

**Del Webb, Corporate Development, and the Building of the Landscape
of Mass Consumption in the Postwar American Southwest**



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Introduction

In a 1969 *Los Angeles Times* editorial, Arelo Sederberg and John F. Lawrence suggested that “[Del] Webb is the Bashful Barnum, the Silent Showman.”¹ The contradictory nature of the terms “Bashful Barnum” and “Silent Showman” alludes to the notion that journalists in the midcentury period, just like historians today, may not recognize Del Webb’s name, despite his integral importance to the “landscape of mass consumption” that defines the American postwar built environment.² What did Del Webb, a figure that a majority of historians and laypeople today may not recognize, do to deserve such a title? What made him the showman worthy of puffery editorial features?

Del Webb was a construction and real estate mogul who had multiple companies that shifted the American built environment in the twentieth century, especially in the era following World War II. While Sederberg and Lawrence called Webb bashful, his influence is particularly visible in the American Southwest, especially in the Phoenix, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles metropolitan areas. Del Webb’s real estate projects and developments spanned a variety of forms, from industrial projects, to casinos, to private houses, retirement communities and more. Through these projects, Del Webb contributed to the establishment of what historian Lizabeth Cohen calls “the metropolitan landscape of mass consumption” that defines the American-built landscape in the period after World War II.³ Del Webb’s developments relied on the increasing orientation of the American economy on leisure and mass consumption.

¹ Arelo Sederberg and John F. Lawrence, “Del Webb, The Bashful Barnum,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 1969, M16.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/del-webb-bashful-barnum/docview/156271568/se-2?accountid=14522>.

² Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 226.

³ *Ibid.*

As of 2021, real estate makes up approximately two-thirds of global assets.⁴ Because real estate makes up such a prominent percentage of global wealth, it is thus very important to study through various social science disciplines. The historical literature about real estate and development is vast for this reason. In the context of twentieth-century American history, many scholars have focused on many different aspects of real estate. Historians in the subfields of urban history, suburban history, spatial history, environmental history, racial history, and economic history have produced a great deal of research about how real estate has influenced American communities, environments, and people.

All of these questions come together in the historical development of the Sunbelt after World War II. The Sunbelt stretches from California to Florida in the southern portion of the country.⁵ It is known for its hospitable climate and distinct politics. Historian Elizabeth Tandy Shermer in, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics*, describes how the region was shaped by suburban sprawl, deindustrialization, conservatism, and the military-industrial complex.⁶ The Sunbelt's population exploded in the latter half of the twentieth century, so much so that its share of the entire American population increased by twelve percent from 1950 to 2000. Increased economic productivity (based on the expansion of both public and private capital in the region), increased demand for amenities and warm climates, and increased housing supply all contributed to the growth of the Sunbelt.⁷

American suburbanization was not unique to the post-World War II period. The first American suburbs actually arose in the early nineteenth century on the peripheries of

⁴ Jonathan Woetzel et al., "The rise and rise of the global balance sheet: How productively are we using our wealth?," McKinsey Global Institute, November 15, 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/financial-services/our-insights/the-rise-and-rise-of-the-global-balance-sheet-how-productively-are-we-using-our-wealth#/>.

⁵ Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 1.

⁶ Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism*, 1-13.

⁷ Edward L. Glaeser and Kristina Tobio, "The Rise of Sunbelt," *Taubman Center Policy Briefs*, May 2007, 1-3.

Northeastern cities such as Boston and New York.⁸ However, the phenomenon of suburbanization did not truly become popular in the United States until the late nineteenth century, with the advent of the “streetcar suburb.” The streetcar suburb was built around new electric streetcar stations: allowing for easy access to the city via public transportation while also allowing for a lifestyle that was less chaotic than that offered by the city.⁹ The streetcar suburb became popular across the nation and dramatically changed the landscape of the United States’ built environment. However, the prototypical American suburb did not truly arise until after the Great Depression and passage of the New Deal. The suburbs before the New Deal were predominantly made up of self-built housing, were well connected to public transportation, and were not as distant from the central city as the suburbs that arose after the passage of the New Deal and, especially, after the closure of World War II. This phenomenon is well illustrated by South Gate, a suburb to the southeast of Los Angeles that Becky M. Nicolaides profiles extensively in *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965*.¹⁰ During the Great Depression, foreclosures and evictions dominated the American residential landscape as homeowners and renters could no longer afford their living arrangements. Hoovervilles, which were tent cities composed of unhoused individuals and families and were named after the President at the time, Herbert Hoover, became a reality for thousands in American cities and suburbs.¹¹ To mitigate this homelessness crisis, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration passed legislation under his New Deal that used federal money to facilitate economic recovery and homeownership for middle-class whites. The administration did this by creating the Homeowners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Housing

⁸ Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), 21-44.

⁹ Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, 74-76.

¹⁰ Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 26-35.

¹¹ Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 58.

Administration (FHA) which extended mortgage term lengths for borrowers and insured loans for lenders in the case of foreclosure.¹² By doing this, the FHA made homeownership and financial recovery a much more attainable goal for many Americans.¹³ However, through discriminatory policies, racial minorities were effectively barred from eligibility for FHA loans, establishing a new era of racial discrimination in the American housing market. After the FHA was passed and World War II ensued, there was insufficient supply to meet the increased demand for housing in Sunbelt cities that benefited from increased defense spending during the war. Because of this demand and because of fears that centralized cities and industries could be decimated by atomic weapons in the era of the Cold War, the federal government sought to subsidize suburbanization on an even larger scale.¹⁴ To accomplish this, the FHA incentivized the mass development of suburban tracts on behalf of homebuilders. This ushered in the new era of suburbanization: one oriented around developer homebuilding (as opposed to self-building) and auto-centric suburbanization.¹⁵ This new form of suburbanization in the postwar era dramatically changed America's built environment and its political economy.

According to historian Dolores Hayden, this new type of suburb had a dramatic impact on the American environment and consumer economy. She suggested that “The postwar suburbs were constructed at great speed, but were deliberately planned to maximize consumption of mass-produced goods and minimize the responsibility of the developers to create public space and public services” and that “By the mid-1950s, private developers claimed to represent the

¹² Adam Gordon, “The Creation of Homeownership: How New Deal Changes in Banking Regulation Simultaneously Made Homeownership Accessible to Whites and Out of Reach for Blacks,” *The Yale Law Journal* 115, no. 1 (2005): 192-194.

¹³ Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 179-182.

¹⁴ Matthew Farish, “Disaster and decentralization: American cities and the Cold War,” *Cultural Geographies*, 10, no. 2 (2003): 125-148.

¹⁵ Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven*, 189-193; Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, 131-132.

authority of ‘the market,’ while taxpayers and overworked town governments had to deal with the so-called externalities of environmentally irresponsible development.”¹⁶ Just as Americans consumed the new developer-built suburban housing, these suburbs sponsored a new wave of consumer culture oriented around private shopping malls, television dinners, leisure, and mass materialism.¹⁷ This new mass-suburbanized consumer culture was coined as the “sitcom suburb” by Hayden.¹⁸ With leisure and consumption at the forefront of this new type of real estate development, America’s postwar political economy became increasingly rooted in the migration of the middle and upper class (particularly those who were white) into distant suburbs from the central city, consumerism, television and electronic entertainment, and leisure. While there are many factors that went into the creation of the “metropolitan landscape of consumerism,” we can see the intersections of these factors by studying the career of Del Webb.

Delbert Eugene Webb (“Del Webb”), was a real estate mogul whose career stretched from the late 1920s until he died in 1974. Del Webb is best known for his retirement communities called the “Sun Cities.” However, he played a role in a variety of types of developments: from casinos on the Las Vegas Strip, to Veteran Affairs hospitals in the World War II era, and shopping malls and streets. Del Webb’s main geographical focus was in the American Sunbelt (particularly in the American Southwest), but he also had developments nationwide and in places as far as Central America and East Asia. Although his Sun Cities have been discussed in urban planning, historical, and sociological circles, Del Webb has not been studied in depth by historians, despite his oversized influence on the history of the growth and shape of the American Southwest and beyond. Especially given the influence that this built environment had on changes regarding the economy, politics, and environmental sustainability,

¹⁶ Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, 128, 152.

¹⁷ Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic*, 194-289.

¹⁸ Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, 128-153.

this project's focus on Del Webb and his developments will add a valuable contribution to the literature on twentieth-century American (sub)urban history.

Some key research questions that this thesis aims to answer include 1) How was Del Webb successful and how did he use strategies such as advertising and litigation to his advantage? 2) How is Del Webb illustrative of broader trends in real estate development in the United States during the latter half of the twentieth century? 3) What role did diversification in real estate development play in Del Webb's financial success and to what extent do different types of real estate developments rely on one another? 4) How does Del Webb serve as both a representation of American real estate developers and American culture and political economy during the postwar period? and 5) How did Del Webb incorporate the culture of leisure and consumption into his development strategy? among others. Through answering such questions, the paper will demonstrate how real estate developments are not created within a vacuum, how developers like Del Webb were able to strategically exploit resources to enable them to overcome opposition and obstacles, and, to some extent, how the postwar American Southwest came to be. This will be accomplished through an analysis of national newspapers, Del Webb's company newsletter (*The Webb Spinner*), home brochures, advertisements, court cases, and more.

Following this introduction, the paper will be divided into three main chapters and a conclusion. Chapter I, "The Bashful Barnum of the American Southwest": The Story of Del Webb, will discuss Del Webb's biography, the early history of his business, and how he diversified his business both through various ventures and through a network of important connections which enabled him to become one of the richest real estate moguls of the twentieth century. Chapter II, Leisure in "Paradise?" The Making of Sun City, will highlight many facets

of Del Webb's most well-known contribution to American real estate development: his Sun Cities. This chapter will outline the history of his Sun City developments, the opposition to such developments, and more while also situating these developments into broader discussions about American suburban development in the postwar period. Finally, Chapter III, Leisure in "Paradise?" Sin City and Beyond, will be centered on Del Webb's hotel and casino developments in Las Vegas, the broader American Southwest, Hawaii, and abroad. This chapter will focus on how these developments are situated into the broader political economy that arose out of the new economy associated with consumption and leisure. It will especially hone in on the topic of Orientalism in postwar America and American international tourism. In the context of this paper, Orientalism will refer to how the United States depicted Asia and North Africa in the postwar period as a means of advancing its image and subjecting the people of these regions to stereotypical tropes. Lastly, this chapter will directly connect Del Webb's Sin City developments to his Sun Cities, which is a significant contribution that this paper makes to the literature at large.

Chapter I: “The Bashful Barnum of the American Southwest”:

The Story of Del Webb

Delbert Eugene Webb (“Del Webb”) was a key figure of postwar American urban, suburban, and corporate history. He was one of the most influential real estate construction managers and developers in the post-World War II era in the United States. Del Webb especially influenced the development of a significant portion of Arizona, Southern California, and Nevada. He also shaped newly built environments elsewhere in the United States as well as in places as far afield as East Asia and Central America. To many at the time, he personified the “American Dream” as he was seen as an archetype for the classic “rags to riches” story.¹⁹ Beyond being a symbol for such a “dream”, Del Webb’s developments also were integral in enabling many Americans (and people in general) to have their own slice of prosperity. In the process, however, Del Webb’s developments wreaked havoc on existing built and natural environments, as well as on the communities that called them home. Moreover, to make this “dream” a reality, he often used exploitative (and possibly illegal) strategies to accomplish this.

Del Webb was born on May 17, 1899, in Fresno, California. He grew up in relative poverty.²⁰ He dropped out of high school to pursue a carpentry apprenticeship. In this apprenticeship and under the guidance of his father, he learned skills that he would later use in real estate construction and development magnate. In 1926, however, he fell ill with typhoid fever. In seeking treatment, he and his first wife moved to the Phoenix area.²¹ This move would

¹⁹ Laura McBride, “Key Individuals helped shape W. Valley,” *Arizona Republic*, December 03, 1999, 10. <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/december-3-1999-page-116-287/docview/1939783493/se-2?accountid=14522>.

²⁰ McBride, “Key Individuals.”

