

# Urban removal: The long-term impacts of the displacement of Denver's Auraria neighborhood

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## Abstract

In the early 1970s, the Auraria Center for Higher Education was developed, displacing a well-established Denver Latino neighborhood, which encompassed a 38-block district at the time, including 155 families, 49 single individuals, and 237 businesses. The implementation of remedial measures for the displacement has fallen short of meeting the needs of displaced residents. The residents were promised affordable education through a program named the Displaced Aurarian Scholarship, which has similarly stated intentions of improving the educational attainment of the displaced individuals and their descendants.

In 2022, the Colorado History Museum, as part of its Museum of Memory project, conducted 13 interviews with 21 different displaced individuals. This paper seeks to understand the long-term effects of gentrification upon the displaced Aurarians, centering on their social impact, economic impact, and the generational impact on the descendants. This study utilizes the Displaced Aurarian Memory Project and a theoretical framework, "linked fate," to contextualize past literature that examines the shortcomings of the remedial measures implemented by Denver authorities. The findings suggest that any remedial measures that provided long-term benefits to the residents occurred despite the actions of the City of Denver and the Auraria Center for Higher Education. These remedial measures required the tedious labor of West Denver activists to develop and implement, with and without cooperation from the institutions involved.

**Keywords:** Displacement, Urban Renewal, Discrimination, Activism, Higher Education, Denver, linked fate

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the early 1970s, the residents of the Auraria neighborhood in Denver (then commonly referred to as West Denver) were displaced when the City of Denver established the Auraria Higher Education Center. Their homes were cleared to make way for the Metropolitan State University of Denver, the University of Colorado Denver, and the Denver Community College campus. The 38-block district at the time of displacement included 155 families, 49 single individuals, and 237 businesses<sup>1</sup>. Although some residents received compensation for their homes, the implementation of remedial measures has been repeatedly described as falling short of the actual needs of displaced individuals. Information regarding compensation, preservation of cultural sites, scholarship, and any other remedial promises continues to be difficult for the public to access. Displaced residents were similarly promised affordable education through the Displaced Aurarian Scholarship. This measure was initially limited to children and the grand-

children of residents but has since expanded to include direct descendants of someone who lived in the allotted area.

In 2022, the Colorado History Museum partnered with activists from the displaced community to conduct detailed oral histories with residents nearly 50 years after the displacement. This paper seeks to understand the long-term effects of displacement upon the displaced Aurarians, centering on the social, economic, and generational impact on the descendants of those displaced. To fully understand the shortcomings of the remedial measures, it is necessary to consider the context of the Auraria Memory Project, the activists involved, and their connections to the resource networks created during the gentrification in Denver from the early 1950s to the 1970s. Past research touches upon the shortcomings of the remedial measures on paper, understanding how they impacted the city of Denver. This paper extends that work, seeking to analyze the direct impacts of these remedial measures through first-person accounts of the individuals involved, and seeking to

understand their changing political consciousness in the context of gentrification.

This paper applies the concept of linked fate, a term originally coined by Michael Dawson to understand the political behavior of Black Americans<sup>2</sup>, to examine the experiences of displaced Aurarians. Linked fate is the phenomenon where one individual sees their fate as tied to the fate of others who belong to the same group. Any sense of linked fate that interviewees expressed is potentially tied to their shared experiences of displacement, economic hardship, and shared cultural, ethnic, or racial identity. These elements of linked fate could potentially explain why some residents felt strongly connected to the fate of other displaced Aurarians, while others did not feel a strong sense of community within the Auraria neighborhood. Similarly, connection to the networks that formed linked fate attachments meant connections to resources to help navigate the displacement. Residents who were not connected to these resources experienced the remedial measures of the city and the educational institutions differently. The findings suggest that any remedial measures that provided long-term benefits to the residents happened despite the actions of the City of Denver and the Auraria Center for Higher Education, and not because of them. Instead, these remedial measures required the tedious labor of West Denver activists to develop and implement, with and without cooperation from the City of Denver and the academic institutions involved.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 The History of the Auraria Campus

The land underneath the Auraria campus has a complex history of development. The early Colorado neighborhoods, including Denver City and Auraria City, were located between the South Platte River and Cherry Creek, where Colorado was first settled<sup>3</sup>. They were established during the Gold Rush in Colorado, when Denver functioned as a hub for mining, cattle, and other related industries. Auraria City was known for frequent flooding because of its geography. The area is placed between several important features. To the South is Colfax Avenue, while the South Platte River and Cherry Creek form a triangle shape, surrounding the area and priming it to take on excess water<sup>4,5</sup>. This pattern of flooding meant that space was described as undesirable for development<sup>4,5</sup>. Despite these issues, the region offered an opportunity for lower-income, immigrant families to settle near the commercial district in Cherry Creek<sup>3</sup>. Several waves of migration from Mexico and New Mexico formed a cohesive Mexican and Mexican American community in Denver, surrounding local community spaces such as St. Cajetan's and St. Elizabeth's parishes, and a series of local businesses and other community

spaces<sup>3</sup>.

