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# Dismantling Structural Inequality in the Inland Empire: Rebuilding Community from the Ground up at Huerta del Valle Garden

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**DISMANTLING STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY IN  
THE INLAND EMPIRE: REBUILDING  
COMMUNITY FROM THE GROUND UP AT  
HUERTA DEL VALLE GARDEN**

by

**JENNIFER E. REYFF**

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR CHAR MILLER  
PROFESSOR NANCY NEIMAN AUERBACH**

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May all beings be well and happy.

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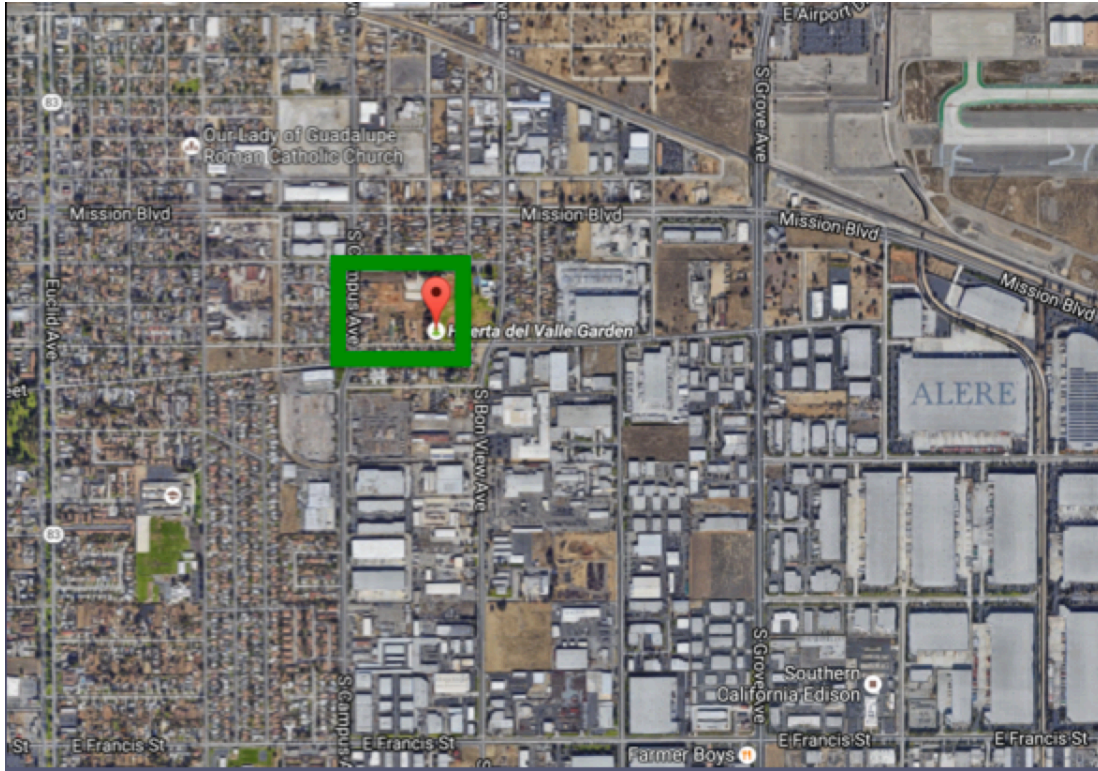
## Introduction

Scripps College is one of five undergraduate institutions within the Claremont University Consortium, located just on the border of the Inland Empire in Southern California (where San Bernardino County meets Los Angeles County). Claremont is a bubble of wealth in a region otherwise characterized by its high rates of unemployment, prominence within the nation's goods movement industry, and poverty. Ten minutes by car south toward Pomona, or east into Upland, there is a drastic shift from 'The City of Trees and PhDs,' as Claremont is colloquially known, to a landscape of fast food and traffic. In Claremont, only eight percent of people live below the poverty line – less than the national average of 13.5 percent – whereas in the neighboring city of Ontario, the focus of this research, 18.3 percent of people are living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). While many students do not venture far out of Claremont, Pitzer College offers an opportunity for students to apply what they have learned in the classroom in a new setting, the city of Ontario.

The 'Pitzer in Ontario' (PIO) program is a semester-long internship-based course, where enrolled students are matched with a local nonprofit organization in the city, and conduct qualitative community-based research over the course of four months. Over the course of my years in Claremont, my studies began to concentrate on the growing field of environmental justice, defined by the Environmental Protection Agency as "... the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies" (EPA, OA.) I became particularly interested in spatial analysis, investigating the proximity of hazardous waste sites or high

levels of pollutants in the atmosphere to low-income neighborhoods of color, as well as the historical circumstances that led to particular communities facing environmental racism today. Following these interests, I enrolled in the PIO program and began an internship with Huerta del Valle community garden.

Located just southeast of downtown Ontario, Huerta del Valle is a suburban community garden serving low-income, predominately Latino residents of a neighborhood just on the border of the daunting warehouse empire, less than a mile away from the Ontario International Airport runway (Figure 1). Virtually every street corner houses establishments like McDonalds, Jack in the Box, Subway, and Popeyes. In 2010, seeing a need for better food accessibility in the region, faculty and students from Pitzer College began the process of engaging local community members to create a garden on the site of former Linda Vista Elementary School (Byler, 2016). However, it was not until the involvement of current executive director, Maria Teresa Alonso, a local resident of Ontario searching for an accessible way to feed her family a healthier diet, that the garden truly came alive. According to current garden project manager and Pitzer College alumni Arthur Levine, community members struggle with high rates of obesity, poverty, and a lack of access to healthy food (Levine, 2016). To Levine, the garden is a way to introduce healthy nutritional habits to a neighborhood facing ongoing, systemic financial hardship.



**Figure 1.** Map of Huerta del Valle Garden from: "Ontario, California." Map, *Google Maps*. Accessed 30 Nov 2016.

In 2013 the garden was relocated to a larger site, a four-acre plot just west of Bon View Park, an already frequented community locale. Walking through the garden today one would be shocked to imagine that when they arrived at the new site, it was found covered in dust, weeds, and abandoned garbage. Three years later and the garden is a life force in itself, serving 62 families with plots sold for between thirty dollars per year (Levine, 2016; Figure 2). This feat of bypassing the mainstream food system has far-reaching implications. By providing those with the least amount of money a constant source of the highest quality food, Huerta del Valle subtly shakes the socio-economic structure of the community, redirecting money away from the ubiquitous fast food industry and simultaneously increasing financial security for its members.



**Figure 2.** Reyff, Jennifer. “Huerta del Valle Community Garden.” 2016. JPEG File.

My research was conducted through hands-on participant observation, working alongside community members tending to the garden, as well as within an education curriculum design committee. Through these complimentary experiences, the prevalence of a social change-based theoretical framework underlying all aspects of development at the garden became clear. In this thesis I explicitly outline a ‘bottom-up’ approach to



leadership and education, the foundation of Huerta's success, both as it stands alone and in contrast to other urban gardens in the region. It is precisely this community empowerment that allows the garden to serve not only as a source of healthy nutrition and space for personal growth, but also as a vehicle for changing social capital, subverting the bounds of the seemingly inescapable capitalist food economy.

To provide historical and spatial context for Huerta del Valle, and address the question of why issues of poverty and obesity arose in this area in particular, the first half of this thesis will track the history of socio-economic formation in the region. I argue that Ontario itself, the 'model colony,' was founded on principles of institutional racism – discrimination based on race or ethnicity as manifested on a broad scale through social or political institutions. It is important to recognize the inextricable connection between past and present to fully grasp the reality of modern day inequality, and use this knowledge to make informed decisions to move toward a more equitable future.

Huerta del Valle Community Garden is a model of social justice innovation in the Inland Empire, providing a historically disenfranchised neighborhood with high quality organic food, food justice education, and a sense of belonging. The bottom-up approach to organization at the garden creates a space of community growth and healing, simultaneously empowering individuals and challenging the modern food system as a whole. By building an alternative food system locally in Ontario, Huerta del Valle has become a symbol of change, proving the efficacy of combatting deep-rooted inequality through compassionate care of individuals.

# **Part One: Tracing the Origins of Institutional Racism in Ontario**

## **i. Introduction**

This section outlines the historical circumstances that defined socio-economic formation in the Inland Empire region of Southern California, and argues that the city of Ontario was founded upon fundamentally racist, discriminatory principles. It identifies environmental injustices as seen today by residents of Ontario, connecting past to present and bringing transparency to an often invisible reality. The following provides spatial context as to the necessity of an alternative food system in the community Huerta del Valle serves.

## **ii. Indigenous Colonization, Spanish Missions, & Ranchos**

The region now known as the ‘Inland Empire’ (IE), one of the nation’s most productive hubs of the logistics industry, has been subject to a cyclical history of imperialism as prompted by its earliest settlers, the Spanish missionaries of the late 1770s. This section tracks the origins of industrialization in inland Southern California, the beginning marked by the colonization and control of indigenous communities.

For the landscape pre-industrialization, long before the human population would explode into a suburban sprawl, there existed a stark difference between the lush prairie to the west and dry desert of the east. In 1776, what is now modern day Ontario was described by Spanish explorer Pedro Font as “covered with good pasturage, both dry and green – a country well suited for sheep and goats” (Gentilcore, 1960). Though there are few firsthand accounts of what the area looked like before any settlers landed there,

Spanish colonists chronicled the land as primarily covered in sagebrush – chamisal, cottonwood, willow, and vines along water – with little substantive vegetation beyond the brush (Ingersoll, 1904). The missionaries settled the land, but this region had long been home to humans – the Cahuilla, Serrano, Luiseño, and Gabrielino (Tongva) peoples (Patterson, 2015).

Though the Spanish missionaries held a fundamental desire to “civilize” native peoples, in reality these communities already had a keen understanding of land management and social order. Prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, native communities had domesticated their home environments, drawing on self-taught knowledge of land productivity. Key to this careful land management was the intentional use of fire. The periodic burning of certain ecosystems encourages plant regeneration, and is appropriate for black oak savanna, coastal prairies, or dry mountain meadows, biomes making up the IE region (Patterson, 2015). The technology developed by native peoples optimized use of a relatively difficult environment to cultivate for subsistence. But despite having cultivated advanced farming practices and a productive economy, Spanish missionaries meant destruction for native communities.

The vast majority of indigenous people living within the radius of missionary influence were converted to Christianity – either out of necessity to obtain resources coopted by the colonists, by coercion into abandoning traditional customs, or simply in being baptized without consent (Patterson, 2015). The conversion and subsequent movement of people disrupted the flow within and between indigenous communities, socially and economically. The Spaniards understood only two types of indigenous people, those baptized and those not. Creating social boundaries between these two

groups served as a key part of the process of class formation. This was done in part through the creation of a market economy where the indigenous people could exchange labor for goods necessary for survival (Sandos, 2004). After depriving communities of their traditional land and resources, harming managed ecosystems with the introduction of non-native species, and bringing diseases that killed thousands, the missionaries had altered the traditional practices and beliefs of an entire culture.

In tracing the history of missionaries through the Inland Empire, most relevant to Ontario is the Mission San Gabriel, founded in 1771. Located strategically between San Diego and Santa Barbara, this site served as a hub for the economy of the foothill belt, supplying food to the rest of the missions throughout California. Despite frequent raids from indigenous resistance, by 1827, Mission San Gabriel had established itself as a substantial food resource with nearly 40,000 cattle (Engelhardt, 1927). The mission's early activities foreshadowed the agricultural future of the region. With the Secularization Act of 1833, the Mexican government restored lands previously preempted by missions to the public, closing the missionary period and making room for the birth of a new rancho economy (Gentilcore, 1960).

Though a rancho-dominated economy would not come into prominence for another fifty years, ranchos began to take shape in the middle of the 1780s. Decades prior to the end of Spanish missionary control in Southern California, military veterans began petitioning the governor for land allowances. The retired soldiers' desire was to procure rights to property to grow crops and raise livestock. To meet this request, while maintaining state regulation of the land, the governor granted temporary concessions in 1786, under the condition that the ranchers would have to build houses on their respective

land within three years time (Patterson, 2015). From this point on, the rancho class was born and grew as the authority of the missions declined, becoming the driving force of the Inland Empire economy from the 1830s until the late 1850s.

The goal of the rancho class was to be self-sufficient, to be able to produce enough food to consume and enough raw materials to trade. This aspiration was, for a time, easily attainable, given the importance of livestock ranching on Southern California's economy as a whole. Contributing to the prominence of the livestock industry was the quality of land in Southern California, and its natural constraints and advantages. Most land, particularly within the foothill belt, was deemed not wet enough to support crop agriculture, but could sustain enough grass in the winter months to provide dry feed for summer (Gentilcore, 1960).