²¹ Richard Rutter, “Personality: Boss in Baseball and Building: Del Webb, Co-Owner of Yankees, a Giant in Construction Carpenter in Desert in 1927, He Found Road to Wealth,” *New York Times* July 9, 1961, 1.

ultimately be the start of his “rags to riches” story. Over the next five decades, Del Webb went from being a carpenter to a millionaire. As will be addressed in further detail throughout this chapter, Del Webb shaped the development of the American Southwest (and beyond) in ways that would have been impossible to predict. Starting with the era of World War II, Del Webb exploited many opportunities to arguably become the American Southwest’s leading real estate mogul. After five decades of such success, Del Webb passed away from lung cancer on July 4, 1974, at the age of 75.²²

Setting the Foundation

Although Del Webb is conceivably best known for his role as a developer, he started his real estate empire in construction.²³ Arizona, which was only incorporated in 1912, was in dire need of construction given the needs of the expanding and young state. Throughout the 1930s, Del Webb worked on various construction projects, which sponsored his later success. He did this under the guise of his first company, Del E. Webb Construction Company. He first started contracting for Bashas’, a small grocery chain in Arizona, before expanding to a wider variety of commercial and multi-purpose buildings.²⁴ In this era, Del Webb set the stage for his “success” during the World War II era. By the onset of the war, his company had become the largest in the state of Arizona. Given the substantial role that the Sunbelt had in the American war effort, this standing would prove significant to Del Webb’s later prosperity.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/personality-boss-baseball-building/docview/115233842/se-2?accountid=14522>.

²² Robert Kistler, "Ex-Yankee Owner Del Webb Dies," *Newsday*, July 5, 1974, 111.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/ex-yankee-owner-del-webb-dies/docview/920502979/se-2?accountid=14522>.

²³ Rutter, "Personality: Boss in Baseball and Building."

²⁴ Rutter, "Personality: Boss in Baseball and Building."

The biggest turning point in Del Webb's career was arguably World War II. In the 1930s, Del Webb suggested that ““construction is no longer a private enterprise, it is a subsidiary of the national government.””²⁵ This quote ultimately foreshadowed Del Webb's trajectory during the war just a couple of years later and foreshadowed his reliance on federal subsidies and policies to succeed as a developer throughout his career. During World War II, Del Webb garnered several construction jobs from the federal government that ultimately propelled his company into the forefront of national attention, with the byproduct of significant profits.

The most notable of these federal contracts resulted in the construction of Poston, Arizona. Del Webb constructed a Japanese-American relocation camp at Poston, Arizona known as the Theater of Operations at Parker, Arizona. This camp served as a home base for the internment of Japanese-Americans from California and Arizona during the World War II period. At its height, the camp housed 36,000 Japanese-Americans, making the community one of the largest “cities” in the entire state of Arizona.²⁶ The internment camp is the site of trauma and horror for thousands of Japanese-Americans.²⁷ Despite this, Del Webb suggested that this was “one of the most patriotic things that his company had done” during his lifetime.²⁸ The notion that Del Webb saw the construction of an internment camp as “patriotic” is disturbing, yet set a precedent for how Del Webb was often blind to the negative consequences his developments had on less fortunate populations and the natural environment. Just as he later gained from the trend of white flight and suburbanization, at the expense of people of color dwelling in cities, Del Webb reaped profit off the backs of Japanese-Americans who were relocated against their will.

²⁵ As cited in Andrew Ross, *Bird on Fire: Lessons from the World's Least Sustainable City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 64.

²⁶ Judith Ann Trolander, *From Sun Cities to the Villages: A History of Active Adult, Age-Restricted Communities* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2011), 54-55.

²⁷ Shaaron Cosner, “Citizens Who Became Prisoners,” *Arizona Republic*, December 3, 1978, 42-44.
<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/december-3-1978-page-372-418/docview/1930746856/se-2?accountid=14522>

²⁸ As cited in Trolander, *From Sun Cities*, 55.

Given how important World War II was in determining Del Webb's trajectory of success, it is imperative to consider the individuals and populations who suffered so that he and his business could thrive.²⁹

Baseball, Suburbs, Casinos, and the "American Dream"

After the war, Del Webb's construction company moved into the construction of major league sports, building stadiums that symbolized how sports had become mass entertainment and a key part of the new American consumer economy. In Orange County, California, he constructed the Anaheim Angels stadium and he also built two major league stadiums in Kansas City.³⁰ Arguably even more important, however, was his involvement with the New York Yankees. In 1945, he and two others acquired the Yankees and their stadium from the Ruppert estate.³¹ In the subsequent twenty years, their team became "the most important sports franchise in the world." Del Webb specifically played a big part in signing influential players and managers.³² In 1965, he and the other co-owner at the time, Dan Topping, sold the franchise for \$17 million.³³ Although this was the last of Del Webb's personal involvement in baseball and major league sports, his contribution to major sports leagues is still visible today. For instance, the Anaheim Angels' stadium that he constructed is now the fourth oldest MLB stadium that is still in operation, behind Fenway Park, Wrigley Field, and Dodger Stadium.³⁴

²⁹ Further research on this front is encouraged and necessary.

³⁰ Roy P. Drachman, *From Cowtown to Desert Metropolis: Ninety Years of Arizona Memories* (San Francisco: Whitewing Press, 1999), 79.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Drachman, *From Cowtown to Desert Metropolis*, 81.

³³ Drachman, *From Cowtown to Desert Metropolis*, 80.

³⁴ "MLB Ballparks, From Oldest to Newest," *Baseball Digest*, last modified March 31, 2017, <https://ballparkdigest.com/2017/03/31/mlb-ballparks-from-oldest-to-newest/>.

As with many other real estate developers across the country in the post-WWII era, Del Webb's developments served suburbanites and the wealthy disproportionately. To begin, Del Webb was a significant figure in the development of Phoenix's Central Avenue corridor, a key stretch of road running north of downtown Phoenix to Phoenix's northern suburbs. According to historian Andrew Ross, "Beginning with the flight of retail up Central Avenue in the late 1950s (including Goldwater's Department Store), downtown Phoenix suffered a sharp decline - the hemorrhaging of commerce and jobs, the decamping of affluent populations, and the acute neglect of those left behind - that differed from other cities only in its sheer rapidity."³⁵ Due to its role in furthering the decline of downtown Phoenix, Phoenician white flight, and the ongoing northern suburbanization of the city, the Central Avenue corridor is key to the study of postwar Phoenix. Del Webb played a major part in this development. He constructed and/or developed many of the key landmarks that allowed for the Central Avenue corridor to attract wealthy and white urban dwellers to the northern Phoenix suburbs. He developed multiple grandiose residential projects along the corridor which include, but are not limited to, the infamous Phoenix Towers and the Camelback Towers (now known as the Landmark Towers), both located in the heart of the strip, and the Camelback Village apartments, located just off the corridor.³⁶ He also was key to the development of several shopping centers, including Uptown Plaza, Chris-Town Center, and Camelback Village Square, all of which were on or adjacent to the suburbs of Central Avenue. These shopping complexes were all designed in an auto-centric and privatized way that

³⁵ Ross, *Bird on Fire*, 81.

³⁶ "Join the Caravan of Carefree Living at the Dramatically Different, New Camelback Village Apartments," *Arizona Republic*, January 18, 1959, 72.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/january-18-1959-page-72-144/docview/1915328982/se-2?accountid=14522>; Tom Cameron, "Nearly Everything Is Brand New in Thriving 'Old' Arizona," *Los Angeles Times*, February 24, 1963, 22.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/nearly-everything-is-brand-new-thriving-old/docview/168306618/se-2?accountid=14522>; "Your Every Wish!," *Arizona Republic*, June 21, 1964, 146.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/june-21-1964-page-146-199/docview/1916998261/se-2?accountid=14522>

catered to the new suburbanites.³⁷ According to consumer surveys, Chris-Town (and likely the other centers as well) were more popular than their downtown counterparts, confirming Ross' observation that the development of the Central Avenue corridor played a role in the decline of Phoenix's downtown economy.³⁸ Further, he also was a major player in the development of the Rosenzweig Center (a large office complex) and Del Webb's Townehouse (an adjacent hotel), both of which were major job providers and economic powerhouses that served the new suburbanites with relatively hefty financial prospects.³⁹ Overall, the Central Avenue corridor is emblematic of Del Webb's post-war empire. By catering to the needs of new Phoenician suburbanites via real estate construction and development, Del Webb was able to foster an environment that enabled him and his company to make millions. Arguably, this success was disadvantageous to downtown Phoenix, its business owners, and its residents who chose not to (or could not) migrate farther north.

The Central Avenue corridor is representative of Del Webb's focus on suburban development as a whole. Given that the postwar era was dominated by American suburbanization, it is not surprising that a profit-driven real estate mogul like Del Webb would focus his resources heavily on the suburbs. He was integral to the development of suburbs throughout the American Southwest and beyond. This trend was first established with the role that he played in the development of Pueblo Gardens, one of the first post-war and auto-centric suburbs of Tucson, Arizona. Alongside architect A. Quincy Jones, Del Webb built Pueblo Gardens in 1948 with an emphasis on catering to white suburbanites in an effort to create a

³⁷ "Newest in Shopping Centers Being Constructed At Phoenix," *The Webb Spinner*, 8, no. 7, December 1954, 2; "Camelback Village Square Is Newest of Webb Shopping Centers in Phoenix," *The Webb Spinner*, 14, no. 4, April 1960, 2; "Late Summer Opening Due At Chris-Town Shopping City," *The Webb Spinner*, 15, no. 5, May 1961, 10-11.

³⁸ "Survey Reveals That Chris-Town Is Preferred Phoenix Shopping Center," *The Webb Spinner*, 18, no. 5, May 1964, 2.

³⁹ "Two New Buildings Become Pride of Webb Corporation," *The Webb Spinner*, 17, no. 4, April 1963, 1; "Del Webb's Townehouse Rising on Southwest's 'Wilshire Boulevard,'" *The Webb Spinner*, 18, no. 2, February 1964, 3.

distinctive type of suburban enclave.⁴⁰ Del Webb's company produced brochures and conducted a marketing campaign targeting this demographic that specifically emphasized the suburban features that encapsulated the essence of suburban lifestyle in the postwar period: namely, a balance of closeness and distance from the city center, nearby commercial shopping centers, and natural spaces and parks, among several other details.⁴¹ As represented through many of Del Webb's *The Webb Spinner* issues, this was a common tactic that he and his company used in marketing their suburbs. This can be seen through the advertisement of suburbs such as Rancho San Diego and Clairemont Estates (both of which are located near San Diego), Clear Lake City (near Houston), and Almaden (near San Jose), among several other suburbs.⁴² Given that developers in the post-war period had a significant predisposition to build in white neighborhoods, build for white clients, and attract wealthier members to their developments, it is not surprising that Del Webb either indirectly or directly accommodated wealthier white individuals through his residential developments.⁴³ As can be observed through the sheer number of suburban developments that Del Webb constructed, his company was very suburban-centric and, therefore, Anglo-centric.

In the literature and in the public sphere, Del Webb is arguably best known for his Sun City communities. These so-called "active adult" retirement communities were essential in shaping the postwar retirement lifestyle in the United States. Del Webb's Sun Cities were critical in popularizing retirement communities that are now so common in the American built

⁴⁰ Clare Robinson, "Unrepressing Class to Reinterpret the Tradition of Midcentury Modern Architecture and Its Preservation in Tucson, Arizona," *Traditional dwellings and settlements review* 29, no. 1 (2017): 25-29.

⁴¹ Robinson, "Unrepressing Class," 27.

⁴² "Clairemont Estates Project Mushrooms on Rolling Hills Near Busy San Diego," *The Webb Spinner*, 10, no. 9, September 1956, 4; "Millions in Homes Rising At Almaden," *The Webb Spinner*, 14, no. 9, September 1960, 3; "Webb Builders Creating Masterpiece On Clear Lake City Site in Texas," *The Webb Spinner*, 17, no. 6, June 1963, 1; "Activity Up At Rancho San Diego," *The Webb Spinner*, 30, no. 5-6, May-June 1976, 3.

