunct law professor at USC, led a popular movement that brought together various groups in the University District under the banner of the Good Government Alliance. Mothers concerned about the negative influences of rabbit coursing and Sunday drinking on their children and university leaders wishing to improve the image and prestige of their school all shared in the same progressive ethos that government intervention and planning could improve the moral landscape of their neighborhood, a common trend across the white middle class of late nineteenth and early twentieth century America. With this popular support, Bowen successfully petitioned for the park's incorporation into Los Angeles (Bowen 11–15; Van Anken 244–247).

From 1899 to 1910, Bowen constantly petitioned for greater civic control over Agricultural Park, even going up to the California Supreme Court to argue his case that the state had not legally sold the park's land to the board and that it ought to be reclaimed for use in the public interest. These campaigns bore fruit when the city of Los Angeles placed the land under the control of a new Sixth District Agricultural Association and replaced the parks' bars and racetracks with neatly curated rose gardens and museums. The new park was built in the grand Beaux-Arts style of the City Beautiful urban development movement inspired by the Columbian Exposition of 1893 that swept the United States alongside progressive ideology. It was renamed Exposition Park, reflecting its new role in marketing L.A. The City Beautiful movement closely tied itself to traditions of European antiquity by emphasizing grandeur and the potential for human ingenuity. It thus was imminently

suitable to the task of reshaping the image of Los Angeles into that of a modern American urban center that served middle-class interests (Wilson 53–74). The park opened on the same day as the L.A. Aqueduct, an immense engineering achievement that enabled Los Angeles's sustained population growth, and the press and politicians celebrated the two events together as historic moments that cemented Los Angeles's future as a major metropolis (“County”).

This telling of Exposition Park's history frames it as an instance of private citizens' improving the quality of life in their communities through dedicated political action, but it neglects other major motivating factors. While Bowen marketed Exposition Park as an improvement to the lives of all Angelenos, it and the many other parks and play-spaces that sprang up to take advantage of Los Angeles's climate and culture of leisure served white audiences almost exclusively. Legal codes and enduring social stigmas regularly excluded minority groups from partaking in public leisure, even those located in “public” parks, as explored by studies from Jeff Wiltse and Victoria Wilcott (*Companion* 421–437). The park hosted Mexican-themed events attended by some members of L.A.'s Mexican American community. However, these events played a part in the deliberate construction of a “Spanish fantasy” past developed to market Los Angeles to white audiences as much or more than they celebrated the genuine history of Mexican Angelenos (*Companion* 305; Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*). Additionally, close analysis of Bowen's campaign reveals a number of vested private interests served by the park's creation, including those of Bowen himself. Though he claimed to be concerned with protecting the community's children, improving the image of the surrounding community served the agenda of Bowen's employers at USC, aided Bowen's own professional goals, and helped him to win positions as legal representative and board member of the University of California regents (Bowen, 1915).

The park's creation contributed to a rapid rise in land value, generating a greater profit for many landowners over the following years. Among these landowners was Bowen himself, who sold the small lots of once-inexpensive land near the new park that he had been granted for his services for a profit of over one million dollars in today's money, an act that eventually got him into legal trouble with the state government (Neylan 4–6). This type of wealth generation, a precursor to the gentrification that would sweep American cities in later decades, was a general trend throughout L.A. County at the time. In the words of California scholar Phoebe Kropp, “However scandalous this private involvement might appear, Southern California boosters had

thrived upon a winning recipe that combined public and private interests for decades,” in ventures as diverse as the building of skyscrapers, marketplaces, train stations, and parks (Kropp 219). The city's self-appointed Community Development Association especially encouraged this kind of development. This organization included L.A. elites from nearly every major sector, including real estate developers, business leaders, politicians, and the publishers of the city's newspapers. These corporate leaders stood to gain a great deal from expanding the size of the city's markets, and they agreed to work with each other to promote Los Angeles as a desirable city to live and work in to the upper- and middle-class white Americans who would be most likely to invest in and consume their products or offer them greater political power (*Companion* 305–306; Avila; Riess). The Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum remains the association's most iconic and lasting achievement.

