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THE
FOLKLORE
OF THE
FREEWAY

Race and Revolt in the
Modernist City

INTRODUCTION

The Invisible Freeway Revolt

In this age of divided government, we look to the 1950s as a golden age of bipartisan unity. President Barack Obama, a Democrat, often invokes the landmark passage of the 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act to remind the nation that Republicans and Democrats can unite under a shared sense of common purpose. Introduced by President Dwight Eisenhower, a Republican, the Federal Aid Highway Act, originally titled the National Interstate and Defense Highway Act, won unanimous support from Democrats and Republicans alike, uniting the two parties in a shared commitment to building a national highway infrastructure. This was big government at its biggest, the single largest federal expenditure in American history before the advent of the Great Society.

Yet although Congress unified around the construction of a national highway system, the American people did not. Contemporary nostalgia for bipartisan support around the Interstate Highway Act ignores the deep fissures that it inflicted on the American city after World War II: literally, by cleaving the urban built environment into isolated parcels of race and class, and figuratively, by sparking civic wars over the freeway's threat to specific neighborhoods and communities. This book explores the conflicted legacy of that megaproject: even as the interstate highway program unified a nation around a 42,800-mile highway network, it divided the American people, as it divided their cities, fueling new social tensions that flared during the tumultuous 1960s.

Talk of a "freeway revolt" permeates the annals of American urban

history. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, a generation of scholars and journalists introduced this term to describe the groundswell of grassroots opposition to urban highway construction. Their account saluted the urban women and men who stood up to state bulldozers, forging new civic strategies to rally against the highway-building juggernaut and to defeat the powerful interests it represented. It recounted these episodic victories with flair and conviction, doused with righteous invocations of "power to the people." In the afterglow of the sixties, a narrative of the freeway revolt emerged: a grassroots uprising of civic-minded people, often neighbors, banding together to defeat the technocrats, the oil companies, the car manufacturers, and ultimately the state itself, saving the city from the onslaught of automobiles, expressways, gas stations, parking lots, and other civic detriments.¹ This story has entered the lore of the sixties, a mythic "shout in the street" that proclaimed the death of the modernist city and its master plans.²

By and large, however, the dominant narrative of the freeway revolt is a *racialized* story, describing the victories of white middle-class or affluent communities that mustered the resources and connections to force concessions from the state. If we look closely at *where* the freeway revolt found its greatest success—Cambridge, Massachusetts; Lower Manhattan; the French Quarter in New Orleans; Georgetown in Washington D.C.; Beverly Hills, California; Princeton, New Jersey; Fells Point in Baltimore—we discover what this movement was really about and whose interests it served. As bourgeois counterparts to the inner-city uprising, the disparate victories of the freeway revolt illustrate how racial and class privilege structure the metropolitan built environment, demonstrating the skewed geography of power in the postwar American city.

One of my colleagues once told me a joke: if future anthropologists want to find the remains of people of color in a postapocalypse America, they will simply have to find the ruins of the nearest freeway.³ Yet such collegial jocularly contained a sobering reminder that the victories associated with the freeway revolt usually did not extend to urban communities of color, where highway construction often took a disastrous toll. To greater and lesser degrees, race—racial identity and racial ideology—shaped the geography of highway construction in urban America, fueling new patterns of racial in-

equality that exacerbated an unfolding "urban crisis" in postwar America. In many southern cities, local city planners took advantage of federal moneys to target black communities point-blank; in other parts of the nation, highway planners found the paths of least resistance, wiping out black commercial districts, Mexican barrios, and Chinatowns and desecrating land sacred to indigenous peoples. The bodies and spaces of people of color, historically coded as "blight" in planning discourse, provided an easy target for a federal highway program that usually coordinated its work with private redevelopment schemes and public policies like redlining, urban renewal, and slum clearance.