⁴³ Elizabeth Korver-Glenn, *Race Brokers: Housing Markets and Segregation in 21st Century Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 42-49.

environment.⁴⁴ At first, Del Webb and his company started with the development of four such Sun Cities: one in the Phoenix area, one in the Tampa Bay area, and two in Southern California. The mogul used similar strategies as he did with the other suburbs in developing these Sun Cities. Del Webb's Sun Cities were crucial in shaping postwar city planning, tax structures, and migration patterns of retirees. Del Webb sought to establish these destinations on the exurban fringes of sunny metropolitan areas, where he could find a combination of cheap, expansive land and a climate that appealed to so-called "snowbirds," retirees from the North who migrated to the Sunbelt either seasonally or permanently in search of a more hospitable climate and environment.⁴⁵ Given their nature, these Sun Cities (and other retirement communities) introduced a new type of segregation to the American built environment: age-based segregation.⁴⁶ Furthermore, through the use of similar advertising as he and his company used in promoting suburbs such as Pueblo Gardens, Del Webb's Sun City developments were arguably catered to white clients, resulting in increased residential segregation. For instance, Sun City, Arizona today is approximately 94% white while the Phoenix metropolitan area where it is located is only 58.5% white.⁴⁷ Therefore, Del Webb's Sun Cities are deserving of more historical scholarship given their impact on the American built environment and the ways in which they introduced and amplified different types of residential segregation. Furthermore, this research complements research on suburban development in general, exposing how suburbanization, white flight, and the Sun Cities were interrelated phenomena.

⁴⁴ Trolander, *From Sun Cities*, 80-81.

⁴⁵ Trolander, *From Sun Cities*, 63-64 & 130-131.

⁴⁶ Drew Thomas Meyers, "Sun Citizens: The Culture and Politics of Retirement in Modern America" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2016), 378-439.

<https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/sun-citizens-culture-politics-retirement-modern/docview/1875031129/se-2?accountid=14522>.

⁴⁷ "Sun City CDP, Arizona," United States Census Bureau, last modified July 1, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/suncitycdparizona>; "Phoenix-Mesa-Chandler, AZ Metro Area," Census Reporter, last modified July 1, 2021, https://censusreporter.org/data/table/?table=B02001&geo_ids=31000US38060&primary_geo_id=31000US38060.

Although Del Webb may be best known for the construction and development of residential suburbs and complexes, his commercial developments are equally if not more important in the context of urban and suburban history. As with the Central Avenue corridor, Del Webb constructed and developed a significant number of shopping centers, office buildings, and hotels across the Southwest and beyond that deserve greater scholarly attention. A prime example of Del Webb's activities in the field of commercial real estate development is the Wilshire Boulevard corridor in West Los Angeles. Extending from downtown Los Angeles in the east to Santa Monica in the west, Wilshire Boulevard is one of the most important streets for economic development and activity in the Greater Los Angeles area.⁴⁸ Del Webb was a significant figure in making Wilshire Boulevard into the commercial center that it is today. On or adjacent to Wilshire Boulevard, Del Webb developed and/or constructed the One Wilshire Building, the Texaco Building, the Union Bank Building, and the Hollywood Building, amongst others.⁴⁹ All of these buildings were commercial skyscrapers that were influential in Los Angeles' postwar corporate economy and continue to serve as corporate hubs in the region. Elsewhere in the country, Del Webb also built significant skyscrapers and commercial buildings. Namely, he built portions of the Dallas Convention Center, the Anaheim Convention Center, and multiple office parks and headquarters buildings in Oak Brook, Illinois.⁵⁰ Thus, although his role in residential development was important, Del Webb's role in commercial real estate development in the postwar political economy also can not be overstated.

⁴⁸ "History of Wilshire Boulevard," Los Angeles Conservancy, accessed November 25, 2022, <https://www.laconservancy.org/history-wilshire-boulevard>.

⁴⁹ "Big Movie Studio Is Webb Co. Hollywood Project: Structure Will Cover An Entire City Block," *The Webb Spinner*, 1, no. 3, February 1947, 1; "Texaco Building Is 'Topped Out,'" *The Webb Spinner*, 11, no. 8, August 1957, 5; "Webb Co. Begins Working On Union Bank Building: Structure Will Be Tallest Building In Beverly Hills," *The Webb Spinner*, 12, no. 8, August 1958, 1; "Webb Builders Launch 30-Story Skyscraper For California Firm," *The Webb Spinner*, 18, no. 11, November 1964, 1.

⁵⁰ "Stockholders Meet In Most Unusual Town," *The Webb Spinner*, 23, no. 4, April 1969, 3; "Compliments From Anaheim," *The Webb Spinner*, 34, no. 7-8, July-August 1980, 3; "\$30.9 Million Dallas Center Contract Tops Projects," *The Webb Spinner*, 36, no. 2-3, March-April 1982, 11.

As a further demonstration of Del Webb's commercial success, his hotel empire is worthy of consideration. Del Webb had several major main hotel chains that he managed or developed during his career. These included the Hiway House motor hotels, the Del Webb TowneHouses, the Merlin hotels, and multiple others. The Hiway House motor hotels stretched across the Southwest and were advertised as "luxury" hotels that catered to travelers on a budget.⁵¹ They also specifically were targeted at snowbirds, at least to some extent.⁵² In this manner, they arguably served as a gateway for attracting more retirees (and people in general) to the Sun Cities and Del Webb's other residential developments. The Del Webb TowneHouses, on the other hand, served a different purpose. They were more geared toward business travelers, although tourists were also welcomed.⁵³ Located mainly in downtown areas and commercial areas like the Rosenzweig Center off Central Avenue, these hotels were tied more to business and conventions, making them great pairs with Del Webb's commercial developments that were discussed in the previous paragraph. As will be discussed throughout the thesis, these hotels were used as sites for urban renewal projects (as in the case of Fresno and San Francisco), while also being responsible for shifting investment away from other downtown areas.⁵⁴ Thus, the impact the Del Webb TowneHouse chain had on communities across the broader Southwest and the nation was location specific. The Merlin hotel chain was a different entity in its own right. Unlike most of Del Webb's developments, the Merlin hotels were concentrated in East Asia (or as he and his company described it "The Far East"). As of 1972, the firm had four Merlin locations: one in

⁵¹ "Flagstaff and Denver Hotels Are Started," *The Webb Spinner*, 11, no. 3, March 1957, 1-3.

⁵² "Phoenix Hiway House Hotel Shaping Up," *The Webb Spinner*, 10, no. 11, November 1956, 4.

⁵³ "Space for Conventions Planned In New Hotel," *The Webb Spinner*, 17, no. 5, May 1963, 1-2; "TowneHouse Hotel and Office Building Heralds New Fresno Skyline," *The Webb Spinner*, 18, no. 3, March 1964, 1.

⁵⁴ "It Was a Fruitful Year For San Francisco," *The San Francisco Examiner*, December 29, 1961, 26.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/december-29-1961-page-26-48/docview/2163348148/se-2?accountid=14522>; "It Was Worth The Cost' New Fresno Mall Attracts Customers," *Minneapolis Star*, September 17, 1965, 15B.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/september-17-1965-page-41-58/docview/1876209561/se-2?accountid=14522>.

Hong Kong, one in Singapore, one in Kuala Lumpur, and one in Penang.⁵⁵ The international aspect of Del Webb's firm is indeed deserving of its own research, as are the Orientalist themes that the company included in its advertising of the Merlin Hotels (and many of his American hotels as well). Figure 1-1 is relatively well representative of this. When viewing the pictures associated with the hotels on the East Asian side of this cartoon "map", one can see the ways in which Del Webb played into stereotypes about the appearances and customs of groups that inhabited the region. This will be further explored in Chapter III. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that although Del Webb profited off the commodification of these people groups through advertising, his hotel developments aimed at luxury international travelers likely did not benefit the local inhabitants of these communities directly. As with previous examples, this analysis allows one to understand how Del Webb may have been blind to how his developments negatively impacted more marginalized peoples and their communities.

⁵⁵ "Del Webb Hotels International - Not a Carbon Copy of the Entire Chain," *The Webb Spinner*, 26, no. 7-8, July-August 1972, 4-5.

Urban renewal has been a phenomenon that has been studied significantly by American urban planning and urban history scholars for quite some time. Much of this research hones in on the negative implications of how the renewal process played out after the *Berman v. Parker* decision of 1954.⁵⁸ This decision allowed municipalities to seize properties in neighborhoods that were deemed to be “blighted”, simply on the basis of their neighborhood characteristics and regardless of their individual characteristics. In Del Webb’s case, the Anaheim Convention Center, the San Francisco Del Webb’s TowneHouse, and the Fresno Del Webb’s TowneHouse, for instance, were all products of urban renewal that provoked substantial opposition from particular residents or community groups. In addition, the Fresno Center, Denver’s 16th Mall project, and the Santa Monica Shores redevelopment were all urban renewal schemes that Del Webb likewise had an influence on. Urban renewal was very significant to the postwar American urban political economy, so a future deeper study of Del Webb’s history with urban renewal is warranted.

Finally, Del Webb’s developments, like a majority of American suburbs that were built after World War II, were heavily auto-centric. Many of the advertisements and editorials for his developments that were featured in *The Webb Spinner* specifically focused on the number of parking spots that the developer set aside for consumers and residents who would travel by car. This is especially notable in Del Webb’s firm’s journalism for the Anaheim Angels Stadium that it developed. The stadium was noted for its ability to accommodate up to 12,000 cars via its massive parking lot, a feat for its time.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Del Webb actually got into the parking

⁵⁸ For example, see Lydia R. Otero, *La Calle: Spatial Conflicts and Urban Renewal in a Southwest City* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2010).

⁵⁹ “What They’re Saying About Anaheim Stadium,” *The Webb Spinner*, 20, no. 6-7, June-July, 1966, 2-3.

venture business himself. His firm created DEWPARK in 1972, a firm that managed parking facilities in at least six metropolitan areas across the nation.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Del Webb was not able to accomplish all of his visions without the assistance of many others. Along with the hundreds of employees that worked for his various development-related companies, Del Webb also had a handful of strategic connections that ultimately benefited him significantly in the long term. Journalists, mobsters, moguls, and other developers all played a crucial role in Del Webb's success. They also, to varying degrees, influenced his reputation with the American public and his consumers. This network of connections will be explored throughout Chapters II and III.

Overall, Del Webb was a man of many trades. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, his real estate portfolio was very diversified which arguably was a key factor in his "rags to riches" success. In the subsequent chapters, some of his developments will be highlighted in greater detail. However, Del Webb's developments did not arise out of a vacuum, as they were dependent on one another in order to succeed, and thus should not be studied in isolation. That is, they should be situated within the broader context of the political economy and should be situated amongst other real estate projects that they may be directly linked to.

⁶⁰ Margaret Finnerty, *Del Webb: A Man. A Company* (Phoenix: Heritage Publishers, Inc., 1991), 143. Del Webb's ties to the auto industry and his dependence on auto-centric infrastructure are thus also worthy of further future study.

Chapter II: Leisure in “Paradise?” The Making of Sun City

Despite being a big-name real estate magnate since the 1930s, Del Webb is most well-known for his Sun City developments that began in the early 1960s. Sun Cities were advertised as “active adult” retirement communities that catered to residents over the age of 55 seeking a community of like-minded people who also valued activeness, leisure, and community. These Sun Cities were integral to the reshaping of the American built environment and ideas of aging and retirement in the latter half of the twentieth century.

