Reinventing downtown San Diego: A spatial and cultural analysis of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza

Jordan Chase Ervin
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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REINVENTING DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO: A
SPATIAL AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS
OF THE GASLAMP QUARTER
AND HORTON PLAZA

by

Jordan Chase Ervin
Bachelor of Arts
San Diego State University
2005

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in History
Department of History
College of Liberal Arts

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2007
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Reinventing Downtown San Diego: A Spatial and Cultural Analysis of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in History

[Signatures of Examination Committee Chair and Dean of the Graduate College]
ABSTRACT

Reinventing Downtown San Diego: A Spatial and Cultural Analysis of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza

by

Jordan Chase Ervin

Dr. Elizabeth Fraterrigo, Examination Committee Chair
Assistant Professor of History
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

This research project explores issues of historic preservation, gentrification, and the contention over public space and culture. More specifically, it analyzes these elements within the setting of the historic Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza in downtown San Diego. By tracing their development and conception from the early 1970s into the twenty-first century, this research reveals the different types of images and cultures that city leaders and developers created within the built environment. More importantly, the project sheds light upon how different social groups understood, experienced, and responded to the transformation of these spaces. This type of analysis is crucial for historians and city planners since no current history has been presented on San Diego’s rapidly changing downtown. The thesis seeks to reveal the complexity of gentrification and preservation in downtown regions such as San Diego, in hopes of sparking greater discussion among city officials, preservationists, private investors, and the general public.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................. iii  
LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................................ vi  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. viii  
INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................... 1  

| CHAPTER 1 RETHINKING DOWNTOWN: EARLY SAN DIEGO URBAN CRISIS AND A NEW PLAN |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A Janus Faced Past .......... | 8                                                                |
| An Era of Urban Crisis      | 8                                                                |
| The Rejuvenation Potential of Cities | 11                                                               |
| San Diego’s Urban Reform Agenda | 13                                                              |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 2 SOUTH OF BROADWAY: AN ALTERNATIVE URBAN LANDSCAPE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gaslamp Quarter Project Area ..........</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horton Plaza Project Area ..............</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The World the People in the Suburbs Have Run Away From”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The People ........................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Infrastructure ..................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fabric of an Alternative Community ......................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 3 THE GASLAMP QUARTER AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LEGIBLE SPACE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Preservation Movement ...............................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Stingaree to Gaslamp Quarter .........................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Creation of a Themed District ...........................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaslamp Quarter Project Goals ................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing a Safe Downtown Experience ....................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Regulations .....................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Scripted Environment ...........................................................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 4 HORTON PLAZA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LEGIBLE SPACE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late Nineteenth Century Department Stores ............................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postwar Suburban Malls .........................................................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Fifth Avenue in the Early Twentieth Century</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>CCDC Development Sub-Area Map, 1975</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Fourth Avenue, 1980</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Fifth Avenue, 1980</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Yuma Building on Fifth Avenue, 1980</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Marston Building on Fifth Avenue, 1980</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Golden West SRO Hotel on Fourth Avenue, 1980</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Horton Plaza Park, 1955</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>Horton Plaza Fountain</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>Gaslamp Quarter Project Area Map</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>Yuma Building Historical Site Board Registry Form</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>Gaslamp Quarter National Register Placard</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13</td>
<td>Gaslamp Quarter Sign</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14</td>
<td>Gaslamp Quarter Official Logo</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15</td>
<td>Rehabilitated Keating Building, Fifth Avenue</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16</td>
<td>Rehabilitated Yuma Building, Fifth Avenue</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17</td>
<td>Rehabilitated Horton Grand Hotel, Fourth and Island Street</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 18</td>
<td>Rehabilitated Rio Hotel, Fifth Avenue</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 19</td>
<td>Rehabilitated Louis Bank of Commerce, Fifth Avenue</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 20</td>
<td>Rehabilitated Grand Pacific Hotel, Fifth Avenue</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 21</td>
<td>Five-Globe Lights in the Gaslamp Quarter</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 22</td>
<td>Gaslamp Quarter Sidewalk Café</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 23</td>
<td>Trolley Inside of San Diego’s Old Spaghetti Factory</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 24</td>
<td>Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project Boundaries, 1972</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 25</td>
<td>ROMA Plan, 1973</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 26</td>
<td>The Lyceum Theatre</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 27</td>
<td>Horton Plaza Passageways</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 28</td>
<td>Horton Plaza Superstructure</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 29</td>
<td>Street Landscaping in Horton Plaza Mall</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 30</td>
<td>Carts in Horton Plaza Mall</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 31</td>
<td>The Palazzo Building, Horton Plaza Mall</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 32</td>
<td>Fast Food Chain, Horton Plaza Mall</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 33</td>
<td>Sketch of the Former City Rescue Mission, Fifth Avenue</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 34</td>
<td>F Street Adult Bookstore, Fourth Avenue</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 35</td>
<td>Romantix Adult Bookstore, Fifth Avenue</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 36</td>
<td>Gaslamp Quarter Garbage Cans</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 37</td>
<td>Fencing Around Horton Plaza Park</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 38</td>
<td>Landscaping in Horton Plaza Park</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 39  Gaslamp Quarter Starbucks Coffee ................................................................. 112
Figure 40  Borders Bookstore, Sixth Avenue................................................................. 112
Figure 41  Hustler Hollywood Adult Bookstore, Sixth Avenue ................................. 113
Figure 42  T.G.I. Fridays Restaurant, Fifth Avenue...................................................... 114
Figure 43  Hooters Restaurant, between Fourth and Fifth Avenues ......................... 114
Figure 44  Hard Rock Café, Fourth Avenue ................................................................. 115
Figure 45  Stingaree Nightclub, Sixth Avenue............................................................... 115
Figure 46  Gaslamp Quarter Lofts ............................................................................... 118
Figure 47  Gaslamp Quarter Condominiums ............................................................... 119
Figure 48  Gaslamp Quarter Comic Strip .................................................................... 121
Figure 49  Downtown Comic Strip ............................................................................... 122
Figure 50  Homeless Man Sitting in Horton Plaza Park .............................................. 124
Figure 51  Homeless Man Sleeping in Horton Plaza Park .......................................... 124

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INTRODUCTION

In 1985, over fifty transients held a candle-light vigil calling attention to their plight in downtown San Diego. Citizens from all walks of life marched through downtown as they sang, chanted, and prayed together.¹ The marchers voiced their concerns over their displacement from newly developed areas of downtown, along with issues such as safety, affordable housing, and their systematic exclusion from public space. This event transpired against the backdrop of the newly developed Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza, symbolizing how certain groups of individuals and their social problems seemed to disappear amongst the transformed downtown. While these citizens became visible at this particular moment, they represented a marginalized group trying to establish their presence in a new downtown.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 in recognition of its late nineteenth century Victorian architecture, the sixteen and a half block Gaslamp Quarter lies within the heart of downtown San Diego. It has since become one of Southern California’s trendiest urban districts featuring dining, shopping, and entertainment. Nearby, the Horton Plaza superstructure, opening in 1985, adjoins the Gaslamp Quarter. Covering six and a half city blocks, the open-air structure is an amalgam of art, entertainment, traditional retail, and restaurants. Attached to the northern end of the

structure stands Horton Plaza Park, a traditional urban plaza that has provided space for public gathering since the late nineteenth-century.

In recent decades, the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza superstructure erupt with activity at all hours of the day. During the week, the district and mall are filled with downtown office workers, tourists, shoppers, and entertainment seekers. On Friday and Saturday nights, the Gaslamp Quarter is particularly vibrant, creating an atmosphere resembling Mardi Gras or the Las Vegas Strip. Locals and tourists alike weave their way through the crowded and brightly lit sidewalks to partake in the district’s activities. Enticing smells from expensive eateries overflow onto the streets as people shop at high end specialty establishments. As the ten o’clock hour approaches, long lines of primped young men and scantily clad women begin congregating in front of trendy and pricey night clubs, which blare their music out onto the streetscape. Against this backdrop, police officers and private security forces patrol the region.

This trendy urban environment has not always existed in downtown San Diego. During its first decade of existence the Gaslamp Quarter struggled to become successful, due in part to its sordid past. Beginning in the late nineteenth century this environment once served as the city’s red-light district. This trend continued through the 1970s as the area featured various elements of urban blight. Old buildings stood frozen in time, decaying as they hosted cheap restaurants, bars, and liquor stores. These buildings also housed low rent apartments as well as residential hotels. The wide assortment of adult businesses, however, remained one of the district’s most prominent features. A substantial number of marginalized inhabitants also existed within this neglected section of the city, ranging from the elderly, to prostitutes, alcoholics, and transients. This milieu
existed outside of the purview of citizens who lived in the more prosperous areas of San Diego. Furthermore, the middle-class disliked, or claimed to dislike, all aspects of the region's cultural landscape. Many city leaders and middle class citizens failed to distinguish between the different types of people and social problems within the area. As a result, all of the regions inhabitants became “invisible” as city leaders and middle-class citizens disapprovingly turned their backs on the area. \(^2\)

The Gaslamp Quarter project was a by-product of a national historic preservation movement, and mirrored projects in cities spanning from San Francisco to Boston. \(^3\) The Horton Plaza project similarly embraced elements of this preservation movement, yet it also followed an additional trend that centered on bringing major retailing centers back downtown. As redeveloped, the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza offered locals and tourists a legible way to conceptualize the previously neglected urban core by offering a semi-public space in the medium of themed architecture. \(^4\) Urban planner Kevin Lynch defines a city’s legibility as, “the ease with which its parts can be recognized and can be


organized into a coherent pattern." Additionally, historian John Findlay describes this concept as the intense supervision of urban forms through careful design and simplified land use patterns. Such legibility satisfies middle-class desires for experience while overcoming their reluctance to take risks, particularly within an urban setting.

As a result, the legibility of downtown San Diego, made possible through the development of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza, transformed the previously gritty urban environment into an orderly and coherent space for middle and upper class citizens. Over time, the reinvented downtown became a place to explore and spend money—an urban Disneyland. In order to understand this transformation, it is crucial to trace the Gaslamp project from 1968, an era of nation-wide urban crisis, through its development in the 1970s, and into the struggling transition years of the 1980s. The Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project can be traced from this same era as the project paved the way for traditional retailing and entertainment to return downtown in a mall-like setting. More importantly, its successful opening in 1985 bolstered the struggling historic district so that by the 1990s substantial changes in the Gaslamp Quarter, and downtown as a whole, fully began to materialize.

This transformation, however, is only one portion of the larger narrative. As historian Phoebe Kropp asserts, "To read the history of a place through its buildings requires more than tracing the skyline; one must read broadly into the stories and people behind the buildings." By studying the transformation of the built environment, this reveals a

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5 Lynch, 2-3.
6 Findlay, 51, 285.
“container of experiences” ripe with people, events, and conflict. Public historian Dolores Hayden further emphasizes how memory, myth, space, and place are all intertwined in “place memory.” All of these components become entangled in a battleground over urban imagery and the symbolic meaning of place, a conflict that illustrates that the spatial landscape cannot be divorced from the social and cultural one.

This study applies the insights of Kropp and Hayden in order to explore the reactions to the spatial and cultural transformations of urban life in post 1960s San Diego. It is crucial that the historian pulls back the analytical lens far enough to equally evaluate not only the principals involved in reshaping the new environment, but also those who contested these changes. Furthermore, the historian should not romanticize the original landscape and its inhabitants, or the reinvented urban space. As a result, this method will provide a clearer understanding of the consequences associated with urban redevelopment.

Throughout the process of creating the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza, developers wished to cleanse undesirable social and physical elements within the project area. As a result, urban space and culture turned inward as the built environment became militarized and scripted. This byproduct occurred as city leaders and developers employed elements of defense, security, and surveillance, in order to police social and

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10 Ibid., 138.

11 Ibid.
physical boundaries within the project area. The transformation of culture also became a powerful means of controlling the urban environment as the types of businesses and services offered symbolized who belonged in the space and who did not. Those with the least influence either became surrounded by, or thrust outside of, the transformed urban space. As the city unveiled plans to reinvent its downtown, marginalized, and previously “invisible,” inhabitants suddenly became a painfully visible problem that stood in the way of revitalization. Developers were forced to confront the distinct cultures, communities, and lifestyles that had existed prior to redevelopment.

As the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza emerged, different groups of people experienced and understood the urban space in various ways. On one hand, the preservation and redevelopment project represented a laudatory sign of progress that cleansed the sordid, neglected tenderloin of the city’s urban core. On the other hand, the project threatened a particular culture and lifestyle for a diverse population already living in the area. Such transformations made a marginalized population visible to city leaders, private investors, and the mainstream public, reminding them that human beings still existed within the transforming urban space. However, as San Diego’s newly reinvented downtown became extremely economically successful, these marginalized citizens and their social problems threatened to become “invisible” once more as they became displaced to other areas of the city.


14 This method of counter-current analysis, which focuses on the contentions over perception, culture, and identity within the same urban space, among varying groups of people, can be seen in an article and text by historian Eric Avila. See Eric Avila, Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004); Eric Avila, “The Folklore of the Freeway: Space, Culture, and Identity in Postwar Los Angeles” Aztlan 23 (1998): 15-31.
This study argues that while there are positive elements of scripted and reinvented space, there are other issues at stake, such as the destruction of communities, displacement of the poor, and conversion of entire downtown regions into exclusive enclaves for a limited segment of society. Reinvented urban spaces such as the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza not only insulate a particular segment of society from unpleasant social problems, but they further render other inhabitants, along with their struggles, invisible to city leaders and the mainstream population by creating pockets of urban affluence. As a result, such urban spaces create the false reality that the people, culture, and built environment prevalent in the revitalized area are representative of the general public.

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CHAPTER 1

RETHINKING DOWNTOWN: EARLY
SAN DIEGO, URBAN CRISIS,
AND A NEW PLAN

A Janus Faced Past

Throughout its history, downtown San Diego has always had a complex janus-faced past. On one hand, the city boasted a thriving urban center in the late nineteenth century. In this same era, however, downtown also featured a thriving red-light district. Both of these elements would continue to exist throughout the twentieth century especially in the postwar era. Downtown San Diego, as with other urban centers across the country in the postwar era, endured through cycles of development, decay, urban crisis and renewal. Underlying this trend were new ideologies brought forth by a group of progressive minded scholars, which challenged how cities should be viewed and designed, in hopes of finding a solution to the ensuing national urban crisis. Local planners and city leaders in San Diego not only adopted many of these ideas, but sought to steer clear of federal involvement by strengthening the ties between local private and public sectors. As a result, San Diego had all of the right ingredients needed to reinvent its downtown.

Business man Alonzo E. Horton founded modern day downtown San Diego in 1867. His wharf at the edge of Fifth Avenue led into the main artery of the city. (See figure 1)
Two years prior, the railroad arrived in San Diego, which revealed how San Diego was no longer isolated. As a result, this helped develop the nascent agriculture industry as well as the waterfront port. What followed was a late nineteenth century boom town comprised of a bourgeoning commercial district and an influx of new inhabitants such as Chinese citizens. New transportation systems such as an electric trolley system bolstered this bustling environment. As the waterfront grew, the area became associated with Chinese inhabitants and waterfront life, which included, “the lusty sailor out for a spree after many weeks at sea.”

Industries revolving around alcohol, gambling, and prostitution flourished during the late nineteenth century as one San Diego Union reporter observed:

Strolling down Fifth in the evening, the ear is rasped by notes from asthmatic pianos, discordant fiddles and drunken voices boisterously singing ribald songs. Noses are offended by garlic, swill and fried meat coming from some chophouse. The eye is pained to see men lying drunk on every corner...it is fully as bad as the Barbary Coast in San Francisco.

Moral crusaders censured this sordid scene, which led to police raids and fines targeted at questionable businesses and activities.

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2 Ibid.
At the beginning of the twentieth century, legitimate businesses, attempting to distance themselves from this atmosphere, began moving north to intersections such as Fifth Avenue and Broadway. This created a border between the legitimate section of downtown and the red-light district, which would exist for the next seventy-five years as vice-oriented businesses filled the resulting spatial vacuum. The red-light district, also referred to as the Stingaree, quickly gained the reputation of being immoral, unsafe, and unfit for women. City authorities and citizens sought to clean up the area for the city's 1915 Panama-California Exposition, which sought to offer "legitimate" types of entertainment. This resulted in health inspections, raids, and the closure of many Stingaree businesses. These efforts also wiped out the adjacent Chinatown region.