My colleague's joke also signaled a shared suspicion among city people of color that the interstate generation of freeway builders targeted their communities with malicious intent. This conviction persists in the barrios and ghettos of American cities. In a 1997 interview, for example, a former Overtown resident begged to understand why state officials routed Interstate 95 through the heart of Miami's historic black neighborhood: "Now all you white folk . . . you tell me the justification. . . . If that isn't racism you tell me what it is." In St. Paul, Minnesota, after Interstate 94 bisected the city's historic black neighborhood, a former resident explained his belief that the "white man's freeway" was built to "allow white people to get from downtown St. Paul to downtown Minneapolis five, ten minutes faster."⁴ And as the following chapters illustrate, such racially inflected skepticism also finds recurring expression in the barrios of southwestern cities like East Los Angeles, where six major freeways ravaged the area during the 1960s, just as it transitioned into the nation's largest concentration of Mexican American poverty.

Beyond mainstream accounts of the freeway revolt and beyond conventional understandings of urban political struggle, city people of color have invented their own freeway revolt, waged through a wide variety of cultural practices rooted in diverse expressive traditions. The sum of this cultural work illuminates an entrenched conviction that highway construction during the postwar period constituted a calculated assault on urban communities of color. *The Folklore of the Freeway* homes in on that belief, its variants, and their expressions in the cacophony of American culture. It aims to listen to the voices and see the perspectives of people who experienced

highway construction firsthand, whose communities were ripped up, gutted, ensnared, isolated, and altogether erased. The interpretative analysis considers a wide range of expressive cultural forms that address the place of freeways in the city and their consequences for everyday life. I describe this cultural work as the “folklore of the freeway,” calling for an elastic definition of “folklore” that includes art, literature, poetry, music, dance, photography, murals, graffiti, theater, children’s books, oral histories, autobiographies, sculpture, and film. Through such disparate modes of cultural expression, diverse city people convey their experiences and perceptions of a structure they know through an unwanted intimacy, forced by an interventionist state at the height of its power.

Hidden within this body of cultural work lies an *invisible* freeway revolt, invisible at least to scholars untrained or unwilling to engage with culture and its expressive forms. *The Folklore of the Freeway* delves into the symbolic realms of language and culture to broaden the scope of the freeway revolt, to contrast the organized, *visible* forms of protest against the freeway in the late sixties and early seventies with the disorganized, *invisible* expressions embedded in the contemporary cultural landscape of the American city. Here, I use the concept of *infrapolitics*, taken from the work of anthropologist James Scott and masterfully deployed by the historian Robin D. G. Kelley, to identify the hidden forms of resistance to the presence of the freeway in the city, beyond the visible end of the political spectrum. From graffiti on the freeway, to the satirical portrait of the freeway in inner-city words and images, this cultural work illustrates the infrapolitics of infrastructural development, underscoring the vital role of culture as a means of political expression among aggrieved communities of color and mobilizing awareness of environmental racism and its inimical consequences.⁵

In the context of urban history, infrastructure can make or break a community. In the United States, the historical development of urban infrastructure has both formed and followed the inscriptions of race, class, and gender on the urban landscape. Ample in more affluent communities, usually absent or minimal in historic concentrations of urban poverty, infrastructure does not serve its public equally. Some cities have a more equitable distribution of infrastructure than others, but many urban neighborhoods remain woefully

underserved.⁶ During the postwar period, the interstate highways sparked the development of new communities, new jobs, and new forms of commerce and enterprise, particularly for the great white suburban middle class of the postwar era. They did not (and do not) serve affluent communities very well because many in those communities successfully resisted local routing proposals, and they often decimated poor, working-class, and racialized neighborhoods, wholly vulnerable to the conclusions that highway planners derived from their meticulous data. These neighborhoods harbored the very conditions that infrastructure is designed to prevent—congestion, pollution, disease, crime—yet remained bereft of public investment. A better solution, in the logic of the time, was to simply eradicate these communities altogether through invasive public-works projects. Small wonder, then, that urban communities of color continue to express a pervasive belief that conquest and modernization are two sides of the same unlucky coin.