The opening of Youngstown, Arizona, located in the Phoenix metropolitan area served as inspiration for Del Webb’s “Sun City” concept. Youngstown was a retirement community that opened in the mid-1950s that targeted the lower middle class retirees as potential residents. By studying Youngstown’s success, Del Webb and his team determined that the retiree market could potentially be one of the most lucrative residential markets. This culminated in Del Webb’s determination to start his “Sun City” concept.⁶¹

The Advent of Sun Cities: Developing and Selling “Active Adulthood”

Del Webb’s construction company began funding research on retirement communities in the late 1950s. Del Webb bolstered the need for “active retirement” communities to satisfy the needs and desires of America’s elders. Del Webb and his company sought to create an environment for retirees that was hospitable to their unique needs while also ensuring that they could still be active, both in a physical and civic sense. This idea resulted in “Sun City,” Del Webb’s name for his retirement community empire that would eventually expand across the

⁶¹ Trolander, *From Sun Cities*, 58.

nation. The company started the Sun City concept in Sun City, Arizona, and then tested out the concept in three other locations immediately after: near Tampa Bay, in the Inland Empire (Southern California), and in Kern City (Southern/Central California). These four original Sun Cities served as the model for Del Webb's Sun City empire which grew across the Sunbelt and, later on, the nation.⁶²

The original Sun City is the one that is the most well-known today: Sun City, Arizona. Located on the northwestern side of the Phoenix metropolitan area, Sun City was founded in 1960 after a long and resource-filled development process. James Griffith (J.G.) Boswell was an integral connection for Del Webb as his company shifted from being construction-focused to development-focused. J.G. Boswell was a wealthy landowner who made his fortune off cotton in the American Southwest. Although being most well-known for his California cotton empire (earning him the nickname of "King of California" by some)⁶³, J.G. Boswell's landholdings in the Phoenix metropolitan area were ultimately more important for Del Webb. According to Judith Trolander, in 1959, Boswell was concerned that his 20,000 acres of cotton farms in northwest Phoenix would not be able to survive the metropolitan area's depleting water tables. Because of this, he looked for an avenue to make a profit on this land. Del Webb's company, with connections to Boswell already established through mutual networks, was able to work out an agreement where Boswell would periodically sell the acreage that Webb would need for the Sun City concept over a twenty-year period for the price of \$15 million. In turn, Del Webb's and Boswell's companies would form a new venture called DEVCO (Del E. Webb Development Company) in which Webb owned 51% and Boswell owned 49%. By doing so, Boswell made an

⁶² Trolander, *From Sun Cities*, 57-74.

⁶³ Mark Arax and Rick Wartzman. *The King of California: J.G. Boswell and the Making of a Secret American Empire* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2003); Stephen Miller, "Remembrances: He Cultivated the Land To Create an Agricultural Giant," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 11, 2009, A4.
<https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/remembrances-he-cultivated-land-create/docview/399057236/se-2?accountid=14522>.

initial principal off the land acquisition sales and would continue to reap profits as the development ensued. This deal mutually benefited both parties and was what Del Webb needed to actualize his first Sun City.⁶⁴

The first Sun City was opened to sales on January 1, 1960. Within the first month, hundreds of homes were sold to eager senior citizens looking for a new type of community life.⁶⁵ Essential to the vision of these migrants was the image of “active adulthood”, complete with amenities pertaining to golf, fitness, tennis, swimming, and more. Ultimately, the first Sun City was successful in delivering this lifestyle to the new residents.⁶⁶ The development reached such a level of success in its first year that the DEVCO venture began looking for ways to expand the concept to other regions of the Sunbelt that same year.⁶⁷

The next three Sun Cities to come to fruition were Kern City outside of Bakersfield, Sun City Center on the fringes of Tampa Bay, and another Sun City outside of Riverside. Although none of these developments were as triumphant as the original Sun City in terms of profits, they were not all busts.⁶⁸ To this day, all three communities still exist and cater to the “active adult lifestyle.”

Despite the fact that some of the original Sun Cities fared better than others, the locations of these developments are worthy of consideration. Each of the original developments was located in the expanding Sunbelt and was located on the outskirts of booming metropolitan areas or growing spatial regions, as observed in Figure 2-1.⁶⁹ That being said, Phoenix’s growth outpaced the other metropolitan areas by a significant margin which is likely both a result of

⁶⁴ Trolander, *From Sun Cities*, 63-64.

⁶⁵ Finnerty, *Del Webb*, 90-92.

⁶⁶ Trolander, *From Sun Cities*, 75.

⁶⁷ Trolander, *From Sun Cities*, 76.

⁶⁸ Trolander, *From Sun Cities*, 76-80.

⁶⁹ Richard M. Bernard and Bradley Robert Rice, *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth Since World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 1-30; Trolander, *From Sun Cities*, 78-79.

developments like Sun City coming to fruition and a factor in why Sun City, Arizona was so comparatively successful. The pattern of building in areas of comparatively high residential growth ultimately followed the general pattern of Del Webb: focusing mainly on real estate development in the booming portions of the Sunbelt with a particular focus on the suburbs. Therefore, studying the histories and spatial dynamics associated with the locations of Del Webb’s developments is critical to understanding the foundation that his real estate empire was built upon.

Figure 2-1: Population Growth in the Original Sun City MSAs as compared to the United States as a whole, 1950-1960⁷⁰

<u>Spatial Area</u>	<u>Population in 1950</u>	<u>Population in 1960</u>	<u>% Population Growth, 1950-1960</u>
Bakersfield MSA	228,309	291,984	27.9%
San Bernardino-Riverside-Ontario MSA	451,688	809,782	79.3%
Tampa-St. Petersburg MSA	409,268	772,453	88.8%
Phoenix MSA	331,770	663,510	100.0%
United States	151,325,798	179,323,175	18.5%

Thus, the materialization of Del Webb’s Sun City concept was rooted in national population trends, favorable land acquisition decisions, and new elderly migrants who were willing to take the risk of moving in order to see what the newly coined “active adult” lifestyle was like. The concept ultimately had significant impacts on the Sunbelt of the United States that continue even today.

⁷⁰ United States Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Population of Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas: 1960 and 1950*, Washington D.C., 1961.

Strategic Selling

Sun Cities required a vast amount of and a variety of marketing techniques in order to be profitable investments. After all, “active adult” communities had hardly existed before the Sun City concept was implemented; and, because of this, it is likely that a majority of Americans were not knowledgeable enough about the supposed benefits and amenities of these communities to be willing to migrate to them. Del Webb and his associates thus had to spend a significant deal of time and resources on their public relations efforts as they pertained to the new Sun City developments. After multiple years of this, however, they had to turn to more cost-effective measures to continue these efforts.

Given that housing is generally the most expensive purchase that Americans make in their lifetimes, buying and selling homes may be viewed as risky transactions to some.⁷¹ In order to alleviate the fears of risks associated with these transactions, Del Webb’s team designed a “guaranteed sales plan” that would attract otherwise hesitant buyers. In this plan, Del Webb advertised itself as the first retirement community in the country to “guarantee the sale of your present home at a pre-arranged top market price enabling you to move into your favorite Del Webb City without delay.”⁷² This type of advertising is important to consider for two reasons. First, the advertisement shows the tools that Del Webb’s company needed to use in order to attract its first customers to the Sun Cities. Given that “active adult” communities were not well known in the public eye yet, Del Webb’s team had to work profusely to target customers and to ensure that the money that the company poured into the Sun City developments would pay off.

⁷¹ “What Americans spend: A look at the cost of housing, food, transportation, and more,” BankRate, last modified December 5, 2022, <https://www.bankrate.com/banking/savings/average-household-budget/>.

⁷² “1st Retirement Communities with a Guaranteed Sales Plan for your present home,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 1963, C14. <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/display-ad-59-no-title/docview/168311145/se-2?accountid=14522>.

Second, the guaranteed sales plan offers hints as to the imagined market for Sun Cities. Rather than offering housing for more affordable prices and targeting elderly persons who had been stuck in a cycle of renting, Del Webb clearly targeted homeowners with the Sun City ads. Because homeownership was an indicator of wealth (or at least, relative wealth), during this time, it is clear that Del Webb was not particularly catering to lower-income elders or elders with few assets when he and his company developed and marketed the Sun Cities. Rather, his target market was homeowners from other regions of the country who had the means to move to their “favorite Del Webb City” as long as they were able to sell their current homes. Thus, Del Webb’s guaranteed sales plan is an advertisement that gives some hints as to who the target clientele was for the Sun City developments.

Ironically, despite their orientation towards suburbia and exclusion, Del Webb chose to market the amenities of the central cities that the Sun Cities were located on the fringes of in order to attract new residents. The first Sun City model home brochure is a representation of this advertising strategy. Webb markets the Sun City as “next door to Phoenix” with its “magical blend of the visionary vibrancy of sparkling youth,” the nation’s “finest” cultural facilities, and entertainment options.⁷³ However, just a couple of pages later in the same brochure, Webb suggests that Sun City is a “metropolis in miniature” that hosts everything a resident could want and need, indirectly suggesting that residents did not need to rely on Phoenix for their lifestyles.⁷⁴ Therefore, the Webb marketing campaigns for Sun City attempted to strategically amplify both the city itself and its metropolitan areas as a means to attract residents through place-based marketing, even if these marketing strategies were somewhat in opposition to one

⁷³ “Next Door to Phoenix,” *Active Living for America’s Senior Citizens: Del Webb’s Sun City, Arizona*, 1, no. 1, July 1, 1960, 6-7.

⁷⁴ “Metropolis in Miniature,” *Active Living for America’s Senior Citizens: Del Webb’s Sun City, Arizona*, 1, no. 1, July 1, 1960, 12-13.

another. As will be elaborated in further detail later in this chapter, it is quite interesting to consider that Del Webb marketed being next door to Phoenix as a positive feature of the Sun Cities and, more specifically, that the company included the “magical blend of the visionary vibrancy of sparkling youth” in its advertising ventures. Given how children and youth were treated by the community, this marketing strategy is important to keep in mind.

In conjunction with this, it is notable that the Sun City marketing campaigns seemed to target Snowbird audiences instead of local residents that already lived in the Sunbelt. Many newspaper advertisements that were used to attract residents were located in Rust Belt and other northern newspapers. Furthermore, many of Sun City’s model home ads directly targeted those who wanted to flee the winter cold.⁷⁵ The fact that the Webb public relations team used a significant amount of resources to publish in these Snow Belt journals is representative of its desire to attract “Snowbird” migrants who would be allured to the Sun Cities not only for their amenities but their more hospitable climates. Although Del Webb did have some advertising campaigns in Sunbelt newspapers such as *The Arizona Republic*, it appears that a majority of articles about the Sun Cities in these newspapers were less advertisements and more news stories. This is another key point to consider when understanding the target market of Del Webb’s Sun City developments. Just as discussed earlier in terms of catering to middle and upper-class desires, it appears that Del Webb also preferred to cater to those outside of Arizona and the Sunbelt as opposed to targeting the region’s existing residents. This intention is important given that many of the region’s existing residents were not able to reap the benefits of the Sunbelt boom that Del Webb and many others were able to take advantage of. Had the Del Webb company considered Sunbelt residents more in their advertising campaigns, the population

⁷⁵ “Paradise Found,” *Active Living for America’s Senior Citizens: Del Webb’s Sun City, Arizona*, 1, no. 1, July 1, 1960, 2-3.

of Sun Cities, and quite possibly the Sunbelt, may have been quite different. This is particularly relevant given ongoing current discussions about the “hyper-gentrification” of some Sunbelt destinations today.

That said, marketing strategies are expensive, and, ultimately, the Sun Cities might have failed if continued extensive public relations efforts were necessary to sell their amenities to clients. This proved true in 1965 when a drop in home sales in the Sun Cities threatened the entire concept’s success. Recognizing this, the President of DEVCO at the time, John Meeker, decided to cut off almost all funding for nationwide marketing strategies and “put his dependence on the community to sell itself.”⁷⁶ Since the community appeared very prideful of their achievements and the amenities that allowed them to engage in the lifestyle that they did, this ultimately was successful. Chain migration of friends and families was enough to ensure the success of the Sun Cities and sales rebounded within just a couple of years. Thus, Del Webb’s marketing strategies enabled his company to foster a network of clientele which were able to use somewhat of a snowball effect in order to ensure continued migration and profits in light of the need to cut funding for advertising.