In the context of a national movement towards urban renewal, and decades after this West Denver community formed, the city and state governments established the Denver Urban Renewal Authority (DURA) and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE). Despite an anti-growth sentiment from some residents during the Sixties and Seventies, the Denver metro area underwent an expansive process of suburbanization<sup>3,4,5</sup>. Developer-friendly policies allowed publicly funded highway construction, water projects, and incentives for new development under a broader process of urban renewal, described as capturing misused lands for reuse through eminent domain<sup>5</sup>. DURA and CCHE identified the neighborhood as a prime location for the future Auraria campus due to its proximity to Cherry Creek and the West Denver location, which situated it close to important roads and waterways that had previously condemned the area as undesirable. The flooding in the region was used by CCHE and DURA as a reason to claim eminent domain and redevelop the land<sup>5</sup>. A shift towards urban renewal meant the expansion of infrastructure that placed the Auraria neighborhood in the center of a developing downtown Denver, and no longer on the outskirts of the city.

The campus would encompass the University of Colorado, Denver, Metropolitan State University, and the Community College of Denver, all in one shared space to foster interactions between the institutions<sup>4,5</sup>. Page and Ross<sup>4</sup> found that the project for the development of the Auraria neighborhood maintained heavy support from local government and the downtown business community, despite resistance from the residents of the community. In 1968, the CCHE, while working with DURA, overcame opposition to previous plans for a downtown campus by creating the shared campus project. From 1968 through 1984, DURA acquired property using the principle of eminent domain to condemn and clear buildings for the Auraria campus site. They estimated that two hundred to three hundred families left the neighborhood, drastically impacting the nearly two hundred businesses that were operating at that time<sup>6</sup>. Although it is unclear how many businesses were sustained through the period of gentrification, these changes drastically shifted the physical appearance of the neighborhood, changing the lives of community members.

### 2.2 Displacement as a Catalyst: Chicano Activism in Denver

While the residents of the Auraria neighborhood faced encroaching gentrification during the displacement, Denver was finding its place in the national Chicano activist movement. El Movimiento refers to the Chicano movement that formed in Denver, specifically, largely

coordinated by Corky Gonzales and other Mexican American activists, some of whom had personal relationships with the interviewees featured in this study<sup>7</sup>. Mexican migrants had built communities in Auraria since the early 1920s, establishing extensive mutual aid networks<sup>7</sup>. The Sociedad Mutualista Mexico and El Sociedad Protectora Hispana Americana were two organizations that formed through these mutual aid networks. Later, individuals who participated in these organizations also participated in displaced Aurarian activism. This increase in activism can potentially be explained by an increase in linked fate attachment brought on by the experience of displacement. The level of integration into the community, religious networks, and shared language access impacted how the interviewees experienced the displacement, and any potential linked fate attachments that were formed or strengthened due to the displacement.

Churches also played a role in community support. St. Cajetan's Church, built in 1926, is said by residents to have "served as the center of Chicano life in the area," by providing residents a school, clinic, and credit union<sup>7</sup>. Since research has found that congregations play an important social role in cities (e.g., they build bridges between residents, provide community services and resources, and they inject a moral tone in the community through discourse and advocacy for the marginalized), it is expected that churches play an important role in buffering the side effects of gentrification<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, during gentrification, congregations may have competed for a limited pool of members and exploit the niches introduced because of neighborhood change<sup>8</sup>. In West Denver, St. Cajetan's and St. Elizabeth's parishes became strong spaces in the community. During the period of displacement in Auraria, these churches were a valuable connection point between residents and a source for the dissemination of information. This is especially true of St. Cajetan's, which had a large Mexican American population and played a significant role in maintaining Mexican cultural events in the community.

Auraria residents had only a few months between when they heard of the plan for the downtown campus and the six-million-dollar special bond election that funded it<sup>7</sup>. Residents received leaflets describing the dislocation and dismemberment of the community. Centro Cultural, a Chicano and Jewish coalition, and the Auraria Residents Organization (ARO), headed by Father Pete Garcia from St. Cajetan's Church, provided outlets for residents to navigate the displacement when it became difficult to receive this information after residents began leaving<sup>7</sup>. Centro Cultural was a non-violent and inter-ethnic coalition created as an activist alternative to the more militant Crusade for Justice established by Corky Gonzalez<sup>7</sup>. Centro Cultural was created in part by the work of several interviewees, or their parents,

who were involved in Auraria Activism. The Denver branch of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) helped guide the formulation of the physical spaces that hosted Centro Cultural. Specifically, the AJC helped coordinate town hall meetings and physical spaces for the Auraria residents to receive information about the displacement process and subsequent remedial measures that were in development during the time Centro Cultural was active. The AJC participated in the coalition until 1971, which was when the displacement began. Members of St. Cajetan's Parish maintained important leadership roles in Centro Cultural, coordinating the distribution of information and resources to the residents during the displacement, particularly through the schools connected to St. Cajetan's and their neighbors at St. Elizabeth's (which included the Ave Maria clinic).