This book strives to listen to what inner-city people think about the freeways that fracture their communities and to open our senses to what is seen and heard in the shadows of the freeway, in the communities exempt from the dominant narrative of the freeway revolt. To some extent, *The Folklore of the Freeway* records long-standing grievances against the freeway and its presence in the inner city, but it moves beyond a simplistic narrative of victimization to explore a dynamic relationship between structure and culture, between the physical fact of the freeway and its refraction through the prisms of identity, language, and place. The surprising results of this investigation tell us not only what freeways do to inner-city people, but also what people do to inner-city freeways. Spatial justice remains elusive in the barrio and the ghetto, but there the freeway revolt continues.⁷

In thinking about the postwar era in general, and the 1960s in particular, the history of highway construction in urban America encapsulates a much broader sea change with lasting consequences for modern culture and society. Here is a *master* master plan, promulgated from the highest levels of a technocratic state at the height of its power, confronting forceful opposition in the cities, where a diverse citizenry rallied to protect its communities from evisceration. This struggle entailed winners and losers, but it also engendered new discourses of identity, community, and locality that challenged official

rationales of progress, efficiency, and rational planning. The 1960s valorized these new modes of political expression, heralding a broader "cultural turn" that prioritized subjective feeling and experience over objective fact and data.

The shift from modernity to postmodernity has been theorized ad nauseam, but the materiality of that shift—its physical manifestations in the built environment—enables a more concrete comprehension of sweeping changes afoot. First on paper, then in practice, the modernist city emerged full-blown in the twentieth century from a set of structural interventions on the urban landscape. In the United States, modernist urban form debuted in a series of installations, erasing fragments of the city's past to produce a new infrastructure of concrete, steel, and glass. This included the construction of a national highway system designed to accommodate growing volumes of automobile traffic. The prioritization of vehicular traffic flow has been the very hallmark of modernist planning and design, from Paris and Los Angeles to Brasilia and Singapore, laying broad swaths of concrete above and below the city surface, segmenting urban space into discrete, isolated parts.⁸

The modernist city took shape through massive state intervention and centralized coordination, and it imposed a new set of values predicated upon progress, order, and efficiency. These values found powerful expression in their own mythology, designed in part to take the edge off the bulldozers and their brutal work. This myth, what anthropologist James Holston calls "the myth of the concrete," found powerful expression in postwar American culture, even in the technocratic discourse of highway policy, which invoked the sacred ideals of professional expertise and scientific objectivity. It turns out that these ideals were myths themselves, ruses for public policies tangled within local webs of material interest and mythic ideology. As a cultural history of American cities during the age of the interstate, this study describes some of that mythology, though it emphasizes the counterdiscourses to the myth of progress: the unexpected articulations of history, locality, and identity that surfaced in opposition to the highway-building program. These expressions of difference emerged from the gaps and contradictions pregnant within the modernist planning program, spawning new modes of urban experience and comprehension.⁹

Rooted primarily in historical analysis, *The Folklore of the Freeway* situ-

ates the urban history of interstate-highway construction within a broader set of social upheavals unleashed during the 1960s. The culmination of civil rights struggles and the eruption of racial violence in the cities, feminism's "second wave," environmentalism, the rise of multiculturalism and its embrace of epistemological diversity, the repudiation of a militarized state and its imperialist ambitions, a rejection of corporate consumerism, an insurgent appreciation of local history and its physical remnants, and, perhaps most of all, a deepening suspicion of progress and the science that bore this ideology: these profound changes redefined collective understandings of what constitutes knowledge, evidence, and politics and opened new avenues for comprehending human experience, perception, and agency. *The Folklore of the Freeway* follows the roads not taken in the literature, introducing alternative histories of highway construction and their diverse outlets for expression.¹⁰

This is a national story, albeit with some requisite omissions, comparing visible and invisible expressions of opposition to the interstate highway program. Although the narrative winds through the histories of Miami, St. Paul, El Paso, Boston, Seattle, Baltimore, New York, San Francisco, Oakland, and New Orleans, Los Angeles plays a lead role. Although a cultural history of urban highway construction needs scant explanation for a recurring focus on the freeway metropolis par excellence, Los Angeles models the very conditions that sustain a vibrant folklore of the freeway: its ubiquitous freeways and their marking of socioeconomic divisions, its history of civil rights struggle and racial unrest, and its diverse expressive cultures that deploy creativity and imagination in the absence of political and economic power. L.A.'s folklore of the freeway took shape under these conditions to mobilize opposition against highway construction and to generate awareness of its pernicious consequences. As these conditions remain broadly apparent in the cultural geography of the American city, and as more cities exhibit spatial and demographic trends pioneered in Los Angeles, they require new frameworks of study, new modes of analysis, and far more inclusive understandings of political struggle and agency.¹¹

