

Beyond the flames: military vehicles and food tents signal Altadena's oppressed status

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National Guard troops in the Altadena neighborhood of Los Angeles in January 2025.

I don't know how many people will read this article. As with so many things, we are at the mercy of the algorithm and the mainstream news cycle. Time goes on. Coverage fades. Interest wanes as corporate news outlets jump to the next story.

Because if we are allowed to look for too long, we might start to see the reality of the injustice, abandonment, and disinvestment that follow news of catastrophe. The current consciousness, or lack thereof, regarding the aftermath of the Palisades and Eaton fires, is a prime example of this phenomenon.

As usual with any crisis under capitalism, the news industrial complex saturates the airwaves and social media with harrowing stories of the destruction before inevitably declaring the crisis of the day to be over. As the homes of famous actors and millionaires burned throughout northern Los Angeles County, CNN, MSNBC,

Fox News, CBS, ABC, and an army of freelance journalists at their behest kept the public painstakingly up to speed on the inferno's onslaught.

The corporate media seems united in its message now: The crisis is over — everyone can move on with their lives. That might be true for viewers or the millionaires who have second homes in Malibu. But what about the working-class Black and Brown people who lived in historic Altadena? Is the crisis over for them? Will they get a happy ending?

Recently, I spent time in the Altadena area delivering supplies to a local church and distributing the LA Harriet Tubman Center's people's program on fire relief. I normally don't write in first or second person as I am in this article. However, I am unable to find the words to describe the devastation I witnessed in historically Black and immigrant communities without speaking directly from my perspective. Frankly, I had mixed feelings writing about or documenting what I saw at all. Walking among all the destruction, two other examples of destruction in oppressed communities drifted into my mind.

First, I was instantly reminded of my experience walking through what used to be the vibrant "Black Wall Street" in [Tulsa, Oklahoma](#). Over 100 years ago, a white terrorist mob launched a massive assault on Tulsa's thriving Black community. The racist mob targeted Black schools, businesses, churches, and any other Black community institution. The fires and violence left hundreds of Black residents dead and thousands displaced. In modern-day Tulsa, the Greenwood Rising History Center has marked the destruction of every Black business in 1920 with a plaque explaining the Black business or other building that once stood there.

This goes on for block after block - so much destruction born purely of Jim Crow apartheid and racism. While Altadena's destruction was not at the hands of a white terrorist mob, it's a different white terrorist mob that has refused and will continue to refuse to invest in Altadena's recovery. That mob is the predatory capitalist

developers and landlords who will ratchet up rents and buy burned properties for pennies on the dollar. That mob is the local city and state governments that have already [closed](#) their limited shelters and donation drop-off locations.

For decades, the historically Black community of Altadena has survived racist redlining practices and thrived in the face of racism and economic inequality. Nonetheless, it seems the ruling class and its government are happy to allow Altadena to lie in ruins.

Second, the number of World Central Kitchen food distribution tents I saw immediately took my mind to the Gaza Strip, where the WCK has been one of the only semi-consistent food providers as the Zionist siege rages. It was not uncommon in Gaza for the WCK's tents to be the only standing structure among piles and piles of rubble. The same is true in Altadena. Again, it is not bombs that have destroyed Altadena - but disinvestment and a failure to confront climate change. Something else that struck me as similar to Gaza was the conspicuous presence of military-grade vehicles parked at the entrances to neighborhoods. This is not the case in the wealthier parts of Pasadena and the Palisades.

These are people's homes, businesses, cars, schools, playgrounds, local dives, and even graveyards - all destroyed. Ultimately, the system of capitalism does not view this sort of destruction as a tragedy, but as an opportunity. Many people have analyzed capitalism as woefully inadequate to confront the tragedy that has played out in Altadena. This is true; however, this inadequacy is not a mistake. The capitalist system isn't designed to care for people's needs in crises but to exploit them.

We cannot forget Tulsa. We cannot forget Gaza. We cannot forget Altadena. The racist and classist oppression at the heart of all these events, one way or another, is still alive and well. The crisis of anti-Black apartheid in the United States is far from over. The crisis of the Zionist occupation of Palestine is far from over. The crisis of

climate inequality and uneven investment in oppressed communities is far from over.

As the working class continues to struggle against escalating ruling-class violence, we have to resist the urge to “move on” from these crises that expose capitalism’s true nature. We know these crises will continue, and our fight for a working-class revolution will continue along with them.