By the 1850s Southern California was under American occupation, with economic uncertainty and volatility in the latter half of this decade leading to the end of the rancho age. Many heavily indebted ranchers were forced to sacrifice livestock to meet the demands of new tax and interest payments from the American government. With the price of beef declining and the market crashing, many rancho properties foreclosed, passing land into American ownership (Gentilcore, 1960). Irreparably halting the reign of the ranchos, from 1862 to 1865 remaining ranchers were subjected to floods, drought, an epidemic of grasshoppers, and smallpox. In American hands, the land was soon forgotten, and "lapsed into indolence" (Guinn, 1911).

This disregard, however, did not last long. By the late 1800s Southern California was experiencing a transformation – an economic agricultural revolution. Between 1850 and 1870, agricultural entrepreneurs sought to identify and promote the feasibility of

commercial crops in the region, such as barley, wheat, silk, cotton, and castor beans (Guinn, 1911). These efforts were largely met with failure – there was little labor to plant and harvest these crops, no access to proper transportation, and poor organization, hindering any substantive accomplishments. This record of unsuccessful agricultural endeavors was finally broken with the discovery of citrus’ affinity for the local environment. Groundbreaking irrigation technology gave rise to the commercial crops industry, primarily citrus orchards or vineyards. With cunning and intentional marketing, this region would soon attract an influx of settlers and colonists, eager to join in on the economic upswing.

### **iii. Water, Railroads, & the Citrus Belt**

*“From the plateau at the foot of the mountain I obtained a birds eye view of the whole area I proposed to acquire, and while I was standing there looking at it, I saw what Ontario was to and did become.” – George Chaffey (Gentilcore, 1960)*

Following the fleeting age of the ranchos, control of what is known today as the city of Ontario – a name chosen in homage to their homeland – fell into the hands of two Canadian settlers, George and William Chaffey (Alexander, 1928). This land was intentionally chosen as the foundation for a new irrigation colony. The city’s development was directed largely by the preferences of a water company, whose fundamental concern was sustained water availability. With the prospect of immense capital gain from making available new irrigation technology and drawing settlers to the region, colonization companies took over land from Pasadena in the west to San

Bernardino in the east (Gentilcore, 1960). In Ontario, this process was controlled by the Chaffey's San Antonio Water Company (Sandul, 2010). This corporate control gave way to the eventual total transformation from a sprawling, infertile desert landscape to lush citrus groves.

On September 18, 1882, the Chaffey brothers paid \$60,000 for about 6,200 acres of land along San Gabriel Mountains, about 38 miles east of Los Angeles (Sandul, 2010). For the Chaffeys, procuring this tract of land near the San Gabriel Mountains meant a future of innovation and momentum. To achieve their aspirations, the brothers kept at the forefront of hydrological technology and agricultural advancements. In George's words, the goal of the colony was to create a "suburban fantasy that incorporated an agrarian ethos of rural civility and urban sophistication and modernization" (Sandul, 2010).

The Chaffey's settlement of Ontario led to the conclusion that the region was best suited to citrus for commercial crops. Oranges were likely introduced to California at the San Diego Mission in the late 1760s, with the first grove planted in 1804, at the San Gabriel Mission (Alexander, 1928). This grove would provide seedlings for growers in and around the Los Angeles area, but at this early stage the citrus industry was far from commercially successful. It was not until the discovery of the Washington navel orange, a high-value product that could be safely shipped to far destinations to maximize profit, and the foundation of Southern California's railroads, that the citrus industry would gain much commercial attention. At the time of Ontario's foundation, most of the region's acreage was already devoted to citrus.

The innovation of the Chaffey brothers came through their desire to set a new standard for rural communities, taking advantage of the region's established agricultural

power. Key to the Chaffey's decision to purchase this tract of land, beyond its relatively cheap price, was the advantageous nature of its topography for citrus agriculture. Where the San Bernardino and San Gabriel Mountains meet the foothill belt they found a flurry of alluvial fans, where fine, highly fertile alluvium soil washed from a high elevation to a lower elevation is found, spreading out in a fan-like shape (Nelson, 1917). For the citrus industry this provided ideal growing conditions, with nutrient-rich soil, slopes providing a natural aid for irrigation and drainage, a supply of both surface and groundwater, and little to no frost given the region's Mediterranean climate.

The success of the 'model colony' can be attributed to three fundamental goals that the brothers Chaffey had established – irrigation, transportation, and higher education for Ontario's new residents. As the city flourished and these ideas became reality, these manifested in the form of the San Antonio Water Company, Euclid Avenue, and the Chaffey College of Agriculture. Among the principles upon which George Chaffey would push the city of Ontario as a 'model colony' was the development of a main thoroughfare, connecting the railroad to a system of public transportation. Eight-mile long Euclid Avenue was placed strategically, climbing north toward the mountains from the Southern Pacific Railroad station, spanning wide across a climbing alluvial fan in a conscious effort to maintain this most desired soil (Gentilcore, 1960). This railroad would be essential to Ontario's growth, connecting communities across Southern California. In March 1883, not long after the brothers founded the colony, they broke ground for the college, in its early years affiliated with the University of Southern California, proving an ingenuous method of revenue for those in power (Sandul, 2010). By 1885, only three years after the creation of the San Antonio Water Company, the



citrus industry and Southern California were synonymous (Trask, 1905). With these technological advancements came the rise of expansive, rapidly globalizing corporate capitalism, largely disbanding the previously utilized framework of small-business capitalism (Sandul, 2010). This began a new era of systemic inequality.

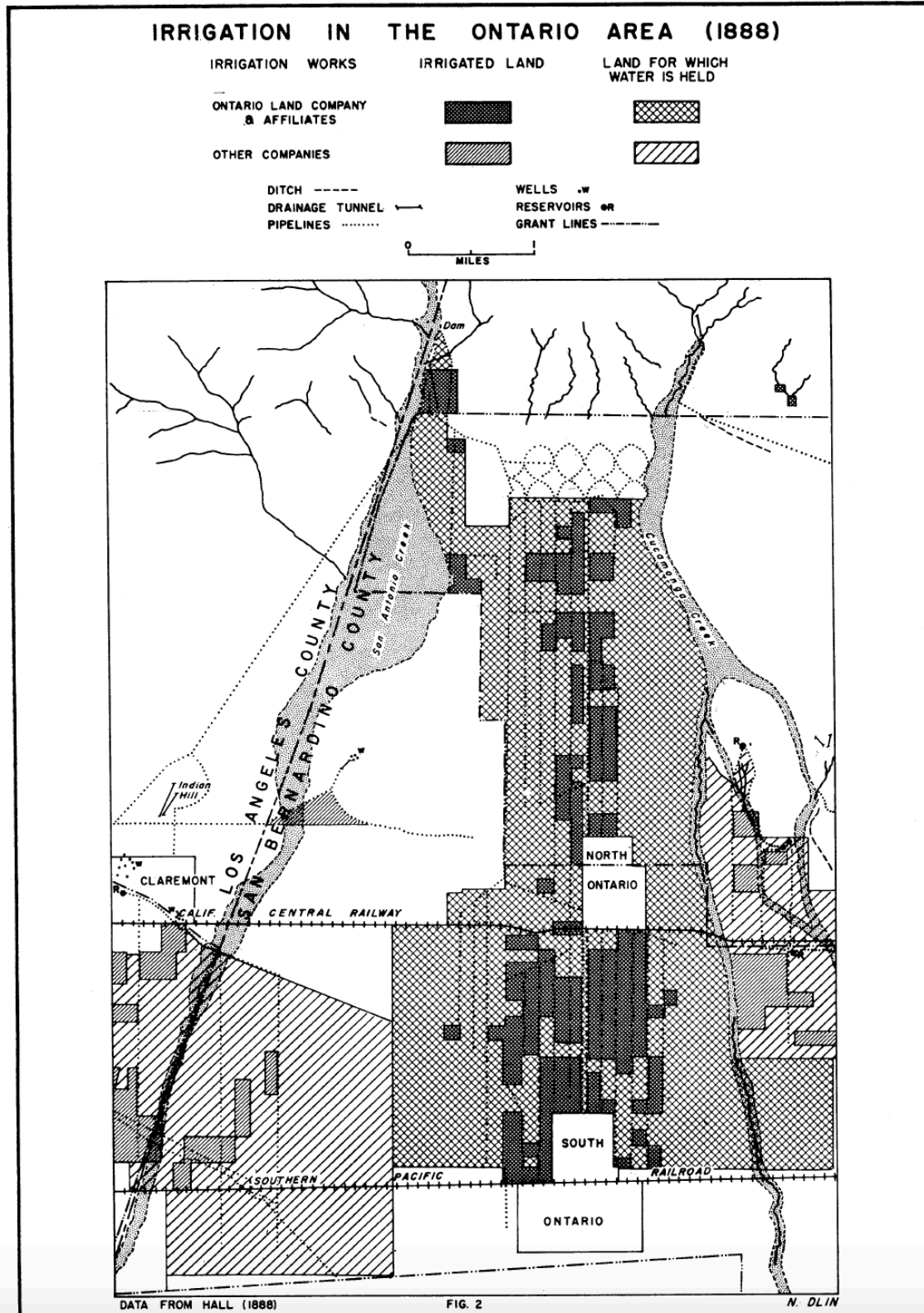
Ontario's proximity to the city of Los Angeles was not by accident, and the connections that would be made between these two areas would change the economic landscape of Southern California indefinitely. The flat land stretching between the urban capital and the Inland Empire was perfect for the construction of a railroad. Chaffey's Euclid Avenue served as a point of contact between the forthcoming Southern Pacific Railway depot and the streetcar system of downtown Ontario (Sandul, 2010). This advancement in transportation capabilities meant connecting some of the most rapidly growing regions in Southern California – Orange, Riverside, Santa Monica, and Los Angeles. This transportation grid allowed for an influx of settlers and their families, eager to make a life in the booming countryside. In 1876 came an incredible feat of transportation, the Southern Pacific Railroad, bringing together the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads, and subsequently which tied the region to western and eastern markets (Widney, 1884). One year later the first shipment of oranges made its way to Chicago, Illinois (Gentilcore, 1960). Further skyrocketing the exponential population and economic growth seen from railway innovation came the Santa Fe Railroad of 1885, a second Southern Pacific line running to San Diego built in 1882, a link with Santa Fe at Cajon Pass in 1885, the Chino Valley Railroad in 1887, and the Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad at the turn of the century in 1903 (Sandul, 2010).

Another essential factor contributing to the economic boom of Ontario was the principle of land and water rights. Ideologically speaking, this region in its formative period laid the groundwork for an American Dream based principle of individual ownership of land and mutual ownership of water. For orange groves to exist at all, the city had to cultivate a precise and technologically advanced irrigation management system. On October 25, 1882, the Chaffey brothers created the San Antonio Water Company (SAWC), a mutual water company within which shares were transferred only to those holding acreage in the colony (Trask, 1905). One share of stock in the corporation came with each acre of property purchased in Ontario, which was then sold back to the water company in exchange for permanent water rights pro-rated by acreage (Sandul, 2010). With this financial structure in place, the Chaffey brothers received profit from both the sale of land itself as well as ongoing profits from the San Antonio Company.

SAWC was responsible for the discovery of a flourishing source of groundwater and the subsequent creation of the first subsurface water tunnel in Southern California, increasing the water supply to the colony (Figure 1; Sandul, 2010). The SAWC drew its water from three primary sources – the San Antonio Canyon watershed, the Cucamonga Tunnel, the Cucamonga gravel beds. By the late 1890s, the company was responsible for constructing the first hydroelectric plant in any irrigation system in the United States (Trask, 1905). The corporation combined former San Antonio ranchos, to the eventual detriment of some orange growers. Unequal water rights became a reality with the irrigation laws of former rancho owners favoring those individuals whose land was most centrally located to the source of distribution, causing conflict (Patterson, 2015). This legislative imbalance is one symptom of a larger pattern of inequality, as perpetuated by

the flaws of capitalism. This framework would foreshadow the eventual institutional inequity facing the Inland Empire today.

Robert M. Widney, judge for the Court of California for Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties, a founder of the University of Southern California, and a key figurehead in Ontario's birth, commented on the state of irrigation, saying, "... since the country has been cultivated the rainfall has perceptibly increased and there is a fair prospect that the dry years will almost entirely disappear" (West Adams Heritage Association, 2016; Gentilcore, 1960). Soon after making this public comment, however, the region experienced an extended drought, lasting from 1897 until 1904. Despite this unavoidable setback, by 1904 the San Antonio Water Company had control of the majority of water in the SoCal area. Figure 3 below highlights the irrigation rights and distribution template of Ontario in 1888 (Gentilcore, 1960) This success can be attributed to the company's optimization of the water supply in San Antonio – used to manufacture electrical energy for water pumps, guided through spreading fields north of cultivated areas to replenish groundwater storage, or utilized most in natural, gravity-assisted irrigation. Ontario's irrigation settlement demonstrated that water rights and land rights were inseparable.



**Figure 3.** R. Louis Gentilcore. "Ontario, California and the Agricultural Boom of the 1880s." *Agricultural History Society, Agricultural History*, 32, no. 2 (April 1960): 77–87.