Past literature has examined outcomes of the mutual aid frameworks in place during the displacement. Perez<sup>6</sup> looked at Father Garcia and the role of St. Cajetan's Church in forming ARO to advocate for Auraria residents specifically. One of the earliest examples of this included a household survey, which found more individuals eligible for relocation supported a bond issue which attempted to allocate funds for building and aiding the development of low-income housing. In 1970, ARO members advocated for new low-income housing, subsidized home purchases, and measures to rebuild dilapidated homes. In this process, they secured funds for a health clinic, contested zoning laws that would replace existing homes with high rises and commercial buildings, and fought transportation plans that would direct extreme traffic through the neighborhood<sup>6</sup>. This process ultimately changed the cultural makeup of the community living there by pushing out a well-established Latino community. As this community engaged in activism to save their homes, they received some remedial measures from the government and the educational institutions. Linked fate suggests that a sense of a shared future within this community encouraged the development of political consciousness among the displaced residents.

### 2.3 Remedial Promises

The displacement of West Denver occurred in tandem with policy favoring urban renewal and investment in large infrastructure projects such as highways and high-rise buildings. This policy change incited a wave of interest in the preservation of historical structures that were threatened. When the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 was passed, it created a legal structure for activists to pursue the preservation of historical West Denver. A 1967 City of Denver Preservation Ordinance was added after the Skyline Urban Renewal Project tried to raise 26 blocks containing the oldest architecture in Denver<sup>1,4</sup>. This ordinance was overseen by the

Denver Landmark Preservation Commission (DLPC), which created historic districts and designated individual landmarks to be protected, including many sites on the Auraria campus<sup>4</sup>. This legal framework provided the avenue for Auraria residents to preserve some important cultural sites, although not all. The preserved sites include St Cajetan's Church, Emmanuel Chapel, St Elisabeth's Block on Ninth Street, and the famous Tivoli Brewery<sup>4,5</sup>. This measure also preserved historical structures that were not originally located in the Auraria neighborhood but were moved to be displayed on campus as historical exhibitions. One example of this is the Golda Meir house, which was moved from another neighborhood to be displayed on campus near the block the interviewees lived on<sup>1</sup>.

To receive federal funds for infrastructure changes, DURA was obligated to "rehouse in safe, decent, and adequate housing in a manner which [would] not be detrimental to any of the families involved," by Federal regulations and Colorado Urban Renewal law<sup>6</sup>. As part of the remedial measures taken by Auraria authorities, they developed the Displaced Aurarian Scholarship to address the concerns of local activists that the quality of education for the West Denver community was irreparably harmed by the displacement.

#### 2.4 Complications of Promises Made: The Displaced Aurarian Scholarship

The Displaced Aurarian Scholarship initially applied only to the displaced residents but was eventually expanded to include their children and descendants. Although in theory, the scholarship would allow the original 227 displaced residents to pursue a low-cost education at the campus, the reality and efficacy of the scholarship have repeatedly been challenged by the displaced residents and literature on the topic<sup>4,5,6</sup>. Residents were assured, despite not receiving physical documentation, that their children could receive an education on the new campus and that the scholarship would extend for residents between 1955 and 1973 to include individuals displaced by events interrelated to the establishment of the Auraria Center for Higher Education<sup>6</sup>. For example, some residents were forced to leave after severe floods damaged their homes, before they ever received notices from city officials that they would be required to relocate<sup>4,5,6</sup>. In 1994, after rigorous community campaigns, the schools extended scholarships to include the displaced residents' children and grandchildren. If the project were implemented with its stated intentions, it would alleviate the impact of the displacement on the educational attainment of the descendants of displaced Aurarians. This generation grew up disconnected from the academic resources their parents had accessed through the private catholic schooling tied to St. Elisabeth and St. Cajetan's. This measure also sought

to address the promise of an education on the new campus that several interviewees received but was never clearly documented by the city.

Colorado legislature left the implementation of the scholarship to the three schools, meaning that scholarship eligibility and guidelines vary by institution. Many of these guidelines created limits on what the scholarship could be used for and who is eligible, preventing some Aurarians from accessing the scholarship altogether<sup>4,5,6</sup>. The remedial attempts of Auraria authorities fell short of what was promised, leaving the displaced residents to navigate displacement in isolation.

