

# Social relations in malibu la due to fire crisis essay sample

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



## Introduction

Different crisis be they natural, environmental or civic have an impact on the social relations of the residents of an area. Sometimes, the happening of a disaster or a crisis reveal an otherwise soft or hard underbelly that would never have been manifest in ordinary circumstances. This paper seeks to examine the account of the fire crisis in Malibu, Los Angeles which is a common phenomenon in the area. Further, the paper seeks to explore various aspects of social relations among inhabitants that the fire crisis usually brings. In this quest, the paper examines causes of the crisis, predictions of their happenings, any warnings given and whether they were heeded to, as well as the actions taken by the respective authorities. Similarly, the paper analyses any policy changes that were put in place as a result of these crises. To this end, I argue that the fire crisis that has continually ravaged Malibu has exposed the fact that the government does favor the wealthy over the poor in the area while confronting the fire. In addition, several aspects of social relations have been affected as depicted by discrimination practices and racism that appears to be deeply entrenched especially with respect to the work by government in dealing with the fire crisis.

In the chapter, *The Case for Letting Malibu Burn*, Mike Davis explores the case of fire catastrophes in Los Angeles in Malibu, California. He states that the period from late August towards early October is the fire season in Los Angeles. Malibu stands out as the wildlife capital of North America and in indeed, in the whole world. The area consists of a rugged 22 mile long coastline which is constantly raged by catastrophic fire every two and half

years. Over the last century, the whole area of the western Santa Monica Mountains has fallen victim to the inferno for over three occasions. Statistics reveal that a fire engulfs hundreds of homes in a march across the mountains to the sea every decade. Over a thousand luxury residences have been destroyed since the year 1970 through four holocausts that have occurred in the area. In these instances, properties worth billions of dollars were razed. More so, patches of coastline and mountain between Point Dume and Tuna Canyon have been burnt a record 8 times since the year 1930. Fire has continually defined Malibu in the American imagination. Ever since the old times, infernos have menaced the Malibu area throughout the nineteenth century. For instance, in the year 1903, a great fire which spread from Calabasas to the sea in a matter of few hours led to the burning of the dream ranch in Malibu Canyon. The Rancho Malibu fire was precipitated by the alignment of its coastal canyons with the annual fire winds emanating from the North. In the year 1930, there was fire at the Decker Canyon in a worst-case scenario involving fifty year old chaparral. There was a five mile front of towering flames and the 1100 firefighters who had come to help quell the inferno were forced to flee. At the time, there was official panic as the firestorm moved towards the Palisades. Looking at the 1930 fire incident retrospectively, it appears that there should have been an examination into the merit of opening Malibu to further development.

It is apparent that Malibu nouveaux continued to build higher and higher on the mountains with little regard of the attendant consequences. The succeeding firestorm that happened in 1970 was a combination of perfect weather and a good harvest of combustible of wood frame houses. This

perfect weather was constituted by the drought conditions, the 100 degree heat, the 85mile per hour Santa Ana wind and the 3percent humidity level. This led to the razing of the asphalt on the PCH and the blocking off of all escape routes. As a result, residents of the area of Malibu colony sought refuge in nearby lagoon. Merged with another fire from the valley, this inferno led to the deaths of 10 people and the burning of 403 homes among them a ranch belonging to Governor Reagan.

In response to this destruction caused by fire, angry property owners denounced the local government for its inability to secure their property and called for new technological and expensive solutions for the problem caused by wildfire. Owing to the rise in prominence of Malibu in fundraising for campaigns and politics, the elected officials were quick to oblige. At the same time there were extensive subdivision efforts being done by developers in a quest to stay ahead of the pack which was the proposed coastal legislation which was slow in forthcoming. The emergence of the next Malibu boom only served to avail more fuel for the next three succeeding Halloween fires that razed homes in1978, 1982 and 1985.

The fire which occurred in the year 1978 led to the burning of the superstar's homes at a new speed record and was able to cross a total of 13 rugged miles terrain in a span of less than two years. The Malibu residents were traumatized as they had also been victims of disastrous deluge and landslides in the year 1978and 1980.

