

Beneath I-280: Excavating a Neighborhood Lost to San José Freeways

Leila Ullmann
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A composite photo created to show a street-level, mid-block perspective of homes that were demolished. L to R: 451, 449, and 441 Delmas Ave. Original photos from Caltrans Right of Way Assessments 1960 - 1970 archival collection, San José Public Library.

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Beneath I-280: Excavating a Neighborhood Lost to San José Freeways

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16. Abstract Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, thousands of people in San José, California were displaced from their homes as the state used eminent domain to purchase land and uproot neighborhoods for the construction of Interstate freeways. This report presents a multifaceted research and public knowledge effort that uncovers some of the communities buried beneath these freeways, in the area where I-280 and CA-87 meet today near downtown San José. The project builds primarily from previously unprocessed California Department of Transportation (CalTrans) archival documents, which this project studies for the first time. The records are rich in detail about valuation and sale data and contain some of the only photographs of these homes in one of the oldest neighborhoods in San José, created when assessing properties that the state intended to purchase for demolition. Yet the absence of human context, life, and value in the records speaks volumes as well. In addition to investigating and analyzing the files, it soon became clear that perhaps the most valuable contribution would be to daylight their contents in an accessible, public-facing manner. By indexing the records, analyzing the photographs, and georeferencing the content into interactive maps, this project worked to combine the archival materials with historic and contemporary maps, news accounts, and city and community records into public resources. A Story Map hosted by San José State University's Institute for Metropolitan Studies allows anyone to explore the historical records and the human impact of the freeway development. Also produced were a publicly accessible database of the archival data, a standalone interactive map, and three new GIS spatial data layers. The goal is to foster further research, storytelling, and organizing about displacement.			
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Many additional thanks are due for the incredible amount of work done mapping the neighborhoods studied here and building the resulting Story Map: Ryan Smith created the parcel outlines for the precise study area during his own time as a graduate student at SJSU before this project was even dreamed of; SJSU graduate students Maxwell Friedman, Bennett Williamson, and Matthew Schroeder converted historical maps and archival materials into interactive tools and a beautiful public resource; and SJSU professor Rick Kos provided support and advice on the GIS work. Thanks also to Hilary Nixon, Ashleigh Baker, Raji Rajesh, and the Mineta Transportation Institute for their generous support of this project.

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Executive Summary

This report presents the process and products of an archival research, mapping, and public knowledge effort at San José State University's Institute for Metropolitan Studies, funded by the Mineta Transportation Institute. The project aimed to uncover the story of the people and communities that were displaced by the construction of the I-280 / CA-87 Interchange in San José, California, through an analysis of previously un-processed California Department of Transportation (CalTrans) records from the 1960s that document the freeway planning and eminent domain process during this era. Upon recognizing the public value of these materials, this project worked to not only index and analyze the archival records but combine them with other materials and geospatial data analysis in the production of public research resources, most notably an online "Story Map."

As was the case in cities across the United States following the passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1956, thousands of people in San José lost their homes and communities as land was purchased to make way for the urban expansion of the interstate freeway system. Among the displaced were homeowners and tenants, many of them immigrants and people of color who worked in the canneries, orchards, and vegetable fields of the so-called Valley of Heart's Delight. The project described in this report focuses on telling the story of some of these communities lost to freeway construction: the neighborhoods under and around where the I-280 and CA-87 freeways now meet near Downtown San José, which were among the oldest neighborhoods in the city.

The project began as an investigation into an unprocessed archival collection: *Caltrans Right of Way Assessments 1960–1970*, held by the San José Public Library in the California Room at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library (King Library). The collection includes appraisal and sale documents, maps, and even photographs that the CalTrans Right of Way division created when assessing the properties that the State of California intended to purchase for demolition in order to build new freeways. This project is the first to study these records.

The first substantive section of this report, Section II, provides the context for this research and the story it aims to tell. It reviews the history of rapid growth in San José after World War II, especially the era of influential City Manager A.P. "Dutch" Hamann, who brought proposals for central San José freeways to state officials. This section also introduces the specific focus area for the study, the neighborhoods directly impacted by the construction of the I-280 / CA-87 interchange: Delmas Park, Gardner, and Washington-Guadalupe. All are historic, immigrant-rich communities near Downtown San José.

Section III of the report describes the *Caltrans Right of Way Assessments 1960–1970* archival collection in detail and the researchers' approach to studying it. The records are rich in detail about property condition, valuation, and sale data and contain some of the only photographs of the homes and neighborhoods that were eventually demolished or moved. At the same time, the

absence of human context or any valuation of place and community in the records speaks volumes as well. To help tell the story, historic maps, contemporaneous news accounts, city and community records, other studies, and conversations with former residents were also consulted. It soon became clear to the researchers that the most valuable contribution could be to daylight their contents in an accessible, public-facing manner. Property details from the records were indexed, the photos were digitized, and all of the information was spatially referenced for mapping.