An important facet of the gentrification of Auraria included the dismantling of the mutual aid networks that had existed previously. Although activists sought to maintain these structures, the physical displacement of individuals resulted in a loss of resources that could have been shared by the community. Community members were isolated from each other, and the governmental remedial measures could not account for the gaps left by displacement.

### 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK - LINKED FATE

The concept of linked fate can be used as a tool to connect the political activity of the residents to their experiences during and long after the period of displacement<sup>2</sup>. A strong perception of linked fate means that an individual sees their fate as tied to that of other individuals in their ethnic group and will make political decisions according to the group's interests. Sanchez and Masuoka<sup>9</sup> build on these concepts, studying linked fate among Latinos in America. This framework understands the political behavior of Latino communities given the context of immigration experiences, race, and socioeconomic status. Linked fate moves beyond concepts like shared historical experience to understand what motivates political consciousness. During the period of displacement, from the early 1950s to the late 1970s (the period determined by the Displaced Aurarian Scholarship), several displaced individuals engaged in Denver politics to slow or stop the displacement and to fight for remedial measures to ease the effects of the displacement on the former residents.

As such, the linked fate framework helps to understand how race, economics, and migration experiences shape the political activity of the Auraria residents. Understanding their behavior through the formation of linked fate and the processes that lessen this link helps explain the long-term effects of gentrification upon the political activity of the Chicano community in West Denver.

## 4 METHODS

In 2022, the Colorado History Museum, as part of the Museum of Memory project, conducted 13 interviews with 21 individuals who lived on Ninth Street in Auraria, who received notice in the early 1970s that their buildings would be demolished for the construction of the Auraria campus. Although 21 people participated in the interviews, 13 interviews were conducted. Several family members of interviewees with a connection to Auraria participated in the interviews. Most of the interviews were conducted in the family homes of interviewees, allowing several other family members with a connection to Auraria to participate. There were three interviewers, two of whom participated as interviewees in oral histories themselves. The Auraria Memory Project also included a library exhibition of archival materials, a community mural, and the construction of a robust map and database centered around 9th Street, detailing the history of the residents of Auraria before the campus was built. The map and database were coordinated through the University of Colorado Denver, spanning from 1955 to 1973.

The early interview questions in the oral histories focused on describing what it was like living in Auraria using sensory descriptions like smells, sounds, and sights. For example, residents were asked, "What smells do you remember?" Other questions focused on the Displaced Aurarian Scholarship, what the experience of displacement was like, and how it has impacted their lives and the lives of their descendants in the decades since. Every interview concluded with the question, "What do you want your descendants to remember about you and your time in Auraria?" Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to two and a half hours. The interviews contain 11 female interviewees and 10 male interviewees. Most residents (19) used language such as Hispanic, Latino/a, Indigenous, Mexican, Mexican American, New Mexican, Chicano/a, or a variety of these terms to describe themselves, while two residents described themselves as descending from Eastern Europe. Although this sample is small, it can still shed meaningful light on the long-term experience of displacement from the Auraria campus.

Each audio file was listened to at least twice to capture the themes between them, utilizing transcripts to confirm this information. Key terms related to events, places, and people that were mentioned by two or more interviewees became themes between the different interpretations of events. Places, such as St. Cajetan's Parish, provided insight into the role of community centers and how they included or excluded the interviewees. People, including public figures such as Corky Gonzales, and community leaders like Father Garcia, clarified information on the political network the community was situated in. Finally, important events such

as the Bazaars hosted by St. Elisabeth's and St. Cajetan's parishes, as well as the official notice of displacement, served as markers to provide context to the timeline of events in the interviews, as well as points to compare the experiences different individuals had with the same event. Using the transcripts as well as the Colorado History Museum's database allowed me to verify information and compare these oral histories to the physical changes of the neighborhood during, before, and after the displacement.

## 5 FINDINGS

The findings of this paper are broken down into the social and economic consequences that the displaced Aurarians and their relatives experienced after the displacement and the way that different remedial promises impacted these experiences. This allows for an understanding of the long-term impacts of displacement upon the residents' descendants as well the role of generational trauma, broader cultural and political changes in the community, and the shortcomings of the displaced Aurarian scholarship and other remedial measures promised to the community. Linked fate provides a framework to understand the change in political consciousness for the interviewees throughout the displacement and in the time after. This allows us to understand how gentrification changed the makeup of the community, changing the sense of a shared struggle between members of the community.