The members of the CDA, particularly real estate tycoon William Garland, recognized that attracting the increasingly popular Olympic Games to Los Angeles would greatly enhance the city's prestige. Winning the nomination for the first ever games in the western United States would be “an ambitious endeavor,” especially in a region that still lacked an international reputation (Riess 53). To mitigate expenses, the association set out to create a readily available entertainment venue in Los Angeles that could serve their interests of attracting new citizens, increasing land values, and generating revenue from other events in the long term, while simultaneously making the prospect of hosting the costly games more reasonable to both the IOC and the existing population of L.A. Several of the association's members, including publisher of the *Los Angeles Times* and major real estate developer Harry Chandler, were themselves friends of Bowen and had experience with Exposition Park's history of using community support and government funding to back large scale developments that served private interests (“Death Takes”). For his part, Bowen had long planned to add a venue to the park that could replace the old racetrack, the last remaining vestige of the old Agricultural Park and its unsavory gambling history (“New Era”). Bowen ordered plans for a stadium from the architectural firm Parkinson & Parkinson, a father-son duo responsible for many urban development projects in Los Angeles, including its first skyscraper, City Hall and Union Station. The choice to place the stadium in Exposition Park, an active hub of development that provided one of the few open spaces available near L.A.'s urban center, made perfect sense.

Gathering support to publicly fund the construction of an Olympic venue turned out to be more difficult than

replacing a disreputable amusement park. Members of a community action group called the Municipal League similar to the middle-class progressives that had once rallied around Bowen and his allies were now their greatest obstacle, as they vocally opposed a wealthy cabal of businesses appropriating funds from a disinterested public for their own interests. In spite of this opposition and Bowen's own history of arguments that private landowners ought not to dominate the University District, the city government received approval from the state Supreme Court to indirectly fund the CDA's efforts. The association was responsible for building and operating the stadium for its first five years but was eventually fully reimbursed in a series of tax-funded payments as control passed back to the city and county (Riess 57–62).

Ultimately, the CDA achieved all of its goals for a new landmark venue. The Coliseum, the largest stadium in the world at the time of its completion, opened with great fanfare enabled by the very same press that had been so closely involved in its creation in the first place. The official inauguration featured a grand “pageant gala” and a stage play that celebrated a loosely-constructed history of Los Angeles. In five skits, the play merged Los Angeles's native and Spanish colonial past with narratives of the American Revolution, the Civil War, and other touchstones of the geographically-distant, predominantly Anglo-American story of the United States. These festivities, like the Coliseum itself, introduced the imagery of European antiquity and the urban ideals of the eastern United States to a city that had mere decades before been a rural Mexican town mostly ignored by white Americans (“Great Pageant”). Its presence was critical to the CDA's successful appeal to the IOC, and it served as the centerpiece to both the prior two Olympics and the future 2028 games. The Coliseum became a landmark in South L.A. and indicated that the city's growth had brought it to the status of a major world metropolis.

Exposition Park remains an active site for this sort of development; a new Banc of California Stadium recently opened adjacent to the Coliseum to host soccer games and support the upcoming 2028 Olympics (Slayton). In spite of promises of community uplift from boosters like Bowen, Exposition Park and the attractions it hosts did not visibly improve and invigorate the community. The neighborhoods that surround the park in South Los Angeles and sit in the shadow of the Coliseum continue to suffer from some of the worst income inequality and racial segregation in the region (Matsunaga). The story the stadium tells about the wealth and beauty of Los Angeles only captures the experience of a select few Angelenos.

The Rose Bowl



Figure 2

The Rose Bowl under construction in the Arroyo Seco Valley, Pasadena, California, circa 1922. Image courtesy of Water and Power.org, http://waterandpower.org/museum/Early_Views_of_Pasadena.html

The Coliseum was not the only stadium built in Los Angeles County in the early twentieth century, nor was it the only one officially opened in 1923. Nestled in the Arroyo Seco valley in neighboring Pasadena is the Rose Bowl, a structure similar to the Coliseum in many ways. Both are National Historic Landmarks that have competed throughout their lifespans for the position of L.A.'s largest and most famous stadium. More notably, both sought to forge a new cultural history for the region that replaced the old *rancho* system with a new vision of Los Angeles as a place of leisure for white Americans from the eastern United States. The Rose Bowl's origins in hosting the Tournament of Roses indicates the powerful role new landmarks could serve in creating and supporting a new cultural history.