That said, downturns in residential real estate across the Sun Cities, like the one in 1965, were enough to cause the Del Webb Corporation to look to other development strategies to diversify their portfolio. Given that residential real estate markets tend to follow similar patterns, Del Webb knew that he had to look for non-residential means of development in order to diversify his portfolio. His company found the solution to this pattern by investing more in his casinos. He had already invested a substantial portion in the construction of casinos in Las Vegas at this point (i.e. the Flamingo), but the 1960s proved pivotal for Del Webb’s presence on the Strip. A *Fortune* article specifically discussing the 1965 downturn and its impacts on Del Webb’s

⁷⁶ Finnerty, *Del Webb*, 82.

success specifically addressed this by suggesting “Running a gambling casino in Nevada is both profitable and legal, whereas the real estate business that Del Webb had developed over the years showed symptoms of being merely legal. Obviously, then, Nevada is the place in which to diversify.”⁷⁷ As will be elaborated in the next chapter, this relationship went both ways. Del Webb also depended on his residential real estate sales in Sun City and beyond during busts in the casino market. Therefore, Del Webb’s need to diversify his portfolio in order to withstand recessions within particular real estate markets ultimately served to connect the histories of Sun City and Sin City.

Segregation, Sprawl, & Sunshine: How the Sun Cities Amplified 20th-Century Urban Issues

The Sun Cities fit into a larger pattern of suburbanization that characterized American spatial dynamics in the postwar period. As suburban communities mainly located on the fringes of Sunbelt metropolitan areas, Del Webb’s Sun Cities were undeniably suburban in nature. Because of this, it is important to contextualize their foundation and growth within the broader history of American suburbanization in order to highlight their distinctive features.

The literature discussing the growth of American suburbia in the postwar era and its impact on different people groups and communities is extensive and very developed. Literature on the subject spans from topics such as externalities of urban sprawl, to how suburban growth accelerated trends towards residential segregation, and much more. Much of this historical

⁷⁷ “What Del Webb Is Up to In Nevada,” 1965, MS-00986, box 2, folder 6, UNLV Libraries Collection of Sahara Resort Press Releases and Reports, 1965-2002, Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

scholarship is relevant to the history of the Sun Cities and allows historians to situate Sun Cities into the broader framework of postwar American urban history.

One key topic in the literature about suburban history is the concept of urban sprawl, “a pattern of uncontrolled development around the periphery of a city.”⁷⁸ Urban sprawl has been studied significantly for its negative externalities and its impacts on environmental and communal conditions.⁷⁹ The negative effects associated with urban sprawl are relevant to the growth of the Sun Cities. When taking into consideration the locations of the Sun Cities on the peripheries of their Sunbelt core cities, it is clear that Sun Cities are associated with urban sprawl. The Sun Cities, at the very least, contribute to urban sprawl.⁸⁰ Arguably, they have even played a role in inducing it. For example, as seen in Figure 2-2, the Sun City located in the Inland Empire (outside of Riverside), greatly influenced demand to live in the region as it was responsible for, “creating a vast new market for land in Perris Valley” and for driving up land values.⁸¹ Had Del Webb’s company not chosen to locate the Sun City in this area, it is likely that a land boom would not have occurred to the same magnitude. Given the “remote” location of this development on the periphery of the Riverside metropolitan area and at the furthest extent of the Los Angeles area, it is clear that this region is a depiction of urban sprawl in action. Since the reasoning for locating the Sun Cities in the peripheral areas was maintained across all of the Sun City developments, it would be plausible to assume that this feature of inducing demand was not unique to the Sun City in Southern California. Thus, the deliberate choice to locate the Sun City

⁷⁸ David B. Resnik, “Urban Sprawl, Smart Growth, and Deliberative Democracy,” *American journal of public health*, 100, no. 10 (2010): 1853.

⁷⁹ For example, see Real Estate Research Corporation, “The Costs of Sprawl: Environmental and Economic Costs of Alternative Residential Development Patterns at the Urban Fringe,” *Portland Regional Planning History*, 26 (1974).

⁸⁰ “What the developers call progress could create another Los Angeles,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, February 27, 1973, 1-8.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/february-27-1973-page-1-36/docview/1877984358/se-2?accountid=14522>.

⁸¹ “Imagine for only \$10.000 You Can Be a Ranch Owner,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 29, 1962, A9.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/display-ad-38-no-title/docview/564611850/se-2?accountid=14522>

in regions like the Perris Valley at least contributed to the Sunbelt's urban sprawl, and potentially even exacerbated it by inducing demand for land.

IMAGINE!
For only **\$10.00***
YOU CAN BE A RANCH OWNER

GET IN ON THE PERRIS VALLEY BOOM!

AS LOW AS \$1790 (FULL PRICE)
PERRIS, CALIF.

VALLEY VIEW RANCHOS
(JUST 15 MINUTES FROM DOWNTOWN RIVERSIDE)

NO SMOG

NO SMOG

PERRIS VALLEY IS BOOMING! The announcement of the new DEL WEBB SENIOR CITIZEN'S DEVELOPMENT has created a vast new market for land in Perris Valley and sent prices skyrocketing. Yet you are still able to get in on the ground floor of this boom at VALLEY VIEW RANCHOS where land is still being sold at opening prices.

You can purchase up to a **2½ Acre Estate** For as little as \$1790.00 FULL PRICE
poultry, retirement and a superb investment. **BETTER HURRY!!**

• DO IT TODAY... TOMORROW MAY BE TOO LATE!
For Further Information, Call:
PON & CO.
711 NORTH AZUSA AVENUE, AZUSA, CALIFORNIA
EDGEWOOD 4-2991
IN PERRIS AREA PHONE 657-2454
OPEN FROM 10 A.M. SATURDAY & SUNDAY. WEEK DAYS BY APPOINTMENT

DIRECTIONS:
FROM LOS ANGELES, TAKE THE SAN BERNARDINO FREEWAY FIRST ONTARIO AIRPORT TO MILLIKEN AVE. TURN RIGHT OFF FREEWAY 2 MILES TO U.S. HIGHWAY 60. TURN LEFT ON 60 AND CONTINUE TO RIVERSIDE. STAY ON U.S. HIGHWAY 398 IN RIVERSIDE AND DRIVE FIRST NORTH AIR BOLE ABOUT 4 MILES UNTIL YOU SEE A SIGN "VALLEY VIEW RANCHOS". TURN RIGHT 2 MILES TO OFFICE AT VALLEY VIEW RANCHOS.

LOS ANGELES, SAN BERNARDINO FREEWAY, PERRIS, VALLEY VIEW RANCHOS, MILLIKEN AVENUE, RIVERSIDE, U.S. HIGHWAY 60, U.S. HIGHWAY 398, LAKE MATHIEWS, PERRIS, HOUSE OF HANDBILLS NO. 7-3010

* DOWN PAYMENT

Figure 2-2: Valley View Ranchos advertisement from 1962. From "Display Ad 38 – No Title,"

Los Angeles Sentinel, November 29, 1962, A9.

Another topic that is extensively discussed by scholars regarding urban sprawl is its influence on residential segregation. Residential segregation is rooted in demographic distinctions such as racial, class, and age differences.

To begin, the Sun Cities are arguably a product of the intersection between class and geography in the 20th-century United States. Affordability and saving money were emphasized in many of the Sun City newspaper advertisements and in the model home brochures.⁸² However,

⁸² For example, see "Del Webb presents...California's Greatest Home Show," *Los Angeles Times*, January 22, 1967, L22.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/display-ad-237-no-title/docview/155549484/se-2?accountid=14522> and "Everything Under the Sun," *Los Angeles Times*, January 7, 1973, J3.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/display-ad-111-no-title/docview/157152389/se-2?accountid=14522>

as mentioned previously, the Sun Cities did not target low-income residents nor were these homes objectively “affordable.” A 1972 *Wall Street Journal* article illustrates this issue. In the article, the author states that:

On the surface, all seems idyllic here [in Sun City, Arizona]. Citizens rave about the climate, about the diversions they can enjoy here. Unlike the elderly who drift to the cheap apartments of the rundown areas of the central cities, and whose lives are often consumed in pinching pennies, Sun Citians are relatively well off; houses here cost \$20,000 to \$55,000, *prices that quite effectively screen out the poor*.⁸³

In essence, the notion that Sun Cities were “affordable” begs the question “For whom?” Given that the housing prices “effectively screen[ed] out the poor” and that the marketing techniques targeted non-low-income people as discussed previously, it is clear that Sun City was built with middle and upper-class interests in mind. Because poor people were not able to buy their way into the community, the nature of Sun Cities upheld a level of class-based residential segregation that is evident in American urban environments today.

Similarly, racial segregation was a key feature of the Sun Cities. Although racially restrictive covenants were deemed unenforceable in the landmark 1947 *Shelley v. Kraemer* decision and the 1968 Federal Fair Housing Act prohibited racial discrimination in housing sales, “white flight” was a de facto means of segregation that persisted throughout twentieth-century America.⁸⁴ Even when housing prices are accounted for as control variables, white Americans left cities where Black residents made up an increasing share of the population at a significant rate during this period.⁸⁵ Suburbs like the Sun Cities boomed as a result, with white residents

⁸³ Hal Lancaster, “Out to Pasture: The Old but Affluent Withdraw to Sun City To Fill Empty Days,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 16, 1971, 1.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/out-pasture/docview/133705153/se-2?accountid=14522>.

⁸⁴ Alyssa Ribeiro, “Segregation, Suburban,” in *Race and racism in the United States: an encyclopedia of the American mosaic*, ed. Charles A. Gallagher and Cameron D. Lippard (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2014), 1115-1117.

⁸⁵ Leah Platt Boustan, “Was Postwar Suburbanization ‘White Flight’? Evidence from the Black Migration,” *The Quarterly journal of economics* 125, no. 1 (2010): 417–443.

moving further and further away from the central city. As historian Drew Thomas Meyers has demonstrated, racial segregation was a prominent feature of the majority-white Sun Cities.⁸⁶ Furthermore, given the relationship between segregation and schooling in the United States during the latter half of the twentieth century, the Sun City residents' refusal to allow schools within their cities nor to pay taxes that were explicitly for schooling, also played a role in amplifying racial residential segregation in the Sunbelt.⁸⁷ Therefore, even though the Sun Cities were marketed and sold in a “race-neutral” fashion, their presence in the urban context of the twentieth-century United States exacerbated trends of residential segregation on the grounds of race.

Lastly, most evidently, the Sun Cities were segregated on the basis of age. Sun Cities require at least one resident to be over the age of 55, with many of them having even more stipulations regarding the age of residents. As will be discussed in-depth in the “Opposition on the Fringes” section that follows this one, this age-based segregation faced significant opposition. Sun City, Arizona, for instance, placed a retirement zoning overlay over its community that prohibited residents under the retirement age from residing in the community for over ninety days of the year.⁸⁸ As will be further explained in the next section of this paper, this zoning ordinance has had dire consequences: both for those who were effectively banned from the community based on their age and, to an extent, for the elderly residents themselves. Thus, just as the Sun Cities were rooted in residential segregation based on class and race, they were also rooted in age-based segregation.

⁸⁶ Meyers, “Sun Citizens,” 378-380.

⁸⁷ Meyers, “Sun Citizens,” 412-414.

⁸⁸ Meyers, “Sun Citizens,” 580-594.

Opposition on the Fringes: Cattle, Children, and (Land) Clashes

Despite the relative success of the Sun City empire, there was significant opposition to this empire. This opposition came from a variety of coalitions, including but not limited to: children and young adults, feedlot owners, and land conservationists. Studying this opposition is key to realizing the adverse effects that Sun Cities had on some specific demographics. Moreover, it is important to consider the opposition to acknowledge the pitfalls of puffery advertising that the Webb Corporation used in order to market the Sun Cities and Del Webb's related developments.

To begin, children and young adults played a key role in opposing the Sun Cities and retirement communities across the Sunbelt in general. As stated in the previous section, age segregation played an integral role in the development of the Sun Cities. A significant portion of Sun City residents were vocal (and still are) in their discontent with youth residents in their community. For instance, when a school bus stop was established in the Sun City in Arizona for younger residents (when the zoning overlay was not put in place), "Sun City residents threatened both the bus driver and the children."⁸⁹ The residents of the community ultimately succeeded in this anti-children campaign as Del Webb eventually banned children as permanent residents and the community eventually enacted the aforementioned zoning overlay banning those under a certain age.⁹⁰ This anti-youth sentiment even applied to younger adults. For example, Sun City residents were successful in kicking out an air conditioning repairman who worked in the community out of Sun City.⁹¹ The anti-children sentiment of the Sun Cities was not only opposed

⁸⁹ Trolander, *From Sun Cities*, 76.

