

## South Los Angeles Sites

### 31 Alameda Boulevard: The "White Wall," South Central Incinerator, and South Central Farm

4100 Long Beach Ave., Los Angeles 90058

(between E. 41st St. and E. Vernon Ave.)

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Before World War II, South L.A.'s working-class neighborhoods were racially segregated by an invisible barrier known as the "White Wall" along Alameda Boulevard. African Americans lived to the west of Alameda, whites to the east. During the Watts uprising in 1965, Alameda emerged as a racial dividing line. Police officers were stationed along Alameda, and the mayor of Huntington Park, Larry Walsh, even got the Southern Pacific Railroad company to line the tracks along Alameda with railroad cars to prevent the spread of agitation and property destruction into white neighborhoods. Many whites fled South Los Angeles immediately after the Watts uprising, citing Black violence and fears of school integration, and taking advantage of racially exclusive housing in the suburbs. As a result, nonwhites, particularly Latinas/os, were able to buy properties on the east side of Alameda for the first time.

As Los Angeles' economic and ethnic geography has changed since the 1960s, Alameda Boulevard has retained its importance as a crucial industrial corridor. Freight rail lines along the corridor connect the port at Long Beach with the vast industrial districts in southeast L.A. that produce, assemble,

and distribute manufactured goods to global consumers. As a result, the neighborhoods lining the Alameda Corridor house both the manufacturing facilities of local and global firms who have been enticed by various government incentives to locate here and hundreds of thousands of working-class, mostly nonwhite families struggling to eke out a living. Not surprisingly, South Los Angeles neighborhoods are highly polluted, and the area's children have higher-than-average blood lead levels and suffer disproportionately from asthma.

Such conditions have generated innovative community activism to resist further industrial and hazardous development. Two environmental justice struggles, both of which occurred at this address, were pivotal. First, in the mid-1980s, the City of Los Angeles planned to build waste-to-energy incinerators throughout the city in order to address the growing trash problem. Not surprisingly, the first incinerator (known as the LANCER project) was targeted for South Central Los Angeles, at this intersection. Research has shown that such facilities are consistently more likely to be located in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, because it is assumed that residents will not protest. But in this case, that assumption was wrong. A group of largely African American women mobilized as the Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles and successfully challenged the accuracy of the environmental impact report, defeating the project. The group went on to





The former site of South Central Farm and the proposed incinerator (the LANCER project), now a vacant lot, 2007.

play a key role in the region's environmental justice movement, built community housing, and was a major force in the development of a citywide recycling program.

After the 1992 Los Angeles uprising, which exposed the lack of sufficient access to fresh food as a major problem in South L.A., the same plot of land was turned into a community garden. The South Central Farm, as it became known, was a 14-acre farm divided into 350 plots that were allocated to low-income families, primarily

Latina/o immigrants, who used them as "survival gardens" to provide food and medicine. The farm eventually became the largest urban garden in the United States. However, the ownership of the land itself was contested because of a series of legal entanglements between the city, a wealthy private property owner, and community organizations. After a prolonged struggle on the

part of community activists and their advocates (including 61 legal claims) and a weak effort by the city to save the farm, the city authorized the eviction of the farmers. Despite widespread media coverage, celebrity involvement, and public outrage, the farm was bulldozed in June 2006. One group of farmers established a farm on a small plot farther south under power lines at 111th and Avalon streets, while others began farming on a donated plot of land near Bakersfield. Both groups are currently selling their produce at farmers' markets in Los Angeles. Ralph Horowitz, the contested owner, has stated that he plans to use the land for a megawarehouse, but his plans were recently defeated by a broad coalition of community protesters, a scathing report by the Air Quality Management District, and a *Los Angeles Times* exposé linking Horowitz's warehouse plans with the clothing retailer Forever 21, which is notorious for encouraging sweatshop conditions. The plot of land remains vacant and its future is uncertain, although



Farmer at the South Central Farm in May 2006, before its destruction