In Section IV, the report highlights some of the insights gained from the archives and additional research about the property acquisition process and the communities that were lost. In particular, it considers the unexpected value of the impersonal photographs, taken of each property by the assessors, for revealing much about everyday life in these places. The recognition that the story of this lost community and the value of the archival materials themselves demand a more public airing inspired the decision to produce an interactive Story Map and other resources to make the material more accessible.

After indexing the records, analyzing the photographs, and georeferencing all this content into maps, the researchers worked to combine the archival materials with information gleaned from other materials into several public-facing knowledge resources. Section V describes these tools.

Hosted on the website of San José State University's Institute for Metropolitan Studies, the Story Map allows anyone to explore the historical records and the human and environmental impact of the freeway's development. It is available here:
<https://www.sjsu.edu/metropolitanstudies/initiatives/underneath-the-freeway/>.

A standalone interactive map is also available directly at:
<https://sjsugis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/media/index.html?appid=e8e7de7a764b441391cbada1349a50d5>.

A new publicly accessible database was also produced, which indexes each of the properties in the study area and the information available for each:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18OAFfjFWXdrvkDk8La_gcJqN2uBowOAGoJLx6k62F8/edit?usp=sharing.

Finally, the map is accompanied by three new geographic information system spatial data layers created by SJSU graduate research assistants: a raster tile layer of georeferenced aerial photographs from 1960, a raster tile layer of georeferenced Sanborn insurance maps from 1950, and a feature layer that combines the property information and photos for each parcel in the study area with the traced outlines of each structure. These files are likewise now available in ArcGIS Online for future users.

By bringing these archival materials to public light, the project not only uncovers this previously buried part of San José's urban history, but also hopes to begin the process of excavating and reconstructing the neighborhoods buried beneath the freeway. We hope that by transforming these

archives into more publicly accessible resources, we can preserve and open up this history while also sparking conversations that might reach the displaced and their relatives. We also hope to demonstrate the unquantifiable human cost of major infrastructure projects like this one and how compensating for assessed property values falls far short of recognizing the damage caused by destroying a neighborhood. Accounting for the past is critical when designing and planning the urban environments of the future.

1. Introduction

Freeway 280

Lorna Dee Cervantes

*Las casitas near the gray cannery,
nestled amid wild abrazos of climbing roses
and man-high red geraniums
are gone now. The freeway conceals it
all beneath a raised scar.*

*But under the fake windsounds of the open lanes,
in the abandoned lots below, new grasses sprout,
wild mustard remembers, old gardens
come back stronger than they were,
trees have been left standing in their yards.
Albaricoqueros, cerezos, nogales . . .
Viejitas come here with paper bags to gather greens.
Espinaca, verdolagas, yerbabuena . . .*

*I scramble over the wire fence
that would have kept me out.
Once, I wanted out, wanted the rigid lanes
to take me to a place without sun,
without the smell of tomatoes burning
on swing shift in the greasy summer air.*

*Maybe it's here
en los campos extraños de esta ciudad
where I'll find it, that part of me
mown under
like a corpse
or a loose seed.*

“Freeway 280” from *Emplumada* by Lorna Dee Cervantes, © 1981. All rights are controlled by the University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA 15260.

For those who drive regularly atop Interstate 280, CA-87, and any of the other major urban freeways of California, it can be hard to imagine a time when these infrastructural behemoths did not exist. Our environments are shaped by the lengths and curves of these highways, their onramps and offramps, the sound walls, and underpasses.

Concrete feigns permanence. It limits imagination of what else could be there or what might have been there before. And these bloated roads have not always been here. In the 1960s and early 1970s, some of the oldest neighborhoods in San José were demolished to make room for them. These were neighborhoods of working immigrant families who benefitted from living within walking distance of the canneries, factories, and orchards where many of them made their living—enough, in many cases, to purchase the homes they lived in. These were thriving communities:

homes, markets, small businesses, factories, churches, schools. All were demolished, and the neighborhood spanning from First Street on the east to Bird Avenue on the west was split into four quadrants, cutting neighbors off from one another.

This study excavates these neighborhoods, which now exist only in memory. Drawing upon previously unprocessed California Department of Transportation (CalTrans) archival documents and additional data, we worked to uncover, index, map, and tell the stories of these places buried beneath the I-280 / CA-87 interchange. In particular, the project transforms the archival materials—which include some of the only photographs of the individual properties destroyed by the freeway development—into a more publicly accessible community resource in the form of an interactive online “Story Map.” Hosted on the website of San José State University’s Institute for Metropolitan Studies, the Story Map allows anyone to explore the historical records and the human and environmental impact of the freeway’s development. In these ways, the project also hopes to catalyze further interest in and storytelling about displacement and other impacts of major public works on low-income communities of color in San José and beyond.