While city leaders and health officials declared the Stingaree "dead" by the early 1920s, vice-oriented activities resumed into the Prohibition era. Throughout the twentieth

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3 Ibid.
century the development of downtown San Diego would mirror the progression of other national urban centers, especially in the West.4

An Era of Urban Crisis

The military industry boom of World War II helped transform San Diego by creating new industries related to heavy defense spending, and sprawling suburbs. The increasing popularity of automobiles helped change the patterns of leisure and transportation, and the locations of commercial centers and business offices, by locating these elements away from the urban core to regions such as Mission Valley, north of downtown. Entertainment and cultural centers also shifted away from downtown to places like Mission Bay Aquatic Park. The greater downtown area lacked vitality and by the 1950s, no significant building had been built for nearly thirty years. Downtown earned the reputation of being a navy town with a seedy tenderloin region, which mirrored the Stingaree. Ten years later, Mayor Wilson and city planners set out to revitalize particular business districts downtown, excluding the old Stingaree, which began with new high-rise construction projects.5

Following World War II, urban centers across the country faced decay and the exodus of Anglo citizens. Downtown San Diego was no exception, as the area faced decay in the postwar era. Furthermore, retail shops and entertainment venues also fled the city for the burgeoning suburbs. Federal Housing Administration and VA loans made these new

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4 For other literature relevant to San Diego’s past refer to the following sources. Roger Lotchin, “The City and the Sword in Metropolitan California, 1919-1941,” Urbanism Past and Present 7 (Summer/Fall 1982): 1-6; Roger Lotchin, Fortress California: From Warfare to Welfare (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

suburban residences possible while automobiles, accompanied by expansive freeway systems, helped create decentralized commercial and industrial centers. Within the remaining urban cores, the Public Housing Acts of 1949, 1954, and 1965 encouraged urban renewal by bulldozing slums and replacing them with inadequate high-rise public housing projects. Furthermore, the expanding freeways carved up the remaining urban environment by ripping through various lower income neighborhoods.

As a result, groups such as ethnic and racial minorities, elderly people, and the poor became trapped, physically and financially, within the decaying urban centers. African Americans faced additional hindrances, including red-lining and block busting, designed to keep them out of white suburbs. Other strategies, such as the creation of master planned communities with zoning restrictions against low income apartment units, along with segregated schools, posed further challenges for African Americans trapped within downtown regions. These crumbling cities erupted in the 1960s with nation-wide race riots in reaction to the urban crisis. For example, the 1965 Watts riot not only spread like a wild fire to nearby cities such as San Diego, but also to cities across the nation.

The Rejuvenation Potential of Cities

Responding to this national crisis, a group of progressive-minded scholars emphasized the connection between urban space, image, and individual and social well-being. Rather than accepting new postwar spatial forms such as sprawl and fragmentation, most visible in Los Angeles, they presented alternative frameworks for understanding and creating urban space that favored economic, social, and ethnic diversity within a dense urban setting. Underlying these efforts was their collective belief
in the importance and value of urban centers in the postwar era. One such scholar and activist, Jane Jacobs, argued that cities were an “unstudied, unrespected, sacrificial victim” filled with rejuvenation potential because they were appealing, vibrant, and organic. Planners, she continued, should utilize and create a network comprised of parks and other public spaces to create a “street fabric” between the built environment and diverse groups of people. To bolster this “fabric,” the author advocated the use of elements such as old buildings, mixed-use zoning, dense housing, and short blocks.

One of the nation’s most influential urban planners, Kevin Lynch, echoed this sentiment by positing that cities “Speak of the individuals and their complex society, of their aspirations and their historical tradition, of the natural setting, and of the complicated functions and movements of the city world.” Collectively, this body of scholarship encouraged city leaders and citizens to rethink attitudes about the city. Jane Jacobs concluded that, “Cities have the capacity of providing something for everyone, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.” This premise thus reveals how planners such as Jacobs and Lynch encouraged leaders to create democratic urban space, not just for a limited segment of society, but for the entire populous of the city.

San Diego’s Urban Reform Agenda

The influence of this new ideology became extremely evident in the city of San Diego. The city’s new mayor, Pete Wilson presented an aggressive urban reform agenda.

7 Ibid., 129.
9 Jacobs, 238.
in 1972. Wilson called for the slowing of suburban sprawl and the revitalization of downtown by mixing housing, cultural, educational, and recreational facilities among the existing and planned office buildings. The keystone of the plan called for bringing major retail enterprises back downtown. In 1972, the mayor and city council, along with various groups of the private sector approved the Horton Plaza Redevelopment Plan.\(^{10}\)

In order to better prepare for these plans, the San Diego City Council accepted a ten thousand dollar private donation from the Marston family to hire an independent consultant to prepare a study on the regional landscape of San Diego. George Marston, considered one of the city’s “founding fathers,” was a wealthy business man who developed the Marston Company Department Store downtown in the late nineteenth century. In 1974 the council hired renowned urban planners Kevin Lynch and Donald Appleyard to prepare the report. In their study entitled, “Temporary Paradise? A Look at the Special Landscape of the San Diego Region” the planners reinstated their idea of legibility, explaining, “centers of a city are the places that people identify with, sharing reflected glory or shame, depending on their quality. People are proud of cities whose unique centers present a clear image to themselves and to visitors.”\(^{11}\)

The planners concluded that the City of San Diego and developers should create a plan not only to beautify the city, but to promote the fundamental rights of every citizen in the region. The plan, the authors revealed, should focus on six elements: livability, access, sense of place/time, responsiveness to human scale, pleasure, and conservation.

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\(^{11}\) Kevin Lynch and Donald Appleyard, *Temporary Paradise? A Look at the Special Landscape of the San Diego Region* (San Diego: Marston Family, 1974), 22.
The authors warned against the excessive use of private interests and profits at the expense of the urban and natural environment by stating, "It will be unfortunate if the renewal program banishes this liveliness [downtown] and substitutes for it an empty space ringed by bank fronts...thus the city becomes a collection of private islands, which ignore each other and ignore the general public." 12

The following year, in 1975, the city adopted a proposal to create a public, nonprofit organization, Centre City Development Corporation (CCDC) to focus solely on downtown redevelopment. The mayor and city council appointed seven members to this organization as they worked as liaisons between the public and private sectors. A year later, CCDC presented its first plan, the “Centre City Plan of 1975,” which called for the revitalization of downtown through four redevelopment project areas. Horton Plaza served as a large retail project, while the Marina District focused on dense urban housing aimed at the middle and upper classes. The Columbia area aimed to extend the business district westward towards the bay. Lastly, the Gaslamp Quarter sought to rehabilitate turn-of-the century architecture prevalent in the heart of downtown. 13 Due to their physical linkage and similar aims, the Gaslamp Quarter would be both dependent on and supportive of Horton Plaza. (See figure 2)

12 Ibid., 44-45.

Figure 2: CCDC Sub-Area Development Map, Downtown San Diego.

This 1975 plan was crucial because it not only acknowledged the centrality of downtown as the focal point for business, but also as the center of retail shops and cultural entertainment facilities. The plan aimed to unify downtown and "reinforce the role of the central area as the image of regional San Diego." Similarly, it revealed a shared commitment and partnership between city leaders and the private sector. These parties sought to reinvent the urban core by dividing downtown into several distinctive sub-districts, each with their own name, character, identity, and land uses. While the

14 City of San Diego Planning Department, "Centre City Development Plan: Summary 1975," San Diego, 1976. Microform available at the San Diego State University Library (CVL Docs SD-C400-P71-C397/4A).

neglected urban core provided the raw materials for transformation, other elements also played a crucial role. The partnership between the public and private sectors, reinforced by new ideologies regarding the value of the urban core, and an ambitious city plan, made downtown San Diego ripe for reinvention as well as historic preservation. However, prior to development, the principals reinventing downtown first had to grapple with the harsh reality that an existing physical and cultural landscape already existed within the urban core.
CHAPTER 2

SOUTH OF BROADWAY: AN ALTERNATIVE URBAN LANDSCAPE

Broadway Avenue served as a de facto boundary between two distinct worlds as the area north of Broadway underwent extensive urban renewal in the early 1960s, creating a new central business core. Besides office buildings, this core included fancy hotels and retail shops. During the daytime, the region bustled with activity as approximately 60,000 middle and upper class white collar suburban workers commuted downtown everyday. A completely different milieu existed south of Broadway Avenue, where the future Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza projects would emerge. In fact, the buildings within the future Gaslamp Quarter remained reasonably intact for preservation because this alternative landscape had been ignored by city leaders and mainstream private investors for decades. Even more crucial was the reality that there was an alternative culture and community embedded within this gritty built environment.¹

Gaslamp Quarter Project Area

The existing structures within the planned historic district had been built between 1880 and 1910, which resulted in a classic Victorian commercial streetscape. A variety of zoning types existed within the area with almost half of the land containing commercial space. Other portions of the region contained industrial space such as warehouses and manufacturing sites. Social services such as religious institutions and rehabilitation centers appeared amongst this landscape. In addition, the built environment included numerous residential hotels, referred to as Single Room Occupancy hotels, or SROs. By 1974, much of the building stock in the district stood in poor condition, yet many of the structures' ornate classical details, such as pediments, pilasters, columns, and parapets, still remained. Ranging from two to four stories high, the buildings shared common characteristics such as brick facades, bay windows, arches, and deep-set openings. At all hours, people of varying ages and from disparate parts of San Diego crowded the streets, lined with pawn shops, cheap restaurants, and SRO hotels. Other buildings housed card rooms, arcades, and bars. Possibly the most visible element within the built environment were the countless massage parlors and adult industries. Both the private and public spaces in this environment lacked the renewal efforts given to their northern counterpart.² (See figures 3-6)

² Gaslamp Quarter Association and City of San Diego, “Gaslamp Quarter Planned District,” February 1975, SDHS Public Records Collection, City Plans R1.33, 2:30; City of San Diego Planning Department, “Gaslamp Quarter Preliminary Redevelopment,” March 1975, SDHS Public Records Collection, City Plans R1.33, 2:33; City of San Diego, “Memorandum Designation of the Gaslamp Quarter Planned District as a Historical District,” July 9, 1976, SDHS Public Records Collection, City Plans R1.33, 3:15. City of San Diego, “Centre City San Diego Community Plan,” 1976, Microform available at the San Diego State University Library (CV Docs SD-C400-P71-C395/5); Kevin Eckert, The Unseen Elderly: A Study of Marginally Subsistent Hotel Dwellers (San Diego: The Campanile Press, 1980), 32. Eckert led a team of researchers and lived for approximately one year in the Gaslamp Quarter’s SRO hotels in the early 1970s. This anthropological study provides rich details about the urban space in the early 1970s.
Figure 3: Fourth Avenue, 1980.

Figure 4: Fifth Avenue, 1980.
Figure 5: Yuma Building on Fifth Avenue, 1980.

Figure 6: Marston Building on Fifth Avenue, 1980.

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As a result, land values in the red-light district were much lower than in other areas of the city. Values decreased over fifty percent per square foot as one crossed south of Broadway. Rent prices within this area remained three times lower than in other parts of downtown. In 1974, the base price of a typical overnight hotel rate within the red-light district served as the starting price for hotels north of Broadway. With no new hotels built within the district for over a decade, the majority of existing hotels were SROs, which varied in price, size, condition, and services. (Figure 7) Those who could not afford these establishments could migrate to places such as the City Rescue Mission on Fifth Avenue and Market.

Figure 7: Golden West SRO Hotel on Fourth Avenue, 1980.

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Horton Plaza Project Area

The six and a half city blocks that would encompass the future Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project shared many of the characteristics of this milieu, minus the large concentration of late-nineteenth, and early twentieth-century architecture. The future project site, however, did include the historic Balboa Theatre, Spreckels Building, and the Horton Grand Hotel. While the downtown area had lost all of its major traditional retailing venues by the 1970s, the Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project aimed to remedy this reality while building amongst the historic structures already existent on the project site. 5

Adjacent to the future Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project stood historic Horton Plaza. The plaza eventually connected to the northern end of the shopping center facing Broadway. Similarly, it sat adjacent to Fourth Avenue which served as a linkage to the Gaslamp Quarter. (See figure 8) Originally, the plaza was part of Alonzo Horton’s house in the late nineteenth century which he dedicated for public use in 1871. Serving as a central public space within downtown, citizens in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century used the plaza for activities ranging from civic celebrations, to political demonstrations, and rallies. In 1895, Horton officially sold the plaza to the city, which in turn renovated the area by planting palm trees. In the fall of 1910, the same year the US Grant Hotel opened across the street, architect Irving Gill designed an ornate fountain for the plaza, which the city dedicated in part to Alonzo

Following World War II, as the urban core deteriorated so did the plaza, yet it still provided public space for a particular segment of society.

The region south of Broadway Avenue was a completely different environment compared to its northern counterpart. The decaying region also contrasted the sprawling suburban communities outside of downtown as the buildings and types of businesses offered in the red-light district could not be found in suburban commercial malls such as Mission Valley and Fashion Valley, both north of downtown. Also not evident in the new suburban developments were particular groups of citizens as the area south of Broadway had an alternative culture and community with a unique social hierarchy.

Figure 8: Horton Plaza, looking across from Broadway Avenue in 1955. Fourth Avenue is to the left of the plaza.

As plans to develop the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza unfolded, city leaders such as Mayor Pete Wilson began to stigmatize the region’s citizens as deviants. Yet, if one considers the area south of Broadway as not only a geographic urban region, but as a human ecology, it becomes clear that an alternative culture and community existed.\(^7\) An individual who embraces an alternative culture can be defined as “someone who simply finds a different way to live and wishes to be left alone with it.”\(^8\) The existing inhabitants and their built environment consisted of citizens who did not embrace the dominant culture’s values such as homeownership, social mobility, marriage, and family. Instead,

\(^7\) Eckert, 46.

this alternative community, composed of various groups, created and took advantage of 
the gritty, distinct culture and infrastructure south of Broadway. Collectively, this 
citizenry embraced the notion of freedom, independence, and privacy. Police officer 
Mark Vattimo described this human ecology south of Broadway in the 1970s as, “...a 
whole different world, the real world. It’s the world the people in the suburbs have run 
away from."

The People

Census tract data from 1970 revealed that the space within the planned district and 
Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project was quite distinct for San Diego County. The area 
was predominantly male with San Diego County’s lowest “family status.” Additionally, 
the area had 3,618 citizens over the age of sixty five, nearly fifty percent of the residents 
within the tract. A quarter of the district’s residents fell below the poverty level, making 
the area the third lowest socio-economic tract in the entire county. In addition to 
elderly pensioners, the area was home to sailors, pimps, prostitutes, homosexuals, and 
employees and customers of skid row businesses.

One of the most notable groups existing within the future project area was the sizable 
 transient population. This group of urban dwellers could further be categorized into two 
 major groups: transients and permanent residents. A third and less visible group of 
people, who came from other parts of the city, were also attracted to the gritty red-light 
district. One adult business owner within the district revealed how many of his patrons

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10 Eckert, 35-36; Adelyse Marie D’Arcy, “Elderly Hotel Residents and Their Social Networks in 
consisted of business men and young suburban couples. He revealed, “I’m just providing what the public is buying.” The highly visible transients often relied upon some form of government assistance while living in the street or temporarily in SRO hotels. Other groups of people viewed these mostly younger citizens as temporary fixtures within the urban setting. Many transients had problems linked to alcoholism, drug dealing, and other illicit activities. One transient reported, “Trouble is, you kin always git some wine...Food’s different. Food cost money, man...When I ain’t got a Mickey I eat shit.”

On the other hand, permanent residents, attracted by low rent costs, were overwhelming elderly, single, white, male, and poor. This group was also dependent on various forms of public assistance. On average, members of this segment had held a steady job for an extended period of time during their lifetime. In 1977, of the inhabitants living in downtown hotels, over half of these consisted of permanent residents who had lived in places such as the Golden West Hotel for over a decade with little connection to kin. This population preferred their unique lifestyle of isolationism over middle-class ideals.

In an environment that demanded little or no social participation, this amalgam of inhabitants shared values of independence, privacy, and personal autonomy. An actual community existed within this specific territory, with a sense of social organization on the streets, and within SRO hotels. Many permanent residents congregated at places such as Horton Plaza Park to bask in the sunshine. Others socialized or played chess while

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13 Eckert, 35-36, 46.
some inhabitants simply watched the world pass by. Seventy-year-old landlady Hazel San Nicoles recognized the community that existed within SRO hotels by declaring, 

People do help each other around here, that’s one thing…If something happens to one of these people, everybody’s there to help or do something if they can…If I don’t see these people around, the older people, I check on ‘em. I know what time they usually come out. I find some dead people here once in a while, and that’s not even funny...The way these people live, they got nobody. 

Within the hotel, however, spatial and cultural tensions existed between the different generations. Permanent residents, who felt that they had worked hard for their small pensions, oftentimes viewed the transients as trouble-making “welfare bums.” Common areas such as the lobby and television rooms thus became contentious spaces within the micro-society.

The Infrastructure

This society utilized and created a micro infrastructure within the future project area. Near perfect weather made this infrastructure even more enticing. Numerous restaurants served low cost meals and bakeries sold discounted stale goods. For example, many cheap Chinese restaurants offered complete meals for fewer than two dollars, while some even offered delivery service, a feature especially attractive to elderly citizens with limited mobility. Pawnshops, secondhand book stores, thrift shops, and missions addressed various material needs. Social needs could be met from taverns or tattoo parlors. Furthermore, the district’s barber college offered free haircuts and a chance for


15 Reed, “If You Lived Here You’d Be Home Now,” 1, 29.

16 Eckert, 116.

28
men to interact with women. Entertainment could be obtained from the penny arcades, card rooms, and movie houses. For another segment of society, burlesque shows, adult nightclubs, and massage parlors offered services not readily available in the nearby suburbs.