### 5.1 Long-Term Impacts Upon Social Networks

The process of displacement changed the physical and human geography of Auraria, disrupting the sense of community that Aurarians felt amongst each other. The displacement fractured the once-close networks of the West Denver community, disconnecting families from each other and from the resources they relied on. The displacement thrust Auraria residents into chaos, forcing them to quickly make new housing arrangements. One resident described what she remembered shortly after the displacement, explaining, "A lot of people are just homeless on the street. I don't think they had any choices. I think they lived with people until that money, or whatever was given to them at the time, ran out, and then they were out"<sup>10</sup>. The social consequences of displacement are largely tied to the isolation and disconnection of mutual aid networks that connected residents before and during the process of displacement. Several interviewees described losing the opportunities for their families to stay together in physical proximity. One resident described her feelings of isolation after moving away from Auraria. She explained, "I didn't feel like it was just us. It was, you know, like the neighbors. My mom knew all the neighbors. And of course,

we knew all the kids in the neighborhood. And even as far as probably blocks down, you know, like it could be down two, three blocks. And we still knew all the kids from all the surrounding area"<sup>10</sup>. The displacement of West Denver meant that the physical spaces that connected residents to a larger network of resources were dismantled. Some organizations and structures collapsed. For instance, St. Cajetan's removal meant that lower-income communities could no longer access the private Catholic school resources that St. Cajetan's provided.

One resident explained the financial burden of education that was placed on the Aurarians after losing access to these Catholic school networks. He described, "the only option we had was private education. St. Cajetan's was, how am I going to put it? Their cost to go to school was considered affordable because they knew the community couldn't afford private [school], really"<sup>10</sup>. Essentially, the only educational option residents felt they had for upward social mobility was through private Catholic institutions. Residents expressed that they participated in walkouts at their public high schools later because they felt they were being intentionally prevented from preparing for post-secondary education and encouraged to pursue lower-paying occupations directly out of high school<sup>10</sup>. Since St. Elisabeth's did not have a Spanish-speaking priest, and St. Cajetan's was more affordable, many of the interviewees who were teenagers during the displacement, attended this school at some point during their education.

Although the schools provided important resources, they were not always conducive to preserving Mexican cultural identity for community members. Several residents remembered instances of discrimination within St. Elisabeths, describing, "They were prejudiced, they were discriminatory"<sup>10</sup>. This resident similarly explained it was difficult for his parents to access information from the institutions relating to the displacement, because there were no Spanish language or additional language options provided or accessible<sup>10</sup>. Although the religious institutions could provide some resources, the spread of information and accessibility of these resources varied for the residents. Another resident described similar discriminatory experiences at St. Cajetan's before the displacement, explaining:

At St. Cajetan's in the first grade, we were caught speaking non-English, and that's where everything changed. And that's when Sister Guadalupe, I think, had already warned us that if they caught us speaking any other language or cussing dirty words, that you get your mouth washed out with soap. So she took us down to the boiler room. It was this huge boiler. It looked like a big elephant. And she had this fresh soap, dial, and she gave each

one of us, there were four of us and gave each one of us a bar of soap... after that, I told my parents what had happened and they came and spoke to the nun. And after the meeting, it was English only<sup>10</sup>.

Auraria residents consistently faced discrimination from different authorities, particularly relating to the use of non-English languages. This made the role of informal information networks within the community even more prominent and fortified a strong sense of a shared struggle amongst the community. Becoming disconnected from the community could mean cultural isolation, particularly for the younger generation of displaced residents, lessening this sense of community and of shared struggle. This discrimination was exacerbated by the economic outcomes of the displacement, which forced residents into crisis. A once interconnected community that dealt with discrimination and struggles related to migration previously had become further isolated from each other after the displacement, which prevented future generations from relying on these same social and mutual aid networks.

## 5.2 Long-Term Economic Impacts

Prior to the displacement, Auraria was a nearly prosperous district. One interviewee described Auraria as "a community on the brink of success"<sup>10</sup>. As the Chicano community in Auraria had been established for quite some time, the residents had taken root, allowing future generations to reap the benefits and form a sense of upcoming economic prosperity within the neighborhood. One interviewee explained, "When that opportunity came in the late sixties or seventies, people were going to college and that could have easily transitioned that community into, you know, higher incomes, more social mobility because people were getting educated"<sup>10</sup>. This sense of a shared, prosperous future was disrupted by the shared experience of displacement. The surrounding businesses, the number of young residents who were planning on attending university, and the stability that the neighborhood had fostered were quickly fractured by the investment projects the city initiated. These projects were determined using the principles of eminent domain to condemn the existing buildings.

Several interviews described how relatives, other community members, and themselves lost their businesses during the late fifties through the early eighties. Due to the changing demographics of West Denver and the population's shopping interests, several businesses had to restructure to support new patrons, move to a different location, or shut down because staying open was economically infeasible. Many of these businesses were patronized or owned by the local Chicano community. One interviewee explained the feeling of physical loss

of the businesses that were displaced. He explained this sentiment as he described a return trip to the campus a few years after the displacement: He remarked:

In '77, no '75, I was walking through the Auraria neighborhood and through the West Side, and I saw those houses [the Golda Mier house and another house next door that was included in the exhibit]. And all of the sudden I felt like what I would refer to as a ghost. I saw the ghosts of a community that had been there"<sup>10</sup>.