In what follows, we begin with a brief background on urban freeway construction in the United States and the historical geography of the central San José neighborhoods of interest to this report. This is followed by a description of this study’s research methods, the data collected, and a discussion of the findings and conclusions of the archival research. A third section describes the creation of the public resource—an interactive online map and Story Map webpage—to daylight the archival records and tell the story of the neighborhood. We conclude with some summary observations and recommendations for further research on the impacts of freeways on our urban neighborhoods.

2. Area, History, and Context

2.1 Growth and Expansion

The City of San José experienced a dramatic increase in population and area between 1950 and 2020. Despite being the oldest civilian town in Spanish-colonized Alta California, as well as the site of the State of California’s first capitol after the United States took over colonial rule from Mexico, San José remained a relatively small agricultural town for its first 150 years of existence. Over the decades of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, San José became an agricultural hub; dubbed “the Valley of Heart’s Delight,” its boosters sought to attract immigrants from around the world. Many longtime San José residents still recall where the apricot orchards were, where the onions were grown, where the spinach was canned. But in the second half of the twentieth century, the human and environmental landscape of San José was rapidly transformed with the rise of suburban sprawl and the birth of the high-tech industry. Farmland turned into shopping malls, canneries into apartments, wetlands into office parks and parking lots.

Just between 1950 and 1960, the population of San José more than doubled from around 95,000 residents to over 200,000. In another ten years, it exploded again by 125% to nearly 460,000 people. In 2020 (prior to pandemic-related population decline), the population was just over 1 million, making San José the 10th most populous city in the United States. Part of this growth had to do with geographical expansion: at one time a 17 square mile city, San José annexed surrounding towns and unincorporated communities and ballooned to 120 square miles by 1970, ultimately growing to more than 180 square miles.

This growth was led in large part by city manager A.P. “Dutch” Hamann, who held the position from 1950–1969. Hamann believed that San José was “destined to become one of the largest metropolitan areas in the State of California,” and his vision was one of unfettered growth.¹ To achieve this, he launched a major annexation campaign, absorbing surrounding areas and initiating massive development projects such as the international airport, sprawling subdivisions, and shopping malls. Not surprisingly, these efforts catered to, and had steadfast support from, local political leaders, business elites, and development interests, and Hamann pushed bond measures to fund these projects with their support.²

As the city’s size and population increased, social services such as schools and public transportation were placed on the backburner. Schools became increasingly overcrowded and public transit options severely limited.³ And yet the relentless focus on growth went alongside efforts to eliminate so-called “blight”—a term commonly used to refer to places where low-income people of color reside⁴—and used urban renewal schemes as a means to replace these areas with new development projects. With the passage of the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act, financing for a dramatic expansion of the interstate freeway system made this an appealing mechanism for the redevelopment or removal of undesirable areas; San José officials jumped at the opportunity, framing freeway construction as a necessary solution to the challenges of the expanding urban

population. A city planner argued at the time that “weapons used to combat decay downtown include . . . better access made possible by developments such as the freeway network and the urban renewal program.”⁵

2.2 Siting the Freeway

Hamann himself proposed and championed freeway expansion. In *Guadalupe Freeway: Proposal for a State Highway* (1961), Hamann argued to the California Highway Commission for the “urgent need for adequate freeways, expressways and major thoroughfares” in San José, framing the infrastructure as essential for the growing city. His proposal estimated that the 9.3-mile Guadalupe Parkway would cost \$21,250,000, of which \$8,725,000 was for right-of-way acquisition of homes (eminent domain) and \$12,525,000 for construction, with the amount covered in large part by bond measures passed by voters. In this proposal, Hamann offered a single route for the freeway’s construction; through the planning process, no alternative routes were considered for where to place the freeway.⁶

San José’s 1958 Master Plan mapped ostensibly blighted areas of the city to be slated for urban renewal. As they did throughout the United States, these efforts disproportionately—and often intentionally—targeted low-income communities of color. The areas chosen reflected racial segregation rooted in American and San José history. As in other cities across the nation, the Federal Home Owners’ Loan Corporation residential security maps had in 1937 categorized San José’s poor communities of color as the highest risk for mortgage lending (see Figure 1); red ink covers the parts of central San José where canneries were concentrated and where many cannery workers, mainly Italian, Portuguese, and Mexican immigrants, resided. In the CalTrans Right of Way Assessments, described in detail below, an assessor illustrated the not-so-subtle intention to uproot one community and replace it with another: “These will be relatively high cost rental units with the intent of attracting a new element to reside in the downtown community.”⁷ The “blighted” redlined areas were also prime targets for freeway construction.