March of 1883, in a public advertisement directed at visitors interested in investing in the colony, Judge Widney declared that "... not only Ontario but all the extended plains stretched out before you will be densely populated in the years to come... water will be stored... or drawn from deep wells, or brought in pipes from distant mountain streams... and cause this valley to blossom as the garden of the Lord" (Gentilcore, 1960). This prediction speaks to the general attitude of those politicians or businessmen with a stake in boosting Ontario's economic worth. To draw settlers to the colony, the Chaffeys hired to advertise the region as flourishing, and dispense a new ideal of 'rural.' The cover of one such advertisement proudly displayed a quote from Judge R.M. Widney, meant to exemplify the irrigation and agricultural innovation making Ontario a true boomtown: "*The rivers run over golden sands and over the golden sands run rivers of gold into golden lands*" (Widney, 1884).

Advertised as an anomalous, ideal middle-class paradise with the perfect balance between rural and urban, thousands were drawn to Ontario by the prospect of owning a ten-acre orange grove and homestead. At its core, Ontario was designed as an "agriburb," meaning a consciously developed and promoted community, responding primarily to demands of a growing agricultural market (Sandul, 2010). To sell the colony as an ideal farming community and garner the most financial gain from potential incoming settlers, advertisements spoke directly to whatever potential migrants or investors desired. Using narratives of class, lifestyle, and individual financial growth, promoters sold the agriburb ideal – beautiful, brand new single-family homes with all the amenities of an urban center, but centered on agricultural land that preserves the advantages of a rural lifestyle.

One such 'model colony' advertisement from the 1890s read:

Ontario Land Company, on climate: “... a great boon to the health-seeker and a comfort to the tourist . . . [and] of inestimable value to the fruit grower; [a climate in which] spring, summer, autumn and winter blend in as perfect harmony as do the rainbow hues; [a climate which] excels that of any other part of the United States for mildness, equableness and as promotive of longevity” (Gentilcore, 1960, 85)

Those responsible for Ontario’s promotion were highly adept businessmen, with a keen mind for producing alluring yet digestible narratives that would appeal to a wide audience therefore enhancing chances of profit. The foundation for Ontario’s marketing strategy involved exploiting an image of community that would appear as a reasonable aspiration for settlers. Even at its humble beginnings, Ontario’s widespread publicity and newfound accessibility due to railroad technology drew settlers, discounting reports of relatively small orange yields. In one of Ontario’s earliest pamphlets produced by Judge Widney, L.M. Holt, editor of the *Riverside Press and Horticulturalist* and considered the leading journalist on irrigation and water policy in California at the time, exposed the poor planting practices being utilized in the citrus industry. Despite offering statistics to expose the discrepancy between the quantity of trees planted (thousands) and those producing fruit (hundreds), incoming settlers were not deterred, and from then on the advertisements spoke only of great success and fertility (Kershner, 1953). Population growth would increase exponentially at the turn of the century, with a population of 683 in 1890, climbing to only 722 in 1900, shooting skyward with 4,274 people living in the colony by 1910 (Sandul, 2010). This trend would persist for decades to come.

Intention, precision, and a lack of transparency were the bases upon which Ontario as a community was planned, as it did not develop out of urban sprawl or even an

exodus of the elite to the countryside. It was boosted neither as an isolated colony nor as an agricultural base from which to supply the urban center of Los Angeles, but rather as having the perks of both a rural and suburban ideal. The conscious planning of city infrastructure and regulation of new homeownership was held by greedy venture capitalists, whose fundamental goal was producing wealth by selling the ‘model colony.’ Touted as the “most perfect and beautiful residential settlement in the world,” promoters took a broad approach to advertising, hoping to appeal to every possible interest and garner the most revenue into the colony (Sandul, 2010). Ontario’s publicists declared the great potential for land values to rise exponentially, advertising their own capital investment in urban amenities and gaining the attention of crowds. The higher likelihood that land values would rise meant more money landing in the promoter’s pockets. To gain credibility among would-be settlers, information within these advertisements was presented in a factual, authoritative manner, flaunting fancy charts and signatures of supposed experts (Austen, 1990). It was meant to highlight the agricultural innovations of Ontario, and dissuade potential colonists from the notion that the region was infertile. A 1905 print ad from the *Land of Sunshine* stated that Ontario “... had city conveniences and country health and pleasure; [was] peopled with the intelligent, well-to-do and law-abiding” (Sandul, 2010)

Born out of this process of profit-seeking was the beginning of institutional racism in the Ontario colony as we know it today. In publicizing the colony as having all the benefits of an urban lifestyle without the pitfalls, promoters sold the idea of a city without pollution, crime, alcoholism, or immigrants, drawing in those who desired an environment with a “better class of people” (Sandul, 2010). Marketing the ‘agriburb’

drew on the past glorification of agriculture, as well as the association with suburbia as a place for the college educated middle-class to follow their professional pursuits (Austen, 1990). This opportunity to achieve the American Dream was sold through an image of the archetypal middle-class male breadwinner – an intelligent, physically fit, active democratic citizen, devoted to his family and work. Inherent to this method of advertisement was a subtle undertone of superiority, offering a remedy for the feared consequences of over-civilization – an idyllic home front for middle-class Americans, away from the influence of immigrants and lower-class individuals in rapidly industrializing urban centers. A promotion from publication *The Horticulturalist* stated, “All sensible men gladly escape, earlier or later, and partially or wholly, from the turmoil of the cities. The love of country is inseparably connected with the love of home” (Sandul, 2010). Ontario was publicized as a city where social control would be maintained, free from degenerates and therefore transcending the possibility of corruption.

One of Ontario’s top boosters, Judge Widney, affectionately dubbed Ontario the “Second garden of Eden.” His brother was Dr. Joseph Pomeroy Widney, MD, whose personal investment in the city was as a trustee of the Chaffey College of Agriculture. Dr. Widney offered his professional opinion on Ontario’s climate, declaring it the ideal place for individuals affected by maladies to settle. He praised Ontario for its naturally medicinal environment, now a seemingly endless stretch of vineyards and orchards, touting the region as a safe escape away from the supposedly illness-inducing industrialization taking place around the nation at this time (Sandul, 2010). This translated to a message of privilege – only those with means deserved access to a healthy environment. Ontario was pushed to be a community of elites, distinctly set apart from



the rest of society, dividing between those with financial surety and those who lack the economic resources to flee to the comforts of the countryside. In systematically solidifying this disparity, Ontario's founders began an age of institutional racism in the region, which would persist today.

#### **iv. From Citrus to Logistics**

In spite of desires for Ontario to be a purely bourgeois bubble, orchard owners needed working-class laborers. Class formation in this region can be attributed to the stark discrepancy in financial opportunities available for the growing rural bourgeois and working-class laborers of citrus orchards, packing plants, or railway construction. Fear of foreign-born immigrants aside, during the 1880s much of the manual work force was composed of Chinese workers, who were then replaced by Korean, Japanese, and Mexican workers. A decade prior to this the agricultural labor force was primarily Cahuilla and other First Nation peoples, but as time went on their relatively small numbers, given years of invasion and genocide having wiped out much of the indigenous population, meant that there was not enough resident workers to meet the grower's demands (Patterson, 2015).

Despite the aim of the 'model colony' to create an elite, middle-class suburban agricultural region free of the influence of lower-class degenerates, other vehicles of economic growth – military, manufacturing, and housing industries – meant otherwise. As industrialization grew exponentially and the Southern Pacific Railway flourished, the market followed, increasing demand for goods other than citrus. Following the initial success of citrus growers came the push for faster and better production, drawing other

industries and creating jobs for engineers. As the region grew it saw the rise of other businesses providing resources for workers, such as stores, saloons, law firms, etc. Thus the inland valley found itself home to three tiers of people – the wealthy bourgeoisie citrus grove owners, a middle-upper-class of merchants and lawyers, and an expansive lower-class workforce to fuel the packing plants and tend to shops, a class made up largely of foreign-born immigrants (Austen, 1990). Immigrants drawn to Los Angeles were likely to end up a part of this class in the Citrus Belt.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Southern California's saw economic growth was fueled by new, non-ag industries. The railroads, a technological advancement largely responsible for the influx of settlers, created a market for both real estate and tourism. The port of Long Beach brought a fishing industry and naval base, oil fields sprung up around the Los Angeles area, aircraft bases were built in western Los Angeles County, and construction companies fueling all of these processes were dispersed across the region as a whole. In 1943, San Bernardino County – for which Ontario was the then-second largest city – was home to almost 50,000 acres of citrus (Sandul, 2010). However, production began to decline in 1948. At this point the 'model colony' had long since disappeared, with changes in dominant modes of industry moving the city away from the Chaffey's idealistic 'agriburb' and folding into the city of Ontario.

The constantly changing economic and social landscape of Southern California meant an eventual decline for the once booming citrus industry. WWII drew attention away from the value of fruit and focused instead on the production of war-related goods, most prominently within the aerospace industry. This shift meant another influx of settlers looking for industrial work, leading to a housing crisis in the inland valley. After

peaking in market value and production in the mid-1940s, many citrus groves were cleared to make way for residential development. With landowners still compelled to pay property taxes, many sold out to an entirely new generation of land speculators and real estate developers (Gonzalez, 1994).

Pollution in the region began with the initial need for transportation of agricultural goods, thus the construction of the railroad, but increased exponentially with the rise of other facets of industrialization and automobility. In 1942, the U.S. government built a steel mill in Fontana, about fifty miles east of Los Angeles. This site was chosen intentionally, adjacent to the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific Railroad tracks, and in close proximity to shipyards, ports, and aircraft companies in the greater Los Angeles County area. Within one year all of the citrus crops in the surrounding area had withered from disease, a result of sulfuric emissions and airborne particulate matter (Patterson, 2015).

By the 1950s, the end of the reign of agriculture was looming, and eyes were shifting toward war-related aerospace corporations. In 1933, airplane manufacturers in Southern California employed approximately 1,000 people; ten years later, by November 1943, that number had climbed to a staggering 280,300 (Moller, 2008). Technological innovations from these aerospace firms led to the industry's economic prominence in Southern California during the Cold War. The expansion of military industry in the inland region meant a prompt housing boom, effectively doubling the population of Ontario from 13,853 in 1930 to 22,872 in 1950 (Gibson, 2005). In the thirty years following the end of WWII, amidst the Cold War, nearly six million new housing units were constructed throughout the state of California (Findlay, 1992).

In 1965, in response to the magnitude of former agricultural land falling into the hands of suburbia developers over the previous decade, the state government introduced the California Land Conservation Act. This measure was an attempt to limit property taxes on farm owners and thus mitigate the sheer amount of land turnover. Landowners would receive property tax assessments based upon agricultural and conservation uses, lowering rates, in contrast to following market value. Unfortunately this policy shift came too late, with the vast majority of land in Ontario already in the process of development. This was largely ineffective for land preservation in Southern California, with the legislation serving primarily upper-middle-class regions, like Marin County in the Bay Area, a leader in open-space innovation for California (CA Dept. of Conservation, 2016).

This new source of economic and population growth persisted in the region through much of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, in spite of its seemingly impenetrable layer of smog, the Inland Empire was considered one of the fastest growing regions in the United States (Mydans, 1993). Suburbia was flourishing, with miles of identical single-family homes lining every street, catering to the nearly one million people who came searching for affordable housing in the 1980s alone. Subprime, low-interest mortgages began enticing another wave of settlers in the mid-1970s, when property taxes and rent in other areas first began to see an increase (Patterson, 2015). Much of Southern California's infamous traffic can be attributed to this suburban sprawl, a result of forcing families away from their homes near workplaces where taxes were skyrocketing, and in turn driving the need for vehicular transportation and associated goods and services.

By the late 1980s, with the Cold War finally coming to a close, military bases and defense related industries that had been holding up the economy of Southern California for half a century were slashed, leading to a decrease in national and international exports (Mydans, 1993). This subsequent economic downturn proved particularly difficult to recover from, given the permanence of job loss brought on when military and aerospace industries vanished from the area. In response, the industry's largest firms consolidated business, forcing closures of smaller aerospace companies and leaving thousands unemployed (Kleinhenz, 2012). At this point in history, the Chaffey brothers' century-old dream for Ontario as an idyllic 'model colony,' due to the constant economic motion of Southern California, had ultimately fallen flat.

The community now dealt with intense levels of pollution and significantly increased crime rates –the number of felonies doubling from 1,570 in 1980 to 3,135 in 1989 (CA Dept. of Justice, 2013). Following a surge of real estate construction of the 1980s, the subsequent housing market boom of the next two decades drew settlers to the region in the hopes of finding affordable housing and a low cost of living – many of whom moved to the Inland Empire to escape from the crime and high housing prices of Los Angeles (Woodhouse, 2010). Instead many found themselves unemployed, having been caught in the chase toward a "...fading mirage of ever-rising prosperity" – one that would continue to define the region's population growth and lack of job security for decades to come. Development projects that had long been in the works were abandoned, with officials declaring the region unfit due to "unprecedented deterioration and continued faltering of the Southern California development environment" (Mydans, 1993, 1).