The Rose Bowl derives its name from the Tournament of Roses Parade, an event celebrating the New Year first held in 1890 by the Valley Hunt Club, a group of local leaders of Pasadena's growing population of white eastern settlers. The parade's initial creation reflects the ethos of settler colonialism that brought its creators to the region. Though the United States government had claimed California more than forty years before the first parade, the area had only recently seen an influx of white American settlers from the East. These new settlers came to the region in search of affordable land and an allegedly “healthier” climate. The city of Pasadena was formally incorporated in 1886, only four years prior to the first parade, due to this population

growth. The first parade's organizers selected a floral design theme as a way to emphasize their new home's sublime year-round weather, with one leading club member, Professor Charles F. Holder, going so far as to boast that friends and relatives living in New York were "buried in snow" while the new Pasadena residents enjoyed the mild California winter. "Let us hold a festival to show the world our paradise," he declared ("History of the Rose"). The Tournament of Roses Parade did not celebrate existing regional history and tradition, but rather acted as an "integrative method for a highly differentiated population," creating a new cultural tradition for the wealthy white Americans who had migrated to the area in waves and asserted themselves as the region's undisputed political, social, and business leaders (Lawrence 157). As Holder's comments about the contrast of the parade's imagery with East Coast weather make clear, this history did not only serve to amuse those who already lived in the region but was meant to market the city and region to a new clientele.

With its attendance bolstered by Los Angeles's population explosion, the Rose Parade proved to be immensely popular, so much so that the Valley Hunt Club soon had to cede responsibility for the event's yearly organization to a dedicated Tournament of Roses Association. Early Rose Parades experimented with numerous events beyond the standard trappings of a civic parade, ranging from exotic animal showcases to chariot races with vehicles adorned with California flowers in full bloom in the winter, a precursor to the later famed floral floats of the modern event. The first Tournament football game was held in 1902, and, though the game was disappointingly one-sided, it was so well attended that the parade officials decided not to hold another football game for over a decade due to the size of the unruly crowds of nearly 6,000. As football's popularity increased in the United States over the succeeding years, the association reintroduced the sport for the 1915 Tournament. These games brought in great college teams from both Eastern and Western conferences, elevating the event to national prominence. As Pasadena and the general area's population spiked and the Parade garnered increasing fame beyond Southern California, demands grew for a space to host the football games that could accommodate the immense crowds (Lawrence; "History of the Rose").

By 1920, the parade's organizers and attendees agreed that the association had to build a proper stadium if they wished for the parade—and Pasadena as a whole—to continue to grow. As with the Coliseum, a private coalition of urban elites paid for the Bowl's creation before control and costs transferred to the local government. For the site

of the construction, the board selected the Arroyo Seco, a river valley already under active development as the major transportation corridor connecting Pasadena with the city of Los Angeles. The association chose a plot of land previously used as a garbage dump, enhancing its pitch that their investment could bring long-term uplift to the wider community. Another of Southern California's most prominent architects, Huntington Library designer Myron Hunt, drew inspiration for the design and name directly from the Yale Bowl, tying the structure to its East Coast heritage. Initially, Hunt planned the bowl as an amphitheater, and when it opened on October 8, 1922, it was not a completed circular stadium but rather a horseshoe-shaped set of seats. An expansion in 1927, motivated by developing standards for football venues and preparations for hosting the Olympics, closed off the bowl and converted it into a circular stadium shape. This expansion brought the stadium's seating capacity up to roughly 85,000, surpassing the scale of the Coliseum and creating an exterior visage that dominated the rest of the valley ("History of the Rose"; "Use Profit").