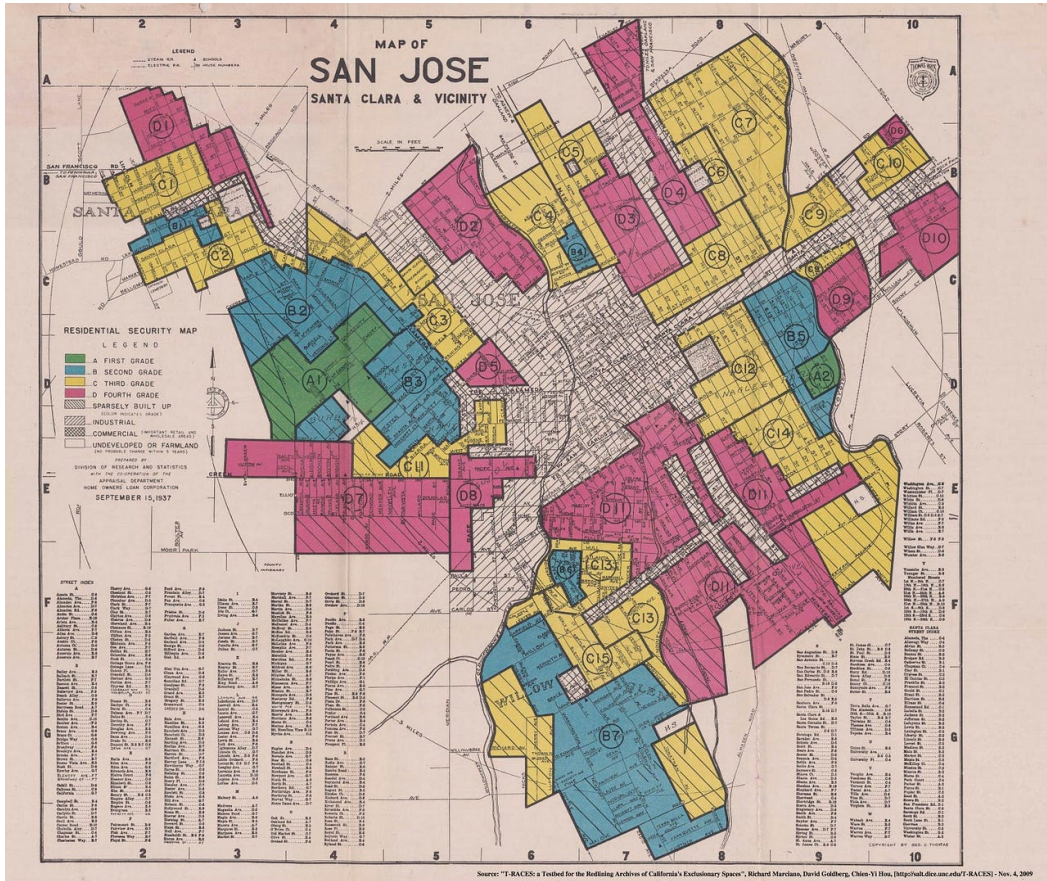


Figure 1. 1937 Residential Security (“Redlining”) Map for San José
 Source: Testbed for the Redlining Archives of California's Exclusionary Spaces.

Hamann’s 1961 proposal was for the urban core to be surrounded by a freeway network “ring road” comprising U.S. 101; Interstates 280, 680, and 880; and, eventually, CA-87. The state approved the proposal, and the appraisal and acquisition process began soon after, in 1965. Numerous neighborhoods and communities were impacted, and thousands of homes were purchased and removed for construction. A particularly essential and massive interchange in this system, where I-280 and CA-87 come together, would be built just southwest of Downtown San José, atop a handful of historic, low-rise urban neighborhoods: Delmas Park, Gardner, and Washington-Guadalupe. This is the area on which this study focuses.