In the early 1990s, to recover from the loss of military industries and a slump in national and international exports, the Inland Empire turned its industrial focus to local manufacturing. However, state regulations imposed when economic barriers were not a consideration now posed a serious problem. Air quality controls and costly social programs for the workforce, such as workers compensation, made growth for local industries and small businesses challenging (Mydans, 1993). Struggles in the local economy meant an opportunity for large-scale corporations to take advantage of cheap land and easily accessible air and railway transportation, opening the doors of the region's next big industry – logistics (Guilhem, 2015). The end of the Cold War and the turn of the century marked a new era of industry for the inland valley, one in which warehouses and semi trucks rule the landscape.

#### **v. 2000 – today: The Warehouse Empire**

*“A big part of the economy in Southern California is goods movement... And we pay the price with our health.”* – Democratic Assemblyman Bill Emerson, Redlands (Bonacich, 2009)

By the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Ontario was the primary hub for the blossoming logistics industry of Southern California. For some of the same reasons that 19<sup>th</sup> century settlers had been drawn to the city – like proximity to transportation – retail distribution industries with national and global trade investments sought warehouse space in Ontario. Though the landscape was a far cry from that which the Chaffeys had envisioned over a century ago, Ontario was proving itself to be a model of growth in unexpected ways, with many other Inland Empire cities following in its vast logistic footsteps.

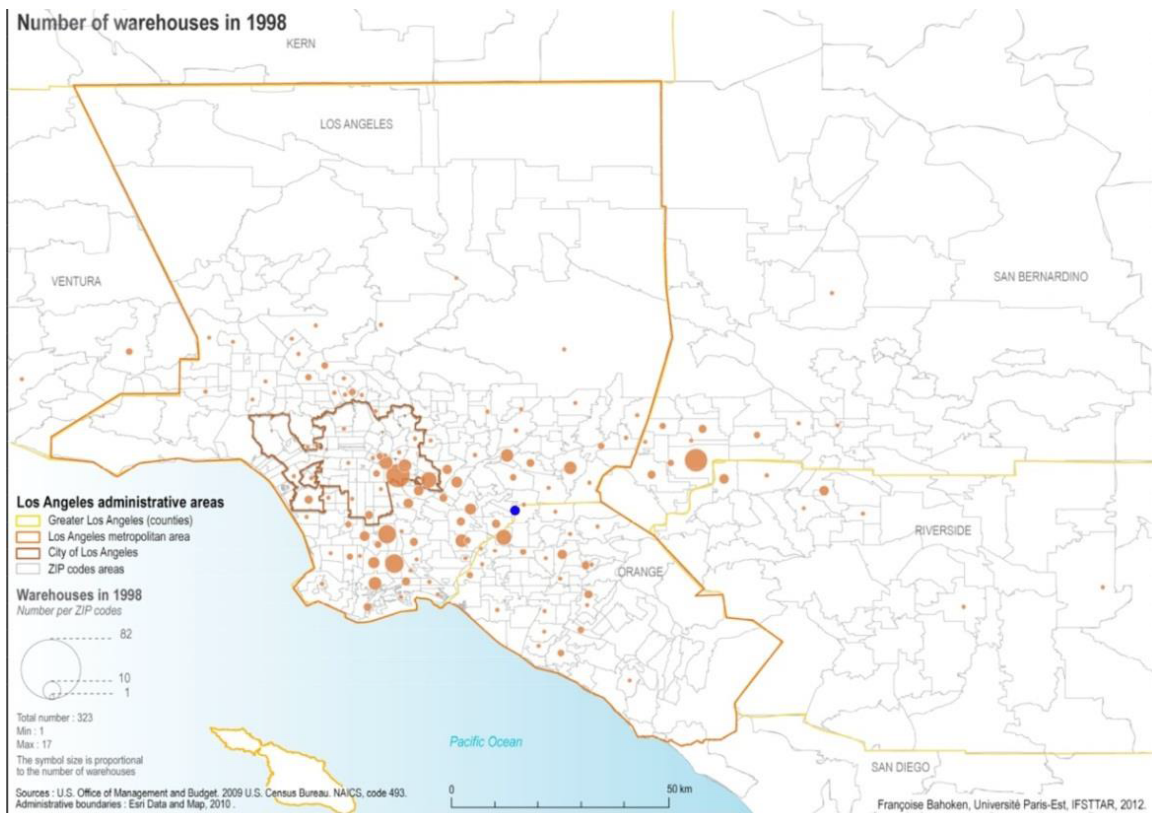
In the 1980s, the United States entered a new economic era, with a focus on global and national distribution of goods. By the mid-1990s, transnational corporations had ramped up offshore production, leading to a need for a fast and functional worldwide distribution system (Bonacich, 2005). This ultimately led to a market dependent on efficiency, in constant motion so as to meet the consumer demands of an increasingly globalized network. The ever-growing nature of this industry led to spatial deconcentration of these facilities from urban areas, causing a geographical shift in Southern California's landscape. This trend of distribution centers moving away from metropolitan areas to nearby suburban regions is known as 'logistics sprawl' (Deblanc and Ross, 2012). The economic incentives, however, are not without a sacrifice. Logistics facilities are a significant source of carbon-dioxide emissions and local atmospheric pollution, coming largely from the constant stream of trucks going in and out of warehousing, idling in the street for hours; and railroad yards and their diesel engines. These pollutants dramatically alter air quality, increasing rates of asthma and other respiratory ailments for residents of communities near Ontario (Deblanc, 2013). As the industry stretched itself from Los Angeles to San Bernardino County, those who had chosen to move to the Inland Empire for more affordable living – those with little money to begin with – found themselves trapped in an environment with a constant stream of railroad traffic, everyday more and more trucks lining the roads, and big-box warehouses popping up left and right.

Between the late 1980s and 2001, distribution industry developers constructed upwards of 120 million square feet of warehouse space near the Ontario International Airport, leaving the city short of open land (Howard, 2001). This demand ran over into

neighboring cities, with Riverside and San Bernardino counties following economic suit. With Ontario's success came the establishment of the Inland Empire as a distribution hub, and led to competition between areas within the region for development. Developers in San Bernardino County sought to transform thousands of acres of former Air Force bases, George Air Force Base in Victorville (now Southern California Logistics Airport) and Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino, into an endless stretch of gigantic distribution centers. The Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation has justified the explosion of distribution centers across the Inland Empire, stating that Los Angeles County itself lacked sufficient land for huge modern warehouses to be built (Howard, 2001). However, justification aside, the logistics industry's vast geographic sprawl is a prime example of environmental racism – the disproportionate exposure of already marginalized communities to the negative consequences of industrialization.

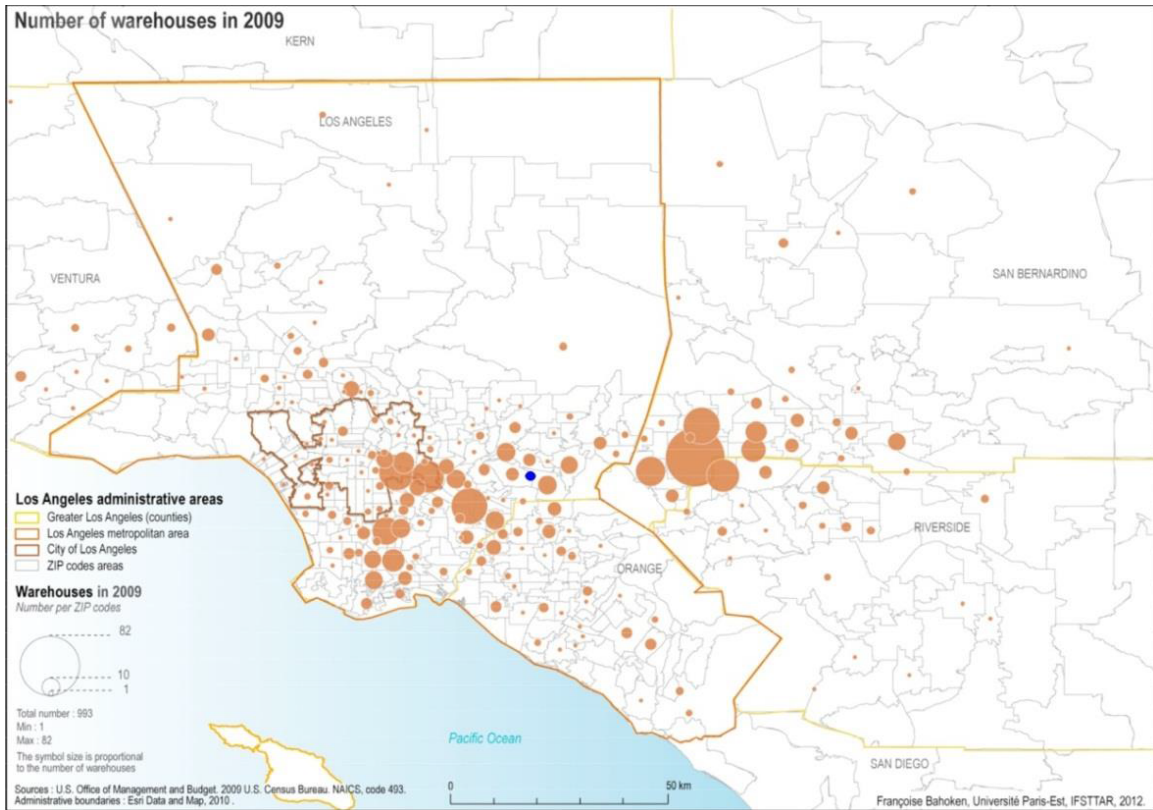
Following in the footsteps of their regional forefathers, Inland Empire politicians consciously pushed an aggressive capitalist pro-growth agenda to ensure the infiltration of logistics into the economy, without regard for lasting social consequences. As planned, affordable mortgages and low levels of unemployment drew millions inland, making Riverside and San Bernardino counties some of the most rapidly growing in California for the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Sarathy, 2013). The Inland Empire's population rapidly multiplied, with entirely new communities and miles-wide warehouses built astride every major roadway. Between 1990 and 2007 more than 73,000 jobs were added to the logistics sector (de Lara, 2011). And from 2000 to 2008, Riverside and San Bernardino counties together saw to the construction of 159 million square feet of brand new industrial warehousing (Matsuoka, Hricko, Gottleib, & de Lara, 2011).





**Figure 4.1. Los Angeles area warehousing, 1998**

Deblanc, Laetitia. “‘Logistics Sprawl:’ the Growth and Decentralization of Warehouses in the L.A. Area.” *5th International Urban Freight Conference, Long Beach, October 2013.*



**Figure 4.2. Los Angeles area warehousing, 2009**

Deblanc, Laetitia. “‘Logistics Sprawl:’ the Growth and Decentralization of Warehouses in the L.A. Area.” *5th International Urban Freight Conference, Long Beach, October 2013.*

The region’s economic boom came to a sudden halt with the mortgage crisis of 2008, turning the Inland Empire into the ‘foreclosure capital of America’ (Patterson, 2014). Where Riverside and San Bernardino once had been leading the nation in population growth, they were now sites of considerable misfortune. In Riverside County alone, unemployment was at 15.4% in August 2010, well above the 2011 national average of 9.1% (Sarathy, 2013). Riverside in particular was considered ‘ground zero’ for property foreclosures, with extremely high rates sustaining through from the crash of 2008 until 2011. From January 2007 to December of 2008 alone, the number of homes seized by banks and sold out of foreclosure climbed from 57 to 4,664 in San Bernardino

County (Momberger, 2012). With the mass migration inland for affordable housing, population growth rates climbed so high that job creation in the Inland Empire would have no chance of keeping up. With a shocking number of foreclosures, unemployment rates reaching an all time high, and the proliferation of low-wage jobs, often for previously white-collar skilled laborers, the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century marked the Inland Empire, yet again, entering a new economic era (Bonancich, 2009).

After 2011, commercial construction picked back up, and by early 2013 the Inland Empire was home to 1.65 billion square feet of active industrial property allotted to the logistic sector. Ontario has the single largest concentration of warehouses for intermodal container cargo, beating not only all of Southern California but also the vast majority of the nation (Jaffee, 2016). The Inland Empire is by far the most vital region in the United States for goods distribution and transportation, and is known as a huge supplier to Walmart, Amazon, and countless other big-box stores. The majority of goods imported from Asia enter the country through the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, and are then transported inland via truck or train to warehouses where they await distribution (de Lara, 2011). More than 45% of the nation's imports enter through these ports, and are then moving through the Inland Empire and on to their respective destinations (Patterson, 2014).

Inside these massive, sprawling facilities, thousands of low-wage workers toil through organizing, tracking, and moving goods, often extremely quickly for same-day delivery (Patterson, 2014). As of 2011, more than 100,000 people were employed by the inland logistics industry (de Lara, 2011). According to 2014 census data, 70.9% of Ontario residents were Hispanic, indicative of the prevalence of Latino workers in the

warehouse industry, who make up over half of the workforce (SCAG, 2015). With labor outsourcing by corporations a widespread method of cutting costs, subversively avoiding compensation and benefits, over half of all warehouse workers are employed by outside temp agencies with little to no union representation (Bonancich and Wilson, 2008).