For most of its lifetime, the Pasadena stadium has struggled somewhat to attract steady business, a major problem for many venues its size. While the Coliseum benefitted from a popular and active tenant in USC and a central location near downtown, the Rose Bowl had only one initial purpose: to hold thousands of fans for a single event that, while extremely popular, only occurred once a year. The parade board and the city of Pasadena sought various methods for solving this problem. The Olympics provided one opportunity; though the Coliseum and other spaces closer to downtown held the bulk of the Games' events, the Bowl's size and shape made it well suited to host cycling. Other plans to sustain the Pasadena landmark involved a more drastic transformation of the valley's physical landscape. Brookside Golf Course, a picturesque 36-hole space of rolling greens, was built with city support adjacent to the Rose Bowl not merely to service golfers interested in making further use of California's sunshine, but also to serve as an additional revenue stream for the stadium. It would take many years for the Rose Bowl to attract a long-term tenant on the scale of USC at the Coliseum when it became home to UCLA football in 1982, and even after that victory the stadium often operated at an overall loss (Johnson).

Despite its financial struggles, the future of the Rose Bowl has never truly been in doubt. While its size keeps costs high and limits the type of events it can sell out, this has only occasionally limited the stadium's budget. In 2010, despite previous reports of the stadium running at an annual operating loss, the city approved \$152 million in renovations for

the aging structure (“Timeline”). The Rose Bowl game only increased in prominence, evolving from a local celebration of Pasadena’s American identity to the culmination of the United States’ immensely popular and profitable college football season. Both the parade and game attract millions of viewers on television and in person annually, thoroughly integrating them into the region’s identity and economy and essentially making them too big for local governments and businesses to let fail. Even if the Bowl somehow lost its year-round tenants, the perceived need to keep the business and cultural legacy of the parade would be sufficient to keep Pasadena lawmakers invested in preserving both the structure and the historic memory of the region it helped create.

Griffith Park, the Greek Theater, and the Problem of Housing



Figure 3

The Greek Theater in Griffith Park, circa 1931. Image courtesy of Water and Power Associates. [http://waterandpower.org/museum/Early_LA_Buildings_\(1925%20+\)_Page_2.html#](http://waterandpower.org/museum/Early_LA_Buildings_(1925%20+)_Page_2.html#)

Not all developments had to match the size and scale of football stadiums to leave a sizable impact on the landscape of Los Angeles and the popular consciousness. The Greek Theater ranks among the most famous mid-size entertainment venues in the world and has hosted countless events

over its many decades of operation. The Greek holds interest beyond its artistic legacy. Its origins as part of Los Angeles’s expansive 4,310-acre Griffith Park contrast with those of other projects suggested for the land, revealing more about the intentions and priorities of the city elites who supported the public funding of such entertainment spaces.

The Greek Theater is close to Los Angeles’s bustling downtown, but a visitor dropped into its seats without having to brave L.A. traffic might hardly notice its proximity to the urban sprawl. The theater’s prominent use of classical columns and its location in the foothills of the Santa Monica mountains, under the stars and surrounded by the trees and undeveloped wilderness of Griffith Park, still provides a unique and natural aesthetic environment for enjoying performances. This type of unique and quality experience was the intention of the park’s namesake, the enigmatic mining magnate Griffith J. Griffith, who left a complex legacy in the Los Angeles region. In 1896, the Welsh millionaire donated 3,015 acres of land that became Griffith Park to the city where he had made his fortunes as a “Christmas gift,” with the request that the land be reserved mainly in its natural state. Griffith made a few exceptions to this conservationist act by requesting the construction of a few buildings of his own conception meant to serve the public interest, including the Greek-style open-air amphitheater (“Griffith”). L.A.’s government accepted this eccentric act of immense charity without looking the gift horse too closely in the mouth; Griffith later shot his wife in the head and was imprisoned for two years, tarnishing his reputation and damaging his ability to ensure that the city followed his plans for the land that still bore his name. The idea of the Greek languished for several decades as various parties debated whether, where, and how to build it. Even William Bowen, in his capacity as a city councilman, stepped outside his usual focus on developing Exposition Park and supported efforts to build Griffith’s theater (“New Era”). Griffith died in 1919 before he could see the project completed. His will set aside funding for the theater, and several of the city’s leaders joined with the Griffith family to fulfill the late millionaire’s wishes.