Just like any downtown, the red-light district in San Diego served as a central transportation hub featuring inexpensive public transportation. Seniors could obtain bus passes for less than a quarter. The bus benches themselves served specific purposes as many elderly spent their time viewing the bustling street activity from these vantage points. For other residents, these same objects served as beds after sunset. One observer commented on the area’s infrastructure by stating, “If they [the region’s inhabitants] want to act out or go a little crazy, they do it. The people around them don’t mind. Their environment allows them to be a little different, a little strange.”

One of the most crucial elements supportive to this infrastructure was Horton Plaza Park. Since the turn of the century, the plaza had been used as a traditional public space for a variety of activities. Citizens gave speeches and petitioned while Protestant clergymen conducted services in the 1930s. During World War I and II, the military sold war bonds there. In the fall of 1960, Vice President Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy both held separate rallies at the plaza while President Dwight Eisenhower also visited. This space also served as an alternate landscape for nearby residents within the urban region. One property owner described the plaza space in the 1960s and 1970s as “a cauldron of hippy freaks, perverts, drug addicts, and a conglomeration of bedraggled, seedy individuals.”

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17 Reed, “If You Lived Here You’d Be Home Now,” 1, 29; Eckert, 45, 139, 143.

29 Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
However, from the early morning through the late afternoon, elderly people took advantage of the plaza. These inhabitants enjoyed waking up early from their residential hotels, getting coffee, and sitting on benches in the plaza. One elderly man stated, “I come because just about everyone comes by here and there’s a lot to see. What else would I do?” The plaza was the only grassy area within walking distance for such elderly citizens who lived downtown. Plaza life in the 1970s also included other sets of individuals. Passionate evangelical speakers shouted their messages of salvation through bullhorns. Additional religious groups such as Hare Krishna members clanged cymbals and chanted. On any given day, one could witness alcoholics, pigeon feeders, thieves, sailors flirting with young girls, and people talking aloud to themselves.

Others used the plaza as a place to conduct business, from pimps and prostitutes, to drug dealers, and panhandlers, and people passing out leaflets. Sounds of blaring boom boxes and ringing payphones mixed with other street noises, creating a discordant urban symphony all while middle class workers scurried around the space. This diverse setting in the 1970s mirrored certain elements of plaza life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this era religious moral reformers censured new immigrants while later on, suffragettes faced ridicule. The police in this earlier era also played a crucial role harassing Mexicans, African Americans, gays, and sailors. Even alcoholics were a common fixture in the environment, existing in the plaza since 1870.

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20 Ibid.

The Fabric of an Alternative Community

This alternative landscape was important for a specific segment of society as this group migrated downtown because of its central location and accessible open spaces such as Horton Plaza. The warm climate and proximity to an assortment of services further made the environment enticing while the numerous SRO hotels provided places of residence for those in this community. One retired hotel resident summarized the critical elements of the alternate environment and culture in the future Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project by asserting,

If they tore down my hotel, I don’t know what I’d do... You just can’t put elderly people on the street. There’s a lot of good people in these here hotels... I like downtown. I have been a bachelor all my life... I’d be setting up there all by myself [if relocated to the suburbs]. I can find all kinds of people to talk with and different people I can have fellowship with... all those different kinds of people [even the winos] can be very amusing, very interesting, well-to-do people as well as poor people. You can have a lot of relationships with a lot of people here and fellowship with a lot of people here and you won’t ever be lonely.  

Many of the region’s inhabitants did not embrace the majority culture’s values of homeownership, social mobility, marriage, and family. Similarly, this populous did not partake in traditional employment and entertainment. Nevertheless, a viable community existed in the urban space.

Analyzing America’s urban bachelor culture between 1880 and 1930, historian Howard Chudacoff argues that individuals within an alternative community should not be stigmatized or romanticized. Instead, Chudacoff posits that this type of community “Can be more reasonably defined as a variant social group, one that constructed a functional existence for itself in society.”  

As a result, the author states that this populous “created

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22 Reed, “If You Lived Here You’d Be Home Now,” 1, 29.
systems of norms, ideals, and standards of evaluation that bridged the distance between
the isolated individual and that individual's social identity.\textsuperscript{24} The built environment and
cultures existent in San Diego's downtown region south of Broadway in the 1960s and
1970s proved that downtown remained, just as it had been in the past, a place with
various overlapping subcultures.\textsuperscript{25} The area's social structure and built environment
would be drastically altered with the development of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton
Plaza Redevelopment Project. As a result, these projects would find themselves
embattled with the subcultures and community already existent in the region.

\textsuperscript{23} Howard Chudacoff, \textit{The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture} (New Jersey: Princeton
University Press, 1999), 19.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 7, 19.
CHAPTER 3

THE GASLAMP QUARTER AND

THE DEVELOPMENT OF

A LEGIBLE SPACE

National Preservation Movement

City leaders and preservationists conceived of the Gaslamp Quarter within this alternative landscape and culture. During the 1960s the national preservation movement emerged after influential scholars such as Jane Jacobs and members of the public expressed concern about the destruction of old buildings caused by urban renewal, the interstate highway system, and other large public works projects during the era.¹ The most important piece of historic preservation legislation materialized with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This federal legislation, coupled with the urban renewal efforts already in progress, served as a catalyst for the creation and redevelopment of entire historic districts, such as the Gaslamp Quarter.

One of the key provisions within the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 was the establishment of the National Register of Historic Places, which operated under the Secretary of the Interior. The National Register of Historic Places recognized and recorded historically significant sites. In addition, the National Register presented a

variety of criteria for establishing historical significance based on two general factors: historical or cultural importance, and architectural importance. More specifically, criteria centered upon significant people, events, and distinctive architectural characteristics such as style, type, period, and method/materials of construction important in American history. The registry expressed that preservation not only honored memory and people, but reflected community pride by creating a link to the past while enriching the present. More importantly, historic preservation provided cities a "competitive edge" of place differentiation and community livability. In turn, this differentiation had the capability of turning a city into an attractive and economically profitable tourist destination.

To assist in the preservation process, the Secretary of the Interior published Standards for Rehabilitation, Standards for Restoration, and Standards for Preservation, which set guidelines for successful preservation efforts. The crux of the preservation movement, however, fell to the state and local level since the National Register program had little to no regulatory power. At the local level, the city government, along with private organizations and property owners, created ordinances pertaining to sites nominated and placed on the National Register. While utilizing the Secretary of the Interior's framework, municipal ordinances gave local preservation authorities the power to review design changes pertaining to the historical structures. Thus, local preservation efforts drove the national movement. Successful preservation efforts not only had municipal support, but such efforts utilized and created various planning organizations while implanting and enforcing strict design review codes.

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3 Tyler, 44-55, 146.
The capstone piece of the preservation movement was the federal Tax Reform Act of 1976. This act cited that expenses from rehabilitating blighted buildings could be recoverable on income-producing structures certified to be important to a greater historic district. As a result, the process of historic preservation had many types of economic benefits associated with it. For example, preservation stabilized and increased property values, which in turn encouraged public reinvestment and private investment. Furthermore, historic preservation enhanced tax revenue collection. All of these elements helped discourage the process of suburban sprawl.

In order to secure these federal tax benefits, a building or district had to be nominated and successfully listed on the National Register. In addition, historic residential buildings within the district that housed rental units could receive benefits. This proved beneficial to property owners and city leaders as many of these rental units in urban centers were slums. This tax act represented a significant shift from public sector involvement to private sector initiatives, now heavily linked to federal incentives. Investors now became crucial players in the preservation movement due to new economic incentives as older buildings in the decaying urban centers became financial opportunities. The re-conceptualization of downtown by progressive-minded scholars, along with such economic opportunities created by the federal government, made the old Stingaree in San Diego a prime candidate to enter into the “business of preservation.”

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5 City of San Diego and CCDC, [www.ccdc.com](http://www.ccdc.com).

6 Tyler, 51.
From Stingaree to Gaslamp Quarter

Even prior to the federal Tax Reform Act of 1976, San Diego city leaders acknowledged the opportunities available in downtown with their multi-year development planning effort, the Centre City Plan of 1975. One portion of this wide-ranging project centered on the old Stingaree in a plan entitled "The Gaslamp Quarter Planned District Ordinance and Urban Design and Development Manual." The name Gaslamp Quarter drew upon the images of a downtown "Golden-Era" with brightly lit gaslamps at the end of the nineteenth century. Initially, property owners and businesses staunchly opposed being included in a larger redevelopment project area, equating this with other bulldozing renewal efforts of the era. Furthermore, the redevelopment plan initially did not permit the city and the CCDC to acquire property for redevelopment purposes. It was not until an updated 1984 Gaslamp Quarter Redevelopment Plan that the city and its redevelopment agency gained the right to acquire and re-sell property for redevelopment purposes that fit the guidelines of the plan. Private businesses interested in the project assumed that as the city improved public elements in the district, such as sidewalks and lighting, they would then take advantage of the economic benefits associated with preservation. In turn, city leaders assumed that this would help remove undesirable citizens, and businesses in the tenderloin area south of Broadway.7

Through the use of zoning ordinances, the city quickly adopted the official boundary of the Gaslamp Quarter. The district stretched from Broadway to Market Street between Fourth and Sixth Avenues. (See figure 10) The ordinance also offered specific development guidelines, set by the City of San Diego Historic Site Board. This fifteen

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member organization served as a local resource advisory board adopted by the city in 1965. The San Diego City Council appointed these members to administer the city’s historical preservation program and to insure that the existing structures were maintained and restored to their “original” character. This plan differed from the more common process of urban renewal because it sought to preserve the built environment by capturing the flavor of the late nineteenth-century Gaslamp Era. More specifically, developers utilized adaptive-use preservation, the process of converting old buildings from their original use to a new economically profitable one. Developers specifically cited similar successful adaptive-use preservation efforts such as Denver’s Larimer Square, Seattle’s Pioneer Square, and San Francisco’s Ghirardelli and Jackson Square.

In order to create this preserved district, the local government in San Diego created multiple organizations to serve as liaisons between the city, private investors, and architects. The city council instated a planning director to ensure the compliance of the preservation process and to approve or modify permit applications for the City of San Diego Historical Site Board resource board. Underneath this planning director were nine officials of the Gaslamp Quarter Planned District Advisory Board, appointed by the mayor and city council. The majority of these members consisted of property owners within the district. Another group, the Gaslamp Quarter Association, handled promotional affairs related to the district. Other organizations such as the Project Area Committee, the Planning Department, and the Economic Development Division Property Department handled affairs ranging from funding applications, design reviews, land use, and the supervision of loans, tax programs, and grant applications. By 1975, Fifth

Avenue had twelve buildings designated as historic structures by the City of San Diego Historical Site Board. The site board labeled fifteen other buildings as having historical or architectural significance. These sites served as the foundation for the city’s nomination of the district on the federal level. By 1980, the federal government placed the Gaslamp Quarter on the National Register of Historic Places.9 (See figures 11-12

Figure 10: Gaslamp Quarter Project Area.

Figure 11: Sample of a San Diego Historical Site Board registry entry. The city would later use these entries in the nomination of the district to the National Register.

Figure 12: Gaslamp Quarter National Register Placard.
Developers of the Gaslamp Quarter would be influenced by Boston’s Faneuil Hall which re-opened after 1976. This adaptive-use preservation venture utilized private and public funds to create the most successful downtown retail experiment of the era.\textsuperscript{10} Previously, private funding dominated the financing of similar projects such as Ghirardelli Square in San Francisco. The Gaslamp Quarter mirrored Boston’s model as developers took full advantage of the Tax Reform Act of 1976. For public elements of the project, such as sidewalks, the city developed a program working with local and state lending institutions to leverage public funds for below market rate loans. By 1980, the city had invested almost eight million dollars in public improvements, which the city hoped to recapture in property taxes and other benefits. Furthermore, the private sector invested approximately twenty-two million dollars in over forty preservation projects. Enticed by new economic incentives, over eighty percent of the property owners within the district were new since 1970.\textsuperscript{11}

While federal legislation created new opportunities to development the Gaslamp Quarter, it is crucial to understand that other key elements within the existing built environment buttressed the process of preservation. Turn-of-the century architecture remained relatively intact and unaltered while cheap residences and businesses could be capitalized on. The reality that a seemingly “invisible” and disposable citizenry also existed downtown, made preservation efforts in San Diego equally attractive for creating a themed district.


The Creation of a Themed District

In 1968, the editor of San Diego Magazine asked Los Angeles artist Robert Hostick to provide an imaginative artistic proposal for the sordid area encompassing the future Gaslamp project. Drawing upon the inspiration of the Victorian buildings, Hostick produced colorful sketches of a Victorian themed landscape that portrayed a sanitized mixed-use, middle-class space. Brick sidewalks guided visitors along a street lined with news stands, flower stalls, cafes, and specialty shops. Details such as European styled steps, ironwork, ornate facades, signs and lettering illuminated the environment. The themes of cleanliness, uniformity, detail, and legibility demonstrated what the urban space should be, while simultaneously exposing what the space should not be and who should not be there. This publication helped ignite the imagination of locals, city leaders, and private investors. Just as Walt Disney had created various lands within his theme parks, Gaslamp Quarter developers sought to create their themed environment within the greater city.  

Gaslamp Quarter Project Goals

Planners envisioned the Gaslamp Quarter as one particular strategic point, or node, within the greater downtown. Kevin Lynch argued that these nodes offered security and intense human experience by satisfying citizens’ needs to recognize and pattern their surroundings. The district would be both dependent on and supportive of the Horton Plaza Redevelopment Plan, another node in its own right. While the city marked Horton Plaza as a high end specialty mall, the Gaslamp Quarter would provide specialty shops

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and entertainment against the backdrop of a historic environment. The historic district would also simultaneously link Fifth Avenue, the district’s spine, to the southern waterfront and the northern business core.\textsuperscript{14}

This endeavor, however, remained unique and risky in the sprawling region of Southern California. Referring to the middle and upper classes, an executive involved in the Gaslamp Quarter emphasized how, “Such a population can’t be expected to flock downtown naturally, but needs to be enticed there, unlike its counterparts on the Eastern Seaboard.”\textsuperscript{15} With a decaying downtown, many residents had not been downtown in decades, thus a new, sanitized environment had to be created in order to attract suburban residents.

An early 1980s national survey revealed another challenge where respondents asserted that San Diego was an unknown commodity associated with retirement, the military, yachting, and golfing. Respondents also voiced that the city had a “dead” downtown. Even local citizens seemed to lack a mental map, or conceptualization, of downtown. As one executive director stated, “I don’t think most people in the broad community understand what downtown is. I have talked to people who say, ‘Downtown, oh, that’s south of the airport, or, I see it from the freeway...thousands of people have never been south of Broadway.’”\textsuperscript{16} Thus, the creation of a downtown district within the larger city had the capability of producing two results. First, citizens would be able to

\textsuperscript{14} City of San Diego Planning Department, “Centre City Development Plan: Summary,” 1975, microform available at the San Diego State University Library, SDSU (CVL Docs SD-C400-P71-C397/4A); Gaslamp Quarter Association and the City of San Diego, “Gaslamp Quarter Planned District,” February 1975, San Diego Historical Society Public Records Collection R1.33, 2:30; “Centre City San Diego Community Plan,” 1976, microform available at SDSU (CVL Docs SD-C400-P71-C397/5).


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
easily enter into the district thus conceptualizing the urban space through its thematic architecture. Alternatively, the revitalized district could serve as a central exterior reference point to the greater city.\textsuperscript{17}

City leaders envisioned the Gaslamp Quarter as serving multiple purposes. First, developers hoped that the region would unite and enrich an amalgam of people, while broadening the experience for locals and tourists alike. Media outlets echoed this sentiment by emphasizing the value of old buildings in relation to character, history, identity, and a “return to the rightful glory of America’s Finest City.”\textsuperscript{18} One advertisement after the debut of the revitalized district stated

\begin{quote}
Come step into San Diego’s historical downtown. Enjoy the unique experience of a walk through Gaslamp—San Diego’s 16 block historic district. This area is teeming with the excitement of architecture which is the strength of its cultural history. Beyond that, this is a neighborhood with varied ethnic heritages hiding behind many a restaurant or shop door. Come explore!\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

Secondly, following a national trend in the mid 1980s, the project enabled Mayor Wilson to declare a “war on smut.” Wilson and other leaders accomplished this by decentralizing the existing population and transforming the cultural flavor of the area by limiting the types of businesses permitted in the region. City documents revealed lists of permitted store uses within the new district. Absent from these lists were arcades, card rooms, adult entertainment venues, and charitable organizations that provided free food and lodging. Furthermore, in 1979 city ordinances prohibited any new adult venue from opening within one thousand feet of an existing adult business, church, school, residential area, or

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] Lynch, 47, 66.
\item[19] Advertisement, March 16, 1981, available in the Gaslamp Quarter Promotional Folder, SDHS.
\end{footnotes}
park. One ordinance specifically targeted the Gaslamp Quarter by prohibiting theaters from hosting both general audience and adult films. These factors, coupled with rising rent prices, exterior building code restrictions, and harassment to “clean-up” the window displays of adult businesses, helped increase the pressure upon the remaining questionable businesses.\textsuperscript{20}

Most importantly, Mayor Pete Wilson bluntly emphasized the economic incentives driving the revitalization of the district. He expressed how the project sought to “accomplish historical preservation by making the periodic flavor of the Gaslamp Era an economic asset, both for the District and the city.”\textsuperscript{21} Wilson imagined that “One could have dinner in one restaurant, then go to a night club and end up on an intimate after hours spot for a nightcap—all within the Gaslamp Quarter.”\textsuperscript{22} City planners concurred, stating “everything is meant to help make browsing, shopping or strolling an interesting and rewarding experience.”\textsuperscript{23} These visions, in turn, had to be marketed into a safe downtown experience.