Despite claims that the warehousing sector would provide blue-collar jobs to local Inland Empire residents and be of economic benefit for individuals, the reality today is one of institutional racism, unjust labor practices, and financial instability. Although managers of these distribution centers claim their businesses bring large numbers of good paying jobs, between \$40,000 and \$60,000 per year, unions that have stepped in to organize for and with warehouse workers say otherwise. In fact, the average wage of a warehouse employee is \$30,000 per year or less, with no benefits. Many individuals are employed by temp agencies, allowing companies to pay unacceptably low-wages, and or are given work less than 30 hours a week. Some companies even bring their own workers when moving inland to join the sprawl, deceptively altering the annual growth rate to appear as though more local residents have been hired. Some knowingly violate state law regarding overtime, rest-break provisions, and itemized wage statements (Patterson, 2015).

Warehouses and distribution centers are far from leisurely environments, with inventory control and same-day or rushed delivery demands often leading to injuries and overexertion for employees. The rapid level of efficiency inherent to this global retail supply chain is often pushed on employees by supervisors through the use of incentives (de Lara, 2013). For workers employed under temp agencies, worker's compensation for injury on the job is nonexistent – one of the primary motives for businesses to hire through these outside agencies. Investigations into these employment firms have shown

warehouse work to be arguably the least secure, worst paid, and most stressful temp job available (McAllister, 1998). In 2010, local grassroots organization Warehouse Workers for Justice conducted a study to get an accurate sense of what was happening behind the windowless walls. After sampling over 300 workers at 150 different warehouse and distribution centers, it was determined that 63% of workers were employed through temp agencies, the median hourly wage was \$9.00, and temps were paid on average \$3.48 less than directly hired employees. Thirty-seven percent of workers held two jobs, 25 percent relied on social welfare assistance programs for survival, four percent had health insurance, and 20 percent reported having been injured on the job (Warehouse Workers for Justice, 2010).

The great lengths these corporations go to cut costs makes it clear that capital is valued more highly than quality of life. To further reduce overheads, workers can be reassigned to different tasks throughout one workday, increasing the likelihood of injury from lifting heavy loads, walking long distances, or the effects of extreme weather conditions on exhausted bodies. In a true feat of inaccessibility, and despite state laws against itemized wages, workers are often paid by number of items handled as opposed to an hourly salary (Jaffee, 2016). Given the physical demands of work in this sector, health and safety are perhaps the most significant issues affecting daily lives of employees. A study from the Warehouse Worker Community Accountability Commission proved the salience of these concerns – of 101 current or past warehouse workers, 63 reported on the job injuries, 83 reported work-related maladies, and 84 reported witnessing a coworker’s injury (de Lara, 2011). Adding insult to injury, external environment conditions are also affected by the logistics sector, with the eastern part of the Inland Empire leading the

region in high levels of air pollution, that are also among the worst in the nation (Patterson, 2014).

The logistics sector and the housing industry make up the two most important economic engines for the inland region, yet both fail to protect families from economic insecurity. Though local politicians and businessmen have embraced the global distribution industry as a remedy for job shortages, workers are not provided adequate salaries to sustain their families. Only three percent of warehouse workers earn a basic family wage, determined by the California Budget Project as \$17.48 (Bonacich, 2009). Due to constraints placed on employees managed under temp agencies, it is unlikely to find possibilities for career growth for a large portion of the workforce in this sector. Low wages and limited advancement opportunities simultaneously recreate and perpetuate social and economic disparities. It is worth noting that the bulk of the area's blue-collar workforce is Latino, leaving an already marginalized community of people in a particularly vulnerable position. As of 2010, forty-one percent of Latino immigrants in the unskilled labor workforce were overqualified, holding a Bachelor's degree or higher (dornsife.usc.edu, 2010).

## **vi. Part One Conclusion**

The 'boom and bust' industries that sparked the region's growth were the precise reason for rampant job insecurity and the proliferation of unsafe work environments (de Lara, 2011). It is projected that by the year 2030, more than 1.3 million new jobs will have been created within the inland warehouse industry. With an ever-growing population, how can an industry that is already failing to provide for its workers handle

an increase without perpetuating or worsening conditions? Though unlikely, a simple solution would be to increase salaries and benefits for workers, which would cause a ripple effect throughout the vast ‘logistics sprawl’ region (Bonancich, 2009).

What takes place behind the doors of these colossal buildings goes largely unnoticed by the general public, but in recent years local grassroots organizations like Warehouse Workers United (WWU) have been stepping up to bring light to these rampant injustices, and improve the safety of the work environment. These organizations, like unions, amplify the voice of an essentially invisible labor force, and beg the question – “what is the human cost of this industry?” (de Lara, 2011). Challenging an industry that is literally global in size is not a simple task, yet WWU has had noteworthy success, such as obtaining initial grant funding from the U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety & Health Advisory Susan Harwood Grant program, to evaluate safety threats in the workplace, as well as provide safety trainings to employees (de Lara, 2011). Initiatives like this have led to the Inland Empire leading in warehouse conditions research (Bonancich and Wilson, 2008). Communities around the Inland Empire have risen and put up a fight against the negative effects of the immense distribution market in their backyards.

The ‘model colony,’ founded on fundamentally racist principles, set the region up for a future of unchecked growth and economic disparity. With structural inequality so engrained in the city’s history, tackling the consequential injustices demands a deep level of both intentionality and consciousness. At Huerta del Valle Garden, Ontario residents have the opportunity to find community amongst those with the shared lived experience of inequity. Through community-based organization and empowerment, the garden goes

far beyond its baseline function of providing healthy, affordable food, offering itself as a space of healing and individual growth. Huerta is a model of innovation for food justice in the region, undertaking the challenge of changing the social structure of Ontario from the bottom-up, in an effort to dismantle the institutional racism set out during development of the 'model colony.' Part two offers an in-depth analysis of development at the garden, outlining precisely how Huerta del Valle serves to change social capital and pushes Ontario toward a more equitable future for all.



## **Part Two: Healing at Huerta del Valle Community Garden**

### **i. Considering Community Gardens: A Brief Literature Review**

Community gardens across the United States play powerful roles in combatting systemic injustices that disproportionately affect marginalized communities with little access to healthy food or other resources. Through engagement with land and community, these intentional agricultural spaces provide communities facing extreme poverty with the opportunity to bypass structural hurdles to adequate quality of life, namely, food. Community gardens have been proven effective tools of combatting institutional racism and inequality, like that which defines the Inland Empire.

This brief literature review covers environmental racism in the Inland Empire (Pulido, 2010), the role of urban grassroots community gardens within the food justice movement (Levkoe, 2006; Shinew, 2004), and the community garden's role in attaining social and human capital, specifically for disproportionately marginalized communities (Glover, 2005). Given the educational nature of my research at Huerta (discussed extensively in the latter portion of this section), I will also briefly survey the literature on skills-based outdoor education pedagogy (Tarrant, 2014), touching on nutritional education (McAleese, 2007).

Environmental Justice scholar Laura Pulido defines environmental racism as the idea that nonwhites are disproportionately exposed to pollution. To understand this concept, she unpacks the multiple, subjective meanings of the word 'racism.' The most commonly presumed definition of racism refers to hostile, discrete acts of prejudice; however racism in truth operates dually, both on an interpersonal level and structurally in society. This manifests in what is referred to as 'institutional racism.' Aligned with the

principles of critical race theory, which implies understanding race as a social and legal construct, Pulido argues that “race is of a material and discursive formation” (Pulido, 2010). Industrialization, decentralization, and residential segregation are said to be important factors in the social manifestation of race as it is constructed. Pulido defines white racism as “those practices and ideologies, carried out by structures, institutions, and individuals, that reproduce racial inequality and systematically undermine the wellbeing of racially subordinated populations” (Pulido, 2010). This exists in countless instances of environmental racism, a concept first recognized in 1987 during a study by the United Church of Christ on waste sites in Los Angeles. Of fifty-seven waste sites examined by demographics, at least 50% were Latino (Pulido, 2010).

Scholar Charles Levkoe argues that the corporate food economy plays a part in guiding systemic political and social injustice. In his work *Learning Democracy Through Food Justice Movements*, Levkoe outlines the ideologies of the food justice movement – Consumers have rights which must be fought for rather than assumed; human and environmental health go hand in hand; there is no such thing as an average consumer; what matters is not just *what* is eaten but *how* it is produced and distributed (Levkoe, 2006). Food justice activism is a vehicle providing marginalized communities access to previously inaccessible or nonexistent resources. This education serves to teach skills and knowledge, and in doing so increase political efficacy and boost confidence. The food industry, driven by market forces and prioritizing profit, harms the individual. This is regardless of whether they are involved in production, distribution, or consumption. As Levkoe argues, this threatens the shape of democracy as a whole.

In a case study of African American and White gardeners in St. Louis, Missouri, researchers set out to determine whether urban community gardens are perceived and treated as cohesive spaces in which people of all races can integrate (Shinew, 2004). The creation of gardens in undesirable urban spaces creates neighborhood assets – both tangibly in the form of nutritious food and a healthy environment, and intangibly through community building and empowerment. In a common multi-racial space, this environment serves to build social capital between communities. Author Kimberly Shinew discusses ‘contact theory,’ the idea that increased and sustained positive contact between individuals of different racial groups will alter their negative assumptions and attitudes. This idea, however idealistic, fails to acknowledge the social underpinnings of institutional racism, present beneath any individualized act of discrimination or prejudice. In this vein, Jackson and Crane (1986) recommended abandoning research on contact theory, to switch to a framework operating more directly upon the realities of race differentiation in power and status. Here, in an effort to move past the subjective bounds of contact theory, critical race theory recognizes institutional racism as it plays out in society.

In their collaborative work on community garden literature, scholars Troy Glover, Diana Parry, and Kimberly Shinew define ‘social capital’ as “aggregate of actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of collectively-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (Glover, 2005). Similarly to Levkoe’s aforementioned argument,

their piece *Building Relationships, Accessing Resources: Mobilizing Social Capital in Community Garden Contexts* contends that pursuing food justice through leisure activities that generate social capital, such as community gardening, encourages greater democracy. Community gardens are social networks, encouraging resource sharing and collective action. Interaction and relationship building within a non-commercial space outside of the bounds of work and home produces a new form of social capital, ultimately becoming the garden's source of survival and self-sustainability.

Within the grassroots community garden subdivision of the food justice movement exists the potential to utilize education, as a means of bettering democracy and healing communities. As seen in the literature and within the content of my research project, education within a garden setting can take many different forms. With a focus on the fundamental aspect of the space – food –, gardens provide a stage upon which to teach nutritional education to both youth and adults. Where healthy produce is not readily available, knowing how to identify and access nourishing foods is an advantageous skill. A study researching the effects of garden-based nutrition education on adolescents' fruit and vegetable consumption found that youth who participated in garden-based educational activities, as opposed to a 12-week classroom based nutritional education program, were significantly more likely to take notice of the nutritional value of their food and increase their fruit and vegetable consumption (McAleese, 2007). The collective action required to sustain a community garden necessitates the opportunity for hands-on education and skill building amidst socialization.

Founded upon early twentieth-century scholar John Dewey's work on education and democracy, *Practice Makes Pedagogy* argues that sustainability education provides

students with the fundamental knowledge needed to become productive agents of change in a complex world (Tarrant, 2014). This type of education stresses the importance of conserving knowledge and values – prioritizing the environment, community building, and melding tradition and innovation. Following this framework, students should be able to think critically, understand systems, envision sustainable futures, and respond through applied learning. Participants in sustainability education are able to hold a holistic perspective, question taken-for-granted patterns, and empower change. John Dewey writes, “There is no such thing as genuine knowledge and fruitful understanding except as the offspring of doing” (Tarrant, 2014).

Ontario is a city founded upon principles of institutional racism, and today its community is subject to environmental injustice. In a spatial sense, there is a correlation between neighborhoods in close proximity to warehouses and roadways, and poor air quality. Economically, many individuals are living below the poverty level, making food a financial hardship. The market-driven food industry, complicit with the United States’ overarching capitalist ideals, puts the legitimacy of democracy at risk with its conscious imbalance between who produces, and who consumes. Due to the constraints of the global food economy, healthy food can be made largely inaccessible to certain communities, like many of those in the Inland Empire. When food accessibility is in question, it deals with many variables. Not only must one consider the cost of the produce itself, but also the method and cost of transportation to the supermarket, and time constraints of working-class schedules and demands. Community gardens like Huerta reshape the structure of society by creating their own social capital, leaving a lasting ripple effect on the greater economy.