Decades of campaigning from these elites eventually led to the fulfillment of Griffith’s long-term wishes. The Greek Theater officially opened on September 9, 1929, several decades after its initial conception and years after other similar outdoor amphitheaters like the Hollywood Bowl and the Pilgrimage Play Theater in the nearby Cahuenga Pass. In accordance with Griffith’s wishes, architect Samuel Tilden designed the amphitheater to resemble a Greek

counterpart straight from the imagination of European antiquity. Griffith and many Progressive Era elites thought that drawing from this particular artistic inspiration when designing the structure would draw similarly high-minded people to it and perhaps “foster civic pride, teach moral lessons, and elevate public discourse” (Meares). The scale of the 6,000-capacity venue and the excess of its stylings also fit neatly into the narrative of Los Angeles as a place that offered larger-than-life entertainment for the masses.

Though the Greek does not match the tremendous scale of the previously-examined venues or share their sport-centric origins, it remains a significant remnant of the 1920s landmark entertainment venue development movement. Like the Coliseum and Rose Bowl, the theater was publicly funded in the service of Progressive era ideals and the interests of wealthy private individuals. The Greek’s design particularly connects with this development movement’s efforts to connect to a white European lineage of history with neoclassical stylings. These shared traits with other major entertainment venues suggest that this type of urban development resulted not solely from rapid growth in the popularity of sports as a leisure event marketed to spectators, but rather was enabled by a more general growth in the market for spectator entertainment among Los Angeles’s growing middle class that mirrored trends visible throughout the United States at the time (*Companion* 431–432).



Figure 4

Rodger Young Village in Griffith Park. Image courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library, <http://photofriends.org/the-small-town-in-a-big-city-life-at-rodger-young-village/>.

The most notable aspect of the creation of this amphitheater in Griffith Park may not even be what function it served, but rather which function it decidedly did not. Griffith’s son Van and other city leaders vowed that all of the parkland would only be used for the purposes requested by Griffith Sr, and it mainly was, with one particularly

notable and complicated exception. During and immediately after World War II, the federal and state government used Griffith Park for military purposes, including storing material, stationing troops, and even interning Japanese-American citizens. The Greek Theater itself was converted into a barracks (“History of Greek”). In the postwar years, however, the government determined parts of the park to be necessary for an altogether different purpose than anything that Griffith originally had in mind: public housing.

In the postwar era, Los Angeles and other American cities dabbled in public housing projects, largely to meet the extraordinarily high demand from returning veterans. Rodger Young Village, composed of a small community center and a series of 750 inexpensive Quonset huts of the type commonly used in military barracks, was one such development in Los Angeles. Built in Griffith Park only a few miles north of the Greek, this small community was planned as a temporary measure to be restored to its original use once the servicemen found employment and other housing. However, a lack of available homes and high-paying jobs elsewhere in the city prevented many former soldiers and their families from leaving. Further, the uniquely non-segregated community offered some of the best and safest housing in Los Angeles for African Americans, particularly to the overwhelming majority of families with young children. Community petitions led to the village lasting nearly a decade. These extensions were met with disapproval from a coalition of L.A. politicians who either wanted the land restored to its original parkland state or were suspicious of the socialist undertones of public housing. The city closed the village in 1954, evicting its residents and tearing down the huts they had made their homes. The land sat empty for several years before being put to purposes thought to be better suited to Griffith’s—and the city officials’—idea of what constituted a “public good.” Part of the old village became a parking lot for the new city-owned and operated Los Angeles Zoo, an entertainment space somewhat more in line with Griffith’s original vision for “a place of recreation and rest for the masses” (“Griffith”). The rest became part of a new freeway, itself a critical aspect of the expansion and promotion of Los Angeles (Cuff 172–209).