Marketing a Safe Downtown Experience

In order for the Gaslamp Quarter to become a reality, private investors first had to be lured back downtown. One way to accomplish this was through the creation of Gaslamp

\begin{footnotes}
\item[22] \textit{Gaslamp Gazette} 2 (December 1979- January 1980, SDHS.
\end{footnotes}
Quarter Association. This organization had membership fees while hosting expensive fundraising events. They were even involved with the distribution of informative newsletters such as the *Gaslamp Gazette*. One invitation beckoned citizens “to join a very select group of pioneers…”\(^24\) This revealed the exclusive nature of the project and how a specific segment of society wielded power over the areas’ development. Geographer Neil Smith refers to such development in terms of a struggle to conquer and civilize the urban frontier.\(^25\) One property owner compared the situation to the war in Vietnam by declaring that owners and city leaders were fighting the mean streets south of Broadway, against the enemy of neglect and abuse. He continued to state that, “We’re building ‘safe-zones’ the same way they did in Vietnam…we have to secure areas so it is safe for the people to walk in them and shop in them.”\(^26\)

To market these safe-zones for locals and tourists, developers and promoters recognized the need to create an identifiable, sanitized entity. District leaders carefully crafted the name, “Gaslamp,” and its accompanying logo to market the area’s history. Developers believed “The name will establish this as a very special and delightful area of San Diego…the logo will become a symbol.”\(^27\) Later, in 1989 the logo appeared on a decorative wrought iron sign over the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Harbor Drive proclaiming the area the “Historic Heart of San Diego.” (See figures 13-14)

\(^24\) Invitation for a dinner party with Mayor Wilson, available in the Gaslamp Quarter Promotional Folder, SDHS.


Figure 13: Gaslamp Quarter Sign, erected in 1989.

Figure 14: Advertisement with the official logo of the district, 1981.
Design Regulations

In order to create a legible space, the city and local historical site board utilized the framework established by the Secretary of the Interior’s *Standards for Rehabilitation*. These leaders placed strict building codes for all renovation or new construction projects within the district. Furthermore, they emphasized the need to respect the old architecture through similarity in scale, building form, proportion, and detail. In order to create a stepping-down effect from the adjacent downtown area, the city limited building heights to four stories or sixty feet. Leaders also placed strict regulations on ground floor heights, window placement and size, architectural details, and building materials. Regulations even stipulated colors, favoring earth tones and stating that no adjacent buildings were to be painted the identical color. Perhaps the strictest codes related to the variety of restrictions placed upon signs by purpose, size, color, placement, shape, material, font, and type of lighting.\(^{28}\) (See figures 15-20)

![Rehabilitated Keating Building, on Fifth Avenue, 2007.](image)

Figure 16: Rehabilitated Yuma Building on Fifth Avenue, 2007.

Figure 17: Rehabilitated Horton Grand Hotel on Fourth and Island Street, 2007.
Figure 18: Rehabilitated Rio Hotel on Fifth Avenue, 2007.

Figure 19: Rehabilitated Louis Bank of Commerce on Fifth Avenue, 2007.
By creating a space that was both public and private, the city recognized the need for street furniture. The city treated these as special objects designed to fit within the Victorian themed environment. For example, the city initially placed numerous Victorian styled benches throughout the district. Lighting was one of the most crucial elements needed to attract pedestrians by creating a safe and vibrant nighttime scene. Developers opted for “historic five globe” light stands to meet these needs. Planners additionally agreed to hide utility wires and other services underground. While recognizing the importance of pedestrians, city leaders adopted plans to widen the sidewalks into eight foot wide brick pathways. This created more private space for outdoor cafes, while reducing street clutter and removing on-street parking, thus shifting the parking burden to nearby streets. To assist in the functionality of the urban space, the city created special

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29 This includes benches, light fixtures, drinking fountains, bicycle holders, trash containers, street-parking, fire hydrants, newspaper stands, telephone booths, and plants.
loading and unloading zones, which could be accessed during specific time periods during non-peak hours.\(^{30}\) (See figures 21-22).

Figure 21: Five-Globe lights prevalent throughout the Gaslamp Quarter.

Figure 22: Widened sidewalks enable private developers to create outside cafes.

A Scripted Environment

By marketing a safe urban experience and implementing strict design regulations, developers attempted to create a familiar and legible urban environment that was scripted, controlled, and orderly. For example, developers encouraged public and private employees within the district to dress in costumes appropriate to downtown’s Golden Era. Additionally, Gaslamp Quarter organizations developed walking tours, a typical tactic found in national historic districts. One tour advertisement in the 1980s, well into the transition of the redevelopment project, stated,

Experience San Diego’s rich Victorian heritage...walk where some of San Diego’s most colorfult history took place---back in the days of Wyatt Earp and the Stingaree Raids...experience some of the city’s finest examples of commercial Victorian architecture...share the excitement of the restoration process as Gaslamp’s streets and buildings are returned to their turn of the century glory.\(^31\)

Developers and other promotional pieces evoked romantic images of the past Golden Era focusing on rustling taffeta, clanging trolley bells, horse drawn carriages, fancy hats, and piano halls.\(^32\) Ironically, while such efforts attempted to create a scripted space by capitalizing on certain aspects of the risqué aura of the era, others worked feverishly to eliminate any traces of different elements in the contemporary one.

Due to the areas’ past reputation and postwar commercial trends such as the development of suburban shopping centers, suburban women became specific promotional targets for the revitalized Gaslamp Quarter. One promotional newsletter featured an article entitled, “Welcome (Back) to Gaslamp” as the author exclaimed,

\(^{31}\) Walking Tour Advertisement Flyer, 1980, available in the Gaslamp Quarter Promotional File, SDHS.

\(^{32}\) City of San Diego, “Fifth Ave. Trolley Line—Gaslamp Quarter Revitalization Project,” April 1978, SDHS Public Records Collection R1.33, 3:28; Invitation for a dinner party with Mayor Wilson, available in the Gaslamp Quarter Promotional File, SDHS.
“Tired of suburban shopping, crowded stores, impersonal service, and the confusing maze of department store merchandise?? COME TO GASLAMP.” This type of promotion encouraged women shoppers to explore the new area, especially the establishments that hosted such specialty products as antiques, clothing and kitchenware. Even mothers became promotional targets; “Mothers at home can give themselves a pampering present by hiring a sitter and spending the day in Gaslamp on an adventuresome spree…rather than traveling all over the city you can also sightsee while you shop.” Other promotional pieces targeted wider audiences by focusing on “exciting” ethnic eateries with “polite and shy Mexicans,” music venues, and Gatsby-like dinner parties. The experience of the Gaslamp Quarter thus became the commodity.

The restaurant chain, Old Spaghetti Factory, located on the southern end of the Gaslamp Quarter on Fifth Avenue, mirrored this trend by combining elements of familiarity and themed space. The eatery, housed in a structure built in 1898, was one of the most popular restaurants during the Gaslamp Quarter’s first decade of existence. Opening on February 20, 1974, and later expanding, the restaurant’s success proved crucial because it revealed how national chains began investing in the district. Private owners transformed the building into a 1890s trolley-themed restaurant. Besides the actual historic building, antiques and other artifacts served to buttress this theme; there was even a life sized trolley within the restaurant. (See figure 23) Waiting in line became a pleasant experience as customers sat on plush Victorian chairs or enjoyed a drink at the mahogany bar. These individuals could also examine the ornate stained glass windows or

33 Terri Schneider, “Welcome (Back) to Gaslamp,” Gaslamp Gazette 1 (October-November 1978), SDHS.
34 Terri Schneider, “Where It's At,” Gaslamp Gazette 1 (December 1978), SDHS.
35 Terri Schneider, “Where It's At,” Gaslamp Gazette 2 (February-March 1979), SDHS.
the original works of art lit by antique lamps. With its legible concept, simple menu, and reasonable prices, the restaurant enticed middleclass families. As a result, the restaurant represented a microcosm of the themed experience and familiarity created within the greater district. In 1985, once Horton Plaza opened and construction began on the convention center, other national restaurant chains began to take interest in the Gaslamp Quarter, which in turn helped spark private investment throughout the district. This ignited a trend, which began to rapidly flourish over the next decades, as it pitted chains against the supposed unique character of the historic district.

Figure 23: Inside of San Diego’s Old Spaghetti Factory, which closed in 2004. (Used with permission from Daniel Pettit)

36 Gaslamp Gazette 1 (March 1974) and Betty Dodds, “Pasta Parlor Pioneers,” Gaslamp Gazette, 3 (March 1980): 4, SDHS.

While the concept of the Gaslamp Quarter was not nationally unique, it proved unique for the city of San Diego as it offered locals and visitors a sanitized historical node within downtown. The region became a place not only to consume goods, but a region to consume urban space and experience. As a result, the district and businesses such as the Old Spaghetti Factory revealed a synergy and synthesis within the themed environment, which emerged in the form of what sociologist John Hannigan has referred to as "shoppertainment and "eatertainment." The district helped citizens gain their initial bearings of downtown, and the city as a whole, thus enabling them to spend money on shopping, dining, and entertainment. While all of the right elements appeared to be in place for the Gaslamp Quarter to succeed, certain issues, such as dealing with transients and stubborn business owners, still had to be resolved. It would not be until the 1990s that the Gaslamp Quarter fully realized its economic potential, due to the success of the Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project.


CHAPTER 4

HORTON PLAZA AND THE
DEVELOPMENT OF A
LEGIBLE SPACE

Late Nineteenth Century Department Stores

Downtown redevelopment projects such as Horton Plaza shared many similarities with their late nineteenth, early twentieth century counterpart: the downtown department store. These stores emerged between 1900 and 1920 in a rapidly changing era.¹ Serving as extensions of arcades and dry goods stores, downtown department stores changed the way people viewed and consumed goods thus transforming how they lived in society. As historian William Leach has revealed, department stores utilized elaborate show-windows housing fashionable goods, elaborate glass and lighting, and mannequins. Inside, department stores incorporated these elements in addition to courts, chandeliers, thick carpets, and large windows. These types of stores further introduced new spatial forms. Creators used new technological features to facilitate physical movement and shopping with the introduction of bargain basements, new entrances, wider aisles, elevators, escalators, and mirrors.² This environment also represented an early example of a legible


² Ibid., 83.
or scripted space as stores employed various color schemes, and exotic themes ranging from Oriental motifs to the Wizard of Oz.  

Department stores of this era served as miniature cities within the context of the greater downtown. Stores offered an array of services ranging from banking, lounges, day care centers, and restaurants. These venues even featured live music and art for their customers to enjoy. Many of these services specifically targeted women shoppers, which in turn "opened" the downtown for women as they created new acceptable spaces outside of the home. As a result, the surrounding streets became extensions of the store with cleaner and safer streets. This milieu created a feminized type of "public" space and assured their presence downtown. Furthermore, downtown department stores helped make the downtown environment into a type of adventure as well as, “The focal point for a novel form of downtown life...the extravagant size of the plate-glass display windows also bestowed an aura of security and splendor upon the downtown streets, making the clean, smooth sidewalks into a woman’s world.” This urban space contrasted the “anarchy of modern city life that engulfed the building.” In the postwar era, suburban shopping malls transplanted particular elements of these downtown department stores.

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 121.
7 Ibid., 127.
Postwar Suburban Malls

In the postwar era, traditional retailing such as department stores fled to the sprawling suburbs. As a result, suburban shopping centers and malls burgeoned in postwar America. These malls and shopping centers became the new “city” as they offered an example of how urban community space should be constructed based upon mass consumption. The ideal of a centrally located “public” space that mixed commercial and civic activity still existed. The suburban malls physically mirrored its older urban counterparts with stores on both sides of the walkway, open air pedestrian walkways, landscaping, and benches. The goal however, aimed to overcome the anarchy and ugliness of cities evident during the postwar urban crisis era. Developers addressed common downtown complaints by offering plenty of parking, security guards, and hidden delivery tunnels. For the comfort of their consumers, the innovators of these malls employed the use of canopied walks, air conditioning, and pleasant background music. Underlying these elements was the aim to offer a variety of stores and expanded services not available in the urban setting.

Developers attempted to exclude particular groups of people, found in urban centers, from these new retail centers. These individuals also aimed to stymie activities often found in urban public spaces such as strikes, protests, and anti-war rallies. Leaders accomplished these goals with marketing research and segmentation linked to store selection. The element of policing not only physically assured the security of the mall,

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9 Ibid., 1056.

10 Ibid., 1058-1059.
but symbolically reassured its customers, while scaring others away. Other tactics such as limited bus routes and the sheer physical distance from urban centers also helped create an environment that differed from the downtown setting. As with past downtown department stores, these new suburban retail centers served as a feminized “public” space. These miniaturized cities thus emphasized a safe, child friendly environment. This new suburban retailing trend resulted in “public” space becoming more commercialized, privatized and feminized on a new levels not witnessed in downtowns. In the following decades, retail developers would transplant these elements back to urban centers.

The Return of Urban Retailing

The influence of the preservation movement coupled with the impact of scholars such as Jane Jacobs, led to the re-examination of the role of traditional retailing downtown in the 1970s by city leaders and private developers. Furthermore, with Ronald Reagan’s entrance into the White House in 1980, this trend became firmly cemented. Reagan emphasized how the federal government would no longer assist cities with economic and social problems. In his first National Urban Policy Report he stated, “State and local governments will find it is in their best interests to concentrate on increasing their attractiveness to potential investors, residents, and visitors.” What emerged in the absence of federal funding was a post-industrial age that pitted cities in a competitive struggle against other cities as well as suburbs. Cities no longer existed as the central site for industry and commerce; rather, just as theme parks created new rides to entice

11 Ibid., 1059.

12 Dennis Judd, “Constructing the Tourist Bubble” in The Tourist City, eds. Dennis Judd and Susan Fainstein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 35.
customers, cities had to reinvent themselves with new attractions in order to attract people back downtown. Mayors and city leaders thus sought to create an urban “trophy collection” of mixed-use projects.\(^{13}\)

Over one hundred new downtown retail centers opened between 1970 and 1988. On the West Coast, Ernest Hahn led the way for downtown retail development beginning with projects in Hawthorne and other small California cities in the 1960s and then larger cities such as Long Beach in the early 1970s. On the East Coast, James Rouse was an extremely influential developer who created major urban retailing projects in Philadelphia and Baltimore. Even more influential was Rouse’s development of Boston’s Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market. Faneuil Hall became recognized as the first successful, national case study in the rebuilding of downtown in the 1970s. While the project area lacked sufficient space to include department stores, it successfully mixed entertainment, retailing, and historic preservation—all within an urban setting.\(^{14}\)

Three different types of downtown retail projects emerged during this era, which would influence Horton Plaza. First, regional shopping malls, such as Midtown Plaza in Rochester, were anchored by at least one department store aimed at the middle of the market; this project closely mirrored its postwar suburban counterpart. Secondly, festival or specialty malls like Faneuil Hall emerged, mixing elements of food, entertainment, and historic preservation. Lastly, mixed-use projects combined retailing with other activities such as offices, hotels, convention centers, and housing. Baltimore’s Harborplace serves

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 35, 39.

\(^{14}\) Frienden and Sagalyn, 5-7, 171.
as a prime example of this type of project. The diversity among these downtown projects revealed how developers and cities needed to employ extra efforts in order for the projects to survive amongst the previously neglected urban core and against their suburban counterparts.

Despite the diversity amongst these downtown projects, they all shared certain characteristics. Each type of project faced particular risks associated with developing in an urban setting. These risks included access, parking, and the added expense of building vertically. Social problems such as transients added a different set of safety problems that had to be dealt with. Furthermore, downtown retailing centers followed the suburban retailing model of aiming at the middle of the market by excluding low-end establishments and including national chains. Interestingly, these urban centers sought to transplant and improve upon the positive elements associated with postwar suburban shopping centers. San Diego’s Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project uniquely sought to combine the retail selection of a suburban regional mall with the entertainment of a festival market, in addition to the diversity of a mixed-use development.