## ii. Huerta del Valle's Roots

*Our mission is to cultivate an organization of community members to grow our own organic crops. Through growing our food we work toward sustainable community empowerment and health: creating meaningful work, building lasting skills and developing strong relationships within the city of Ontario.*

Ontario's suburban farm Huerta del Valle (HdV) serves a pressing need for fresh, healthy produce at an affordable price. This community garden has become a place of empowerment, fostering productive relationships and offering educational opportunities to all of its members, from children to older adults. As of late, a focus has been on expanding the garden both in terms of land and programming. In January 2016, Huerta fulfilled their \$18,000 fundraising goal to facilitate the construction of a community education center on site in northeast Ontario (Levine, 2016). A committee of community members, as well as undergraduate and graduate students studying a range of topics pertinent to environmental education, was formed to prepare curriculum for the upcoming facility.

Huerta planted its roots in Ontario six years ago in 2010. Community organizations such as Fresh Start and The Incredible Edible Community Garden, as well as students and staff at Pitzer College, saw a need for better food access in this region. Pitzer College alumna Morgan Bennett began developing this idea with local community members, which led to the creation of a garden at former Linda Vista Elementary School. The garden was initially funded through a \$67,000 grant from the Kaiser Permanente Community Benefit Grants program (Hochberg, 2016). This site, however, soon proved too restrictive to meet Huerta's goals –to best economically benefit the community, a larger area of land was needed. In early 2013, the garden moved to a larger, more

permanent location in northeast Ontario, adjacent to Bon View Park. This new location allows for easier access, as it is directly next to an already frequented park, soccer field, and community center. Grocery stores are overpriced and miles away, but the garden is just around the corner. This four-acre plot will be home to Huerta del Valle for at least ten years.

Limited food access in Ontario is the result of the city's overall poverty rates and poor nutritional options – a surplus of liquor stores, smoke shops, and convenience marts. The neighborhood surrounding the garden, where it stands today, struggles with high rates of poverty, obesity, and limited food access (Byler, 2016). To combat these symptoms of greater structural imbalance at a grassroots level, Huerta offers extremely inexpensive fresh, organic produce, and makes it easily accessible to the local community. It also provides a space for individual growth and empowerment. Perhaps the best example of this comes from Huerta's own executive director, Maria Teresa Alonso.

Alonso's involvement with Huerta began through a search for affordable organic produce, to aid her son with ADHD, and better the eating habits and overall health of her family. She was encouraged by her son's doctor to pursue healthier nutritional options to treat his ADHD, as opposed to putting him directly on medication. However, she found that the medication would be insured and affordable, while organic produce was prohibitively expensive. Unsatisfied, Alonso sought out a community garden and came across the beginnings of what is now Huerta del Valle. Before Alonso's involvement, the project had struggled to resonate with the community, as it was at the time backed primarily by Pitzer College, a wealthy liberal arts institution two towns away. Alonso stepped up and agreed to become the garden manager, which garnered much more

attention from locals and initiated the real movement of the garden (Hochberg, 2014). As the garden began to flourish at the Linda Vista site, so did her son's health. With the removal of junk food from his diet and the addition of physical activity in the garden notably improving his wellbeing, by recommendation of his doctor, her son was taken off his medication. She reported back that learning healthy eating habits made him calmer and more focused (Byler, 2016). Alonso now has a paid position as executive director of the nonprofit organization created to fund and support the Huerta community.

The structure of leadership at the garden speaks to its commitment to community empowerment and amplification of the counter narrative. Huerta del Valle currently has only three paid staff members – Executive Director Maria Teresa Alonso, Project Manager and former Pitzer Fellow Arthur Levine, and the current community-elected president of the 'hearing committee.' It is anticipated that within the next month – December 2016 – three more community members will be added to payroll, two farmers and a community-supported agriculture (CSA) farm share coordinator. The 'hearing committee,' comprised of community members, elects a president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary to lead weekly meetings with the community at large. Huerta would not exist without the leadership and involvement of community members, with an elected garden manager and certain individuals responsible for opening and closing the garden daily (Levine, 2016).

Despite being relatively young with organizational structure in ongoing development, the real power is already in the hands of the community. During weekly and monthly community meetings facilitated by Levine and Alonso, members of the garden voice opinions, concerns, or new ideas. This method of dialogue serves to



accomplish the goals Huerta embodies – developing lasting relationships, empowering both individuals and the community as a whole, and motivating a sense of investment and solidarity within Ontario. This process in itself speaks to Huerta’s profound success as an organization made for the community, by the community.

One unique characteristic of Huerta, as itself it follows a community garden model, is the depth of both inner and outer community involvement. Pitzer College has been a part of the garden since it’s foundation, and this engagement continues today in the form of the ‘Pitzer in Ontario’ program. This semester-long program consists of three classes that take place at Pitzer’s off-campus site, Casa Ontario, in the heart of downtown, as well as a research-based internship with a local Ontario-based nonprofit organization, one option of which is Huerta. For the garden, this provides an opportunity to have extra hands planting, harvesting, composting, or building new structures to boost farm production. Students work alongside members of the community, fostering a sense of cross-cultural understanding and teamwork. Many residents, especially those living in poverty, rarely if ever leave their neighborhood, growing up in perhaps a few square miles and never venturing further, for lack of accessible transportation or otherwise (Levine, 2016). Alonso sees this as a chance for her community to interact with new people and open doors for personal growth.

With a strong background in organizing for food justice and empowerment, program manager Arthur Levine serves as a vital part of Huerta’s backbone. A well-versed and experienced food justice advocate, Levine has particularly good insight into how to effectively combat injustice from the ground up. He emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the culture, politics, geography, and history tied to food production,

distribution, and the food itself. Having worked on similar projects in New York City and New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, he has a keen understanding of the relationship between racism, classism, and food access (Levine, 2016). If utilized with intention, food can serve as a political tool for community revitalization.

### **iii. Food Justice Innovation in the Inland Empire**

*“Education is a tool for raising consciousness... a process of growth, humanization, and self-actualization or realization.” – Arthur Levine*

Throughout history, Ontario as a colony, then a city, has been an innovative economic powerhouse, with irrigation, housing, and logistics bringing money to the region again and again. This constant forward-motion has meant many communities left in the dust, not receiving the benefits of capitalism in the area, with most of the money landing in the pockets of those at the helm of development. Huerta del Valle models its own form of innovation, but in this case it is for social betterment, not capital gain. The garden is Ontario’s ingenuity and progress reborn, working to unravel structural inequalities created at its foundation, from its original ‘model colony’ to today.

#### Dominant v. Counter Narrative

One key goal of the garden is to be a space defined and led by the counter narrative, that which has been silenced throughout history by the dominant class of individuals. To understand the rationale and praxis behind this separation, it is necessary to recognize the difference between ‘equality’ and ‘equity.’ Though an ‘equal’ society

may not explicitly discriminate against individuals based on skin color, gender, or otherwise, this structure allows for a distinct lack of transparency. There is a loophole in this type of thinking – we, individuals who exist as a part of a broad human community, do not live only in the present. We are products of the past, meaning for certain communities who have been historically marginalized and disadvantaged, saying society is ‘equal’ is nothing but a farce. If this so-called equality operates on top of an already existing unequal foundation, is it really equality at all?

The term used to highlight this discrepancy is ‘equity.’ In an equitable society, these historical disadvantages, which have created an uneven foundation for marginalized communities compared to communities within the master status categories, are taken into account. An equitable society makes space for history. In the United States, the master narrative is dominated by voices from these categories. Mainstream media primarily represents the white, male, American Dream narrative. This, in turn, silences the counter narrative, making it increasingly difficult for marginalized people of any identity to climb the ladder of the social hierarchy. Because we live within a society lacking transparency, preaching equality but knowing nothing of equity, we must work actively to amplify the counter narrative, or rather, to change the master narrative. This is precisely what the community at Huerta seeks to do, and has proven effective thus far. Some details of how this comes to fruition at the garden are offered in the next section.

### Other Inland Empire Community Gardens

Huerta is one of a handful of community gardens and urban farms in the Inland Empire. Though they are all unique and cater to specific community needs across the

region, they share a common goal of providing quality, affordable, accessible food, offering educational opportunities, and community building. Many of these gardens are still in the early stages of development, having been caught in the red tape of bureaucracy for years prior to breaking ground. For these young organizations, Huerta serves as a model of success in terms of community engagement and leadership, garden productivity, and growth.

The Incredible Edible Community Garden (IECG), based in Upland, is a conglomerate of community-based agricultural endeavors. Despite its name, this is not your typical garden, as it is comprised of fourteen different sites across the Inland Empire – nine community gardens, two aquaponics facilities, and three community fruit parks (Hughes, 2016). IECG provides different communities across the region with a network of resources specific to their needs. By “engag[ing] stakeholders from the bottom-up,” IECG seeks to strengthen communities, encourage health and wellbeing, and involve and empower lower-income people (“IECG About”). Despite sharing this common goal, the structure and praxis of this organization is quite different to the singular-site focus of Huerta.

Uncommon Good is a grassroots community organization in Claremont, addressing medical, educational, and nutritional needs of communities in the Inland Empire. With the recession in 2011, founder Nancy Mintie decided to prioritize urban farming in Uncommon Good’s programming, forming the Community Alliance for Urban Sustainable Agriculture (Hughes, 2016). Like most other gardens, its mission is to provide education and nutritional, organic food to the hungry. The idea began as one garden, but has branched into a network of dozens of plots at private residences and

churches across Claremont, Pomona, Ontario, and Covina. This web is now known as Fiddleneck Family Farms. The farmers, who are paid a living wage and receive benefits, are often fathers of children enrolled in the education program. Half of the produce grown sold to the community, and the other half given free of charge to families who could not otherwise afford to eat healthy (“Urban Agriculture, Uncommon Good”).

One garden that has struggled to get on its feet is the Root 66 Garden in Rancho Cucamonga. Initially founded in 2009, before Huerta’s roots were even planted at Linda Vista Elementary, the garden faced “several years of development hurdles,” and did not open as an active garden until 2016. It’s website proclaims, “The Root 66 Garden will provide a vital boost to the health and well being of our local citizens, whether they are in particular need or just an average family who would like to grow their own produce and instill in their children the value of gardening” (“The Root 66 Garden – Who We Are.”). Although San Bernardino’s extremely poor access to healthy food is mentioned, it appears as though this organization is founded upon a basis of equality, not equity. This is a fundamental difference between most gardens in the IE and Huerta – acknowledging structurally engrained inequality, as it exists to perpetuate an inequitable society, allows HdV to operate with a number one priority of community empowerment and leadership from the bottom-up.

These gardens in the Inland Empire do not make up an exhaustive list of those that exist, but serve as appropriate examples of the diversity of structure within each organization. Levine and Alonso believe there should be a garden on every street corner, so growth across the IE is inherently positive. However, there is a difference between a garden providing a ‘band-aid’ solution to the symptoms of inequality, and one in which

the harsh truth of social injustice is understood. The public health of people utilizing the U.S. food system or as it could be called, the nutritional industrial complex, is poor. Levine believes this epidemic can be addressed in its own small way through the community garden and farm. Huerta del Valle proves itself as a model of innovation for the region in its quality of community engagement and level of leadership, actually altering social capital, and by extension, social structure. With roots from liberal Pitzer College, Huerta has grown into a socially conscious organization with full transparency as to systemic injustices prevalent in the community. This provides a foundation upon which the garden can pursue truth, justice, and effective social change.

#### Community Success, Positive Impacts, & What's Next

When asked about the motivation behind the new educational efforts at Huerta, Levine explained that the platform upon which these programs are being developed allows for moves toward a more egalitarian society. Through whatever programs the community deems desirable, education will bring transparency to hidden truths, which in turn will motivate social change. The backbone of all curriculum will be aiding people's ability to analyze reality, encouraging critical thinking and questioning. While the community as a whole determines the topics of classes to develop, the committee, an organization in itself, should serve to accomplish the conceptual framework – securing resources for education and organizing teachers and learners.

Because of its undeniable benefit to the community, 62 families are currently Huerta members, effectively ensuring there are people present at the garden at all times. Though often community gardens start strong but don't maintain consistency, at Huerta

this is not the case. With active and productive family plots, and a functional farm that provides produce to Ontario and beyond, it is the people who continue to shape the community every day. In regards to functional accomplishments, the garden continues to compost over one million pounds of food waste, has been founded as a new non-profit, and just celebrated a three-year anniversary. Most importantly, beyond the 200 trees planted and formal recognition from city council members, Huerta del Valle provides a space for people to feel at home and at peace. The garden encourages both spiritual and physical growth for individuals involved, and creates strong relationships within the community.

Development of community gardens in the United States and Los Angeles has been taking place for years, but is a relatively young concept for Ontario. Herein is where Huerta del Valle's true innovation lies – spatiality. For the people in Ontario, considering contextually the hurdles faced by residents, the community nurtured at the garden is very meaningful. In the future, he anticipates the garden at its current site near Bon View Park will transform almost entirely into an educational facility and resource center, as well as a community food hub, offering organic produce at an affordable price and distributing it to places where healthy food is not easily accessible. He believes Huerta will begin growing food in new locations, while maintaining this site as both the education center and a hub of produce distribution. There are a select few other gardens across the U.S. pursuing models like this, making Huerta yet again a leader in innovation and a model for other gardens in the Inland Empire. Despite not being a brand new idea, Levine says “[the difference is] we’re bold enough to think we could actually do it” (Levine, 2016).