This is also a multiracial, multiethnic story, emphasizing race and racial conflict as primary categories of analysis. With explicit and implicit racial agendas, the planners and engineers who rammed freeways through cities

unwittingly provoked sharper articulations of racial difference and conflict. In some instances, their work hastened violent unrest in the ghettos of American cities during the “long hot summers” of the mid-1960s. It coincided with the racialization of the inner city itself, in which poor people of color, African Americans and Mexican Americans in particular, clustered within the spaces abandoned by whites and white ethnics who fled for new suburban frontiers. The centrifugal thrust of white affluence and enterprise structured the concentration of racial poverty in precincts that gave birth to the modern ghetto and barrio. Freeways helped seal the deal, erecting new barriers that isolated and contained poor people of color. In this shifting geography of wealth and poverty, race displaced class as the discursive basis of social conflict, dominating the national conversation. Urban highway construction played no small part in this process, ensuring an uncomfortable and antagonistic relationship between freeways and city people of color.

The Folklore of the Freeway draws on the literature that has amassed around the “postwar urban crisis,” but it brings into the fold the voices of racialized social groups who have been left out of that narrative. Like African Americans, Mexican Americans also confronted the walls of racial bias built into the restructuring of urban life after World War II. In the urban Southwest, highway construction led to severe consequences for the barrio, which emerged alongside the formation of the modern ghetto.¹² This is, therefore, as much a “brown-white” story as it is a “black-white” story, though the experiences of other racialized groups—Chinese Americans, Native Americans—also populate the narrative, navigating through a folklore uttered mostly in English, but with a few references in Spanish, Spanglish, Chinese, and Hawaiian as well.

The Road from Paris to Honolulu

The Folklore of the Freeway delves into the dark side of modernization—into the urban quarters of darker-skinned peoples to explore a more recent chapter in the cultural response to modernity. An earlier chapter, which has amassed its own library of scholarship, considers mid-nineteenth-century France, where the modernist city was born by imperial fiat. Under the monar-

chy of Napoleon III, Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, prefect of the Seine, set out to retrofit the city of Paris with a new system of wide, uniform boulevards, fitted with rail lines, trees, and gas lamps. The new boulevards, touted as the summit of progress and modernity, were designed to accommodate the circulation of traffic, that creature of nineteenth-century urbanism that, like the crowd, threatened the order of city life and the maintenance of civil society itself. Haussmannization, with its own social, political, and military agendas, enforced a radical reorganization of urban space, exerting a new discipline over the flow of traffic and crowds.¹³

The monetary costs of Haussmannization paled in comparison to the social consequences. Tens of thousands of people were evicted from old buildings to make way for streets, bridges, quays, and buildings. The city's poor were banished to the periphery of the city, their homes replaced by government and commercial buildings or by new apartments beyond their means. The destruction of tens of thousands of old buildings, some of them notable monuments from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, compounded the toll that Haussmannization took. Haussmann himself invited accusations of vandalism by such writers as Louis Veuillot, Victor Hugo, Pierre des Essarts, and Paul Fournel. “Cruel demolisher,” wrote Charles Valette in 1856, “what have you done with the past? I search in vain for Paris; I search for myself.”¹⁴ Still, despite its critics, Haussmannization created new opportunities for profit in Paris, prompting a boom in real estate speculation and commercial development, shifting vast sums of money into the hands of a rising bourgeoisie who claimed their stake in this new urban order.¹⁵

It is difficult to overstate the influence of Haussmann on a twentieth-century generation of American road builders who sought to reinvent their cities around the automobile. For Robert Moses, Haussmannization offered a useful lesson in hacking one's way through the built-up boroughs of New York City, and also in administering those bold interventions. In 1941, Moses wrote his own homage to Haussmann in the pages of *Architectural Forum*, expressing his admiration for Haussmann's vigorous approach to city planning.¹⁶ Throughout his career, the New York power broker maintained an image of himself as the prefect of the Hudson, modeling his own designs for the Bronx's Grand Boulevard and Concourse after Haussmann's boulevards.