⁹⁰ Paul Weingarten, "Arizona: Sun City is waging a war to keep its old folksy image," *Chicago Tribune*, June 18, 1987, 28. <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/arizona/docview/608146501/se-2?accountid=14522>

⁹¹ Trolander, *From Sun Cities*, 75-76.

by the children and young adults themselves, but also by economists and retailers. Some of these groups even suggest that restrictions on children ultimately make these communities at risk for “suburban blight.”⁹² Furthermore, the nation’s sociologists at the time mainly opposed age-based community restrictions like those that Sun City imposed.⁹³ Lastly, even some of the elders themselves opposed the adverse effects of the Sun City communities being so anti-youth. Many of the elders ultimately suggested that the age-based segregation caused them to have chronic feelings of uselessness and depression as they felt closed off from the outside world.⁹⁴ Even today, the opposition to Sun City’s restrictions toward non-elderly residents is still active. Currently, the Sun City, Arizona age zoning overlay is being challenged by residents, with ongoing permit hearings.⁹⁵ Thus, the opposition towards Sun City’s anti-youth sentiment is multifaceted and comes from a variety of coalitions. This opposition is ongoing and demonstrates a decades-old fight between these coalitions and certain vocal elderly Sun Citians.

In a similar vein, the Sun Cities faced opposition from the residents and laborers that their suburbs displaced. This phenomenon is most evidently represented by the landmark Supreme Court case, *Spur Industries v. Del E. Webb Development Co.* (1972). This Supreme Court case is renowned for the manner in which it redefined the relationship between American property rights and public nuisance. To summarize the case, the defendant, Spur Industries, was sued by Del Webb for the presence of his feedlot being a “public nuisance” to Sun City residents. His feedlot was present for years in the location before Sun City was built. That said, Del Webb sued for an injunction on the basis that the feedlot violated the rights of Sun City residents due to the

⁹² Jim Fisher, “What happened to my neighborhood? Retailers must adapt to their continuously evolving markets,” *National Petroleum News*, 96, no. 6, June 2004, 58.
<https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/what-happened-my-neighborhood/docview/223287220/se-2?accountid=14522>.

⁹³ Trolander, *From Sun Cities*, 76.

⁹⁴ Lancaster, “Out to Pasture.”

⁹⁵ Rusty Bradshaw, “Sun City age overlay challenged again,” *Sun City West Independent*, October 26, 2022.
<https://www.yourvalley.net/sun-city-west-independent/stories/sun-city-age-overlay-challenged-again.337675>.

odors that the feedlot created in the community and the flies that were attracted to the community due to the feedlot being adjacent to it.⁹⁶ Del Webb sued on the basis that these nuisances constituted harm to both the residents of his community and to his own business.⁹⁷ In the end, the court ruled in favor of Del Webb, as his injunction was granted and Spur was required to close down or to relocate (but this injunction was required to be paid by Del Webb).⁹⁸ In the context of suburban history, Spur's opposition in this landmark Supreme Court case was representative of the "losers" of suburban sprawl. Given that Spur's feedlot was present in the area before the Sun City community encroached, the fact that Spur's lot was enjoined is significant. Suburban developers like Del Webb were able to weaponize litigation pertaining to nuisance in order to change the respective land uses of the suburbs that they created and to displace the agricultural interests of those who resided or worked in the regions before the suburbs came to fruition. This ultimately allowed suburban developers to continue to acquire and develop land further away from city centers and further into the hinterlands. Thus, Spur's opposition to Del Webb's lawsuit against his feedlot is illustrative of the people who presided over the hinterlands before mass suburbanization and thus were displaced or adversely affected by mass suburbanization across the country.

Lastly, Del Webb's Sun Cities were also opposed by land conservationists who sought to protect federal lands from urban sprawl. Because suburbanization depends on developing lands further into the hinterlands, it was inevitable that developers would eventually find issues in trying to acquire agricultural lands that happened to be under the control of the Federal Bureau of Land Management. In the context of Del Webb, this was particularly significant to his ventures

⁹⁶ Osborne M. Reynolds Jr., "Of Time and Feedlots: The Effect of *Spur Industries* On Nuisance Law," *Washington University Journal of Urban and Contemporary Law*, 41, January 1992, 75.

⁹⁷ Reynolds Jr., "Of Time and Feedlots," 78.

⁹⁸ Reynolds Jr., "Of Time and Feedlots," 90.

in Nevada. Del Webb's developments on the fringes of Clark County, including Sun City, have been up for scrutiny since many of them have relied on land deals in which Del Webb paid what many deem to be a lower than market value price for land owned by the BLM.⁹⁹ The opposition to Webb's land deals is best described as "controversial land swaps" where Del Webb's lobbying tactics intentionally resulted in deflated appraisals that allowed his company to purchase developable land for much less than its true value.¹⁰⁰ Thus, just like the opposition for agricultural interests and from youth, land conservationists (and to some extent, general taxpayers) found themselves aligned against Del Webb's company due to the company's practices associated with suburban development. By using lobbying in a similar way as the company used nuisance litigation, therefore, Del Webb was able to overcome financial and physical barriers to suburbanization while simultaneously gaining opponents in the process.

Therefore, studying Del Webb's Sun Cities and their opposition can provide valuable insights pertaining to the history of American retirement communities and the broader political economy in the postwar era. By studying the Sun Cities, their situation within metropolitan areas, and the opposition that arose against them, one can gain a deeper understanding of how developments like the Sun Cities fit into American twentieth-century urban, economic, and cultural history.

⁹⁹ Geoff Schumacher, *Sun, Sin, & Suburbia: The History of Modern Las Vegas revised and expanded* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2015), 142-144, 212-213, & 230-231.

¹⁰⁰ Schumacher, *Sun, Sin, & Suburbia*, 230.

Chapter III:

Leisure in “Paradise?” Sin City and Beyond

Until the middle of the twentieth century, Las Vegas was mostly unknown to the general American population. Without the popularization of air conditioning coupled with a dry desert climate and a comparatively low population, the city had few attractions and was relatively unknown. However, that all changed after a 1931 Nevada law that re-legalized gambling.¹⁰¹ This law would ultimately make Nevada into the gambling haven that it is known as today, all the while making Las Vegas a destination for tourists from all over the world.

The development of the Las Vegas Strip is unique and has been the study of major historical scholarship for decades. The uniqueness and intensity of its development can not be overstated. Historians Sally Denton and Roger Morris describe this well in saying “Beginning as a remote oasis of legal vice, a criminal city-state grew as a colony, then clearinghouse, then international center of a pervasive and swelling American corruption.”¹⁰² The Las Vegas Strip was the center of this “colony.” What was once a small desert settlement ultimately became one of the most well-known American thoroughfares: with casinos dotting both sides of the street and the introduction of the popular phrase “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas.”

¹⁰¹ Sally Denton and Roger Morris, *The Money and The Power: The Making of Las Vegas and Its Hold on America, 1947-2000* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 96-97.

¹⁰² Denton and Morris, *The Money and The Power*, 11.

Developing a Gambler's Paradise

Del Webb was a crucial figure to the development of the Las Vegas Strip. He owned and/or developed four of the most significant midcentury Las Vegas Strip casinos. These include the Flamingo, the Sahara, the Mint, and the Thunderbird. In his decades of Las Vegas development, he networked in a manner that ultimately supported his financial success in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Del Webb's presence in Las Vegas began just a few years after gambling was re-legalized in Nevada. However, his first development in the city was not a casino but rather a small local Union Oil gas station.¹⁰³ The gas station served those driving to and from California during the Depression era.¹⁰⁴ Despite its relative insignificance to the built environment, the gas station would prove to be the first of many developments of one of Las Vegas' most influential power brokers.

The Las Vegas Strip started to gain traction for real estate development in the early 1940s. Del Webb was quick to follow suit. With the development of the Flamingo Hotel in 1946, Del Webb secured his position as one of the leading real estate magnates that would dominate Strip development for the next several decades. Furthermore, the Flamingo's development helped Webb foster a network of connections that he would continue to do business with in the coming decades. Some of these connections included the Valley National Bank (a Phoenix-based bank that served as one of Del Webb's most important financiers for many of his developments across Arizona, Nevada, and beyond), Bugsy Siegel who is one of America's most notorious

¹⁰³ "Sun City builder in LV since 1935," July 6, 1991, MS-00986, box 2, folder 6, UNLV Libraries Collection of Sahara Resort Press Releases and Reports, 1965-2002, Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

¹⁰⁴ Finnerty, *Del Webb*, 111.

Mob members, and J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the FBI at the time.¹⁰⁵ The Valley National Bank loaned the project approximately one million in its development stages.¹⁰⁶ The Flamingo's success was critical for Del Webb to present himself as a reputable candidate for VNB financing in his later developments (including for the Sun Cities). J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI director, actually (and ironically) played a role in advising Del Webb to invest in Vegas, despite his acknowledgment that there was a criminal element in the region.¹⁰⁷ Bugsy Siegel, who was the owner of the Flamingo project, was an infamous Mobster who had deep ties to crime, corruption, and violence.¹⁰⁸ Despite Siegel's reputation as such, to Del Webb "a job was a job" and there was no reason to worry regarding having a Mobster boss.¹⁰⁹ This sentiment seems to have been common throughout Del Webb's career as it appears that he was willing to work with Mobsters whenever it meant that he would have a stake in the profits.¹¹⁰ That said, this topic deserves a significant amount of additional research and attention from investigative journalists and historians of corruption. Del Webb's first casino in Las Vegas set the stage for his real estate development career on the Strip: one full of profit, mystery, and supposed corruption.

Del Webb's next large casino venture was the Hotel Sahara, which opened in 1952. In conjunction with its "Sahara" name, the casino included several names for its "rooms" and locations that are Orientalist in nature, including the famous "Congo Room."¹¹¹ This theme will be addressed in further detail in the next section. As with the Flamingo, the Sahara was also very

¹⁰⁵ Denton and Morris, *The Money and the Power*, 55.

¹⁰⁶ Denton and Morris, *The Money and the Power*, 55-56.

¹⁰⁷ Finnerty, *Del Webb*, 113.

¹⁰⁸ Denton and Morris, *The Money and the Power*, 49-58.

¹⁰⁹ Finnerty, *Del Webb*, 113.

¹¹⁰ "Del Webb's Other Side: Hidden Ties to Mobsters," *Newsday*, March 19, 1977, 4-5.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/arizona-story-del-webbs-hidden-deals/docview/927147782/se-2?accountid=14522>.

¹¹¹ "Hotel Sahara Opens in Las Vegas 'Strip,'" *Los Angeles Times*, October 8, 1952, 24.

<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/hotel-sahara-opens-las-vegas-strip/docview/166443478/se-2?accountid=14522>.

successful in its initial years. The project was so successful, in fact, that, in 1961, Del Webb's investment advisor suggested that his company acquire the hotel via acquiring the Sahara-Nevada Corporation.¹¹² This decision demarcated Del Webb's transition from being solely a developer/construction magnate to a real estate manager and investor as well.¹¹³ Through this acquisition, Del Webb became the owner of the Mint Club as well, which was under Sahara-Nevada Corporation ownership at the time of his acquisition.¹¹⁴ In 1961, Del Webb was able to circumvent the regulation that attempted to make it illegal for publicly owned companies to own casinos by merging with the Sahara-Nevada Corporation. Del Webb's firm created an operating company for this which 'leased' the Sahara from Del Webb, "operating the casino in exchange for rent, which happened to match the gaming revenue." Other than this, as urban planner student Stefan Johannes Al points out, "Besides this unique case, Teamster money, rather than corporate capital, would become the only source of capital available on the Strip."¹¹⁵ Del Webb's ability to overcome federal legislation in this manner was thus historically unique and may necessitate future discussion.