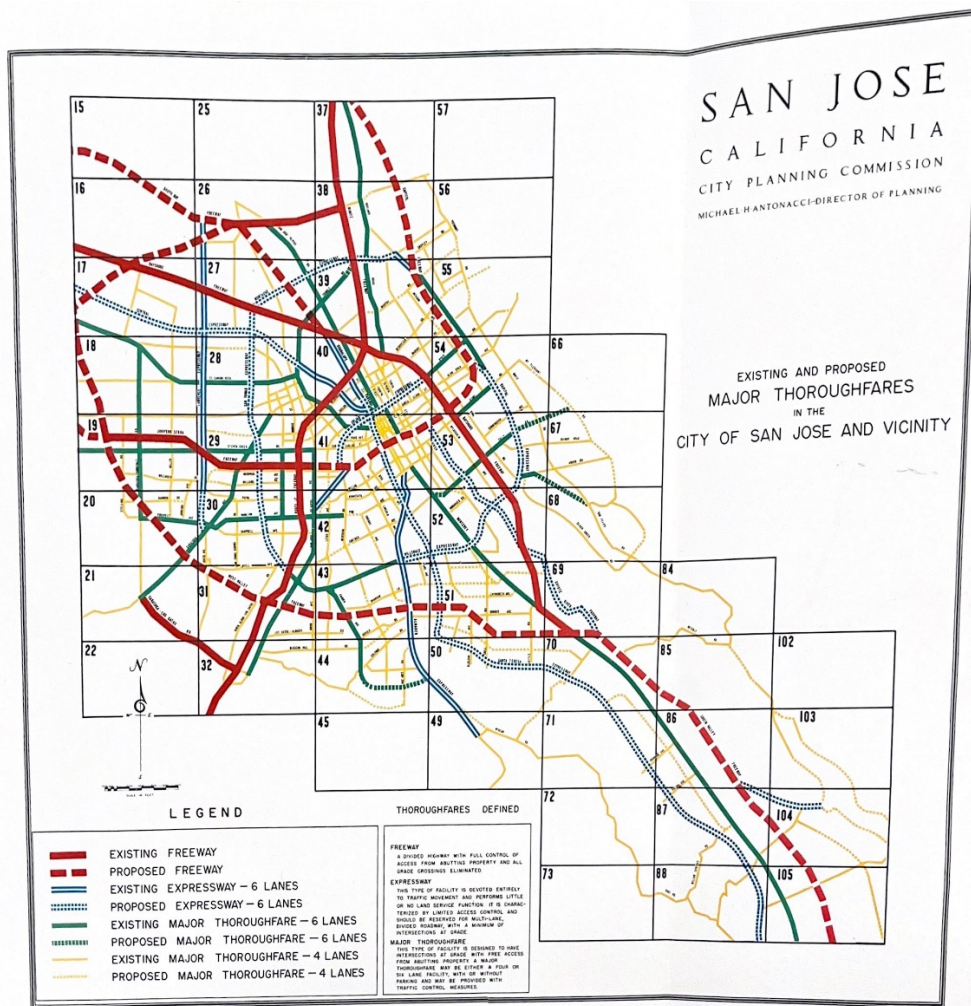


Figure 2. 1961 Map of Existing and Proposed Freeways in San José
 Courtesy of San José Public Library’s California Room, the King Library.

2.3 Communities in Place

The Gardner neighborhood to the west of the Guadalupe River and the Washington-Guadalupe neighborhood to the river’s east have been home to predominantly Mexican, Central and South American, and Italian immigrants since the turn of the twentieth century. Close to a number of the local canneries and orchards, many residents of these neighborhoods worked in the agricultural industry, as well as in construction and service work. By the early 1960s, these neighborhoods were home to thriving intergenerational working communities. The places themselves were bustling, walkable, and self-sufficient, with nearby shopping districts, schools, churches, public transportation, and related services.

When plans for the new freeways through this area took shape in the halls of power, there was little opportunity for the community, particularly those who would be most directly impacted by the freeway construction, to weigh in. Indeed, according to conversations with residents recorded in the archives, many who lived in the project area had no idea about the plans until assessors

knocked on their doors to tell them of the state's intent to acquire their homes. Although the eminent domain process mandated payments to homeowners at appraised market value, many of the residents in these neighborhoods were tenants and likely received even less notice and no compensation for their displacement.

With construction beginning in the late-1960s, the project was already underway when the local community started organizing in earnest, calling for increased community engagement in planning and for more policy emphasis to be placed on public transit options as an alternative to the car-requiring freeways. In 1970, Jack Ybarra, the president of the Confederación de la Raza Unida, a pre-eminent Chicano civil rights organization in San José, presented to the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Seminar on the necessity of involving poor residents and residents of color in decision-making around urban transportation.⁸ In 1977, the Confederación, then helmed by Ernestina Garcia, introduced a 9-point proposal for measures the city, county, and state could take to improve transportation options for Chicanos in the city.⁹ These proposals caught the attention of key legislators at all levels, including Rep. Norm Mineta, then representing the region in Congress. Unfortunately, few of these recommendations were meaningfully enacted at the time, but they still serve as critical proposals for alternatives to car-centric transportation planning, written by and for working people of color. The recommendations were as follows:

1. Updating and coordinating all city and county general plans before conducting any further transit studies.
2. Halting expansion of freeways or major arterial highways other than conversion to transit or bikeway use.
3. Giving a high priority to the 55-mile light rail network once the population increases to a level that can support such a system.
4. Upgrading the existing Southern Pacific Railroad service throughout the county and across the Dumbarton Bridge between Palo Alto and Fremont, and extending it to Gilroy and Monterrey.
5. Running express buses 24 hours a day on major traffic corridors.
6. Creating an extensive bikeway system for short trips.
7. Providing dial-a-ride service for senior citizens and the physically handicapped.
8. Land banking in housing elements of general plans to preserve areas near transit for low-income housing.

9. Financing capital improvements in transit with a \$3 daily parking fee at public transportation facilities, imposing corporate taxes on industries and commercial enterprises, and increasing gasoline taxes.