This physical difference is reflective of the traumatic losses the Aurarians experienced as businesses and community spaces were erased.

Some families and small businesses are said to have received financial support from Auraria and Denver authorities during the displacement. The interviews do not include any individuals who directly received financial support in this way, and records of this financial support are not included in the Museum of Memory database. One individual described, "You know, some people got money, some people got, you know, nothing." We didn't get anything. We didn't get any assistance"<sup>10</sup>. Clarity about the nature of and written records of this support is difficult to decipher as there is no way to verify who received financial support, what entities provided this support, and where the money came from. This pattern of inconsistency in the remedial measures continues to create issues for the displaced Aurarians and their descendants today.

### 5.3 The Long-Term Impacts Displaced Aurarian Descendants

The generational trauma of displacement has meant that even the descendants of the displaced Aurarians continue to suffer the effects of the removal long after the events occurred. Sherrie Arguello explains that her house was removed, only for the university to display the house of former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Mier as a historical exhibition in the same location<sup>10</sup>. Mier lived in Denver and was involved early in the political discourse around the Auraria displacement, as she is referenced throughout the transcripts. This traumatic reminder of the loss of Arguello's house is combined with a hurtful erasure of her history in Auraria. The removal of her home and history to center a historical exhibit about a different woman who did not live there is particularly symbolic of the historical erasure of the displaced Aurarians' presence in Denver.

Several interviewees described the displacement as a catalyst for their political consciousness as they saw the effects of Denver's gentrification reflected in a national setting. This history is tied to the formulation of

linked fate attachments, connecting the Auraria residents to a national political movement. Many of the interviewees and their parents participated in the Chicano movement, which is an important part of Colorado's political history. Resident Tony Garcia described how the displacement impacted his identity, explaining, "It definitely spurred political consciousness, cultural consciousness, identity consciousness, that that was a change and that was the transition as far as the getting, keeping our spaces, and there were small victories that took place that kept some of the houses"<sup>10</sup>. Their activism initially aimed at resisting the gentrification of their neighborhood. Garcia went on to explain that the Aurarian resident's activism predated the famous historical events associated with the Chicano movement in Denver. He goes on to explain his experience a few years into the displacement, during the Denver High School Walkouts of the 1970s.

We always understood the dynamics of the city in that we were marginalized people and there was racism, and that there were places you could go and places you couldn't go. We always understood that. But I think that there was this illusion that somehow, we had figured out how to circumvent it and actually live lives. And I think what was beginning to evolve out of that was this, this awareness that unless we organized ourselves and we fought, we would just disappear. And it became the first steps of my consciousness as a Chicano<sup>10</sup>.

The displacement catalyzed Garcia and other displaced Aurarians into a political consciousness in the context of a national social movement. For residents who were not intertwined in the political movements of West Denver, the displacement seemed to awaken political consciousness in the same way that it did for residents like Garcia.

However, not every resident described a sense of linked fate with the members of the neighborhood during the process of gentrification. Kathy Prilika, who immigrated from Yugoslavia and described herself as Eastern European, discussed the harmful personal impacts of the displacement and how she felt isolated even because she did not feel integrated into the West Denver community. She was not aware of many of the political actions at the time, meaning that she had to sort out many of the impacts of displacement without the community's support that other residents described as vital<sup>10</sup>. For many of the displaced Aurarians who saw themselves as a part of a larger community, their experience of displacement was guided by networks of resources and information within the community. This was not the same for people who were disconnected from that community, despite living there. Although they experienced displacement at the same time, a sense

of shared struggle was not universal among the residents.

An important cultural value, repeatedly discussed by the interviewees, is education. Remedial measures tied to educational attainment became a prominent goal of the activists because of the overlapping process of developing political consciousness and the disconnection from previous educational resources (at St. Cajetan's and St. Elizabeth. institutions that replaced their homes and community. Jay Alire, who described many of his experiences as a teenager involved in West Denver Chicano politics, emphasized how the community values the importance of education combined with the formation of his political consciousness. He describes why he participated in the walkouts at his Denver high school, explaining:

When this bond issue came, we had already started becoming a little bit more politicized... a lot of students walked out of West High School and decided that we needed to take control of our education because it was really obvious that they were they were not preparing us to go to college. They were preparing us for manual labor jobs and jobs that did not require post-secondary education"<sup>10</sup>.

Students participating in the walkouts across the city protested racial inequality in Denver Public Schools. Several of the other interviewees voiced a similar sentiment to Alire, seeing education as the best avenue to alleviate the long-term effects of displacement, and seeing the disruption of education as a primary long-term effect. The Displaced Aurarians scholarship sought to remedy the long-term impacts of gentrification upon the Aurarians and their descendants by providing them with access to education.