Finally, in 1964, Sahara-Nevada purchased the Thunderbird Hotel, bringing four Vegas casinos into Del Webb's ownership.¹¹⁶ These four casinos played a major role in Del Webb's financial success and proved pivotal in providing guidance for the company to follow in other burgeoning casinos and gaming markets in Reno, Atlantic City, and abroad.

Despite "Sin City" being the heart of his casino and hotel real estate ventures, Del Webb found success in other hotel and gaming markets across the country, and to some extent, around the world. Because of their importance to the development of American capitalism and the

¹¹² Finnerty, *Del Webb*, 116.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Finnerty, *Del Webb*, 117.

¹¹⁵ Stefan Johannes Al, "The Strip: Las Vegas and the Symbolic Destruction of Spectacle" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2010), 74-75.

¹¹⁶ Finnerty, *Del Webb*, 121.

global built environment of the twenty-first century, studying hotels is highly relevant to scholarly historical and geographical discussions.¹¹⁷ To begin, he applied his knowledge from developing in Las Vegas to later expanding casino markets in the United States such as Reno/Lake Tahoe and Atlantic City.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, he developed hotels across the Southwest, in Hawaii, and in East Asia. The Hawaii and East Asian developments are particularly notable on the basis of their advertising which arguably catered to white tourists and the imperialist context in which they are situated.

Del Webb invested in multiple hotels/casinos in the American gaming destinations that sought to replicate the success of Las Vegas. Two of these destinations are the Reno/Lake Tahoe area in Northern California/Nevada and the Atlantic City area in New Jersey. Both of these spatial areas took a similar approach to that taken by the power brokers of Las Vegas. Likewise, Del Webb followed a similar development strategy in these markets as he did in Las Vegas. In the Lake Tahoe/Reno area, he developed four casinos that, along with his Las Vegas ventures, were “the jewels in the crown” of his casino empire.¹¹⁹ In New Jersey, Del Webb bought a fifty-year-old hotel and expanded it to include a casino after gambling was legalized in Atlantic City following a 1976 New Jersey voter referendum.¹²⁰ However, unlike his success in both Nevada markets, Del Webb found much more difficulty in New Jersey.¹²¹ This arguably represented Del Webb’s empire in general: He tended to reap the most success with the least amount of difficulty in his home base, the American Southwest.

Similar to his strategies for incorporating the gaming industry in his real estate ventures, Del Webb also aimed to take advantage of the role that real estate played in the tourist industry.

¹¹⁷ A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, *Hotel: An American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 1-9.

¹¹⁸ Finnerty, *Del Webb*, 125-131.

¹¹⁹ Finnerty, *Del Webb*, 125.

¹²⁰ “Casino Gambling Ok’d,” *The Daily Register*, 99, no. 99, November 3, 1976, 1.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20130922055120/http://209.212.22.88/DATA/RBR/1970-1979/1976/1976.11.03.pdf>

¹²¹ Finnerty, *Del Webb*, 126-130.

Similar to how the casino markets that Del Webb succeeded in (particularly those in Nevada) were mainly known as tourist hubs, Webb also developed and managed properties in tourist areas that were known for amenities that were not gaming-oriented. Hawaii is arguably the tourist destination that Del Webb developed that is most illustrative of this.

Del Webb's resort venture in Hawaii is particularly important when it is situated in the broader literary discussion about the relationship between American tourism and American constructions of race. Del Webb's Kuilima Resort Hotel and Country Club opened in 1972 on the northern side of Oahu, forty-five minutes away from Honolulu.¹²² Advertisements for the hotel took on a variety of approaches. To start off, some of the company's advertisements promoted the notion that the resort symbolized "Old Hawaii," removed from the constraints of urbanization that the American tourist industry caused in nearby Honolulu. In this regard, it is interesting to note that it was real estate developers like Del Webb who were mainly responsible for the ongoing urbanization of Hawaii, so it is equally interesting that Del Webb antagonized this type of urbanization in his Hawaii advertisements. Furthermore, other advertisements for Kuilima appealed to racial sentiments. In scholarly discussions about race and Hawaiian tourism, it is noted that the Hawaiian tourism industry exploited the construct of race as a means to promote itself. Sarah Miller-Davenport, a global historian, explains this phenomenon well when suggesting that "As Hawaii sought to distinguish itself from other vacation-lands, it spun a dual narrative of racial difference and racial mixing to help sell the islands as a unique destination where Americans could purchase a transformative leisure experience. This was part of a larger discourse around Hawaii's special role as a multi-ethnic offshore state of the US. But it also took

¹²² "It's just a 45 minute drive from Honolulu. But it's like being on an Outer Island," *New York Magazine*, 5, no. 12, March 20, 1972, 84.

on a life and logic of its own as race was deployed in the service of large-scale financial gain.”¹²³ Del Webb’s Kuilima advertising can be seen as especially representative of both this dual narrative and the desired financial gain that the tourist industry sought to achieve by appealing to it. In Figure 3-1, it is notable that Del Webb sought to demonstrate the supposed positive influence that his resort would have on the local Kahuku residents.¹²⁴ This is particularly well-represented when the advertisement states “Many of the residents of Kahuku hope that Del Webb’s Kuilima will be only the beginning. They wish to continue their growth as an active and culturally rich community.” It is interesting that this advertisement arguably speaks for the Kahuku residents, without giving any evidence as to whether the company consulted with these residents during the development process. Although advertisements such as the one seen in Figure 3-1 allude to the idea that Hawaii could serve as a bastion in which white American tourist money could benefit locals of different races, many critics of Hawaiian tourism argue that the Hawaiian tourist industry makes it impossible for true racial equality in the state.¹²⁵ Despite advertisements like Del Webb’s appealing to a liberal racial sentiment in which white Americans were drawn to the “inclusive” image of Hawaii, it is clear that the tourist industry there was not as promising to local and indigenous residents as the advertisements made it appear. Therefore, when analyzing Del Webb’s Kuilima resort in Hawaii in terms of its development and its promotion, it is important to contextualize how the broader Hawaiian tourist industry adversely impacted Hawaii’s indigenous populations, even if advertisements like the one referenced above tried to conceal this notion.

¹²³ Sarah Miller-Davenport, “A ‘Montage of Minorities’: Hawai’i Tourism and the Commodification of Racial Tolerance, 1959-1978,” *The Historical Journal*, 60, no. 3 (2017): 818.

¹²⁴ “Del Webb Hotels Resorter,” 1971, MS-00986, box 2, folder 7, UNLV Libraries Collection of Sahara Resort Press Releases and Reports, 1965-2002, Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada (hereafter cited as, “Del Webb Hotels Resorter,” UNLV Libraries Collection of Sahara Resort Press Releases and Reports, 1965-2002).

¹²⁵ Miller-Davenport, “A ‘Montage of Minorities,’” 840-841.



Figure 3-1: Del Webb's Kuilima Advertisement. From "Del Webb Hotels Resorter," UNLV Libraries Collection of Sahara Resort Press Releases and Reports, 1965-2002.

Hawaii also played a pivotal role in the relationship between the United States and Asia during the Cold War era. A 1959 *Newsweek* article highlights this clearly when suggesting "In Asian eyes, the U.S. is the land of the white man, and all too frequently it is tarred with the brush of 'colonialism.' Hawaii the 50th state could change all this..."¹²⁶ Clearly, as journalists in the 1950s and 1960s repeatedly cited, Hawaii's majority-Asian population had the potential to transform Asian perceptions of the United States, and vice versa. This potential is encapsulated in historian Christina Klein's chapter "Asians in America: Flower Drum Song and Hawaii" in her monograph *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*. Klein states

¹²⁶ "Enchanting 'State,' *Newsweek*, 53, no. 8, February 23, 1959, 29.

that Hawaii “facilitated the postwar flow of American civilians into the East, serving as a jumping-off point for tourists traveling to Asia and the Pacific” and that its statehood and rising American tourist industry had a profound impact on the United States’ Cold War relationship with East Asia.¹²⁷ Because of Hawaii’s position as a ground that could positively influence the United States’ and East Asia’s historical relationship and because of Hawaii’s ability to “facilitate the postwar flow of American civilians into the East,” it is particularly interesting to note that Del Webb developed a hotel empire in East and Southeast Asia in conjunction with his Kuilima development in Hawaii.

Del Webb’s Asian hotel empire was known as the Merlin Hotel chain. The company developed and managed at least four hotels in the “Far East” in the 1960s and 1970s, making it the third-largest international hotel chain in the region at the time. These locations included a hotel in each of the following cities: Penang, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore.¹²⁸ Advertising for these hotels was arguably targeted toward white Americans in a similar fashion as the Kuilima development was. Advertisements for these hotels touched on the locations’ “exotic foods,” “modern” landscapes, and “uncrowded” terrains: crafting the East Asian environment into one that was aesthetically pleasing to white American tastes.¹²⁹ Since American tourism in East and Southeast Asia during this period (as it was in Hawaii) was critical to the shift in American-Asian Cold War relations, it is necessary to consider how real estate developers and tourist moguls like Del Webb contributed to this phenomenon both through real estate development and advertising for such advertisements. More historical literature on the subject of American real estate development and tourism in both Hawaii and East and Southeast

¹²⁷ Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 2003), 244.

¹²⁸ “Del Webb Hotels Resorter,” UNLV Libraries Collection of Sahara Resort Press Releases and Reports, 1965-2002.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

Asia could be important in further developing scholarly understandings of the international political economy during the Cold War era. This literature could also benefit understanding of shifts in American cultural history during this period to accommodate the rapidly globalizing world of consumption and tourism. Therefore, studying Del Webb's gambling and tourist ventures both on the Las Vegas Strip and beyond during the postwar period offers a unique lens into studying the domestic and international political economy during this period. This study also provides insights into shifts in consumption and leisure history that occurred during this same period.

Place Making & Whiteness: Orientalism and Building a White Vegas

Las Vegas did not become the unique gambling tourist destination that it is today without a network of connections similar to Del Webb's networking "webb." Most notably, Las Vegas' connection to Hollywood was critical to its success. Johannes Al describes this important connection in lengthy detail in his 2010 dissertation. Johannes Al explains that:

The alliance between the resort industry and the movie industry would only continue to grow, especially since the nexus of the movie industry, Hollywood, laid only a few hours' drive away. In William Fox's view, the success of Las Vegas lied in this alliance, since casinos 'relied on a growing synergy with Hollywood, using by association the glamour of the movie industry to make the exoticism of Las Vegas - some of it faux, some genuine - attractive to the national audience of a mass medium. In addition, as long as Las Vegas modeled itself after movie imagery and stereotypes, it would become an interesting backdrop and subject for the camera, and it would be disseminated to a global audience. The link between Hollywood and Las Vegas would allow images of the Strip to be projected globally. In order for Las Vegas to extend its image, all it needed to do was build on America's fascination with Hollywood and nourish its special qualities.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Johannes Al, "The Strip," 41.

As is evident from Johannes Al's dissertation, Hollywood and its film industry was crucial to the development and marketing of Las Vegas. This relationship cannot be overstated.

When analyzing Las Vegas through the lens of Orientalism, it is important to keep in mind the city's historical association with Hollywood. In the postwar era, Hollywood was critical to the development of a new version of Orientalism that pervaded American culture and was important to American constructions of the "East" amidst the United States' strategy for international relations during the Cold War era. American Studies Professor Salim Kerboua illustrates this Hollywood-driven re-construction of Orientalism by saying:

Whereas nineteenth century European scholars and artists were the originators of early Orientalism, American Orientalism was not the exclusive creation of intellectual and academic textual production. Another medium contributed to the production and propagation of representations of the Orient in the United States public scene, namely, American cultural and entertainment media and, at its lead, the Hollywood industry of the post-second World War period. This new medium not only provided the American public with a new image of the Orient, but it also constructed and projected a peculiar image of the United States and its new responsibilities on the world stage.¹³¹

Like Hollywood, Las Vegas thrived off stereotypical caricatures of "Eastern" cultures and environments. Despite limited literature on the subject, some cultural studies scholars have begun to study how Orientalism is engrained in the Strip's architectural environment, referring to this style of Orientalism as "postmodern Orientalism."¹³² This postmodern Orientalism is a vessel for developers to commodify the spaces in which they design.¹³³ In the context of Las Vegas, this has resulted largely in a tourist-built environment that depends on depicting other populations and their environments in a stereotypical and Westernized manner.