3. Research and Analysis

This project is anchored in an archival collection known as *Caltrans Right of Way Assessments 1960–1970*, housed in the California Room Local History Collection at the King Library in San José (a joint public-university library). The collection contains documents, maps, and photographs that the CalTrans Right of Way division created when assessing properties that the State of California intended to purchase for demolition in order to build new freeways. The California Room acquired the collection in 2018, but the files were never processed. In short, the collection is organized into individually numbered boxes, containing individually numbered file folders, and each folder contains the records for a given number of properties within a particular geographic area. Finding aids were limited to a spreadsheet containing box and file numbers, years, and general file locations.

Assessors used parcel numbers as the unique identifier for each property (though some parcels included multiple addresses); the parcels include residential, commercial, and industrial properties. The individual file for each parcel contains the following: information about how the assessment of the total value was calculated based on the cost of land and the cost of any buildings (“improvements”); recorded conditions of the overall parcel; when it was bought by the current owner; some detail about the sale if one took place up to five years prior to the assessment; and an image taken by the assessor of the property itself. Most properties have a single photo, which may be the only photo of these homes that have since been destroyed.

The archive contains this information for all of the homes and other structures that were eventually demolished for the I-280, I-680, and CA-87 freeways. After an initial survey of the larger collection by the researchers, the research team decided to focus in on the quadrant immediately beneath and surrounding the future I-280 / CA-87 Interchange. This area was chosen particularly for the existence of multiple historical and immigrant-rich neighborhoods within it, for its proximity to Downtown San José, and for neighborhood connections to subsequent nearby developments requiring an eminent domain process, including the San Jose Convention Center and other urban redevelopment in the downtown area.

The archival data collection was meticulous and deliberate. With only limited finding aids available, researchers searched each box and file in the collection to identify those containing records for the parcels within the project area. Once these files were identified and sorted, information from the records for each of the properties was input into a new, detailed spreadsheet; images were scanned and tagged with their corresponding parcel number; and each record was geocoded for incorporation into geographic information system (GIS) software. The resulting database catalogues the address and geographic location, appraisal and sales data, scanned photographs, and location in the archival collection (box number, file number, and parcel number) for each record. There are two sets of images in the database: the uncropped digital file showing the original photograph on its page in the file and cropped versions of each photo for use on the web.

A “Notes” column in the database contains additional details for a given property uncovered in the archival record and / or from other sources. While the CalTrans documents are rich in detail about the conditions and value assessments of each property, they are sorely lacking in information about the lives of those who inhabited them, the character of the neighborhoods that were disrupted, or where anyone went after losing their home. The researchers turned to primary sources such as the *Mercury News* archives, phone book records, and even informal conversations with community members who experienced the displacement to gather more context. This provided limited supplemental information about a handful of the families who were displaced. Researchers also analyzed the photographs of each property, seeking to learn what more could be gleaned about the residents and communities that existed there before the freeway (see below).

Finally, using ArcGIS Pro software, all of this information was georeferenced by skilled graduate research assistants who created three new spatial data layers: a raster tile layer of georeferenced aerial photographs from 1960, a raster tile layer of georeferenced Sanborn insurance maps from 1950, and a feature layer that combines the property information and photos for each parcel in the study area with the traced outlines of each structure. These files enabled the creation of interactive maps and the online Story Map feature described below, and the layers are now available publicly in ArcGIS Online for future researchers, students, and community members to use.

4. Assessing What Was Lost

For all their details, absent from the archival records is any recognition of the assessed properties being anything more than structures carrying monetary value. Property is central and people are incidental, if mentioned at all. The few records that do describe an interaction with a resident often note that the assessor's visit was the first time the resident had heard about the planned freeway and the state's intention to buy them out. That these parcels were homes that held complex lives, or grocery stores where kids would stop on the way home from school, or churches where neighbors would gather to pray, was, of course, not assessed. Nor is any rubric or scale provided with the records that describes how assessors defined conditions or quality, or what materials and finish choices for the home's exterior, roof, floors, heating, or kitchen were deemed more or less valuable for the properties being assessed. This reminds us of the inevitable subjectivity of the assessments themselves. Given that these neighborhoods were already deemed "blighted," not to mention what we know about prevailing attitudes at the time, it is probably safe to assume that the properties were undervalued.

Still, the presence of life within these neighborhoods is reflected in fleeting hints and details, especially in the photographs. To be sure, the images are generally impersonal snapshots of the front of a house. Many are awkwardly framed, unfocused, and poorly lit. But together they form a detailed and perhaps final visual record of streets and neighborhoods that were soon after destroyed.

