

Eminent Domain and Landmark Property Stolen Part 2: How Chavez Ravine Became Dodger Stadium

Link: <https://www.vox.com/videos/2021/5/17/22439387/dodger-stadium-chavez-ravine-history> (May 2021 [13 mins]) VOX

The Dark Legacy of this Iconic Baseball Stadium

Until the late 50s, in Los Angeles' Chavez Ravine, there was a thriving Mexican and Mexican American community. Due to racial covenants and redlining, there were very few areas where people of Mexican decent could live, but in Chavez Ravine on the edge of downtown, people were living comfortably, often owning their own homes and sometimes small businesses and many were bordering on the edge of middle class. When urban planners and city officials started envisioning their future for LA, they began labeling areas as "blighted" and "slums" in need of rebuilding; not surprisingly, they tagged Chavez Ravine as one of those areas. The city could legally take properties through eminent domain by "compensating" property owners whatever the city deemed as fair value. People in Chavez Ravine were promised "better" living conditions in new aggregated housing buildings that were being designed for that area. However, Chavez Ravine was already a community of homeowners who lived in freestanding affordable houses with gardens, and sometimes livestock; residents already had what they wanted. As was the pattern across the country, few residents of Chavez Ravine were able to hold on to their homes. There was intimidation and thousands vacated the best home they would ever have for the promise of new "homes" in projects to be built. Because of the ballooning of the LA population, urban planners advocated public housing developments; but in the 50s Red Scare, these were deemed Socialist and the Urban Renewal Developments in Chavez Ravine were scrapped. May 8, 1959, final residents were ordered to leave their homes and holdouts were violently removed. In 1962, Dodger Stadium opened on the site.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBOtKhAAUHs>
Chavez Ravine: A Los Angeles Story (2003 [24 mins])

From the YouTube Description: *"Jordan Mechner's award-winning 2003 half-hour documentary tells the bittersweet story of an American community betrayed by greed, political hypocrisy, and good intentions gone astray. Don Normark's haunting black-and-white photographs reclaim and celebrate Chavez Ravine, a closely-knit Mexican-American village that once overlooked downtown Los Angeles from the hill where Dodger Stadium now stands. Narrated by Cheech Marin. Music by Ry Cooder and Lalo Guerrero."* Nominated for an Oscar, this short documentary uses photographs of everyday life in Chavez Ravine, and former residents' reflections about a time when children were born in homes, and then used boxes like toboggans to slide down the ravine. It tells the story of the strength of the communities and their demise in the 1950s due to external aspirational goals, racism, and the Red Scare. Chavez Ravine, on the edge of downtown Los Angeles was a tight community along the Legion Park and Los Angeles River. "Great times. Beautiful times." But in the early 50s, residents were told that they had to sell their homes in order to make room for new public housing of face having their homes condemned. But residents were also told that they would be provided better homes in new Urban Renewal projects—they would get first pick! Some fought but then moved due to pressure of Eminent Domain, the threat of a house condemned becoming worthless, and the bulldozers. By the late 50s, when most of the residents moved and the holdouts were forcibly so, the plan for public housing in the area was summarily dropped. Frank Wilkerson, the advocate for the Chavez Ravine projects was attacked as a Commie-- as public housing became synonymous with

children's institute



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socialism. Pulling the plug on the new homes functioned to free the real estate from the former residents forever, and a few years later, the site was sold to build Dodger Stadium.

Additional Resources:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/10/31/561246946/remembering-the-communities-buried-under-center-field>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1LvQvRpfvg> Why the Dodgers are haunted by Chavez Ravine ghosts | Fernandomania @ 40 Ep. 3, Los Angeles Times