#### 5.4 Education as Resistance: The Displaced Aurarian Scholarship

The scholarship was formed to remedy the hardships the Displaced Aurarians faced, but its shortcomings continue to impact the Aurarians and their descendants. Another resident described the community values around education, explaining, "when we talked about how we value education, that we have the evidence of some of very successful people that came out of that area only because of our educational value, and that was demonstrated by Saint Cajetan's, the commitment many families made to Saint Cajetan's to get our education"<sup>10</sup>. Connecting the loss of important educational resources to the long-term impacts of displacement is vital to understanding why these remedial measures were developed. This sentiment is in part why the

scholarship was so important for community members; however, the way the scholarship was implemented prevented it from truly alleviating the long-term harm that the displacement had on the educational attainment of younger generations.

Several residents who were displaced at the time could not access the scholarship at all, which is why the scholarship was expanded to include more generations and eventually all direct descendants. This came only after the persistence of Auraria activists. One interviewee explains, "We didn't use the scholarship because at that time, there were no buildings on the land. And that was one of our arguments about how the scholarship was so incomplete. I mean, we're supposed to go to take classes in buildings that weren't there"<sup>10</sup>. However, even when the scholarship was expanded to address the needs of the residents, the actual implementation of the scholarship continued to fall short of meeting the displaced population's needs.

For instance, the scholarship initially only provided funding for degrees up to a bachelor's degree. Eventually, after the efforts of displaced activists, it was expanded to cover graduate degrees. Katelyn Puga, one of the first residents to receive a master's degree using the program explained, "I specifically requested that they support me through my master's program. And they did. And so, I think that was probably the first sign of opening the door for endless education, lifelong learning opportunities for us as Displaced Aurarians"<sup>10</sup>. Puga had faced difficulties using scholarship funds for her undergraduate degree previously. Accessing this scholarship meant that Puga and her siblings were able to break some of the barriers to upward mobility that their parents faced.

For those who were able to access it, the scholarship made all the difference. One of the children of a displaced Aurarian explains, "Some of my siblings have children. And so, knowing that it can be passed on to them is a really big deal. And their kids and their kids, it's breaking cycles and helping to just propel our family forward through education is a big deal"<sup>10</sup>. However, Puga, her siblings, and her father still faced obstacles to accessing these resources. Since her father did not have records with the primary schools in Auraria to prove he lived there, he struggled to prove his kids qualified for the scholarship. However, his siblings and their children had been approved for the scholarship. Extending the scholarship to three generations allowed Puga to qualify because of her grandparents' connection to Auraria rather than her father's. Puga's sister continues:

I come from Displaced Aurarians who already valued education before they even knew that that was something that I may benefit from, because of their sacrifice is amazing to me. And I

think that when I'm on that campus, I feel empowered as a student and as a person because I know all of the history involving my family there<sup>10</sup>.

Several other interviewees discussed struggling to spread information about the scholarship and trouble accessing it themselves. Francis Torres described how information about the scholarship was intentionally unclear or misleading, which made it difficult for individuals to even know it existed. She explained, "I just heard from a 53-year-old gentleman who lived there and moved as a young child that he said it would have made all the difference in the world if he would have known about"<sup>10</sup>. Many residents mirrored this sentiment, explaining that this scholarship would have alleviated some of the financial burden of displacement.

Another resident explained, "There's a gap between when that conversation [when residents were made aware of the scholarship] took place and when it was implemented... I was having a hard time finding out where the documents were"<sup>10</sup>. Similarly, the daughter of Kathy Prilika explained that they did not know about the scholarship until at least 30 years later, when her son was already enrolled at Metropolitan State University<sup>10</sup>. She expanded, "I called the school and asked about the scholarship and got some information. And that set us on the path to where now we know we're part of a community of others"<sup>10</sup>. She had to pursue this information directly and only heard of the scholarship by chance. Dispersing information about the scholarship continues to be an issue for Auraria descendants who may not even be aware it exists. Implementation of the scholarship was left to the discretion of the different institutions on the Auraria campus. This meant that there were huge disparities in how the scholarship was applied to individuals. The displaced Aurarians and their descendants had to navigate different hurdles to access the scholarship. One resident explained her grandson's experience, describing "But my grandson, he got the runaround, and he never got anything. Everybody keeps saying, 'we're not sure what you're talking about.'" And they said this, too, from the very beginning,"<sup>10</sup>. This inconsistency in implementation and communication means that there is no clear path for individuals to follow to access the scholarship.

