

Research question

Did LAPD's implementation of LASER zones in LA's 77th Division affect rates of criminalization, displacement, and acquisition by new landlords within that area?

Why it matters to you and what's at stake

As students in the MURP program, housing stability is at the forefront of interest because we understand the importance of people's relation to place, housing as a human right, and the housing crisis that is affecting the most marginalized and vulnerable communities. The implementation of LASER zones by LAPD between 2011 - 2019 warranted for more surveillance in low income Black and Brown neighborhoods. With technology made by the military for wartime surveillance, the most marginalized communities in Los Angeles became areas of criminalization and harassment by the local police department. We are supporting the work of the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition to bring into light the effects that the LASER zone program had on the Hyde Park and Park Mesa neighborhoods that are within LAPD's 77th Division. Urban planning policies were used by LAPD to monitor and displace people and we are interested in seeing the relationship between criminalization and displacement.

Part of the tactics of the LASER zones were to designate "anchor points" to buildings and homes that were perceived to have high crime rates. LAPD would implement city policies such as evictions, permits, licensing, and changes to environmental design to displace tenants and businesses that were deemed undesirable by LAPD. By continuing the work of the Stop LAPD Spying coalition, we will be contributing to learning more about the active role that the police in Los Angeles has on displacement and trends of landlord acquisitions.

Spatial scope

The LASER zone program was implemented by LAPD from 2011 - 2019 in areas that were attributed to high crime rates. We are specifically looking at the 77th Division in South LA. According to the crime data, this is designated to be area 12 in the LAPD database. LASER zones typically lasted from nine months to two years. In this particular area, the LASER zone was in place from 2015 - 2017.

Data sources

Demographic data:

- American Community Survey, 2009-2013 5-year Estimates
 - Racial demographics in LA County by census tract:
https://www.sociaexplorer.com/tables/ACS2013_5yr/R12678383
 - Income levels across LA County by census tract:
https://www.sociaexplorer.com/tables/ACS2013_5yr/R12678384
 - Educational Attainment in LA County by census tract:
https://www.sociaexplorer.com/tables/ACS2013_5yr/R12678385
 - Housing Tenure in LA County by census tract:
https://www.sociaexplorer.com/tables/ACS2013_5yr/R12678381
- American Community Survey, 2014-2018 5-year Estimates
 - Racial demographics in LA County by census tract:
https://www.sociaexplorer.com/tables/ACS2018_5yr/R12673551

- Income levels across LA County by census tract:
https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2018_5yr/R12673551
- Educational Attainment in LA County by census tract:
https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2018_5yr/R12673557
- Housing Tenure in LA County by census tract:
https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2018_5yr/R12673820

Neighborhood data:

- Laser Zones, City of Los Angeles:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Qi4u2L3v9jKj3uVW3bZpztOv-bkP8O6r/view?usp=sharing>
- City of Los Angeles Zip Codes: <https://geohub.lacity.org/datasets/zip-codes-la-county>
- Los Angeles Census Tracts, 2010:
<https://geohub.lacity.org/datasets/lacounty::census-tracts-2010-1>
- Property Acquisition by LLC Landlords in South LA, 2010-2020
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ofqPesjHK_DDnBmgbKtq0zoZmPGodKiw/view?usp=sharing
- Unsealed Eviction Filings in 90043 zip code, 2010-2020:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jruhPURYrtJhlxuaHt3Nip0ujDvf0QL0/view?usp=sharing>
- Crimes and arrests in City of Los Angeles
<https://data.lacity.org/A-Safe-City/Crime-Data-from-2010-to-2019/63jg-8b9z>
- Business Closures in City of Los Angeles
<https://data.lacity.org/A-Prosperous-City/All-Closed-Businesses/tkh9-tssh>

Scope of data and intended analysis

This research aims to pursue a comparative analysis of neighborhood change within the Hyde Park and Park Mesa Heights neighborhoods of South LA at the beginning and end of LAPD's implementation of LASER Zones within the 77th Division. Overall, there were six designated LASER Zones within LAPD's 77th Division, and the neighborhoods we are focusing on fall under LASER Zone 3, which runs along Crenshaw Blvd from Slauson Avenue to Florence Avenue.

As the Operation LASER program was implemented from 2011-2019 yet was operated in the 77th Division from 2015-2017, we will compare data prior to and after the start of its implementation in the 77th Division. With that, we plan to use the data variables listed above to examine not only demographic data, but also patterns of landlord acquisition, eviction, crime, business closures, and new development. As the ACS 5-Year data will give us the most comprehensive estimates of the demographic data we hope to analyze, we will utilize the 2009-13 ACS data to provide information on the beginning of the program and 2014-2018 ACS data for the end of the program. Another reason we chose to go this route is because 2014-2018 data is the most recent ACS 5-year data that is available, and so it makes sense to compare that to 2009-13 data. We hope to have the scope of the neighborhood data (landlord acquisition, eviction, crime, business closures, and new development) we will analyze to fall in line with the 2009-13 and 2016-18 periods as well. By examining these overlapping data, this project hopes to understand whether Operation LASER was effective in reducing crime and more importantly, its potential relationship with residential and commercial displacement. We will hopefully not only learn the demographics of residents who have been evicted, but also the level of evictions that took place, what types of new developments there are, and any changes in the level of LLC Landlords that are present in the area.

Insights and research implications

Completion of this research may provide a deeper understanding of the impact and potential harm that over policing has on neighborhood change, particularly in communities of color. It also hopes to provide insight on the types of residents and businesses that experienced displacement in this neighborhood over the last several years. We recognize that our research may not indicate that over policing was a direct or sole cause of gentrification, but it would still be illuminating to see whether any relationships exist. Over policing is not typically discussed as a factor of gentrification, especially in comparison to skyrocketing property values and stymied wages, so our analysis may also inform broader advocacy efforts or measures in the future to protect against similar policing programs and the displacement of vulnerable residents and small businesses. Although our geographic scope of research is very narrow, it can serve as a model for analyzing similar impacts across other previous LASER zones.