More than any single individual, Moses helped reconcile the mass proliferation of the automobile with the survival of the American city, especially during the postwar period, when decentralizing policies threatened the economic stability and cultural relevance of traditional urban cores. Seeking the *carte blanche* that Haussmann enjoyed in his rebuilding of Second Empire Paris, Moses pursued an aggressive program of modernization that influenced an entire generation of American road builders in cities throughout the nation. Ultimately however, toward the end of his career, as the freeway revolt gathered steam, Moses discovered that Haussmannization did not translate easily into the messy realities of American democracy.

Nonetheless, the structural transformation of Paris during the Second Empire established a cultural framework for understanding the folklore of the twentieth-century freeway. Haussmannization sparked an outpouring of literary and visual expression that many scholars associate with the birth of aesthetic modernism. Much of this work criticized the new urban order. Émile Zola, for example, depicted the heavy toll that Haussmannization took on the city's poor.¹⁷ With agonizing detail, his novels described the ruthless patterns of displacement that enthroned a rising bourgeoisie. The poet Charles Baudelaire took a more ironic stance toward these new social confrontations. Strolling the city's new boulevards, sometimes with a pet alligator on a leash, the flaneur translated his observations into verse that satirized the pretense of the bourgeoisie and savaged the paradox of desperate poverty in the heart of a newly gilded city.¹⁸ The impressionists, on the other hand, rendered a more ambivalent portrait of the new Paris. Standing with their easels on Haussmann's boulevards, Claude Monet, Édouard Manet, Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, and others depicted public scenes of pleasure and spectacle, fit for a city in the throes of gentrification. Yet their work also registered the psychic toll of rapid modernization, inserting hints of alienation and exploitation into their image of the new Paris.¹⁹

Let this brief detour through Second Empire Paris remind us of a larger historical effort to interpret structural forms of modernization through cultural expression, much broader in space and time than the purview of this study permits. Cultural workers in the ghettos and barrios of the postwar American city—muralists, poets, painters, musicians, choreographers, graf-

fiti writers, and photographers—inheriting a *Western* tradition of interpreting modernization through creative expression, bringing their own experiences, memories, and judgments to bear on the vast and unwieldy canon of aesthetic modernism, which remains rooted in Eurocentric notions of cultural hierarchy. Like the Parisian working class during the Second Empire, city people of color in the age of the freeway bore the brunt of urban modernization programs. As with Haussmann's boulevards, the imposition of high-speed expressways on the precincts of the American city marked yet another expression of "capitalism in its essential form"—another instance of an interventionist state attempting to rationalize urban space and stimulate economic growth.²⁰ This work also favored the interests of an expanding middle class (who settled on the suburban fringe without having to sacrifice convenient and autonomous access to the city) while helping eradicate working-class slums and create new incentives for profit and gentrification.

But if we limit our reading of the folklore of the freeway to the language of class and class struggle, America's "race problem," to quote a homegrown discourse of race, remains stark in its absence. For one thing, the social conflicts engendered by urban highway construction were generally not articulated through the discourse of class. Through powerful union representatives, American workers expressed their undivided support for the interstate highway program and its promise of mass employment. On this issue, they stood on the side of their employers, rooting for more highways in more cities. Also, as a recent generation of urban historians has shown, highway construction conspired with other state-sanctioned programs—urban renewal, slum clearance, suburbanization, and public housing—to isolate urban communities of color, creating a "second ghetto" in the heart of American cities, and a "second barrio" in the urban Southwest.²¹

Such historical developments worked in tandem to enforce the racial segregation of urban America during the postwar period, even as the civil rights movement made greater strides toward racial equality. The spate of racial violence that erupted in American cities in the mid-1960s shocked white Americans who had insulated themselves within exclusive suburban enclaves, willfully ignorant of inner-city conditions of racial poverty. After riots in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts, 1965 became America's 1848, sparking

more stringent demands for racial equality and drawing the world's attention to America's latest race problem. In the depths of inner-city despair, highway construction added insult to injury, fanning the flames of racial unrest. As one black former resident of the Rondo neighborhood of St. Paul said in 1964, just days after that city's worst racial conflict, "We've got cops busting down our doors and freeways destroying our neighborhoods. . . . Of course we're mad, what would you expect?"²²

The following five thematic chapters ground the urban history of the freeway revolt and explore its diverse expressions in American culture since passage of the Interstate Highway Act in 1956. Chapter 1 provides a historical overview of highway construction in metropolitan areas and of its relationship to the broader transformation of the postwar American city. It begins with the experts and their mystique. The postwar generation of highway planners and engineers reached the peak of their profession during the 1950s, presenting themselves as the very personification of scientific expertise and empirical objectivity. Their technocratic reign ended in the following decade as freeway revolts erupted in cities across the nation, feeding on a deepening suspicion of state power and forcing substantial revisions of highway policy at both local and national levels. These scattered victories, however, only widened racial and class disparities in the city. Beyond the communities that successfully blocked specific highway projects, freeways hit hard, casting shadows over the experience of daily life and inspiring new expressions of political dissent, which are taken up by the following chapters.