Levine sees growth and expansion in Huerta's future. Within the next three to five years he anticipates hiring a solid staff of community members, implementing collaborative educational programming open to all, and bringing in animals and bees. Teachers and learners will work together to meet the community's needs, offering programs in early literacy, technological literacy, culinary skills, mental and physical health, and nutrition. Essential in the expansion of Huerta's services is the goal that sustainable knowledge will be transferred to younger generations, attributing value to the cultural knowledge held by the community. Looking ahead, Levine explains that the overarching goal is to build a much broader and larger food system that serves local and low-income people. Alonso says the ultimate goal is to have the 160,000 people in the city of Ontario with healthy, organic food within their reach. When asked about the long-term vision for the site, Levine responded, "We're going to feed people who have no money the higher quality food that's out there... maybe if we talked to an economist they'd say 'well you're crazy;' and maybe we are, but we think we're going to do it anyway" (Levine, 2016).



## Conclusion

Through education, innovation, and engagement, Huerta del Valle serves as an invaluable resource to the city of Ontario, nurturing community reconstruction in a region where inequality has been structurally engrained throughout history. Though it is being done on such a small scale as to seem inconsequential in a broad socio-economic scope, urban gardens are revolutionary, and continue to make great strides for community wellbeing and social justice. In developing an alternative food system, Huerta challenges the system of neoliberal capitalism and redefines social capital, emphasizing education and community solidarity.

The final part of this project is a compilation of qualitative research observations from my internship. I have included this to provide explicit examples of community leadership development and community-needs priority assessments employed at Huerta. This portion details the work of the education curriculum development committee, highlighting the fundamental principle behind our collaboration – to meet the needs of the community, as decided by the community.

It is my hope that this thesis may serve as a reference for the creation of a decolonizing, social change-based framework upon which to develop any grassroots campaign. I would encourage those interested in food justice as a means of combatting structural inequality to follow Huerta del Valle's growth in the future, as the organization continues to expand its horizons and broaden the scope of success.

## **Appendix: Qualitative Community Research**

### **i. Background**

From January until May of 2016, I held an internship at Huerta through the Pitzer in Ontario program. My involvement at the garden came through two separate but interconnected angles. The bulk of my time was spent working on site at the garden, using participant observation to inform my outside research on educational curriculum development, giving faces and names to the community before embarking on generalized needs assessments. My job was to step in wherever help was needed, from planting, harvesting, working in the compost or travelling off-site to collect food waste, or even building the biggest structure currently on the farm, a greenhouse. By far the most meaningful aspect of my research came from working side-by-side community members, children and adults alike, who graciously offer their time and energy to build and sustain a profoundly impactful community. In this section I will expand upon my research and provide insight into the methods behind Huerta's success, the most significant aspect being community-based leadership.

My research and development efforts within the educational design committee were fueled by a goal to amplify the counter narrative, helping create a foundation upon which the community can continue to grow and serve others. Listening to the voices of the community led to an understanding of how to best be of assistance, from there aiming to tackle a macro challenge from a micro perspective – combatting structural inequality from the ground up. The entirety of my work was done according to community priorities.

The project-based research I conducted dealt directly with Huerta's new outdoor curriculum programming. The content of this research included surveying community

members as a part of an ongoing critical needs assessment, and subsequently unpacking the results to define where Huerta was lacking. Over the course of three months we met about ten times, both at Casa Ontario on Euclid Ave, and at the garden. The committee was comprised of Huerta staff members, Arthur Levine and Maria Alonso, as well as a number of students, including my research partner Pitzer College alumni Ethan Long, and myself. We were joined by three graduate students working toward their degrees in Education, with varying focuses on outdoor education, curriculum design, etc.

Feedback from the community needs assessment directed our focus on a variety of different programs to be implemented at Huerta – plant identification and benefits, nutrition and culinary skills, technological literacy, youth resource space, physical health development, and applied home gardening skills. During meetings we spent the time brainstorming solutions to posed problems. To document our progress, we used a particular education curriculum development framework, creating essential questions that would aid us in maintaining focus throughout the complex and nuanced work to come. Following the project-based research model of implementation – evaluation, diagnostics, prescription, and implementation – we would be active for the first three portions of design, ending our internship before implementation, anticipated in early to mid-2017.

### Ethical Considerations

Spending time working at Huerta was the most informative aspect of my research, thus allowing me to think analytically about our curriculum framework. From this, I could draw on the knowledge of personal experiences to best assess how to be most beneficial to the community. Having spent a significant amount of time listening to the

stories of twelve-year-old Alex, this posed a slightly ethical concern. My lack of Spanish language proficiency I was experiencing hindered my ability to connect with many community members, therefore much of my experience was informed by the time spent with children, particularly with Alex and his younger brother. Though told with a jovial and naïve tone, the content of his narrative was often intense and profound. Because he is a minor and these conversations were not conducted as formal interviews, I did not want to be exploiting the trust that grew over these few months. I have changed all names mentioned in this paper.

## **ii. Educational Development Committee**

### Community Priorities

The other side of my research at Huerta came through participation in the education development committee, made up of a group of individuals of diverse backgrounds. Our goal was to create programming for the future educational facility. Just before my internship with PIO began, Huerta raised \$18,000 through a Kickstarter campaign to construct an educational community center at the garden, replacing the thin tent and uneven platforms where community meetings are held. The committee was comprised of Ethan and myself as PIO students, an array of graduate students from local universities, and Huerta's two staff members.

As a means of amplifying the counter narrative, our first goal was to have the community determine our group focus. To hear what members would like to see happen with this new educational addition to Huerta, we conducted multiple community needs assessments over the course of four months.

## Community Needs Assessment 1

In the early stages of the program planning process, HDV's education committee created a community needs assessment that was introduced, discussed, and completed by members of Huerta's community. The goal of the needs assessment was to ascertain topics the community felt were most important to include in educational programs. Each individual proposed an area of focus, then these educational topics were prioritized using a voting system that allocated ten votes to each community member, after which individuals were free to place their votes on any of the topics. These votes could be distributed in any way—allocated evenly across ten topics, or stacked on a certain topic to give it higher priority.

This initial needs assessment was structured in a specific way—community members were asked to not simply list subjects they wished to learn about, but to provide a problem they face that could be solved through Huerta's educational programs. The product of the needs assessment was initially a long list, consisting of over a dozen problems. The education committee met afterwards to consolidate the list; problems that overlapped or were similar were combined together, refining the list down to ten problems to be addressed.

First Community Needs Assessment  
Plant to Plate Curriculum meeting  
Listing Community Needs Priorities  
2/20/16

1. Can't identify plants (28)
2. How to eat healthy without paying a lot (20)
3. Don't have computer classes (18)
4. Don't have a space for kids to learn about agriculture and have them see how to plant things (22)
5. There is no way for kids to be more involved and have more positive activities and events especially for them (25)
6. Don't have classes to understand how to cook what you grow (17)
7. Don't have space for yoga classes/ physical activity classes (8)
8. Kids are always on their phones (3)
9. Youth don't have opportunity to be outside and to develop skills (0)
10. Don't know how to grow food in our backyard (0)

This meeting served as an open forum providing a space for community members to offer ideas about what they felt was missing from Huerta, specifically for children. The ideas for youth programming were: positive after school activities, outdoor skills, planting practice/ nutritional value, cooking with plants from the garden, technology/ computers, yoga, how to grow plants at home, and recycling.

Using the problems as a guide, we addressed each of them, creating a preliminary list of programs. The programs that were developed in response to the problems presented by the community have been listed numerically, the number given to each program is the same as the number given to the community problem that it addresses. The first round of tentative programs are as follows: (1) a plant identification/knowledge program and or a speaker series featuring plants and their benefits; (2) a series of cooking classes and or a food quality and nutrition program; (3) a program devoted to the economics of healthy eating; (4) a program centered on the development of practical

computer skills; (5) designating a space for, and organizing yoga/exercise classes; (6) a home gardening resource development program; and (7) a farmer training program for youth.

At our next meeting we created a negative and positive inversion to help frame our ultimate goals for the program, in line with the community's needs.

*Negative Statement:*

Inland empire residents are struggling because they don't know: about plants and their benefits, obtaining culinary skills, stretching food dollars for good nutrition, technological literacy, physical health development, applied home gardening skills and there is also a lack of a space for youth to learn about agriculture and have positive outdoor afterschool activities; and there are not sufficient educational opportunities and resources in our region to currently to achieve this.

*Positive Inversion:*

Inland empire residents are living healthier higher quality lives because they know: about plants and their benefits, have culinary skills, know how to stretch food dollars to eat healthily, are technologically literate, have opportunities for physical health development, know how to apply home gardening skills and youth have a space to learn about agriculture and have positive outdoor afterschool activities; because these opportunities are available at Huerta Del Valle in their community education center.

## Community Needs Assessment 2

After digesting the results of the first assessment, we distributed a second needs assessment to community members at Huerta del Valle. In many ways it paralleled the first needs assessment, as its purpose was also to determine topics to include in HDV's educational curricula. However, it was not open ended – it took the educational topics brainstormed in the first assessment and revisited them, as opposed to creating a new list of subjects. Community members re-read the list of preliminary programs (derived from the first needs assessment) and rated their (1) level of interest in each program and (2) the likelihood they would attend each program on a scale of one to ten. On this scale, a rating of one indicated the least level of interest as well as the least likelihood of attending.

Additionally, there was space to provide feedback, whether for proposing a new program, posing questions, or expressing concerns. Upon completion, the secondary needs assessments were gathered by the education committee and organized into three distinct categories based on age: 0-20 years old, 20-40 years old, and 40-65 years old (there was no age cap, the oldest survey participant's age was sixty five). At this point, each assessment was analyzed; the ratings given to each program were recorded and added together, the resulting totals allowed us to determine which programs were deemed high priority, and alternatively, the programs that community members found least interesting.

In the 0-20 year old age group the programs with the lowest ratings were: “plants and their benefits speaker series”, “practical computer skills class”, and “50 million new farmers youth farmer training program.” Conversely, the most highly rated programs were: “healthy cooking classes and cooking on a budget”, “food quality and nutrition



program and nutrition on a budget”, and “yoga classes”. Within the 20-40 year old age group, “practical computer skills class” and “yoga classes” were given the least priority, while “healthy cooking classes and cooking on a budget”, “food quality and nutrition program and nutrition on a budget”, and “the art of gardening: art and creativity in the garden class” were highly prioritized. Lastly, the lowest priority program for the 40-65 year old age group was “practical computer skills class”; the most interest was attributed to “plant knowledge program”, “healthy cooking classes and cooking on a budget”, “food quality and nutrition program and nutrition on a budget”, and “garden beet camp: gardening exercise fitness program.”

Additionally, participants’ language preferences were recorded, as well as the degree to which they wanted technological skills incorporated into HDV’s programs. In the 0-20 year old age group: 4 participants preferred mono-lingual classes, while 8 preferred an option for both English and Spanish; 1 participant preferred technologically integrated classes, 7 participants preferred non-integrated classes, and 5 participants preferred both. Among 40-65 year old participants: 8 people preferred monolingual programs, 6 preferred an option for both English and Spanish, and 2 people indicated no preference. In regards to technological integration: 5 participants preferred technologically integrated programs, 7 preferred non-integrated classes, and 3 participants preferred the availability of both. The information gleaned from the secondary needs assessment will be used to further refine Huerta Del Valle’s educational programming, and ensure that their curricula are relevant and engaging for learners.

## Educational Development Committee: Program Design

The most important framework for our research falls under the term ‘bottom-up approach,’ meaning we followed exactly the community’s self-determined priorities and offered our curriculum design assistance only where was explicitly stated. Modeled after Huerta itself as a grassroots community organization, our intention was to give voice to the counter narrative. Understanding Ontario as a place where low-income, often undocumented residents often have disproportionately difficult access to obtaining resources such as education, medicine, transportation, food, or otherwise, it is our job to use whatever is in our power to combat this structural inequality. We held the knowledge of the connected cycle of structural systems, forming socially accepted and government-sanctioned institutions, in line with the privileges assigned to those within master status categories. Applying this to the context of Ontario within the Inland Empire, we used the community’s feedback to create a vision for the curriculum. The following is a compilation of our progress.

### Educational Vision, Mission, Strategy, and Tactics

#### Vision

- Huerta Del Valle (HDV) envisions a vibrant empowered community of active learners of all ages who collaborate and conspire in design and implementation of proactive and innovative solutions to the challenges facing them at the individual, local and global levels.

#### Mission

- HDV sees education as a vital aspect of understanding our role as human participants in a dynamic and interconnected world. HDV is committed to

growing the consciousness of individuals in relation to our communities, our environment and ourselves.

- HDV sees its mission as empowering individuals by providing spaces to develop the tools and skills to become active agents of change in their communities.