Horton Plaza Redevelopment Plan

Following this national trend, in 1972 the San Diego City Council approved the Horton Plaza Redevelopment Plan, the keystone of the larger Centre City Plan. The project would eventually border Broadway and G Street, between Fourth and First Avenues. (See figure 24) This plan sought to bring traditional retailing in a mall-like setting back downtown. City leaders named the project after Alonzo Horton, the founder

15 Ibid., 172.
16 Ibid., 171-173.
of modern day downtown San Diego. The city and the redevelopment agency had the
ability to acquire land by gift, exchange, and eminent domain. Additionally, this group
had the right to move and or demolish buildings in the project area. The city and
redevelopment agency also bore the burden of finding housing for those who would
become displaced in the process of development.

![Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project Area](image)

Figure 24: Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project Boundaries, 1972.

Before the city chose a private developer for the project, they paid thirty-three million
dollars to prepare and assemble the site. This entailed issues such as utilities and the
street closure of Second and Third Avenues, along with F and G Streets. To aid in this
process, in 1974 the city hired a private San Francisco architectural firm, ROMA,
(Rockrise Odermatt Moutjoy Amis Urban Design Consultants) to devise a developmental

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Diego Historical Society Public Records Collection, City and County Reports R2.72, 2:9.
project plan. The firm advised creating a modern, functional, urban center with mixed uses while providing, "a socially balanced community." The plan also spoke of returning a sense of place to downtown by salvaging the 1915 Spreckels Theatre, the 1924 Balboa Theatre, and the 1913 Golden West Hotel, all buildings that existed within the Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project area. This reasoning mirrored influential scholars and planners such as Jane Jacobs and Kevin Lynch. The city and redevelopment agency used the ROMA Plan as a reference point, which became the official statement of design guidelines and procedures for Horton Plaza's development. (See figure 25)

Once the city adopted the ROMA Plan, the Hahn Company won the right to develop the retail center in 1975. By the 1970s, Earnest Hahn was one of California's most successful developers with thirty nine regional shopping centers already developed by 1983. In 1977, the Hahn firm hired young architect Jon Jerde to work on the Horton Plaza project. Jerde had previously worked with Hahn on other retail projects such as Plaza Pasadena in 1974. In order to speed up redevelopment, as well as to facilitate negotiations, the city council adopted a proposal in January of 1975 to create the nonprofit Centre City Development Corporation, or CCDC. This organization negotiated between the city and the Hahn Company. As a result, CCDC became the first nonprofit

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19 Beth Coffelt, "The City is Dead Long Live the City" San Diego Magazine 25 (April 19, 1974): 112; ROMA (Rockrise Odermatt Moutjoy Amis Urban Design Consultants), Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project, (San Diego, California, 1973): 1, 4, 39, SDSU.

20 The ROMA Plan provided the basic guidelines for issues such as parking, streets, utilities, open space, street closures, land-use, preservation, phasing, and recommendations for the use of offices, retail, hotels, entrances, housing, art, signing, and street furniture.
redevelopment corporation in California. Seven years of negotiating with not only the city, but possible anchors for the mall followed for Hahn and Jerde.  

Figure 25: Horton Plaza Redevelopment ROMA Plan, 1973.

While most property owners did not contest the city’s land acquisition within the project area, there were a handful of lawsuits. The largest settlement came from the Zemen Brothers lawsuit which challenged the city’s use of eminent domain. Zemen’s owned an old vaudeville theater, which in the 1970s housed a venue for X-Rated films. The owners argued that the $900,000 offer was too little and would result in “the loss of

goodwill" of their customers. The owners argued that they would lose customers since they could not relocate nearby, due to a new city ordinance stating that adult businesses could not open within one thousand feet of another such business. The city reached a settlement which granted the Zemen brothers $1.2 million for the sale of the building; the operators received an additional $325,000. Furthermore, the city granted the operators the right to move into the Gaslamp Quarter and operate as an X-rated theater, despite the new ordinance.22

Relocation also included the clearance of inhabitants from five residential hotels, including the Golden West, Com-Comodore, and Knickerbocker. This process featured the only time during the Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project that the city sought federal aid from the Housing and Urban Development organization. By 1979 and 1980 two apartment towers, each housing over one hundred units, broke ground outside of the Horton Plaza Project area. David Allsbrook of the CCDC oversaw the process of relocation as the San Diego organization sought the assistance of Los Angeles firm Port and Flor, whose tasks included the management of the relocation process. This included the organization of meetings with residents and the management of the $225 dislocation allowance. Thus the Port and Flor firm served as a liaison between those displaced and developers.23

In order to finance the redevelopment project, the city relied upon tax increment financing. With uncertainties surrounding the availability of federal programs for cities under the Nixon administration, tax increment financing took advantage of future tax

22 Gordon, 64.
23 Ibid., 43, 83-84.
benefits in order to finance the current project. Such redevelopment projects were expected to raise the value of the surrounding area and encourage new investment, thus creating more taxable property and increased tax revenues. In turn, the city and developers used these revenues to back the sale of bonds. However, this process changed with the introduction of Proposition 13, a tax cutting initiative passed in a special California referendum in June of 1978. This reduced the property tax rate throughout the state which in turn added an additional financial strain upon the city of San Diego. This meant that the city could no longer agree to build the project’s parking garages and other particular site improvements. Furthermore, this measure hurt the amount of public assistance available for the redevelopment projects adjacent to the project. The Hahn Company thus faced the added burden of building a nineteen million dollar parking structure using only private funds.24

Final development plans revealed that the city would receive twenty five percent of gross revenues from parking garage fees for fifty years while also receiving ten percent of gross rental income from the mall’s future tenants. While the city prepared the project site, the Hahn Company invested $182 million, including $57 million for the adjacent Westin Horton Plaza Hotel.25 In all, the city and Hahn Company amended the development agreement five times, reconfigured and changed the designs and site plans a dozen times, and negotiated with numerous anchor stores. With these details in place, the Horton Plaza Redevelopment project offered a prime example of a venture that was truly private and public as these two sectors paved the way to create a themed mall.

24 Gordon, 37, 87, 116.
25 Ibid.
The Creation of a Themed Mall

While the Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project followed in the footsteps of other retail centers returning downtown in the 1970s and 1980s, the project proved unique in that it combined elements of the traditional suburban mall with the entertainment of a festival marketplace, in addition to the diverse elements found in a mixed-use project. The Hahn Company, along with architect Jon Jerde, hoped to evoke a European town environment with winding pedestrian streets “guiding visitors and shoppers on an adventure of sight, sound, and smell.” Leaders wished to juxtapose the surrounding urban environment by attracting “legitimate” entertainment and “legitimate” citizens. Jon Jerde stated that, “Over time, Horton Plaza will be thought of as a section or zone of San Diego…a place that demands to be explored and re-explored.” Developers and leaders alike viewed the project as the keystone to the larger downtown region. As a result, project leaders hoped to sell the idea that downtown was the major commercial and cultural center of the city.

City leaders and developers were aware of the great risk involved in bringing major retailing back downtown. Jon Jerde commented, “Whatever this beast was we were going to create, it had to have extraordinary attractiveness to do this job of pulling people out of the suburbs and back downtown.” In order to survive, the project had to entice a diverse population which included tourists, residents, and downtown office workers. Most importantly, San Diego suburbanites had to be convinced to come to Horton Plaza.

26 “Horton Plaza,” opening day pamphlet, Ernest W. Hanh Inc. San Diego, CA, SDHS.
27 Ibid.
and bypass thirteen other regional suburban malls like Fashion Valley, located north of downtown in Mission Valley. Pam Hamilton of the CCDC explained: “First impressions are very important...If they [visitors] haven’t been downtown for quite some time and their first impression is negative, we may never get those people back.” Thus, Horton Plaza, as well as other similar national projects, fought to commercialize downtown by creating a sanitized and orderly node that would impress new and returning visitors.

Hahn believed that the key to this factor lay in the idea of making shopping a form of entertainment. Hahn and Jerde accomplished this through the use of unusual architecture that housed exclusive one-of-a-kind shops and a variety of restaurants. Bolstering this environment, entertainment venues included the Lyceum Performing Arts Theater and the Untied Artists Seven Screen Cinema. (See figure 26) These elements all rested upon the foundation of four department stores: Nordstrom, Robinson’s, The Broadway, and Mervyns. Hahn strongly stood behind the concept of mixing elements of shopping and entertainment as he echoed, “I cringe when people call it a regional shopping center...You wouldn’t call Rodeo Drive a regional mall.” Horton Plaza represented a new breed of shopping centers, one that specifically featured upscale urban shopping and entertainment.

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31 Ibid.

68
Originally, Hahn envisioned developing an enclosed mall, however with the financial strains posed by the tax cutting Proposition 13, the developer had to face the added responsibility of funding two parking structures. In order to cut costs, Hahn ordered that architect Jon Jerde design an open-air structure, without air conditioning units. By mixing architectural elements ranging from Spanish Colonial, Mediterranean, Moorish, Contemporary, and Gothic, Jerde drew upon inspiration from East Coast festival malls as well as Southern Mediterranean marketplaces. He used an “S” shaped diagonal pedestrian system and staggered shop levels rising on both sides. (See figures 27-28)

Figure 27: Passageways inside of Horton Plaza

Figure 28: Inside of Horton Plaza.

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This vibrant environment prevalent in the Horton Plaza Redevelopment Plan encouraged exploration. One promotional document from the Hahn Company explained that, "You owe it to yourself to first proceed to the Broadway end of Horton Plaza 'street' to get the full effect of history---and walking the length of this huge district." Furthermore, Hahn wished that visitors would have a unique experience:

You get a feeling of 'what's ahead?' as you stand before the clustered buildings and walls. It must be something grand and formal, but whimsical at the same time. As you climb the stairs, you're reminded of a Colorado River sandstone canyon that twists and narrows, only to open mysteriously—suddenly—into a hidden amphitheatre of high walls, caves, and ledges.

What emerged was a multi-leveled, multi-colored, multi-angled, open-air maze of steps, ramps, passageways, fountains, terraces, and courts with the purpose of creating dramatic vistas at every turn. The interior streetscape included brick paving with expensive finishing materials. Other details such as accent tiles, special lighting, and a historic clock completed this environment. Even more staggering, the project incorporated the use of forty different pastel colors. (See figures 29-30)

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34 Ibid.

35 Gordon, 3.
Within Horton Plaza, designers created ten distinct districts. The Columbus Tower existed near the entrance and Robinson’s. Stores in this district had “a historical feeling.” In the Esplanade district, stores featured highly polished woods, metal, and stone, creating a “traditional urban retail” atmosphere. The Galleria section recreated a Main Street motif with neon lighting. In the Palazzo district, intended to serve as a space for congregating, an unusual triangular building boasted colored tiles. (See figure 31) The North Terrace section hosted entertainment venues such as a multiplex cinema while the
South Terrace relied upon Southern California motifs. Chelsea Court featured a Victorian themed environment with details evident throughout the Gaslamp Quarter. The "industrial" district, entitled the Mercado, had awnings and multi-paned windows; this space eventually housed the Irvine Ranch Market which showcased top quality produce and other gourmet items. The upper-most levels hosted Restaurant Row and Sports Deck, which offered open-air upscale restaurants such as Harbor House.\textsuperscript{36}

![Figure 31: The Palazzo Building in Horton Plaza.](image)

Developers required tenants to adapt to this festive urban environment by conforming to signage and design restrictions. The regulations stated that national chains had to abandon their standardized suburban designs in place of unique window displays, signage, and layout. (See figure 32) In the food court area, design requirements stated that each tenant had to incorporate a theme that expressed some aspect of the type of product sold. Thus, a fast food restaurant in the food court might incorporate giant french

\textsuperscript{36} "Horton Plaza: The Urban Festival Opens August 9," a special report by San Diego Home/Garden Magazine in cooperation with Ernest W. Hahn, Inc., and the Centre City Development Corporation (1985): HP28-HP30.

73

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fries in their sign. In turn, these requirements spurred competition for the most creative storefront.^^

Figure 32: A sample of a fast food chain in Horton Plaza.

Other elements within Horton Plaza bolstered this unique built environment. Pushcarts could be rented, which helped change the atmosphere on a weekly basis. In an effort to blend with the downtown skyline, developers hid mechanical equipment such as utilities on the rooftop. Preservation also played a crucial element in the overall project. Jerde proposed to save the flavor of two seismically unsafe historic buildings, the Knights of Pythias and Bradley Building, by creating castes of them. Developers recreated the facades and then integrated them into the new design. Jerde’s model also salvaged the Balboa Theater, to be restored at a later date, and the Spreckels Building. To bolster the

37 Gordon, 138-139; Urban Land Institute Case Study 16 (October-December, 1986): N/P.
38 Urban Land Institute Case Study 16 (October-December, 1986): N/P.
distinctiveness of the project, the use of live entertainment throughout the mall became crucial. This included the use of pre-approved street musicians, mimes, jugglers, and artists. Hahn and Jerde also incorporated actual art within the mall itself; the project featured over one million dollars in architectural amenities and fine art. When the mall opened, the CCDC showcased this atmosphere by providing free guided walking and bus tours of downtown on the weekend.\textsuperscript{39}

Since the issue of parking was one of the major obstacles in bringing major retailing back downtown, developers had to grapple with this element. The project featured two seven story garages, which included over two thousand parking spaces, with entrances on Fourth Avenue and G Street. Architect Jon Jerde created a novel design that was not only vertical, but hidden, by wrapping the garages inside of the mall. His design also hid from customers, and the rest of the city, the underground service tunnel and its multiple loading docks. Initially, shoppers received forty five free minutes of parking. With a purchase over seven dollars, shoppers earned a validation coupon with more time. Shortly after, developers implemented a new system which stated that parking was free for the first three hours with proof of purchase at the mall. The question remained, would suburbanites pay for parking, when they could park free at regional malls that were closer? This was a key consideration as the city and developers had to combat the auto culture of the suburbs.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{39} "Horton Plaza: The Urban Festival Opens August 9," a special report by \textit{San Diego Home/Garden Magazine} in cooperation with Ernest W. Hahn, Inc., and the Centre City Development Corporation (1985): HP27, 32.

\textsuperscript{40} Jim Okerblom, “Changes Due in Parking Rates Hit Horton Plaza” \textit{San Diego Union Tribune} (November 5, 1985): B-1.
Marketing and Opening Day

Prior to Horton Plaza’s opening, developers had to deal with two major challenges. First, they had to combat the negative image associated with downtown’s sordid past. Secondly, developers had to compete against suburban shopping malls, which were physically closer to suburban residents, filled with ample free parking, and associated with favorable images. As a result, the Hahn Company followed an aggressive marketing scheme which included turning opening day into a large spectacle. Hahn not only wanted to capture the attention of locals within San Diego County, but he wanted to draw attention from California, and the rest of the nation.

In order to attract people back downtown, the city and taxpayers, who were not given a choice, played a crucial role in promoting the August 9th opening of Horton Plaza. Specifically, the city paid for and distributed brightly designed Horton Plaza promotional letters with over two hundred thousand city water bills in July and August of 1985. This effort, costing over five thousand dollars, represented the first time city envelopes had ever been used to promote a private, profit making business. The agency also agreed to buy and distribute 25,000 copies of a special Horton Plaza advertisement supplement, appearing in the August edition of San Diego Home and Garden magazine. The Hahn Company promised to purchase additional copies in return for the editing rights of the project. The Hahn firm also handled promotional affairs by creating a special position that handled public relations and special events. The director, Sonny Sturm, took Jerde’s design model around the city, and nation, for public viewing in order to gain positive exposure for the firm and the project. Sturm also worked closely with the public sector in
order to keep the media aware of every construction milestone, in turn provoking interest and curiosity among visitors.\textsuperscript{41}

The promotional campaign also targeted neighboring residents in Tijuana, Mexico. City officials and Hahn treated Mexican dignitaries to a preview tour of the mall. This gesture revealed an attempt to stimulate economic and political relationships across the border, especially since Mexican visitors in 1984 spent over $50 million in San Diego. Hahn further envisioned performances by Mexican artists and displays of Mexican arts and crafts. This type of pre-opening promotional campaign also sought to garner interest from the rest of the state, and nation. City leaders and the Hahn Company invited numerous mayors from California and other states for luncheon celebration and information session.\textsuperscript{42}

Horton Plaza opened on August 9, 1985 with an exuberant fanfare that rivaled the opening of Boston's Faneuil Hall nearly a decade earlier. Former city mayor Pete Wilson and Earnest Hahn delivered just two of the many speeches. The event featured all types of live entertainment and colored banners leading from the freeway off-ramps to the mall. Tens of thousands of visitors flocked for the opening, from all across the country. In the evening, festivities included a 1920s themed party. On the second day, over 70,000 people passed through the mall. To further entice suburbanites and tourists, parking was free for the first month. Opening day festivities extended throughout the week with activities that ranged from fashion shows and chamber orchestras to wine tasting. The


festivities even featured appearances by Miss Universe, and San Diego Padre players.43 One elderly couple exclaimed, "We were afraid to come down here, especially at night...But now we'll be back" while a teenage girl added, "Love it! All of a sudden, it's neat and fun to go downtown."44

Initial Success

Within the first year of operation, Horton Plaza performed in the top ten percent of the Hahn Company's shopping centers. The project created thousands of jobs while gathering sales and property taxes for the city.45 Tourists comprised of approximately one-third of the visiting population, while the remainder of shoppers came from across San Diego County. Despite this success, nearly sixty percent of city residents claimed that they did not visit other downtown areas while at Horton Plaza.46 This revealed how in Horton Plaza's formative years it served as a self-containing downtown that blocked out unsightly elements such as transients and poverty. Furthermore, this revealed the discordant relationship between the superstructure and the adjacent Gaslamp Quarter.