Chapter 2 explores the history of the freeway revolt through the analytic lens of gender. In the aftermath of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which no scholar has read as a feminist indictment of suburbanization, second-wave feminism forced a radical rethinking of social relations and of the spaces that enforced the maintenance of patriarchy. This chapter considers the indictment of the freeway as one of those spaces, analyzing cultural critiques of highway construction as a male pursuit. *The Feminine Mystique*, though often regarded as the opening salvo of second-wave feminism, also draws criticism from black and Chicana feminists as a narrow argument for equality for white middle-class women. This discrepancy is a central premise of this chapter, contrasting the experiences of white women who successfully

organized their neighborhoods against highway construction—Jane Jacobs and her ilk—with those of Chicanas and other women of color who deployed creativity and talent in the absence of political and economic power to issue a sharp rebuke of highway construction as not only a racist but also a sexist enterprise.

Chapter 3 considers the aftermath of highway construction and local efforts to preserve the memory of communities lost under the freeway. Highway construction sparked a community's pride in its past, either as a political strategy against the invasion of bulldozers or as latter-day nostalgia for a bygone world. Race provides one means for comprehending this difference. During the age of the interstate, only those remnants of the urban landscape built by and for European Americans counted as historically significant. This Eurocentrism worked to the advantage of some neighborhoods, such as Soho in New York City and the French Quarter in New Orleans, whose defenders against federal bulldozers won a powerful weapon with passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966. This act, however, did not save the black neighborhoods that won historical recognition long after they were destroyed. The chapter thus leaps to the 1980s, when African Americans in two cities, Miami and St. Paul, initiated concerted attempts to rebuild the cherished memories of communities lost to the freeway. Between these different stories with very different outcomes, this chapter illustrates the way freeways impaired not only a community's experience of space but also its sense of time.

Chapter 4 turns to the aesthetic dimensions of the freeway revolt in the history of American art since the age of the interstate. Related to the emergence of pop art, the noted portraits of freeways in painting and photography since the 1960s signaled an aesthetic engagement with new modes of urban experience that debuted in cities like Los Angeles, as well as a persistent disquiet with the ever-forward thrust of modernity, a favored theme in Western art since the Industrial Revolution. This work, however, pales in comparison to the Chicano portrait of the freeway in East Los Angeles, steeped in the riotous colors of a barrio aesthetic, which took shape as an integral part of the Chicano movement in the early 1970s. As East L.A. artists who made the barrio the subject of their work, David Botello, Carlos Almaraz, and Frank

Romero translated the immediacy of their experience with highway construction into colorful paintings that satirized, criticized, and aestheticized the structure of the freeway. Their *situated* perspective of the freeway in its barrio context contrasted sharply with the abstract imagery of white artists who emphasized the freeway's extraction from its physical and social environment. In exploring the image of the freeway in art and photography, this chapter illustrates the way the visual culture of the interstate era registered the racial conflicts engendered by metropolitan highway construction.

Chapter 5 retains some of its predecessor's focus on visual culture by exploring the problems and possibilities of living with freeways. The spaces under the freeway are familiar to city people of color, often associated with crime, vagrancy, drugs, prostitution, and other troubles that Marvin Gaye memorably described as the "Inner City Blues." Nonetheless, city people of color strive to reclaim this space through expressive cultural traditions, weaving it back into the fabric of their communities. The most spectacular example is San Diego's Chicano Park, where local artists and their supporters won the right to paint murals on the concrete piers that support the superstructure of a highway interchange. Chapter 5 surveys this and similar strategies of adaptation and improvisation, emphasizing the way urban communities of color take advantage of the freeway's proximity to assert their presence in the urban landscape.