Though the Rodger Young Village affair took place years after the initial boom of development for landmark venues, this particular case casts light on a more passive aspect of the construction of these buildings in Los Angeles and throughout America in the early twentieth century. Local governments had—and have—a tendency to ignore affordable public housing as a viable or important use for available

land in favor of projects that benefit private interests. In the case of Los Angeles, a city still expanding its population at a tremendous pace, the use of park land to build sites to entertain consumers rather than provide suitable places for them to live conveyed the heavy influence that real estate developers had on the use of public land. Public housing cut into these figures' profits and livelihoods; building attractions in those spaces that raised land values achieved just the opposite. Cries of creeping socialism were scarce when government funds propped up lavish and expensive spaces like the Greek, the Rose Bowl, and the Coliseum, but were loud enough to largely erase this type of affordable public housing in L.A. by the 1960s (Cuff 205–207). Entertainment spaces need not carry the sole blame for the direction of L.A.'s urban renewal, but developers' decision to not support projects like Rodger Young Village in lieu of those that more directly benefitted private businesses had long-term ramifications deserving of further consideration and scrutiny when assigning future public funds.

Conclusion

These studies comprise only a few examples of the landmark venues that shaped early twentieth-century Los Angeles. Many other structures have endured for decades as a reminder of how the demand for mass entertainment spaces impacted life in L.A., from outdoor amphitheaters to dozens of architecturally striking theaters and movie palaces in the city's downtown. Beyond those landmarks that survived in Los Angeles for nearly a century, others destroyed and replaced by later urban development nonetheless had a major impact on the city and its people. As much as the existing remnants of City Beautiful urban development from the early twentieth century impact the modern L.A. landscape, the wider history of former structures like Wrigley Field and Gilmore Stadium that did not last into the modern era suggests that this movement had an even greater impact on the city at during its heyday.

The most notable aspect of this monument building movement is not found in venues built in one specific period of time, but in how that movement never truly ended. Other spaces, like the Staples Center, the Forum, and the Dodgers' and Angels' Stadiums, replaced or added to existing offerings. While newer structures may not share the exact same City Beautiful designs or the same consideration towards forming a new cultural identity, they align in the drive to tell a mythical narrative of the city. These spaces celebrate civic greatness and wealth, often without openly acknowledging the debates and costs involved in their creation. Additionally, Los Angeles's increasingly crowded conditions

in the succeeding years led to many developments coming at the cost of existing communities. Perhaps most infamously, the Dodgers baseball franchise built their stadium on the site of the Mexican American neighborhood of Chavez Ravine, a community wiped away by city claims of eminent domain in interest of public housing before becoming an expensive home for America's pastime (Cuff 272–309).

In modern Los Angeles, the push to build monuments to the city's greatness is perhaps stronger than at any point since the metropolis' formative years. The largest such proposed structure, currently named the Los Angeles Stadium, is under construction in Hollywood Park in Inglewood and will host two NFL franchises when it opens in 2020. The presence of state-of-the-art venues with secure plans for long-term support helped to bring L.A. its third Summer Olympics in 2028. Like the observed examples of similar urban development from nearly a century ago, the city's promoters market the creation of these structures as also serving the interests of the local economy and Angelenos as a whole (Wharton). While the 2028 Olympics could be a real boon to the city's economy, evidence that stadiums in a community generate long-term economic uplift remains scarce in both the historical record and more modern studies on stadium building. Urbanists and locals alike have expressed fears that these spaces will negatively impact the day-to-day lives of those living in the surrounding area, particularly in regards to increased traffic, rising housing prices, and displaced residents (Delaney 331–332; Hawthorne). As Los Angeles enters into what looks to be another major moment in its urban development and must consider how to design and fund major public entertainment venues, the city's leaders and citizens must keep in mind the actual legacy of these spaces: a great deal of popular culture, distinctive architecture, and a clear civic identity, which came at the cost of cultural history, alternatives for public spending, and the well-being of existing communities.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to Andrew Highsmith, for his steady support and advice; to the staff of the Rose Bowl, Coliseum, and Natural History Museum of Los Angeles, for their open help and resources; to UCI's SURP program, for funding this paper; and to my parents, for everything else.

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