Horton Plaza sought to sell "uniqueness" and experience in an environment that was orderly and safe. It aimed to distinguish itself from other regional malls by creating a synergy and synthesis, which sociologist John Hannigan has referred to as


45 Urban Land Institute Case Study 16 (October-December, 1986): N/P.

“shoppertainment.” Architectural critic Paul Goldberger offered that Horton Plaza was like Disneyland, the one locale where Southern Californians had pedestrian experiences. For citizens in the car oriented sprawling region of Southern California, Disneyland provided a sanitized pedestrian alternative to the Eastern urban landscapes such as New York, Boston, or Philadelphia. He further concluded that, “There is nothing in Horton Plaza to threaten the priorities of Southern California too strongly. It is a place where one can pretend to be in a city while still living a fundamentally suburban existence...It is still possible to go to Horton Plaza and entirely miss the rest of downtown.” As developed, Horton Plaza presented an urban fantasyland, yet hidden behind this disguise were the core ideals evident in suburban regional shopping centers in the postwar era. Instead of being a truly organic urban center, Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project was in many ways a new version of suburbia.


CHAPTER 5

WORLDS COLLIDE: CONTENTIONS

OVER URBAN SPACE

A New “Golden-Era?”

Those shaping the image, culture, and built environment of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza drew inspiration from the perceived “Golden-Era” of downtown, which spanned from the 1880s to 1920. Behind the notion of this era, the principals involved with reinventing downtown San Diego assumed that conditions downtown were once much better and since then had been in rapid decline. This nostalgia for certain elements of a perceived past, however, omitted all of its various problems and social divisions. As a result, contentions over urban space emerged between the original inhabitants and their alternative community and those in favor of creating a new “Golden-Era” for downtown San Diego.

This perceived “Golden-Era” not only witnessed the construction of lavish department stores, but also apartment buildings and luxury hotels. World Fairs spanning from Chicago to San Francisco also appeared during this time, while trolleys and other new transportation methods appeared on the crowded streets. The City Beautiful Movement further created an environment with urban parks, theaters, and civic buildings.

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Citizens with the proper means could partake in various forms of entertainment ranging from dancehalls to vaudevillian theaters. Yet, serious social and environmental problems in this era such as rampant disease and pollution associated with overcrowding also existed. In addition, riots and fires raged over gang wars and social differences. Many urban centers hosted Ku Klux Klan revival parades, while in the 1930s one could witness extreme poverty and winding depression-era lines. Both World War I and II created shortages and disinvestment in cities across the nation. Socially, divisions existed by work, home, income, ethnicity, gender, and race. Certain usable elements of the "Golden-Era" ideal created a set of mythical images and fond memories, which leaders and developers used to compare to the postwar urban crisis era.

Preservation and development efforts in the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza drew upon this perceived past. As a result, elements considered to be "historical and important tend to reflect the political and economic contemporary concerns of those who are in positions of power." In addition, those behind the creation of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza also drew upon the language and mentality of "bringing back" a respectable citizenry downtown. This assumed that a past downtown of proper decorum and middle-class values once existed. Yet, in reality downtowns of the "Golden-Era" housed many poor marginal groups of citizens and their residences, which consisted of flats and tenements. This environment had also featured gritty businesses, such as working class saloons and skid rows. Lavish urban department stores in this era served as self

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2 For a detailed history of the various forms of urban entertainment in the late nineteenth century through the early twentieth century, refer to David Nasaw, Going Out (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

3 Ibid., 25-26.

4 Mark Hutter, Experiencing Cities (Boston: Pearson Press, 2007), 141.
contained downtowns protected from this backdrop as “most people visited only a very small section of downtown and often spent much of the day in just a few major department stores.”

Despite the dual nature of the perceived “Golden-Era,” it shared certain aspects with the 1970s version of downtown San Diego. The element of decency became crucial in both eras, which in turn determined who could participate in the new urban spaces. Additionally, the new urban entertainment spaces in both eras created a vibrant public culture outside of the house and work place, thus creating a seemingly public sphere. In reality, this public sphere existed for those who belonged and could afford it. As a result, entertainment and consumption spaces of the “Golden-Era,” along with future projects such as the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza, created a middle-class illusion that sought “to convince less affluent patrons that they were being transported to magical realm…and at the same time reassure bourgeois pleasure-seekers that these new public amusements were safe and physically and morally clean.”

While nostalgia for a perceived past played a crucial role in the formation of the “Golden Era” myth, memory also shaped how developers utilized this perceived past. San Diego city leaders and private developers “retreated into a comforting past” in order “to regain a sense of control of their cultural environment.” Anxieties surrounding the urban crisis era provoked nostalgia and created a produced past that smoothed out

\[\text{\footnotesize Footnotes:}\]
5 Ford, 39, 163.
6 Nasaw, 13, 47, 116.
negative issues like the Stingaree.\textsuperscript{9} In some cases however, San Diego leaders and developers romanticized and capitalized on not only the "Golden-Era" myth but also on the risqué aura of the city’s Stingaree past. This revealed the power of memory in regards to the creation of a usable past. This interconnection between myth, memory, and space did not solely exist in San Diego. Other projects such as Denver’s LoDo District and St. Louis’ Gaslight Square also specifically drew upon this image. Other projects relied upon different themes such as the colonial Faneuil Hall in Boston, and the nautical motifs evident in Baltimore’s Harborview. Romanticized industrial images materialized in San Francisco’s Ghirardelli Square and Seattle’s Pike Place Market. Other themes such as the Santa Fe Rancho, Spanish Fantasy Heritage, and the Western Frontier, to name a few, existed in varying projects across the nation.

The legible spaces evident in the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza Mall revealed how the built environment was directly connected to elements of myth, memory, and culture. The images that city leaders and developers created offered selective images that attempted to "erase" unsightly people, their culture, and social problems from the project area. The legibility of these themed spaces made downtown San Diego, its citizens, and its history easier to understand as they offered a "quick, shorthand method of characterizing a place."\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.

A Fortified “Golden-Era”

The population within the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza project area did not share the same idealistic “Golden Era” vision of urban space that business investors, city leaders, and mainstream society promoted. As the area’s physical, social, and cultural landscape began to transform, the environment became militarized. Polemicist Mike Davis has referred to this process as the defense, surveillance, and policing of social and physical boundaries. In downtown San Diego, this materialized in various forms ranging from the displacement of the region’s original inhabitants, to heightened security, and control over culture and the built environment. Despite these similar themes, each specific environment had its distinct conflicts over urban space, which directly related to the nature of each project: the Gaslamp Quarter as a nationally preserved district, Horton Plaza as an urban mall, and the plaza park as an existing public space that became engulfed by new development. In order to comprehend the spatial and cultural conflict that ensued, one must analyze everyday forms of resistance, which can be read in the daily lives of citizens. Historian Robin Kelley argues that rather than simply being dismissed as criminal acts, these “hidden transcripts” characterize the complexity of scripted urban space.11 Adding to this framework, historian Eric Avila asserts that there are, “counternarratives, counterstrategies, and counterexpressions” that assert and maintain humanity in transforming spaces, such as the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza.12

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The Gaslamp Quarter

In the Gaslamp Quarter, the displacement of the area’s original dwellers became a harsh reality. Spearheaded by mayor Pete Wilson, with the goal of creating an economically profitable downtown with minimal federal involvement, initial city documents reveal very little detail addressing human elements related to the Gaslamp Quarter project. One 1976 document expressed more concern for the “elegant types of people that Gaslampers hope to attract” than the “rougher elements of society.”\(^\text{13}\) Planners casually assumed that, “As the Gaslamp Quarter develops, the economic growth of the area will most likely disrupt the existing residential community as well as other users that would not find the area suitable for their needs…”\(^\text{14}\) This ideology ran counter to preservation efforts in Seattle, such as Pioneer Square and Pike Place Market, where planners in the 1970s purposely aimed to protect low-income SRO housing to maintain the area’s original milieu.\(^\text{15}\)

As developers sought to rid the district of certain people and low-income SRO housing, San Diego still had approximately 1,500 homeless people living amongst the urban landscape in 1985.\(^\text{16}\) This same year, the district’s City Rescue Mission closed due to a resolution banning such services in the project area. (See figure 33) Transients adapted to the rapidly changing policies by sleeping in vacant lots or in old downtown buildings. Others sought refuge in produce trucks or parked Greyhound buses at the

\(^{13}\) City of San Diego, “Centre City San Diego Community Plan,” 1976, microform available at the San Diego State University Library (CVL Docs SD-C400-P71-C397/5).

\(^{14}\) Ibid.


nearby station. Those with meager funds could sleep in all-night theaters, as long as they still remained. Some transients simply slept on benches or on the sidewalk. One San Diego Union Tribune article presented a picture of store front under renovation with a homeless man sleeping lifelessly on a bench as the caption read, “Although rebuilding operations are moving along at Gaslamp Quarter, some objects are still stationary.”

Gaslamp organizations distributed tips for property owners and visitors on how to cope with these stationary objects such as “Don’t give food to transients. It doesn’t really help them---and it does hurt the neighborhood.”

Figure 33: The former Rescue Mission on Fifth Avenue.

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19 Gaslamp Quarterly Newsletter (Spring 1984), SDHS.
In addition to disrupting the activities of the district’s transients, development of the Gaslamp Quarter greatly affected the elderly population. In 1975, the district encompassed the highest percentage of elderly citizens in the city and county. As development began in the late 1970s, the region witnessed a great population influx of younger people, which suggested an in-migration of younger persons and an out migration or dying off of the elderly. Five years later, the median age was approximately thirty seven years of age, while by 1990 the median age became even lower. This change partially occurred due to the decrease in availability of inexpensive rooms. In 1976 there were approximately 4,600 inexpensive rooms, where by 1985 there were less than 3,500.

As the area developed, SRO hotels began to disappear, thus raising rent and living expenses higher than the coverage provided by social security and disability checks. For example, the average rent for a SRO hotel room increased over one hundred dollars between 1980 and 1985. As new high-end establishments emerged, the urban infrastructure utilized by the elderly and other inhabitants began to erode. The elderly, disabled, and others with fixed incomes began losing out to a new generation of better paid downtown workers in specialty shops and fancy restaurants. As a result, one of the key components of reinventing downtown San Diego was the influx of younger citizens back downtown.


22 Kevin Eckert’s study classifies “inexpensive” SROs as ranging from $12-$14 per night or $120-$249 per month.

The face of public security and police enforcement within the planned district also changed to create a sense of safety for its targeted consumers. Police Chief William Kolender boasted that crime rates in the Gaslamp Quarter dropped 40 percent between 1978 and 1980. Three years later, the city assigned walking beat cops to patrol the area. These officers patrolled the district on horse and by foot at all hours sweeping the streets for illicit activity. They monitored activity from inside of buildings, rooftops, or by mingling with shoppers. Ironically, one police sergeant declared that, "The one thing we didn't want was an image of heavy-handedness." In 1986, the city council approved a storefront police station within the district on Fifth Avenue, thus increasing the area's image of safety for middle and upper class consumers.

Besides the increase in public security, private security hired by merchants within the district also became increasingly prominent. Venues such as the Old Spaghetti Factory and Cabo Cabo Grill teamed up to hire security guards. Some private security officers even gained public notoriety, becoming characters within the themed environment. In 1979 Ben Harroll, known as Clancy the Beat Cop, and his twelve-man team began patrolling the Gaslamp Quarter in turn-of-the-century police uniforms. They frequented questionable businesses multiple times a day and interrogated customers, workers, and owners. While multiple Gaslamp Quarter Merchants contracted this team, they later faced public scrutiny for their vigilante style of shocking transients with cattle prods and


88
dumping buckets of water on them. Such security groups also used mace and clubs on transients.  

Legally, however, only official police members could enforce the misdemeanor of loitering. While official Gaslamp Quarter organizations distanced themselves from these “unofficial” groups, they did offer a variety of free crime prevention seminar series to the public. The first installment taught how to prevent panhandling, while the second program addressed how to become street wise and defend oneself.

Earlier inhabitants of the area viewed this security trend differently. They did not understand the space as becoming more consumer friendly, but rather as a new fortified urban area. One homeless man in the later 1980s, and former SRO resident, lamented:

We can’t go anywhere near Horton Plaza. I can’t even walk over to that store across the street without being harassed by the police...They’ve started treating people like dogs... We don’t bother nobody, we don’t steal, we’re not on dope. We don’t even go down into the Gaslamp Quarter anymore. We have a right to be here.

With heightened security, street people not only faced arrests, but harsh interrogations, fines, and pressure to reveal identification or other documentation.

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30 Ibid.

31 Arnold, “Now, Sweep Up the Citations,” 5. A sample from a three week period in 1985 revealed 702 citations and 352 arrests: 60 transients received tickets for panhandling, 181 for illegal drinking in restricted areas, 46 for possession of marijuana, and 227 for illegal lodging.
As the built environment changed and rent prices rose, the gritty cultural flavor of the original urban space began to disappear. Responding to the transforming district, one disgruntled business owner declared,

If people want cute and sanity, let them go to the carefully planned communities in the suburbs where everything is made to look alike, and where nothing out of the ordinary is ever allowed to happen. A great many people like me come downtown specifically to escape that kind of spiritual blight.\(^{32}\)

The remaining red-light venues all suffered declines in business, some as much as 60 percent. Clamp-downs on massage parlors and prostitution also stymied these types of businesses. In addition, police vice squads raided such venues, and harassed or fined customers, owners, and employees. One bar owner revealed how a vice squad leader told him, “The next fucking time you tip anybody off that we’re vice squad, I’m gonna run your ass to jail...”\(^{33}\)

Liquor stores also faced scrutiny as the Gaslamp Quarter Association persuaded these venues in the district to discontinue selling individually sold cigarettes and bottles of fortified wine in 1983, both favorites among many transients. Even more crippling were the cut backs in public bus transportation services beginning in August of 1978, which stopped transit between suburb communities and downtown by eight in the evening. While this may appear to run counter to the goal of attracting suburbanites, these actions helped keep transients and elderly residents out of suburban communities while

\(^{32}\) Neal Matthews, “Porn to Win,” *San Diego Reader*, 18 (June 1, 1989): 5.

simultaneously curtailing suburbanites without automobiles from partaking in the more risqué elements of downtown.34

Fifth Avenue had been home to the highest density of X-rated businesses in San Diego, but the development of the Gaslamp Quarter changed this. External pressures ranging from rising rent prices to restrictive ordinances on exterior building codes, along with harassment from vice squads all helped change these urban spaces. Bob Clark, owner of Lyric Bookstore, asserted that his business suffered a 40 percent decline due to the busing cutbacks and increases in police forces. Clark cited twelve raids within a year and a half, which resulted in two clerks quitting. Furthermore, such businesses had to submit an annual $300 payment for monthly health inspections. Even mainstream theaters and bookstores suffered a substantial decrease in business.35 As a result, adult businesses elsewhere, such as National City’s Pussycat Theater south of San Diego, witnessed an increase in patronage, thus shifting such activities, venues, and patrons out of the project area. From 1969 to 1981, the number of adult establishments in the district declined 50 percent without any new adult businesses opening and by 1992 only two adult businesses remained.36 (See figures 34-35)


35 DeWyze and Neal Matthews, “Pinball Machine Arrested For Flipping Off Vice Cop,” 3.

Even seemingly unimportant street fixtures within the Gaslamp Quarter symbolized the various contentions over the changing space. The city bought approximately two hundred new garbage cans for the themed district. (See figure 36) A portion of these were specially designed “transient-proof” cement cans: bullet proof, theft proof, and scavenger
proof. However, some inhabitants did not view these pieces as themed street furniture. One large transient, who was an epileptic Vietnam veteran, known as “Tank,” left his social mark on the themed environment by pushing over many of these new fixtures along with smashing old aluminum ones. Despite the fact that the city spent over fifty thousand dollars to buy new fortified cans, people in the Gaslamp Quarter became accustomed to seeing tipped, destroyed cans, a social reminder that people such as “Tank” still remained embedded within the urban environment. Once business owners complained to the city, “Tank” disappeared. Police records confirm that he was not jailed, thus making it highly possible that authorities deported him out of downtown.37

Figure 36: Garbage cans in the Gaslamp Quarter.