The conclusion begins by exploring a recent twist in the folklore of the freeway. On the Hawaiian island of Oahu, the long-delayed construction of Interstate H-3 between Honolulu and Kaneohe Bay sparked an unexpected backlash among the descendants of indigenous Hawaiians, who rallied against the desecration of sacred ancestral lands. Invoking ancient superstitions and legends, the local cry of opposition against H-3 fueled a broader resurgence of Hawaiian folkloric traditions during the 1980s. After long and costly delays, the sixteen miles of H-3 ultimately opened in 1998, making it the most expensive road in American history. Its construction sparked defiant expressions of indigeneity and sponsored new levels of racial conflict on the Hawaiian Islands.

The fight against H-3, like the many cultural expressions and practices

described in this book, signaled the unexpected consequences of building the modernist city. Even after the turmoil of world war, economic depression, and genocide and under the threat of nuclear annihilation, the executioners of the interstate highway program rested assured that their work made life better for all Americans, that it brought economic development, national security, and social progress—all powerful cultural ideals that found vibrant expression in the zeitgeist of 1950s America. They pushed history forward, claiming the mantle of national progress to build the largest public works project in human history.

Yet the sixties and seventies aroused deep skepticism toward these men and their achievement. Like policemen, soldiers, and other agents of state power, highway planners and engineers found themselves on trial for abusing public trust and colluding with powerful private interests. Neither guilty nor innocent, the technocrats who rammed freeways into American cities faced a changing public mood, largely unsympathetic to their expertise and authority. They saw their power capped by substantial reforms in federal highway policy, which mandated a new sensitivity to the contexts of nature, culture, and history. Today, contemporary ambivalence toward their work is once again altering the urban built environment in profound ways. Some cities are widening their freeways; others are tearing them down. Some cities have enacted costly new megaprojects to correct the mistakes of the interstate megaproject; Boston, for example, buried its elevated Central Artery to restore an organic urban whole.

So far, however, these remedies seem little more than aesthetic treatments that fail to address the broader inequities exacerbated by the aggressive push of urban highway construction after 1956.²³ This book explores these inequities and their expression in the cacophony of American culture. The folklore of the freeway entails its own freeway revolt, an unexpected consequence of the racial biases built into highway policy and practice during the interstate years. Obviously this was not the first, nor even the most egregious, instance of race bias in public policy, but unlike other institutionalized forms of racism, this example retains its stature in the physical landscape of the city, casting noxious shadows over poor, crowded neighborhoods that

remain underemployed and underserved. This scenario resurfaces in the following pages, rendered through a set of words and images that assert the unique significance of diverse communities, histories, and identities and inspire new forms of community organization. They are the unexpected consequences of building the modernist city, whose creators planted the seeds of their own destruction.

The Master's Plan

The Rise and Fall of the Modernist City

The American city was in crisis after World War II. The suburbanization of business, retail, industry, and home ownership depleted the urban core of the riches it had hoarded over the past century or so. Against this backdrop, public officials at federal, state, and local levels, many reared within the managerial cultures of the Progressive Era and the New Deal, prescribed massive interventions to remedy what they diagnosed as an urban crisis. They confronted a conundrum of their own making. To counter the consequences of policies that promoted the decentralization of employment, consumption, and home ownership, they implemented bold measures to rescue the city from the threat of irrelevance.

History has made it clear that these efforts—urban renewal, public housing, slum clearance, and highway construction—produced their own urban crisis with lasting consequences; the effects persist today. Yet this approach to the American city was not conceived willy-nilly. Rather, it inherited a weighty tradition of thought and practice, from eighteenth-century Europe to twentieth-century America, fueled by the trans-Atlantic thrust of modernity and its twin engines, urbanization and industrialization. From Charles Fourier to Henri de Saint-Simon, Baron Haussmann to Otto Wagner, Ebenezer Howard to Daniel Burnham, Le Corbusier to Robert Moses, powerful new ideas emerged about the modern city and how to guard its successive explosions of wealth and population against the ever-present threat of total anarchy.