These findings suggest that many of the remedial measures that provided long-term benefits to the residents occurred through the diligent activism of West Denver residents. In pursuing these remedial measures for their community, some Aurarians developed a political consciousness tied to Chicano political identity. In a national context, the struggles of the displaced Chicano community in Denver reflect a national struggle of discrimination, identity, and gentrification.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The development, implementation, and dispersal of information about remedial measures after displacement required the tedious labor of West Denver activists without the cooperation of City authorities and the academic institutions involved. These remedial measures included financial compensation, preservation of important cultural sites, and the Displaced Aurarian Scholarship. This reflects a historical pattern in Denver's Chicano population, which saw waves of activism and political organizing in tandem with waves of gentrification. Remedial measures were spearheaded by the activist community of displaced residents, not by the urban renewal authorities. This dynamic meant that the city's measures failed to address the harm done by displacement, because the city did not intend to address this harm. The linked fate framework explains how the activism of displaced Aurarians and the cultural values tied to their resource networks encouraged others to pursue the Displaced Auraria scholarship. Similarly, linked fate provides a framework to understand how the displacement drove activists to pursue remedial measures.

Linked fate is highest among Latinos who predominantly speak Spanish and live in Spanish-speaking communities, shared language as motivator of group consciousness for Latino people<sup>9</sup>. The displaced residents repeatedly discuss language, erasure of Spanish and indigenous languages, and the role that the language plays in connecting communities. Residents who did not speak English or Spanish experienced a lower sense of connection to the Aurarian community. Linked fate explains that the context of a shared identity around language could have played an important role in forming the political consciousness that spurred Chicano activism in the community, and why this may have been different for people without that identity. As such, Linked fate, tied to the experience of displacement, catalyzed Aurarian activists to push for the educational remedies that were established.

The discrimination experienced by many in the community before the displacement was exacerbated by the economic outcomes of the displacement, which isolated residents from each other and the vital networks they had formed to connect to resources. When the community was disrupted, a once interconnected network that helped with struggles related to migration became further isolated, preventing future generations from relying on these same social and mutual aid networks. The shortcomings of remedial measures thereafter were justified by the same narratives of eminent domain that allowed for displacement in the first place. Younger generations who were not alive for the displacement may not have the same experience of linked fate as their parents and grandparents because they did not experi-

ence the close-knit community networks, the context of the broader Chicano movement in the 1960s, and the catalyst of displacement all at once. Activists during the displacement connected their experiences to the experiences of their relatives and ancestors. Similarly, the Aurarian descendants today can connect their experiences to their parents and grandparents as the displaced Aurarian descendants continue to prioritize education as a cultural and personal value. To more fully understand the shortcomings of the remedial measures, it is necessary to consider the context of the Auraria Memory Project, the activists involved, and their connections to the resource networks created during the gentrification in Denver from the early 1950s to the 1970s.

The experience of the displaced Aurarians functions as a microcosm of national political, social, and economic discourse around education, immigration, racism, and gentrification. Their stories provide a window into the politics of urban renewal and removal in Denver and elsewhere. These findings suggest that the long-term benefits of the scholarship came from the persistence of Auraria activists, who faced barriers from the city of Denver and the Auraria Center for Higher Education at every step. In pursuing these remedial measures for their community, some Aurarians developed a political consciousness tied to Chicano political identity. Today, descendants of the displaced Aurarians are continuing the legacy of their elders by pursuing their education through the long-fought-for Displaced Aurarians Scholarship.

## 7 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In the future, it is worth considering how the formation of linked fate attachments might occur differently between each generation, if at all. More research should be done to understand how the political consciousness of the displaced residents formed, and how this has impacted their children and grandchildren. Past research touches upon the shortcomings of the remedial measures on paper, expanding how they impacted the city of Denver. These findings illustrate the interconnected nature of the long-term impacts of gentrification in cities like Denver. Although the remedial measures Denver authorities tried to implement had the potential to help the Displaced Aurarians, the displaced individuals had exhaustively fought for every piece of these remedies.

Understanding the behavior of displaced Latino neighborhoods, through the formation of linked fate and the processes that lessen this link, could inform future research to expand on the long-term effects of gentrification more broadly through the lens of political consciousness. Future research could delve further into the specific features of the long-term impacts of gentrification, utilizing the Displaced Aurarian Memory Project to contextualize the robust database that

History Colorado created. This data includes specific economic information that could provide insight into the long-term economic impacts of displacement upon the specific families in the sample<sup>11</sup>. Detailed analysis of the economic impacts on the displaced population is difficult to pursue because the population records are unclear, which is one of the main issues the city faces in implementing remedial measures. The dispersal of the community meant it was difficult for the Auraria Memory Project to incorporate a large sample of people to interview, so accessing detailed information related to the long-term economic impacts on this population who lived in other parts of the neighborhood could prove similarly difficult. However, work could be done using quantitative methods to examine the scholarship and the concrete features of its implementation, accessibility, and lasting effects on the educational attainment of the West Denver community across generations.

## 8 EDITOR'S NOTES

This article was peer-reviewed.

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