Of the hundreds of images of houses in the study area that we reviewed, only 36 have people in them: a woman waters the lawn as children look on, a man with white pants stands on the porch with his hands in his pockets. An older woman wearing a sweater, skirt, and clogs, with her hair wrapped in a scarf, sweeps the leaves off the sidewalk. A man kneels down on a rag to work on a car, raised up on a jack in his driveway. A young woman in a plaid dress and white flats squints into the sun at the photographer across the street, her long shadow stretching towards a tidy front stoop. Laundry hangs out to dry; bicycles and tricycles rest on front lawns and side porches. A man in a short-sleeve white button-up shirt carrying a large white sheaf of paper strides purposefully across the street; he appears again in nearby photos, peering into properties—another assessor on the job? In a series of photos, children follow the assessor and pose in front of many houses, smiles on their faces, clearly enjoying the game of modeling for the strange photographer. Caught in everyday life, they are not the focus of the assessor's lens, but in their normalcy they show that this was a neighborhood filled with life. This is part of the story to be told about this place and what compelled the research team to create a public-facing resource out of this archival research project.



Figure 3. Photograph of Children Posing in Front of 440 Illinois Ave.
Source: CalTrans Right of Way Assessments Archive.

5. A Public Resource

This study set out to examine the materials in the CalTrans Right of Way Assessments archive and uncover some of the story of the neighborhoods lost to the construction of the I-280 / CA-87 freeway interchange. As described above, it was soon clear that these stories, and the archival records themselves, never before even analyzed, demanded to be shared in a form that would help the public to access them, to comprehend and visualize the impact of a project of this scale. Out of these goals came the four publicly accessible resources described above: the database created from the archival records, three new spatial data layers, an interactive map, and the Story Map. This section presents the latter two, which we consider the most community-oriented public tools produced, in greater detail.

5.1 Interactive Map

Built in ArcGIS Online, the Interactive Map¹⁰ provides a visualization of some of the properties that were acquired for the construction of the I-280 / CA-87 interchange. Each property is delineated as a polygon, representing the approximate area and boundaries of the acquisition. Each property is associated with a pop-up window containing the following information: address, property owner, residents, appraisal value, date the owner had acquired the property, an image of the house, and any additional notes. The map also contains a variety of layers, which help to situate the various properties within different contexts.



Figure 4. Screenshot of Interactive Map
Created by Maxwell Friedman, Bennett Williamson, and Matthew Schroeder.

5.2 Story Map

The Story Map¹¹ is the most comprehensive tool for interacting with the archival data. Using ESRI's web-based Story Map platform, this component presents the study, the map, and the archival records themselves in a visual narrative form. As a user scrolls through the website, the Story Map walks them through the history of the study area and the freeway project, displays composite images recreating some of the neighborhood, introduces the interactive map through a guided tour, and highlights the stories of ten selected properties in different parts of the study area. By combining the property records, photographs, and spatial data into an interactive, public-facing online resource, our goal is to welcome community members and other researchers to explore and remember the story of this place.

6. Conclusions and Further Research



Figure 5. Satellite Images of the Study Area before and after Freeway Construction
Source: ESRI.

Today, the I-280 / CA-87 freeway intersection has an air of permanence. It is an enormous piece of infrastructure, and the physical and social environment has stretched and shifted to make room for it. Thus, while the neighborhoods surrounding the intersection resemble each other, it is hard to imagine how they were once connected before the freeways. Noting that around 500 parcels were demolished to make room for *just* this one intersection, we can only imagine how many people were impacted by the freeway project as a whole. Similarly, faced with tens of boxes with

poorly labeled files, it is hard to imagine how those records account for homes and neighborhoods, let alone full communities.

The goal of this project was to uncover, remember, honor, and mourn what has been lost. By consolidating the archival data into a searchable spreadsheet and by creating the interactive maps and website, we can better visualize the enormous impact the freeway had on the community it displaced. By transforming the archives into a public resource, we hope to invite more investigation. Perhaps it can support the relatives of people who were displaced in uncovering buried stories they may not have known or the remaining community members in better understanding the shape of their neighborhoods. At the very least, we hope to empower San Joseans and others by uncovering the story of an entire community that once lived and thrived in the area where this freeway is now. In these ways, perhaps we can provoke more conversations about the human and environmental impacts of projects of this size. To that end, we offer just a few possible directions for further research and analysis that we see building on this study:

Complete archival processing: This study focuses on a small segment of the homes assessed for the construction of the freeway network in San José. Future researchers may return to the archives and process and map the remaining areas. Doing so can provide a more complete picture of all the parcels assessed and of the impact of freeway construction on many more communities.

A study into reparations: While the purpose of the assessments was to determine a monetary value for each property and reimburse the owners for that amount in the eminent domain process, the assessments undoubtedly failed to yield just compensation, not only for the homes themselves, but for the impacts of displacement on the individuals and an entire community, and the lost intergenerational wealth that could have come with property ownership in Silicon Valley. Around the country, conversations are building around the racism of freeway construction and the direct roles it played in segregation, displacement, and environmental racism in urban areas.^{12, 13} It is critical for San José and the State of California to take responsibility for the racially unjust impacts of the freeways and take steps toward repairing that damage to the families and communities harmed.