Similar conflicts emerged over themed benches, creating a type of “bench-warfare.” Developers placed multiple expensive Victorian styled benches throughout the district. The city additionally entertained plans to purchase additional wire-mesh benches which had no backs on them, a design tactic used to deter sleeping transients. If urban dwellers

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fell asleep on these benches, they would fall off. The themed benches came to have three separate meanings for three different groups of people. To the homeless, the objects provided a comfortable place to sit or sleep. For developers, these benches offered themed pieces of history throughout the district. Lastly, business owners viewed these fixtures as a major menace. Soon after the city distributed these new benches, merchants quickly condemned them and demanded their removal as they became gathering places for alcoholics, drug users, and people who harassed customers. Merchants also complained that people littered, panhandled, and urinated on or nearby the benches. When one business owner took the liberty of removing what he referred to as a “Victorian styled wino’s throne” outside of his store, business rose. Other Gaslamp business owners blamed the new benches for break-ins and other acts of vandalism. A separate private owner expressed, “They [the police] tell me I ought to do like one of the other businesses did---the benches just disappeared…” Eventually, the city removed all of the district’s benches.

With the closing of places such as the Rescue Mission, “unwanted” elements migrated outside of the boundaries of the Gaslamp Quarter, creating new clashes between communities and the built environment. In 1989, places like Pantoja Park, near G and State streets, now faced large numbers of people in its urban park sleeping, and partaking in illicit activities. This milieu contrasted the pricey downtown condominiums across the street in Park Row/Marina Park that emerged following the development of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza. Residents complained of verbal harassment and vandalism, while stumbling upon razor blades, plastic bags, and hypodermic needles. While yuppies


envisioned the park in one manner, for others the park became a trading post for drugs and fortified wine, while shrubs became restrooms. As a result, Councilman Bob Filner proposed to the city council that the park be closed and locked up at night. As the Gaslamp Quarter gradually cleaned up, other adjacent areas got worse and were forced to face new problems. However, within the new project areas downtown, genuine urban social problems appeared to be solved as they became easier to ignore.  

Horton Plaza Mall

Similar contentions over urban space and culture arose over the Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project in reaction to the militarization and theming of downtown San Diego. However, specific contentions in urban space occurred due to the fact that the project was an urban mall. Sociologist William Whyte revealed that mega-structures, such as Horton Plaza, represented the ultimate flight from the street as they were self contained, fortified downtowns. One could drive from the freeway straight to the parking garage and back, with no contact with the actual street or city. Such structures also limited contact between citizens by simulating cities and their sense of place while denying elements of the actual surrounding space within it.  

However, counter-narratives amongst the region’s original inhabitants sought to contend this trend. The displacement of residents and businesses within the Horton Plaza project area occurred between 1974 and 1982. During this process, nearly 60 percent of the region’s inhabitants found new housing in the downtown region, while approximately 30 percent


41 William Whyte, City: Rediscovering the Center (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 206-221.
moved to other locations in the greater metropolitan area. The remaining residents fled the city completely. Old businesses within the project area, however, fared much worse. While fifty eight businesses relocated, almost half of these firms went out of business soon after. Of the remaining businesses, 33 percent remained in the downtown region, while 16 percent moved out of downtown completely. These changes reveal how the transformation of the built environment was only one component surrounding the development of Horton Plaza. The displacement of the project area’s original inhabitants helped establish who belonged in the new downtown. Likewise, the displacement of the region’s original businesses, helped determine the type of culture that would exist in the newly developed urban core.\(^{42}\)

Within the walls of Horton Plaza, brown-uniformed security members monitored activity within the mall, the parking garages, and on the surrounding streets. Since the mall was in an urban setting and had the added responsibility of creating an image appealing to suburbanites and tourists, these security forces were two to three times larger than most shopping malls.\(^{43}\) Furthermore, during the first five years of operation, developers had to suppress fears of crime and danger as local media sources such as the San Diego Union Tribune reported numerous robberies and related crimes within the mall, at its ATM machines, and in its parking structure.\(^{44}\) Initially, the project had thirty

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four officers, both uniformed and disguised while each of the four anchor stores had its own security. Both of these groups of security forces discouraged activities such as panhandling and prostitution. These forces also prevented gangs and illegal immigrants from loitering in and around the project area.\footnote{Moore, “Center Piece: Horton Plaza, from Within and Without,” 11.}

While the mall appeared to offer a secure new public urban environment, it remained a “semi” public space. More specifically, it was private in the sense that private funding developed the project. On the other hand, it was also public because millions of dollars of taxpayers’ money prepared the site for private developers. Furthermore, Horton Plaza represented a “semi” public space because it was a privately owned form of “public space,” where the first amendment could no longer protect or guarantee free speech and assembly. In the 1960s, the Supreme Court grappled with this same conflict over postwar suburban shopping malls. Initially, the Supreme Court of the 1960s favored first amendment rights over private property rights in \textit{Amalgamated Food Employees Union Local 590 v. Logan Valley Plaza}. Justice Marshall argued that the suburban malls became the, “functional equivalent of sidewalk and public space.”\footnote{Lizabeth Cohen, “From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Market Places in Postwar America,” \textit{American Historical Review} 101 (Oct 1996): 1069.} In the Nixon era, this trend shifted, favoring property rights with \textit{Lloyd Corp. v. Tanner}. By the 1980s, the Supreme Court protected free speech in these environments, yet with limitations.

Horton Plaza faced these types of conflicts over public space. In 1986, a theater troupe called “Playing for Real” sought permission to perform a skit critical of the United States’ policy in El Salvador, but executives of the mall denied the request, citing private property rights. Nevertheless, the troupe entered the mall and performed the brief play.
Police informants notified Horton Plaza operators prior to the event, so they were prepared to apprehend the group. While the event unfolded in a peaceful manner, the police stated that, “it appeared the group has the intention of creating problems within the shopping center, possibly including physical violence.” Even though the protest was peaceful, the theater troupe eventually lost their appeal due to the ruling that there were “no suitable staging areas” in the mall while public spaces outside of the center could have been used. While these other spaces might not have proved as effective, this case study revealed the ambiguities that began to arise over this new form of semi-public space.

Other examples clarified the reality that Horton Plaza represented a semi-public space with conflicts also emerging over decency. Just as city leaders sought to rid the Gaslamp Quarter of particular images, developers of Horton Plaza sought to maintain a similarly sanitized space. As a result, it was not just the built environment that made Horton Plaza feel like a mall, but it was the public’s ability to recognize what the particular types of stores meant and where they belonged. One conflict emerged over the display window of the trendy clothing store, Jigsaw. The display window featured four mannequins dressed in military fatigues, wrapped in dozens of wrapped condoms, with signs that read, “In the combat against AIDS, do your part” and “Jigsaw clothes aren’t the only things we encourage you to wear.” A few hours after the store owners unveiled the display, the mall’s security forces ordered the removal of the display and signs. As a result, store

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owners moved the window contents inside of the store, away from the direct view of visitors. Just like the Gaslamp Quarter, Horton Plaza celebrated constrained diversity in the setting of semi-public space. This in turn limited the list of citizens and the types of cultures eligible for “the public.”

Tensions also arose concerning the parking structures within Horton Plaza, as they manifested themselves in miniaturized “parking battles.” Workers in the service sector of the mall had to abide by the same parking regulations as regular visitors, or pay for a sixty dollar monthly pass. For workers, especially those making minimum wage, many responded though the process of “rotating.” This process occurred when a mall employee, office worker, or any downtown visitor, parked at the Horton Plaza parking structure for just under the three free hours of validated parking, and then pulled his/her car out of the garage, drove around the corner, and re-parked with a new ticket. While mall operators noted how this act was illegal, rotators did not share this perspective. One rotator stated, “But I don’t feel guilty...God, look how much money they’re making!” Another employee rotator sarcastically exclaimed, “I make four dollars an hour. I’m sure I can afford to pay for parking.”

Further parking battles centered upon women employees and their safety within the downtown setting. In November of 1986, operators instated a new parking policy which forced all employees to park outside Horton Plaza’s parking garages during the holiday

50 Ibid.


53 Ibid.
season of November and December. Referring to the area surrounding the newly
developed downtown, one women employee who regularly worked late shifts expressed,
"I feel they're putting our life on the line...It's not safe out there." Assistant General
Manager Ron Burns did not share this view as he responded by stating that, "But there's
a limited amount of responsibility we can accept...It's life downtown...Our
responsibility is to the center." These particular conflicts especially highlight the
challenges and differences between suburban shopping centers, with ample free parking
in a safe environment, and urban shopping centers which one had to pay for and cope
with elements such as transients.

While Horton Plaza and its parking structure represented a self-contained downtown,
city planners and private developers envisioned that the structure would serve as a
linkage to the historic Gaslamp Quarter and the existing plaza. However, there was
spatial discordance among the built environment. The Gaslamp Quarter side of the
structure on Fourth Avenue revealed a gray wall and the skeleton of the multistory
parking structure. This revealed the aim by developers to fortify the superstructure
against the lagging Gaslamp Quarter which still hosted an array of adult businesses and
other "unsightly" businesses. As a result, developers cut off the structure from the
surrounding area and its streets. Gaslamp Quarter merchants complained that the project
"turned its back on the city" and "mooned" the Gaslamp Quarter. The solution to the
problem did not get resolved until 1991 with an $8.3 million multi-story mixed use
project on Fourth Avenue, between the Balboa Theater and Golden West Hotel. This

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
upgrade masked the previously visible cinder-block walls, skeleton frame, and parked cars.  

Other spatial cacophony appeared between the superstructure and the actual plaza. For example, the entrance at Robinson's did not align with the plaza's fountain, its stairs were not intended for sitting, and the ground level did not provide a welcoming transition for those passing by. Further spatial discordance appeared at the entrances of the structure as the north and west sides of mall transported customers though the elaborate entrances of the department stores. While the formal pedestrian entrance existed on the Broadway side of the project, visitors ended up entering the project mainly from the parking garages. This physically separated visitors from urban dwellers and the surrounding streetscape.

The social, cultural, and spatial conflicts that emerged in the Horton Plaza mall resulted from the reality that the space served as a fortified node, protecting not only its physical environment, but its customers inside. However, not everyone viewed this fortified space favorably as a limited type of public and culture was "aloud" to participate in this themed environment. Hence, sociologist William Whyte's diatribe regarding the self-containing nature of downtown mega-structures proved true in the case of San Diego's Horton Plaza.

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58 Whtye, 206-221.
Horton Plaza Park

Even though Horton Plaza Park was linked to the transforming Gaslamp Quarter and the semi-public Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project, it remained a public plaza. However, the plaza became militarized as Horton Plaza mall opened and the Gaslamp Quarter continued to develop. As a result, the urban space served as a “theater” ripe with spatial and cultural conflicts in reaction to the newly reinvented urban landscape, which engulfed the plaza. Likewise, the plaza’s original inhabitants did not simply flee the area once the mall opened in 1985, but rather two disparate worlds existed. On one hand, these spaces were spatially connected to each other. On the other hand, these same environments became separated by walls, parking garages, and different types of citizens and cultures. Similar to the contentions that arose over the themed benches within the Gaslamp Quarter, the plaza came to have different meanings by different groups of people. Developers, city leaders, and merchants viewed the plaza as a space that represented the wrong people, the wrong image, and the wrong activities. Ron Oliver, president of San Diego’s Central City Association, stated that the plaza “should be a place where a family can go...where business people could have lunch...”

For a different group, the space represented one to be historically preserved. Finally, the space also represented a place to live and call home.

Two years after Horton Plaza’s opening, urban dwellers remained in the plaza park. While all types of people moved though the plaza space, no genuine mixing existed between them. One type of citizenry included downtown workers, shoppers, and yuppies that scurried through or around the plaza. In contrast, the plaza also hosted the homeless,

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59 Michael Granberry, "Face-Lift Crew Deposes Park Vagrants" San Diego Union Tribune (June, 21 1991): NP.
veterans, minorities, religious zealots, alcoholics, and those partaking in illicit activities. While Seattle’s Pioneer Square, San Francisco’s Father Alfred Boeddeker Park, and Los Angeles’ MacArthur Park welcomed these types of spaces, San Diego city leaders did not share this view in regards to Horton Plaza. In their regional study of San Diego, urban planners Kevin Lynch and Donald Appleyard warned that a renewal program that removed Horton Plaza of its brash and tawdry liveliness would result in an empty space. Nevertheless, San Diego city leaders and developers sought to transform the plaza and reform the environment and its inhabitants. Supporters of this plan followed the theory that if the plaza was made uncomfortable for everyone, it would become uncomfortable for undesirable people and their various activities.

Prior to the conception of the Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project, local preservationists fought in 1971 to save the plaza and fountain as they placed them on the local San Diego Historical Site Board. As a result, there were numerous attempts to clean up the plaza and its surroundings between the early 1970s and 1985. During this period, the city ordered palm trees and planted them in custom-made concrete urns. The city also installed new park benches with dividers on them to prevent sleepers. In order to keep people from sleeping on the grass, the city used sprinklers set to turn on at specific times as well as decorative cast-iron posts set in concrete and connected by a thick, sturdy chain around lawn perimeter. Special police patrols monitored the plaza, physically and with video cameras, and kept traffic flowing. With mounting pressures


62 Ibid.
from Gaslamp Quarter merchants and Horton Plaza developers, the 1984 plaza reform effort sought to remove the bathrooms from the plaza as well as its benches and grass. By 1990 the City Council voted to remove the park’s eighteen benches and all of the grass, planting shrubs and geraniums in their place.  

(See figures 37-38)

Figure 37: Fencing around Horton Plaza.

Figure 38: Landscaping in Horton Plaza, which replaced the lawn.

In addition to these spatial changes within the plaza, in 1985 the city transit board voted in favor of moving the main downtown bus stop away from the plaza. This coincided with the opening of the Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project. At the time, the bus stop was the second busiest in the entire city, handling approximately five thousand riders per day. The new bus stop appeared one block west to the corner of Third Avenue and Broadway. The bus stop was not the only element removed from the vicinity of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza. By removing the bus stops and benches away from the entrance of the mall, leaders physically and visually removed the citizens who relied upon public transportation, along with nuisances such as exhaust and noise.64

Cultural changes also helped transform the plaza environment. In the 1990s the city and developers added newsstands, kiosks, and live entertainment acts to the plaza. Just like the entertainment provided within the walls of Horton Plaza, the city pre-approved the entertainment. One promotional flyer advertised the lunch-time festivities during the work-week: “Bring your lunch to Horton Plaza Park and enjoy the noon-time festivities!!”65 The Central City Association and Commission for Arts and Culture presented this “Noon-Tunes” series in an effort to attract new people and activities to the environment.

While these physical and cultural reform efforts initially helped scatter some urban dwellers to other areas of downtown, for the most part undesirable people and elements remained. Possibly serving as symbols of frustration for these citizens within the transforming downtown, vandals ripped out irrigation lines, used graffiti, and set fire to

palm trees. Furthermore, people continued to take baths, urinate, defecate, and vomit into
the fountain. Similar to the “bench-warfare” prevalent in the developing Gaslamp
Quarter, a “bathroom-warfare” raged on a second front. Since the removal of the plaza’s
bathrooms, merchants now found that urban dwellers were increasingly using their
doorways as public restrooms. By 1990, five years after the opening of the Horton Plaza
Redevelopment Project, police continued to patrol the plaza at least five times a day.66

The original inhabitants of the plaza became deeply affected by the various changes
surrounding the plaza. For these people, the plaza had offered sleeping arrangements on
the benches or lawn. The space also served as a place for handouts, from shopping mall
patrons, and groups like the Hare Krishna. For others, the environment appeared as a
miniature market place where one could buy and sell cheap cigarettes from Tijuana, as
well as other items.67 The plaza served a wide array of inhabitants, such as the elderly
from the nearby SRO hotels. Many elders woke up early, got coffee and then walked to
the plaza to sit on the benches. One elderly SRO resident stated, “These benches are a
friendship center to me.”68 The public environment had been one of the few places in
downtown with grass and bathrooms. When the city removed the benches and grass one
homeless women exclaimed, “They just tore up my bed...the sprinklers come on at
7...I’ve been homeless for six years, and this is the only place I felt safe. Now it’s gone
too.”69 Another homeless man echoed, “What’s wrong with sittin’ on a bench? This was

“Let’s Take Lunch” San Diego Reader 12 (October 6, 1983): 3.
the only place left. Now, they’re throwing us out." The elderly were also affected by the removal of the benches and grass. One SRO resident who used to enjoy the street activity by sitting on the benches expressed how “Bench seats may not matter to younger people, but seniors and those with disabilities need them.” With the militarization of downtown, coupled with the closing of nearby service centers such as the county mental health center, there became fewer places for particular downtown inhabitants to live in and enjoy.

