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Introduction to Urban Studies

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Block 10 Land Use #2 Assignment

Block 10, confined by 2nd street, previously Live Oak Street, and 4th Street, formerly Cedar Street, and West Avenue to Guadalupe Street, displays a shift over time from an area predominantly employed for industrial uses to a setting for commercial purposes. In 1885, the main features of Block 10 consisted of manufacturing, dwellings, and railroads. By 1935, while the area retained its use for manufacturing, storage, and railroads, it established a more prominent residential area, specifically in Blocks 5, 23, and 26. Now in 2017, block group 10 has since transformed its railroad use to parking, developed its residential uses into apartment buildings, and replaced its manufacturing functions with specialized businesses.

In 1885, the land use for the group of blocks was overwhelmingly focused around manufacturing purposes. This is evident within Blocks 5, 9q, and 26. Block 5 was utilized to manufacture cotton, where almost all of the functions of cotton production were executed on this piece of land. Within Block 9q there are various facets of the lumber industry, such as storage units for lumber and general manufacturing purposes, administrative offices, and lumber production. Similarly, the map of Block 26 indicates an almost identical function as a lumber yard. The block includes storage for lumber and lumber factories. These three examples show the importance of manufacturing to this group of blocks in 1885.
Single dwellings also played an important role in land use during 1885. The maps of Blocks 5 and 26 show dwelling spaces sporadically placed on the blocks. Meanwhile in Blocks 22 and 23, dwellings are clustered together in a specific area on the block. These dwelling spaces are all close to the businesses, factories and attractions on the blocks. Most of the dwelling spaces in 1885 were single unit dwellings, with a few exceptions of multifamily dwellings towards the center downtown Austin.

Block 10 was mainly dominated by manufacturing and residential spaces in 1885, however another key feature of the block was the railroad that passed through the area. A railroad stretched along 3rd Street, formerly known as Cypress, through the block area. In Blocks 22 and 23, the railroad passes through sections of the blocks, designating space for rail-yards. Surrounding the rail-yards are their accompanying storage warehouses, lumber yards, as well as single-family dwellings. Looking to Block 5, on the western side of our group next to Shoal Creek, the railroad passes through and extends out of the downtown area. This specific section is surrounded by cotton platforms, whereas the surrounding blocks on the other end of our grouping are predominantly lumber yards and platforms, with an additional cotton platform in Block 22.

Unlike in 1885, where dwellings were only small portions of the block area, Blocks 5, 22, 23, and 26 each dedicated a quarter to a half of their land to host residential spaces in 1935. Many of the blocks in this area of Austin had dwellings for families living close to the manufacturing and storage areas that surrounded Shoal Creek and the Colorado River. Most of these residential buildings were single units, however a few of the dwellings on Block 23 acted
as multi-family spaces. This block group also included a few shops, offices, and a small school to accommodate the people who lived within the area.

Block group 10’s remaining area continued to contain land uses meant to benefit the manufacturing and storage facilities. Block 9q’s only purpose in 1935 was to serve as a space for a railroad platform and the railroad that continued down Cypress St. The rest of the blocks had some sort of storage or yard space close to Shoal Creek, the Colorado River, or the railroad that ran through the area. Next to the storage facilities were factories with warehouses that are historically in close proximity. This is continuous with the block group in 1885, which also hosted many manufacturing and storage areas close to some form of mass transportation.

Where there once was a railroads, residential dwellings, manufacturing plants and retail storefronts, a majority of Block 10 as a group is now dominated by parking in 2017. Block 26 and Block 9q progressed from residential dwellings, storage facilities, offices and retail storefronts, to parking structures in 2017. Having these parking structures in the midst of downtown Austin provides the city significant revenue aside from taxes. The parking structures on Block 9q and Block 26 are located in the middle of downtown Austin’s most densely populated area. These parking structures are now in an accessible location for the United States Federal Courthouse, republic square, and many other commercial and residential buildings.

In 2017, Block 10 has two high-rise apartment complexes surrounded by retail and respective parking. Over half of Block 22 has been reconstructed into an apartment complex, with the remaining portion of the block consisting of retail and a parking garage, which are all connected to the same building. Moving to Block 5, containing the other apartment complex, there is the same system of an apartment complex with retail relevant to potential residents in its
ground-level spaces. Other blocks within our grouping also contain apartment complexes, dominating the group with modern multi-family dwellings.

Specialized businesses are a vital use of the land in Block 10 in 2017, as it occupies about half of the area. Block 23 was previously home to single and multi family dwellings, an oil warehouse and other manufacturing plants. Now, specialized businesses such as Google’s Austin office, a comedy store, a large dance studio, a wealth management firm, and a sizable church take its place. Low-level cities do not need a major technology office, a renowned dance studio, or a number of these other services. In Block 22, which was once a location for manufacturing, a cotton storage facility, and a handful of single family dwellings, there is now street level space strictly used for specialty retail and restaurants. This is seen with stores such as the Apple store, St. Bernard and many others. In 1935, there were no specialized businesses on our group’s respective maps. However, today specialized businesses take up a notable amount of space within Block group 10 in downtown Austin.

From 1885 to the present, Block 10, through individual block evolution and as a whole, has undergone a number of changes that reflect on the prevalent land use of the time. While in 1885 the land was predominantly industrialized, its function had then transformed in 1935 to having more residential areas, and has since finally blossomed by 2017 into the heart of a quintessential “downtown” as a bustling center of residence and business.