Study other San José neighborhoods lost to eminent domain: The freeway project was just one of many large urban development projects in San José. Close to the study area, the McEnery Convention Center is another development that used eminent domain to demolish a full neighborhood, as is San José International Airport. Building out a broader picture of the historic ways that government entities have destroyed San José communities is critical to informing complex contemporary debates around development, from a new office or housing project to large-scale climate change resiliency efforts.

Implementation of the Confederación de la Raza Unida transportation policy recommendations: These recommendations, drafted by the Chicana civil rights group in 1977, surfaced from the Ernestina García collection also housed in the California Room and are mentioned above for the nine alternatives they presented to the destructive freeway project in favor of a more just and functional

transportation system. Organizers and researchers may wish to study the pertinence and feasibility of these proposals today.

Study the environmental impact of the freeway: Very little attention has been paid to the environmental harms of San José's freeways. For instance, the I-280 / CA-87 interchange runs over the Guadalupe River, limiting access to one of the main waterways and sources of life in San José. And it has been well documented that living in proximity to a freeway leads to a multitude of negative health consequences. Studying the environmental impacts on the surrounding community could be an important contribution of future research in this area.

These are just a few of the many future directions this research can take. We sincerely hope that this project represents a helpful step towards a future for San José where communities of color remain safely housed and connected to their neighborhoods, with access to a just transportation system.

Endnotes

- ¹ Paul Rogers, “Hamann: San Jose’s Growth Guru,” SiliconValley.com website. February 23, 2005. <https://web.archive.org/web/20050223144311/http://www.siliconvalley.com/mld/siliconvalley/living/2765036.htm>. (Accessed Aug 31, 2023)
- ² Rogers, 2005. *Op cit.*
- ³ Rogers, 2005. *Op cit.*
- ⁴ Andrew Herscher, “The Urbanism of Racial Capitalism: Toward a History of Racial 'Blight.'” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40, no. 1 (2020): 57–65. <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-8186049>.
- ⁵ Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris et al., “The Implications of Freeway Siting in California: Four Case Studies on the Effects of Freeways on Neighborhoods of Color.” Report of the Pacific Southwest Region University Transportation Center, Project PSR-20-40. March, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.19050.39360>.
- ⁶ A. P. Hamann, “Guadalupe Freeway Proposal for a State Highway” (Office of the City Manager, San José, May 25, 1961).
- ⁷ “CalTrans Right of Way Assessments 1960 – 1970” (California Room, San José Public Library, n.d.).
- ⁸ Loukaitou-Sideris et al., “The Implications of Freeway Siting in California.” *Op cit.*
- ⁹ Confederación de la Raza Unida. “Off Track, Chicanos Claim; Bus-Rail Network Proposed,” article in Confederación de la Raza Unida monthly newsletter (1977). Ernestina Garcia Collection, California Room, San José Public Library (1997).
- ¹⁰ <https://sjsugis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/media/index.html?appid=e8e7de7a764b441391cbada1349a50d5>
- ¹¹ <https://www.sjsu.edu/metropolitanstudies/initiatives/underneath-the-freeway/>
- ¹² Otis R. Taylor Jr., “America’s Highway System Is a Monument to Environmental Racism and a History of Inequity,” *KQED.org*, March 13, 2023. <https://www.kqed.org/news/11943263/americas-highway-system-is-a-monument-to-environmental-racism-and-a-history-of-inequity> (Accessed September 2, 2023).
- ¹³ Denise Robb, “Reparations for Pasadena Families Displaced by the 210 Freeway?” ColoradoBoulevard.net website, December 29, 2021, <https://www.coloradoboulevard.net/reparations-for-pasadena-families-displaced-by-the-210-freeway/> (Accessed September 2, 2023).

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Born and raised in downtown San José, less than a mile from the project focus area, Leila Ullmann has always been curious about the relationships between people and place which span past, present, and future. With a background in community organizing, scholarly research, and political strategy, she works to collectively reimagine our relationship to land in the pursuit of liberation for all oppressed peoples. She is currently a visiting scholar with the Institute for Metropolitan Studies. She received her B.A. *cum laude* from Princeton University in African American Studies and Dance and is pursuing a Masters in Urban and Regional Planning at University of California, Los Angeles.

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Gordon Douglas is the director of the Institute for Metropolitan Studies and an associate professor in SJSU's Department of Urban and Regional Planning. His work focuses on social inequality in planning and development, neighborhood identity and gentrification, and peoples' relationships to their physical surroundings. His first book, *The Help-Yourself City* (Oxford, 2018), concerns people who create unauthorized but functional “do-it-yourself urban design” interventions in their communities. His writing and photography have appeared in a variety of academic journals, books, magazines, newspapers, and websites. He is currently working on local organizing efforts around affordable housing production, safe streets, and the rights of our unhoused community members in San José and Oakland.

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