As the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza developed, the social problems that plagued the project area merely shifted to other areas of the city. Developers did not wish to genuinely address these issues, but rather sought to change the image of downtown by removing their visibility from the project areas. As a result, visitors could ignore negative elements of reality as they experienced a new downtown that appeared to lack any problems. The reinvented spaces sought to overcome fears of downtown by creating a dense, compact, multifunctional core. As a result, this concentrated people in particular scripted spaces, shortened the distances between destinations, and limited the activities offered. All of these factors helped determine the type of people using the environment. Nevertheless, the spatial and cultural conflicts that emerged all served as a reminder of various problems downtown. This symbolically materialized when over fifty transients organized to hold a candle-light vigil and marched through downtown San Diego in 1985 calling attention to the conditions facing urban dwellers within the rapidly


71 Ibid.

transforming downtown region. Worlds collided between different cultures, citizens, and spaces. Not only was the built environment manipulated, but the shaping of culture in the overall project area served as a means of controlling downtown.  


CHAPTER 6

DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO ENTERS
THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY:
“AND EVERYBODY FORGETS
AFTER DINNER”

Early Gentrification Efforts

By the 1990s, the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza began to substantially transform the entire downtown region. Aiding this transformation was the opening of the city’s convention center in 1989, located between the Gaslamp Quarter and the harbor front. This furthered development along the harbor, with the creation of more hotels. As a result, many of these patrons flocked to the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza mall. The success of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza, coupled with the new convention center, enabled downtown San Diego to reinvent itself once again as the city entered the twenty-first century.

Despite these large projects, San Diego’s urban core still had a substantial amount of empty space. In an attempt to create even more uses for the downtown region, in the 1990s the CCDC turned its attention to the creation of actual downtown neighborhoods. This trend in the late 1980s and 1990s, referred to as gentrification, could be defined as “a geographical, economic, and cultural reversal of postwar urban decline and
abandonment."\(^1\) The success of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project paved the way for the CCDC to focus its attention on conquering the residential urban frontier.

This was a viable option in San Diego for four major reasons. Downtown now had a multi-functional core complete with offices, shopping, dining, entertainment, and a “legitimate” nighttime culture. Secondly, the urban landscape offered the nearby amenities of Balboa Park to the north and the redeveloped waterfront to the South. Furthermore, the success of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza led to increased land values, which created new economic and investment incentives. Lastly, with San Diego’s near perfect weather, downtown began to attract residents from other parts of the country who had lived in large cities their entire lives. Many relocated New Yorkers and Bostonians preferred to live downtown, even though many of them referred to it as, “a toy downtown.”\(^2\) As a result, the CCDC and private investors, many from all over the world, carved out five distinct urban neighborhoods: the Marina District, Little Italy, the Cortez Hill neighborhood, the Gaslamp Quarter, and East Village. These early gentrification efforts helped attract new types of people downtown as well as introducing luxury towers, mixed-use and mid-rise housing projects to the environment for the first time in the city’s history.\(^3\)


\(^3\) Ibid., 115-118.
The Gaslamp Quarter

Despite its struggles in the 1980s, by the nineties the Gaslamp Quarter had finally become the trendy success founders had envisioned. This is directly related to the opening of Horton Plaza, as the mall’s success reassured chains and other potential business investors in the adjacent Gaslamp Quarter. This lag occurred due to the reality that a red-light district not only had to be cleansed of unsightly people and activities, but it also had to be historically preserved, factors that did not exist on this type of scale with projects in places such as Denver, San Francisco, and Boston. Today, over one hundred restaurants, hundreds of specialty shops and boutiques, thirty night clubs, and one hundred and fifty professional firms can be found in the district. Over this decade, revenues from property taxes, sales taxes, and transient occupancy taxes increased by four hundred and fifty percent. This successful trend shows no sign of slowing as the district now also walls itself off to host special music festivals, and block party celebrations ranging from Mardi Gras to St. Patrick’s Day and Cinco de Mayo. These particular events truly resemble a theme park as patrons must buy tickets to enter the closed-off Gaslamp Quarter for such events. The historic district has even provided a trendy backdrop to numerous reality television shows.4

Ironically, the Gaslamp Quarter might be becoming a victim of its own success. As of 2004, chain stores within the historic district represented a quarter of all retailing establishments. Some locals and small merchants believe that the historic district, which thrives on individuality and a “folksy” feel, is being turned into a suburban strip mall.

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While there has always been a measure of suburbia to the historic district, this element has become even more visible with the increase in chain stores to the Gaslamp Quarter: Borders Books and Music, Z Gallerie, Urban Outfitters, Wine Bank, Lucky Jeans, Splash Bath and Body, Quicksilver, Puma, and Pacific Theaters. Even adult businesses within the Gaslamp Quarter have become more a part of the mainstream culture as the district is now home the chain, Hustler Hollywood. (See figures 39-41)

Figure 39: One of the multiple Starbucks in the Gaslamp Quarter.

Figure 40: Borders Bookstore on Sixth Avenue.

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Restaurants in the district have faced this similar trend as many owners complain that they do not draw enough local business because of parking constraints, and higher fees compared to other entertainment venues across the greater city. Various eatery chains are now visible throughout the Gaslamp Quarter: Rock Bottom Brewery, Hennessy’s, Hooters, Dick’s Last Resort, Hard Rock Café, T.G.I. Fridays, Starbucks, and Oceanaire Restaurant. (See figures 42-44) Others blame the problem of not attracting enough local business to the increasing number of upscale night clubs as they cite how these businesses have transformed the districts’ demographic to a younger crowd that favors clubbing over fine dining. As a result, this nightclub atmosphere can steer families and older crowds clear of the district. Ironically, one of the newest trendy nightclubs in the district is called The Stingaree. While developers in the 1970s sought to erase all
elements of the red-light district, including the name Stingaree, this seemingly non-usable past has come full circle to become usable once more.⁶ (See figure 45)

Figure 42: T.G.I. Fridays Restaurant on Fifth Avenue.

Figure 43: Hooters Restaurant between Fourth and Fifth Avenues.

With success comes rising land values and higher rents. As a result, restaurant and retailing chains have begun squeezing out small retailers who cannot compete with the raised costs. This raises the issue of the district’s character, as one ponders if the Gaslamp Quarter is defined by its occupancy or its architecture? With the “strip malling” of the district many locals and visitors may opt to remain in the self-containing Horton Plaza superstructure or go to other retailing and entertainment centers in other parts of the
city with easy parking and other amenities not available in the downtown setting. Nevertheless, the Gaslamp Quarter today is not only extremely economically profitable, but it is easily the most recognizable and most popular node downtown, while also serving as central symbolic node for the city as a whole.

Horton Plaza Mall

The Horton Plaza Redevelopment Project has also proved highly successful as it celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2005. In 1998 the Australian based company, Westfield, acquired the superstructure. As these new operators renovated the structure this represented the process of globalization in a “unique” and historic area. Today, Horton Plaza has approximately twelve million visitors each year comprised of the affluent, tourists, and locals. In 2005 operators announced that Mervyns was closing, citing the fact that it was no longer economically profitable since tourists did not go there. On the other hand, numerous high end stores such as Coach continue to move into the structure. While Horton Plaza generates millions of dollars in property taxes for the city, it now serves as a legitimate link to the Gaslamp Quarter. It is a curious to ponder if the Gaslamp Quarter would have been successful without bringing traditional retailing back downtown. The Gaslamp Quarter would have probably become successful, but over a longer period of time.

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7 Jones, “Chain Reaction,” 1, 25.

East Village and Beyond

The success of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza spurred further development in other downtown areas. The latest project in downtown San Diego has focused on East Village, adjacent to Gaslamp Quarter and Convention Center. As the Gaslamp Quarter developed, the region’s original inhabitants and services shifted to this region; much of the counties’ social services operated out of East Village, the former blue-collar warehouse district. Just as with the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza projects in previous decades, city leaders and private developers joined in a public-private venture with the goals of removing blight and visible social problems from East Village. Developers began this process in the spring of 2004 with the opening of the San Diego Padres new stadium, Petco Park. This project attempted to mirror newer urban ballparks in places like San Francisco and Denver. The project offered a prime example of how a ballpark, through the use of private and public partnership, could serve as a catalyst for private enterprise. The city paid $225 million of the $458 million dollar project though the use of “bed” taxes from hotels.9

The ballpark not only absorbed excess space, but it gave focus and value to the area. It now serves as the centerpiece to the new trendy urban warehouse district project area. The district is comprised of twenty-six blocks to include offices, retailing, entertainment, hotels, and residences. As of 2004 there was already an estimated one and a half billion dollars invested in the development of this area alone. As with the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza, preservation issues have become highly visible. Thus far, several single

story warehouses have been saved after nearly two hundred separate public hearings with local preservation groups. One four story historic building, the Western Metal Supply Company, was directly integrated and absorbed into Petco Park's outfield wall. The opening of the ballpark has only added to the financial success of the nearby Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza as fans spill into the area before and after home games. This type of development, especially luxury condominiums and lofts, has boomed not only in East Village, but throughout the rest of downtown. From 1999 to 2004 the downtown population has jumped from 20,000 to 50,000 citizens. \(^\text{10}\) (See figures 46-47)

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\(^\text{10}\) Skelley, "Up and Running" n.p; Ford, 110.
Since many of these recent changes have occurred after the 2000 census, the true demographic shifts and cultural transformations of downtown San Diego cannot fully be understood. Whether or not these residences will burgeon into legitimate communities, or if they will simply become places for wealthy investors to dump money still remains. One fact is certain at this point, such residences are targeted at the high end of the market with one and two bedroom luxury condos starting at over half a million dollars.

Downtown has been transformed not only physically and culturally, but an exclusive new population is taking root. Interestingly, the postwar pattern of urban flight has come full circle as suburbs have now become more diverse while reinvented downtowns such as San Diego have become more homogenized.\(^\text{11}\)

Conclusion

San Diego’s reinvented urban landscape mixed public and private space, creating a new semi-public space. The metamorphosis in downtown San Diego revealed attempts by city leaders and private developers to ensure that the public enjoying the new spaces represented a particular kind of public. The space that resulted was controlled and orderly. Those with the most influence helped shape who constituted this “public” and the activities within the new environment. The process of exclusion from these spaces represented a powerful means of reinforcing the concept of an “invisible” population. This development did not represent the “end” of public space, but rather a transformation of a public space with greater control over access. Today, these “invisible” individuals are not completely gone, as they still linger in the plaza and throughout the historic district. However, the space is no longer “theirs” as they are now infiltrators in this gentrified space. Nevertheless, through the process of “hidden transcripts” and counter-narratives, those excluded gained some type of visibility, voice, and representation within the rapidly transforming downtown. As a result, this process reveals how marginalized groups of people, such as transients, are indeed actual citizens with basic human needs and rights.

One may question if the Gaslamp Quarter, Horton Plaza, and the rapidly gentrifying downtown, have become too successful. Throngs of cities across America are experiencing similar types of gentrification from Seattle and San Jose, to Las Vegas and

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Miami. Are these the types of downtowns that scholars such as Jane Jacobs and Kevin Lynch initially envisioned, or are they bastardized versions of them? Furthermore, the national success of historic preservation and redevelopment did not necessarily preserve the industries, communities, and cultures that had occupied these environments in the past. As cities enter into the twenty-first century, emphasis appears to be more on trendiness and exclusiveness, rather than diverse democratic urban space. Downtown San Diego has been reclaimed and reinvented, but for whom and at what social and cultural cost? The blurring of lines between public and private space has created a complex environment, which continues to become more and more costly for citizens to enjoy. While the region was originally designed to attract a wide array of citizens it has instead targeted a very specific crowd. "Anyone" can enjoy the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza, however tickets to this theme park are not free. (See figures 48-49).

Figure 48: A New Downtown. (Used with permission from Jay Allen Sanford)
This trend in downtown San Diego is not unique. In this century cities have become commodities to be bought and sold just like any other consumer project. The paradox lies in the fact that while tourism offers the opportunity to see something different, reinvented cities such as San Diego seem more and more like other urban centers. Geographer Larry Ford has responded to this paradox by offering what he refers to as “the central city as Disneyland” model. Each of these cities, he argues has similar components: a central business district, Historyland, Waterland, Festivaland, Sportsland, Dramaland, Conventionland, Adventureland, Warehouseland, Governorland, Parkingland, Shoppingland, Learningland, Greenland, Yuppieland, and Condoland. As a result, this urban formula has not only changed how people understand cities, but it has created a new kind of urban core, one that is composed of separate themed environments.


Despite this new type of city, the harsher elements from the “old downtown” San Diego are now more visible than ever as there are few places left for downtown’s earlier inhabitants to migrate to. Few SRO hotels remain in the area, with more of them closing each year. Nevertheless, the Golden West Hotel, next to Horton Plaza mall on Fourth Avenue, still remains, yet its occupants huddled outside of the lobby on the street are painfully out of place. The corridor on Broadway Avenue between the Gaslamp Quarter and the business core also maintains certain elements from the older downtown, with pawnshops, cheap Chinese restaurants, transients, and masses of citizens crowded around bus stops. Horton Plaza Park remains a “safety valve” of public space that the homeless and other marginal groups occupy. Even though the grass and benches have been removed, some of the homeless bring their own wooden chairs and place them in the plaza while others simply lie on the ground. (See figures 50-51) Additionally, in order for visitors to leave San Diego’s downtown theme park on a Friday or Saturday night, many are forced to drive past rows of sleeping bags and tents stretching east of the Gaslamp Quarter to the freeway onramps.

The plaza also remains a “safety valve” for political resistance. In 2003, with the emergence of the Iraq War, approximately fifty war protesters rallied in downtown and blocked rush hour traffic. They marched though Horton Plaza and urged acts of civil disobedience against the war in Iraq. Later in the evening, about a dozen protesters wrapped themselves in sheets spattered with red liquid as they lay on Broadway and Fourth Avenue to symbolize innocent Iraqis killed by American soldiers. In a similar instance, over three hundred women marched in protest prior to the invasion of Iraq.

Gathering at the Lyceum Theater in the Horton Plaza mall, women dressed in black and marched around the streets surrounding Horton Plaza. Many of them carried shopping bags with signs that read “Women don’t buy this war.”

Figure 50: A homeless man sits at Horton Plaza with his chair and other belongings.

Figure 51: A homeless man lies in Horton Plaza.

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It is crucial for city leaders, citizens, and private developers to “see through” the pockets of affluence found in these reinvented downtowns and account for the social, cultural, and spatial costs of developing semi-public urban space. The city of San Diego will have to grapple with the extreme success of the “new downtown” which may prove extremely challenging for a city already plagued with political scandals, a budget/pension crisis, and the reality that median house prices exceed over half of a million dollars. In a downtown that continues to rapidly reinvent itself, it will be necessary to conduct an updated analysis of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza, along with newer projects such as East Village, in the following decades to come. The “invisible” population, their environment, and social problems could truly become invisible.

In 1979, longtime local preservationist Robert Miles Parker composed a poem that helped capture the essence of this complex transformation in downtown San Diego:

I like the bleary-eyed old men in flannel shirts. Ragged beards, tattered pants...the signature of the dispossessed. A derelict stands in the open door way of ‘The Home of God’s Extended Hand.’ Fat man snoozing in the drizzle, under a cross of new concrete blocks, cold and inhospitable, those unpainted blocks. Lost old man. Dead Dreams. Mexican talk on the sidewalks. Pilipino jargon, too. Glossy-haired beauties serve ponsit to countrymen hungry for a taste of home. Gangly Negro fellow in a droopy felt hat prancing on the wet cement, long wooly curls catching raindrops which glitter like diamonds. Vacuums running in an old Mission House, wooden windows frame scowls. Tawdry humanness...tired, lost people, warmed by the pungent aromas from the Manila Café. Good to see the Café and know that it will continue to exist here, though the transients may drift away. The derelicts—I like them—like to look at them, but I don’t think anybody really cares about them...and I wonder if they care about themselves? I read pompous articles deploring the downtrodden’s plight, and I’ll wager the writers go to their comfortable Mira Mesa homes. And everybody forgets after dinner. Some of the bums are younger than me. I used to worry, when I was a little boy, prowling downtown, that I’d be a bum one day. Here I am...still on their street, taking pleasure in
their buildings, their colours, and their sounds. The rain falls. High-heeled staccato on wet cement.¹⁷

Parker, writing in a lamenting tone, humanized the distinct culture and community that existed prior to the emergence of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza, a milieu that many in the twenty first century do not know ever existed. This portrayal was not glamorous, trendy, or profitable, yet it offered a gritty and real sketch of a functional streetscape for a particular citizenry.

The development of the Gaslamp Quarter and Horton Plaza made it easier for “everyone to forget after dinner” as it became possible for visitors to traverse and conceptualize the urban core without coming into actual contact with the rest of downtown, its social problems, and its inhabitants that did not live in gentrified housing. These new spaces became nodes or entry points for the middle and upper classes to return downtown.¹⁸ As a result, the process of screening out certain groups of people and social problems became political in nature as certain individuals in the project area became invisible, without representation. As the popularity and success of downtowns such as San Diego only continue to flourish in the twenty-first century, the developers and city leaders reinventing these gentrified downtowns should revisit the advice of Jane Jacobs: “Cities have the capacity of providing something for everyone, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Robert Miles Parker, “Thoughts While Drawing on Fifth Avenue” Gaslamp Gazette 2 (February/March 1979): 5.


APPENDIX

PHOTO CREDITS


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