These ideas and the practices they inspired wrought the modernist city,

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Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Richard O. Baumbach and William E. Borah, *The Second Battle of New Orleans: A History of the Vieux Carré Riverfront Expressway Controversy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1980); Alan Lupo, *Rites of Way: The Politics of Transportation in Boston and the U.S. City* (New York: Little, Brown, 1971); Helen Leavitt, *Superhighway-Superhoax* (New York: Doubleday, 1970); Ben Kelley, *The Pavers and the Paved: The Real Cost of America's Highway Program* (New York: Donald W. Brown, 1971); Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).
2. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 312.
3. My thanks to George Lipsitz for sharing this joke with me.
4. Ralph McCartney, interview by Devon Williams, August 14, 1997, *Tell the Story*, Oral History Project, Black Archives Foundation, Miami, Florida; Dr. Constance Raye Jones Price, interview by Kateleen Hope Cavett, February 24, 2003, Rondo Oral History Project, Ramsey County Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota; Yusef Mgeni (born and raised in the Rondo neighborhood as Charlie Anderson), interview by Kateleen Hope Cavett, Rondo Oral History Project, March 21, 2003; Rudolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 2000); Helena Maria Viramontes, interview by Michael Silverblatt, "Bookworm," August 16, 2007, on KCRW, www.kcrw.com/etc/programs/bw/bw070816helenamaria_viramon.
5. James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 8.
6. For a discussion of urban infrastructure and social inequality, see David Torres-Rouff, "Water Use, Ethnic Conflict, and Infrastructure in Nineteenth Century Los

Angeles," *Pacific Historical Review* 75, no. 1 (February 2006): 119–40. See also Matthew Gandy, *Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002); and Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Post-war Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

7. This point draws on Edward Soja's notions of spatial justice; see Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

8. James Holston, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (London: Architectural Press, 1960); Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, 3rd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992); Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992). For a more general cultural history of modernity and postmodernity, see Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*; and David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

9. Holston, *The Modernist City*, 13.

10. Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

11. On the freeway in Los Angeles, in particular, two works stand out: David Brodsky, *L.A. Freeway: An Appreciative Essay* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). On Los Angeles generally and its expressive cultures, see Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US City* (London: Verso Press, 2000); Kelley, *Race Rebels*; Anthony Macías, *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1935–1968* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008); Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

12. On the urban history of Mexican Americans in twentieth-century America, see Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848–1930* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); Rudolfo Acuña, *Anything but Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles* (London: Verso Press, 1995).

13. David H. Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958); Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*; David Harvey, *Paris: Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2006); see also David P. Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labors of Baron Haussmann* (New York: Free Press, 1995);

Michael Carmona, *Haussmann: His Life and Times and the Making of Modern Paris* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002).

14. Valette quoted in Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 3.

15. T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

16. Robert Moses, "What Happened to Haussmann," *Architectural Forum* 77 (July 1942): 57–66.

17. See *L'Assomoir*, for example, or other novels from Zola's Rougon-Marquart series.

18. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, 142–71.

19. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*; Herbert, *Impressionism*.

20. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 55.

21. The term "second ghetto" comes from Arnold Hirsch, who describes modernist public housing towers as a new form of containment for black racial poverty. See Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940–1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

22. *St. Paul Dispatch*, September 28, 1956.

23. To be fair, the Central Artery/Tunnel Project (CAT Project, known as the Big Dig) was also about expanding and retooling Boston's highway system to meet current traffic needs, though many constituencies at both local and national levels wanted to see the tearing down of Interstate 93, the "Green Monster" that cut the city in half, separating it from Boston Harbor. See Dan McNichol, *The Big Dig: The Largest Urban Construction Project in the History of the Modern World* (New York: Silver Lining Books, 2000).

1. THE MASTER'S PLAN

1. Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*; Leonardo Benevolo, *The Origins of Modern Town Planning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967); Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century*; Holston, *The Modernist City*.

2. Dan McNichol, *The Roads That Built America: The Incredible Story of the U.S. Interstate System* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 2006); William Kaszynski, *The American Highway: The History and Culture of Roads in the United States* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2000); Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997); John Murphy, *The Eisenhower Interstate System: Building America Then and Now* (New York: Chelsea House, 2009); Felix Rohatyn, *Bold Endeavors: How Our Government Built America and Why It Must Rebuild Now* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009); Earl Swift, *The Big Roads: The Untold Story of the Engineers, Visionaries, and Trailblazers Who Created the American Superhighways* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011); Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*.