### Strategy

- Our strategy is to engage children, youth, and adults in analyzing critical issues and involve them in active problem solving. HDV plans to accomplish this by facilitating classes, internships, trainings, field trips, and workshops.
- Huerta's educational programs will be constructed in direct collaboration with community members, giving them the ability to prioritize the issues that they are facing as a collective. These issues will inform the foundation of the curriculum, which we will implement for our youth groups. HDV's curriculum will empower young people with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to critically and actively engage in their food system, their community, and local politics.
- Self-advocated community needs will strategically inform all stages of the design process for our educational programs. For educational programs, the design will be tailored to the amelioration of issues prioritized by the community. Designs will be evaluated and adapted in response to feedback from the community. Huerta del Valle will ensure that its educational space undergoes a process of continuous improvement, which makes direct community feedback and collaboration an utmost necessity. Huerta's educational programming and its effects will be continually evaluated to measure progress, develop skills and refine practices.
- Progress and success of the educational initiatives will be evaluated against the intended results and other changes identified by the participants.
- Huerta del Valle stresses the importance of learning as a lifelong activity. Keeping this in mind, HDV's workshops will ensure that individuals are aware of the range of learning opportunities offered, and are able to access relevant options regardless of their age.

## Intro to HdV Macro Curricular Framework

As we begin to think about program design it is helpful for us to first consider the beautiful community we serve. Often people that are drawn to the garden have an inherent understanding of the principles of urban farming and the food system; let us ignite and empower all members of the community especially:

- Those that are hesitant to participate
- Those with less experience with the concepts that we are discussing and implementing
- Those with less ability to participate for a multitude of reasons
- Those who have varied interests and styles of learning and moving in the world and in educational spaces.

And let us develop and mentor:

- Those that have a wealth of skills and abilities but have not become excited to apply their knowledge to advocate for their community's right to wellness and self-determination.

Questions to meditate as we plan how to spark change through developing understanding...

- How do we (HDV) organize ourselves and our programs so that it more likely, by our conscientious design, that participants of our programs really understand what they are asked to consider and can apply their understanding to improve their lives, community, and world?
- What are the big systemic ideas, themes or topics we want to invite our community to consider? How do these ideas help our community to connect and understand their lived experiences?

If we would like to unpack the concept of inequities in the food system then we must design our curriculum to help our participants to learn and reflect on new knowledge or

implicit understanding of the food system (lack or access to affordable organics). We will take it a step further and show participants that this knowledge empowers, and combined with their skills and tools, they can create the change that they wish to see for themselves and their communities (advocating for policy changes, creating a home garden, starting a backyard compost, petitioning for reformed school lunches, etc.).

#### Educational Themes:

1. Health and Wellness,
2. Urban Agriculture and Food Systems,
3. Career Skills and Readiness,
4. Bilingual Education,
5. Technological Literacy,
6. Internships, Trainings,
7. Plant Identification & Medicinal Uses,
8. Affordable and Healthy Food Habits,
9. Garden Planning,
10. Planting & Harvesting for Youth, and
11. Navigating Resources in the Inland Empire

#### Learning Outcomes:

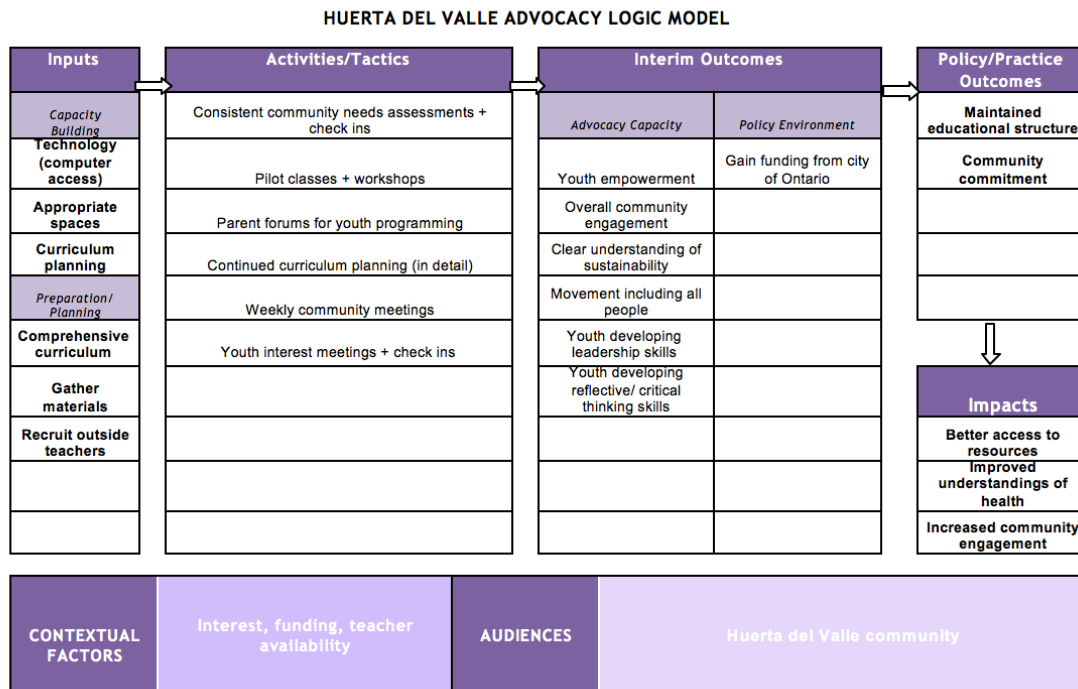
- Literacy
- Resourcefulness
- Sustainable living
- Empowerment
- Self Care
- Group Collaborative thinking
- Community building
- Systems thinking

- Bilingual skill building
- Asset based thinking: Understanding community resources
- Mindfulness
- Cultural Heritage
- Political Literacy

<p>HDV Goals for Educational Programs</p> <p>Across programs what are the understandings, questions, <u>habits</u> of mind, skills and tasks that we will focus on?</p> <p>Possible Essential Questions that we are looking towards answering in and with our educational programs. These questions should set the frame the educational programs offered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What is the process to creating social change? What is community? How do different conceptions of society and community influence the society, the city, and communities we live in? How is my community and myself connected to larger contexts?</i></li> <li>• <i>What makes a community a healthy place to be? What is health? What is wellbeing? Are they related?</i></li> <li>• <i>What is community and individual empowerment? What do we need to become empowered?</i></li> <li>• <i>In what way do I influence society? In what ways has society influenced me?</i></li> <li>• <i>How do we "read" the environment we live it? Can the current conditions be explained? What are the critiques? How can the environment be improved?</i></li> <li>• <i>What is the cause and the effect of the level of our engagement? What role do I play in advocating for the rights of my self and my community?</i></li> </ul>					
<p>Do we wish to define our Standards for Community Engagement or Education?</p> <p>Some helpful food for thought:</p> <p>See <a href="#">The National Standards for Community Engagement</a>. Do we want to talk about how we will create equitable assess to all in the community. Or check out competencies for community learning and development <a href="http://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/?page_id=8">http://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/?page_id=8</a></p>					
Educational Programs:					
Internships:	Youth Groups:	Trainings	Guest Speakers	Workshops	Field Trips:
Ongoing	June-Aug	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
Pitzer Students, High school Students	Ages 0-5, 6-10, 11-14, 15-18, 18+	All Ages	All Ages	All Ages	All Ages

See [The National Standards for Community Engagement](#); Competencies for community learning and development [http://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/?page\\_id=8](http://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/?page_id=8)

**Figure 5.** Huerta del Valle Goals for Educational Programs



**Figure 6.** Huerta del Valle Advocacy Logic Model

### iii. Informative Participant Observation

#### Children

One of my first impressions at Huerta was how deeply the community cares for the children and puts their best interest first, as became clear during community meetings discussing goals of education programming or fundraising. Because my lack of knowledge limited communication with most of the adult community members at the garden, I forged my most meaningful and telling relationships with the bilingual children. My participant observation research as a whole was highly informed by these friendships. These close connections also added perspective to the work we were doing within the education development committee. Two brothers, Alex and Jose, elementary school and

toddler age respectively, had a particularly strong influence on my research and overall experience.

Alex is extroverted and very talkative, so soon after befriending him, I found myself listening to his stories and asking questions. Immediately as I recognized what was happening, research ethics came to mind. While simultaneously acknowledging my role as a qualitative community researcher, I authentically befriended Alex. As a young child with little to no filter, I suddenly found an accessible lived experience testimony, something I was struggling to find given my English-speaker isolation. These profoundly honest conversations felt heavy. Two situations in particular propelled me in a very specific direction with both qualitative research conclusions and curriculum development.

One morning in early February, Ethan and I arrived an hour early to find no one around but Alex. We made small talk, going from weather to school to Facebook, landing somehow on the topic of immigration documentation. He casually mentioned that he thought a particular community member whom we had gotten to know was undocumented, meaning she could never return home to Mexico. Though perhaps a normal assumption, this thought had not yet crossed my mind. This expanded my focus from only the disproportionate marginalization faced in Ontario, to another layer of understanding the layers making up lived experience. From this conversation we saw the harsh reality that much of the community remains stuck in this situation.

That same day we started a new project planting garlic around baby fig and pomegranate trees. The brothers followed us, all the while Alex engaging with Levine about possibilities for his future. I was surprised when he began to ask very specific questions about how to write a petition to the city to build a skate park in Ontario. Levine



provided truthful answers, offering his assistance if Alex really wanted to see this through. Moments later, as we were walking past the large farm equipment, he asked if he could attend Pitzer College to learn how to build tractors. Levine informed him that, though Pitzer does not offer this kind of education, when the time came for him to explore that as a real option, he would be there to help guide him through the process. This moment illuminated just how profound an impact Huerta can have on children facing institutional barriers, innocently unbeknownst to them. This newfound understanding was the first step in discovering how to frame the youth education programming in the most effective way, following the community set goals.

Alex shared his insight again in late March, at which point we had cultivated a true friendship built on shared enjoyment of our activities, as well as my personal investment and genuine caring for his wellbeing. As I was tackling the strenuous task of removing overgrown fava beans with deep roots, he was staying close by. Frustration arose, as I did not want to accidentally hurt him, given the force and sharp tools I was using. This same worry had come up in the past, during construction of the greenhouse where we were carrying bulky, heavy metal panels and using dangerous tools. Because my head was in this present worried state, I was taken by surprise when Alex casually began talking about his older brother, Frank, who is in his early twenties and currently serving time in prison.

According to Alex, Frank was to be released around September 2016. As this was not the main topic of our interaction, but rather information shared in passing, he went on to share his excitement for an upcoming robotics tournament he would be attending at Cal Poly Pomona in May. Our conversation again took an interesting turn when he

decided to share that he was grounded for stabbing his little brother Jose with a pushpin. Though this behavior is perhaps normal for young brothers, I was left wondering what influences led him to that particular impulse. Realizing I knew nothing of his home life but this new information about Frank, and that he was almost always at the garden when we were there, I hesitate to make uninformed conclusions based on limited observations. However, given his older brother's incarceration, I imagine these impulses are not merely childish and perhaps related to his home or school environment.

Due to language limitations and a lack of initiative on my part as a researcher, I never connected with their parents to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their family experience. In the context of linguistic isolation, this absence highlighted another observation from the garden – bilingual children of monolingual adults hold an extra burden of translation, both at Huerta del Valle and outside the garden. Where the children need a space of empowerment and support for this unavoidable responsibility, there exists both a need and community driven desire for English as a Second Language (ESL) education at the garden.

#### **iv. Concluding Remarks**

As of November 2016, there have been certain developments within Huerta's relatively broad range of programming. In 2013, a \$10,000 Napier fund grant was awarded to Ontario resident and New Resource Student at Pitzer College in order to start an educational program geared toward children, *Abejas*. The goal was to provide early literacy support to children who otherwise have linguistic difficulty, often living in monolingual Spanish speaking households and attending English only schools. With lots

of children already present at the garden, it was decided this was a good pool of students to serve. Unfortunately the grant money ran out after just one year, and the volunteer-run program became more activity-based than learning-based (Levine, 2016). Given that the garden is only three years old, with five years being recognized as the threshold for recognition, there is room to grow and expand on ideas such as this – precisely the drive for the education committee.

The work completed by the education committee is anticipated to be submitted to foundations to hopefully gain funding, and ideally create a new, paid council to develop the minutia of curriculum. By instating organizational membership, where people have the option to become members and take classes for free, and have non-members pay, Huerta could create a sustainable income stream for teachers and coordinators of the diverse array of educational opportunities aimed to offer.

It is my hope that by providing both theory and praxis, this will illuminate the framework and thought-processes underlying the garden's functions, and responsible for Huerta's success. Huerta del Valle offers not only nutritional education, but food justice education for youth and elders alike. Many other gardens in the Inland Empire focus purely on health education, but Huerta's strong environmental justice roots allow for a deeper education. By changing the food system locally in Ontario, and regionally as time progresses and the garden continues to grow, Huerta has become a symbol of a new way of doing food, community, and resource building.

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