¹³¹ Salim Kerboua, "From Orientalism to neo-Orientalism: Early and contemporary constructions of Islam and the Muslim world," *Intellectual Discourse*, 24, no. 1 (2016): 19.

¹³² Jeffrey Cass, "Egypt on Steroids: Luxor Las Vegas and Postmodern Orientalism," in *Architecture and Tourism: Perception, Performance, and Place*, ed. D. Medina Lasansky and Brian McLaren (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 241-261.

¹³³ Cass, "Egypt on Steroids," 246.

Del Webb was no stranger to this process. He and his company arguably exploited postmodern Orientalism through both the architecture of their developments and their advertisements for those developments. Del Webb's Sahara exemplifies American-style Orientalist architecture. The Sahara's architecture has been referred to as "the road to Morocco" and contains several rooms and shops that have Orientalists names and architectural elements.¹³⁴ Within a year of acquiring the Sahara, Del Webb proposed a new architectural plan that would add an "elaborate Caravan Room coffee shop" and "a regal House of Lords steak house" along with a 24-story addition to allow for more hotel guests.¹³⁵ These Orientalist architectural tropes fed into tourists' imagined understanding of what the built environment and cultures of the North African region were like, despite being highly stereotyped. Likewise, many of the advertisements for the Sahara drew upon Orientalist caricatures that are worthy of consideration. For example, one advertisement for the "Sahara Safari" (the Sahara hotel) included references to "The Congo Room" and "The Casbar Theatre" with advertising for "exotic drinks" and "a South Seas paradise."¹³⁶ Additionally, another advertisement suggests that the Sahara will bring tourists into a "land of Fable" that is an "enchanted Mecca."¹³⁷ A third advertisement even states that a restaurant in the Sahara would even "tempt a Sultan's appetite" and a trip to the Sahara would allow visitors the chance to experience a "famed bazaar."¹³⁸ Lastly, a fourth advertisement

¹³⁴ "Sahara taking road to Morocco," October 10, 1995, MS-00986, box 4, folder 9, UNLV Libraries Collection of Sahara Resort Press Releases and Reports, 1965-2002, Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

¹³⁵ "A 24-Story Addition, And An Even Brighter Future For Webb Company's Hotel Sahara," *The Webb Spinner*, 16, no. 12, December 1962, 9.

¹³⁶ "Sahara Safari," MS-00811, box 1, folder 1, Brad Burch Collection on Las Vegas Gaming Hotel Advertising Ephemera, 1970s-1980s, Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

¹³⁷ "Stay where the Stars Play, Play where the Stars Stay," MS-00986, box 4, folder 3, UNLV Libraries Collection of Sahara Resort Press Releases and Reports, 1965-2002, Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

¹³⁸ "Sahara: Resort Hotel of Enchantment," MS-00986, box 4, folder 3, UNLV Libraries Collection of Sahara Resort Press Releases and Reports, 1965-2002, Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

suggested that the Sahara is “a Moroccan-themed paradise featuring...exotic decor” with an emphasis on “Moroccan motif[s].”¹³⁹ Despite being the “Sahara,” these advertisements touched on a variety of “exotic” geographical locations outside of North Africa including the Congo (in Central Africa) and the South Seas (in Oceania), effectively lumping much of the “East” together into one tourist experience. This geographical mixing was used in conjunction with phrases like “Sultan” and “Mecca” to attempt to represent the Arab World. In doing this, these ads conflated different geographical regions with falsified representations of North Africa and Southwest Asia, resulting in a blatantly Orientalist experience. Therefore, through the Orientalist tropes that the Sahara used in both its architecture and its advertising, Del Webb was able to exploit the trend of postmodern Orientalism that took over the consumerist fantasy that defined postwar Las Vegas.

Thus, contextualizing Las Vegas’ relationship with Hollywood, postwar consumerism, and the associated trend of “postmodern Orientalism” that characterized these relationships permits a greater understanding of how Del Webb exploited trends in American consumer culture in order to reap a profit, even if that meant subjugating groups of people and their environments to stereotypical travesties.

Connecting Sun City & Sin City: Diversification Despite a Lack of Diversity

As briefly touched on in the previous chapter, Sun Cities and Sin City were directly linked. In 1965, as mentioned beforehand, there was a downturn in the residential real estate market that significantly decreased the profitability of the Sun Cities. Because of this, Del Webb

¹³⁹ “Excitement is Building: Fact Sheet,” MS-00986, box 4, folder 3, UNLV Libraries Collection of Sahara Resort Press Releases and Reports, 1965-2002, Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

specifically looked to Las Vegas as a means of diversifying his portfolio. This served as a turning point for Del Webb as this pivot significantly increased the importance of Las Vegas to Del Webb's business structure.¹⁴⁰ Conversely, Del Webb's profits in Las Vegas were dependent on the Sun Cities when the casino real estate bubble experienced some difficulties.¹⁴¹ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the casino market faltered due to increased competition and changing tourist behavior. Because of this, according to a Legg Mason document,

Webb's three casino/hotels in the weak Nevada market show few signs of improvement. Profits in 1983 could be slightly higher than the \$8.5 million estimated profit in 1982. Webb has sold two of its major casino/hotels in Nevada, the Sahara-Vegas and the Sahara-Reno, hence marketing efforts can be concentrated on the three remaining casino/hotels which have special niches in the Nevada market.¹⁴²

Meanwhile, according to the same document, Del Webb was experiencing record gains from his residential real estate in the Sun Cities. The document stated that,

The recent increase in the housing business throughout the country is beginning to have a substantial impact on Sun City's house sales. A year ago, Webb was selling one house every day, sales are now running at two a day and increasing. The marketing at Sun City has been improved with new models better suited for the present market. Over the last 18 months, Devco-Sun City debt was reduced from \$70 million to zero, excess models were sold and a factory owned by Devco was leased for \$400,000 a year.¹⁴³

As shown in juxtaposing the asset management firm's conclusions about Del Webb's financial success in the early 1980s in both Las Vegas and in the Sun Cities, it is abundantly clear that Del Webb depended on the increase in residential real estate business in his Sun Cities in order to

¹⁴⁰ "What Del Webb Is Up to In Nevada," 1965, MS-00986, box 2, folder 6, UNLV Libraries Collection of Sahara Resort Press Releases and Reports, 1965-2002, Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

¹⁴¹ "Del Webb: In the black and maybe the pink," by Howard J. Klein, April 1983, MS-00986, box 2, folder 5, UNLV Libraries Collection of Sahara Resort Press Releases and Reports, 1965-2002, Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

¹⁴² "Legg Mason," 1982, MS-00986, box 2, folder 1, UNLV Libraries Collection of Sahara Resort Press Releases and Reports, 1965-2002, Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

make up for the relatively low profits that he was making in his Nevada casinos. Given that this relationship was bidirectional as demonstrated by the juxtaposition of how Del Webb's diversified portfolio overcame the 1965 residential real estate bust and the 1980s casino real estate bust, this financial analysis serves as a means to directly connect the Sun Cities and Las Vegas.

Del Webb's developments in both the Sun Cities and Sin City are also linked in other ways. Both the Sun Cities and Sin City can be situated into the broader American postwar political economy which was more focused on leisure and consumption than the prewar economy was. The Sun Cities popularized a new type of community: one that is centered around leisure and "active adulthood" for retirees. These communities represent a new postwar built environment that is oriented more towards leisure and consumption rather than work and production. Likewise, the developments that Del Webb constructed and/or managed on the Las Vegas strip are representative of a postwar city that is oriented around consumption (especially gambling) rather than general labor.¹⁴⁴ Del Webb's Sahara casino is particularly illustrative of this as its postmodern Orientalist elements in its architectural features and its advertising both symbolize the new American postwar political economy and consumption culture that depended on privileging white Americans over other groups of people and their communities. Overall, both the Sun Cities and Sin City are therefore compelling examples of what historian Lizabeth Cohen calls the postwar "consumers republic." This term describes the postwar American culture and political economy that was dependent on unprecedented levels of consumption and leisure.¹⁴⁵

Thus, it is possible to connect Del Webb's Sun Cities and his Las Vegas Strip developments both by directly studying his company's financial statistics and by comparing the

¹⁴⁴ That is not to say that Las Vegas is not dependent on its laborers, but rather that it was and is still advertised and developed as a tourist-oriented and consumer-oriented city.

¹⁴⁵ Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 10-14.

two through the lens of the shifting American political economy. Studying how seemingly unrelated real estate developments, like the Sun Cities and Las Vegas, are in fact related can help scholars understand larger trends and patterns in real estate history. This type of historical analysis should be encouraged as more literature revolving around real estate history is published and discussed within scholarly circles.

Epilogue

Del Webb's influence on the postwar American landscape of consumption can thus not be overlooked. His Sun City and Sin City developments, as well as his other developments all over the globe, are revealing of the class, race, and age dynamics that were fostered by the landscape of consumption as well as the role the landscape of consumption had in shaping these dynamics in the postwar period. By studying Del Webb's developments in conjunction with one another as opposed to in isolation, it is possible to understand the relationship between the landscape of mass consumption with the social and cultural dynamics that defined the American urban landscape in the latter half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, studying these developments can offer hints as to how real estate development may have influenced American politics in this time period.

In her study of the postwar American Southwest, Judith Nies briefly touches on the political shift that the region endured in the decades following World War II. In regard to Arizona, Nies states that "In 1952 Arizona was still a Democratic state. The hundreds of thousands of midwesterners who poured into the massive retirement communities that Del Webb would build were still a phenomenon of the future. Where could Goldwater's winning votes come from?"¹⁴⁶ By specifically suggesting that Del Webb's retirement communities drew in thousands of midwesterners who ultimately were responsible for the conservative shift of Arizona's politics, Nies makes a key point that Del Webb's retirement communities were integral to the politics of the state. Given that Del Webb's Sun Cities dotted the entire Sun Belt as the latter half of the twentieth century went on, future research should focus on the extent to which

¹⁴⁶ Judith Nies, *Unreal City: Las Vegas, Black Mesa, and the Fate of the West* (New York: Nation Books, 2014), 21.

these Sun Cities (and retirement communities in general) were critical to the success of the GOP in the last couple of decades.

Although the nationwide shift towards conservatism in the late twentieth century is conventionally credited by historians as a product of the growth of the Sunbelt, this analysis is not as nuanced as it could be. In her study of the “urban crisis” and the conservative counterrevolution within large cities in the 1970s and 1980s, historian Alice O’Connor suggests that,

I aim to underscore the importance - in a movement usually associated with ‘suburban warriors,’ white working-class ‘backlash,’ and Sun Belt wealth - of an elite mobilization spawned in the heart of the Eastern Seaboard and Rust Belt cities traditionally associated with urban liberalism, a mobilization that, while unlikely to convert those cities from blue to red, seeks to use them as springboards for political influence on the national stage.¹⁴⁷

Because the Sun Cities mainly relied on the migration of white residents from the Midwest and Northeast, a future avenue of research that would be interesting to pursue would be to connect the politics of Sun Cities’ residents to O’Connor’s argument about the use of liberal cities as “springboards” for furthering the conservative agenda. Analyzing how, if at all, residents of the Sun Cities who hailed from liberal metropolitan areas used their former places of residence to inform their political beliefs would be insightful for political scientists and Sun Belt historians alike.

Therefore, it is imperative that real estate historians study real estate developments in conjunction with another instead of in isolation. As this study of Del Webb’s developments demonstrates, analyzing real estate developments in relation to one another can offer key insights that can advance current understanding of urban and suburban historical patterns.

¹⁴⁷ Alice O’Connor, “The Privatized City: The Manhattan Institute, the Urban Crisis, and the Conservative Counterrevolution in New York,” *Journal of urban history*, 34, no. 2 (2008): 336.

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