Indeed, some warnings had been given a few months to the catastrophe. One of the most accomplished architects and landscape designers named Frederick Law Olmsted Jr had called for public ownership of around 10, 000

acres of the most scenic beach as well as the mountain landscape that lay between Point Dume and Topanga. Despite these warnings by Olmsted, public officials blatantly failed to heed to the calls. As a consequence, there were further series of fires in the years 1935, 1936 and 1938 that led to the destruction of 400 homes in Malibu and Topanga Canyon. The proposal by Olmsted was the need for a greater public domain in the Santa Monicas. On the contrary, the County of Los Angeles spurned an excellent opportunity to acquire a total of 17, 000 acres in the year 1938 from the bankrupt Rindge latifudia in exchange for \$1, 100, 000 in delinquent taxes. Two years later in December of the year 1940, May Rindge was forced to put her whole empire on an auction with potential buyers being advised to make an early selection of facilities. Further, 150 homes were incinerated in a fire in the Southern California mountains in the period of the Second World War yet this did not prompt or put in a desire for any post-war migration.

The 1956 uncontrollable inferno coincided with a waxing of Cold War anxieties and unprecedented political ramifications. There were questions as to the ability of the government to deal with nuclear conflagrations if the same had been unable to tame wildfires in the Santa Monicas. It is against this backdrop that the then president Eisenhower's administration cited the Malibu fire disaster as the first major fire disaster of a national scope. The congress, though it was more concerned with the institution of a big civil defense team, debated on measures of providing complete fire prevention and protection in Southern California.

In the face of this fire crisis, the Eisenhower administration took a number of actions one of which was to offer tax reliefs to the victims of the blaze. This

was made possible by the declaration of the Malibu fire as a national disaster. In addition, the victims of fire incidences were offered preferential low interest loans thus setting a precedent of public subsidization for areas affected by fires. As a consequence, an inferno was next followed by a rebuilding on a larger and more exclusive scale, as regulations and fire code became relaxed in a bid to incorporate the victims of fire. The result of this development was a displacement of modest homeowners and renters from areas such as Paradise Cove, Broad Beach and Point Dume. This displacement was done by rich pyrophiles who were fuelled by socialized disaster relief, an expanded public devotion to defend Malibu and a cheap fire insurance that was artificial in nature.

Since there was no fire risk-zoning, the only impediment on development was a scarcity of water for purposes of domestic use and firefighting. A trunk-water line was completed in the year 1962 thus setting the stage for a new land rush. In addition, the County's Regional Planning Commission endorsed developer's fantasies in a prompt manner through the authorization of a whopping 1400 percent expansion of the Malibu population over the succeeding generation. Indeed, the population in the year 1960 of Malibu was 7, 983 and had increased to 117, 000 residents by the year 1980.

It is instructive that despite the ongoing measures that were aimed at giving a leeway to inimical overdevelopment, county and state officials continuously rejected every opportunity of expanding the public beach frontage. At the same time, these officials also refused to create or even evince an intention to create a public land trust in the mountains which were

by then under private ownership. The upshot of this was that the vast majority of the Malibu became inaccessible to the general public more so for the people of color, as it were during the isolationist era.

The fire at the Hotel St. George on the 25th March 1952 featured some people throwing themselves from a third story building which was burning. The hotel is known for having caught fire a record three times namely in 1912, 1952 and the year 1984. the ensuing brutal debate over the inferno between the Councilman Davenport, the chair of the Police and Fire Committee and the Fire Chief Alderson pointed to a failure by leaders in their official capacities. The Fire Chief accused the Council of failing to enact the new fire safety regulations that had been recommended by his department at least three years before. On his part, Councilman Davenport lay the blame squarely on the Fire Chief accusing him of failing to enforce the existent regulations. It was clear that when the fire broke out at the Hotel St. George, there was a violation of virtually all its safety measures and section of the fire code. For instance, there was an unusable drop ladder and a bolted nailed door at the bottom of rear stairs. The Councilman Davenport cited corruption at the fire Department as the cause of the failure of the hotel not being closed while it was in default of the required standards.

Davis argues that there is an institutionalized trend of discrimination and racism where the response by the government in such times of crisis in Malibu is dependent on the social class and race of the victims. Persons of the Black race are not well catered for, as are the poor. This is in stark contrast to the rapid response that attends the wealthy persons of the white race. The inadequate regulation and negligent enforcement of existent

regulations that pervade the industry today are responsible for the mess, in addition to the lethal design of the buildings. In conclusion, it is clear that the fire crisis occasionally reveals other aspects of social relations between people such as those of cooperation in a bid to surmount the challenges that emanate from such crises.

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