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“There’s Life Beyond the Strip”:

Immigrant Rights Activism and Spatial Resistance in Las Vegas, Nevada

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in Chicana and Chicano Studies

by

Briceida Hernandez-Toledo

2020

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2020

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

"There's Life Beyond the Strip":

Immigrant Rights Activism and Spatial Resistance in Las Vegas, Nevada

by

Briceida Hernandez-Toledo

Master of Arts in Chicana and Chicano Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Leisy J. Abrego, Chair

This research project examines immigrant rights activism in Las Vegas, Nevada and asks: 1. How did Las Vegas activists engage in spatial resistance through their involvement in the immigrant rights movement beginning in 2006? 2. What organizing methods and/or tactics did they utilize? And 3. What did it mean to engage in immigrant rights activism in Las Vegas, an internationally-renowned tourist destination? To create an interdisciplinary frame for this research project, I bridge scholarship across different disciplines and subjects, from Las Vegas history, to immigration studies, and geography. I draw on qualitative interviews with immigrant rights organizers and maps of Las Vegas created during the interview process to argue that Las Vegas immigrant rights organizing was spatial resistance to illegality, racism, and classism as it was produced and practiced in Las Vegas. Participants declare that there is life in Las Vegas

beyond the Strip, and that Las Vegas has been a site of critical importance and continued resistance through their maps, interviews, and organizing efforts.

The thesis of Briceida Hernandez-Toledo is approved.

Genevieve Carpio

Juan Herrera

Leisy J. Abrego, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

DEDICATION

With much love, gratitude, y cariño, I dedicate this to my parents, Evangelina y Reynaldo, and to the gente and communities that call Las Vegas home.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This master's project would not have been possible without the generosity, support, and participation of Adan, Meño, Evelyn, Liz, Claudia, Kenia, Anita, and Joanna. I am forever thankful for the Las Vegas that you all fought for, for all the spaces you built, and for the communities you created. Much love to the muxeristas of Las Vegas.

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I celebrate this work with you all, because without each and every one of you, this would not have been possible.

Introduction

When you drive or fly into Las Vegas at night, you cannot help but be struck by the bright, concentrated lights along the Strip, and the lines and lines of streetlights surrounding it, stretching into the mountains. Las Vegas is a valley in southern Nevada, encircled by mountains. During the day, based on where you are, the mountains appear purple, reminiscent of the "purple mountains majesty" of *America the Beautiful.* And while the Las Vegas valley extends far beyond it, this area in the Mojave Desert is most recognized for the Las Vegas Strip, a 5 mile stretch of land known worldwide for its glittering neon signs, casino resorts, shopping centers, and tourist wedding chapels. With its bustling nightlife and various attractions, the Strip, designated as a "National Scenic Byway" and "All-American Road" by the U.S. Department of Transportation, seems to never be closed. Yet in an act never seen before in Las Vegas's history, on the hot desert evening of May 1, 2006, thousands of people came together in protest of anti-immigrant legislation, shutting down the casino-lined boulevard from any traffic.

To avoid the high daytime temperatures[1] and to maximize the number of workers that could participate, organizers planned for the rally to begin in the evening. Under the glaring, flashing neon lights of the Fremont Street Experience[2] in downtown Las Vegas, organizers and community members spoke out in support of immigrant rights and against anti-immigrant policies. As Evelyn, one of the key organizers of the event, declared, "Por la primera vez en la

[1] According to the McCarran International Airport weather station, it was 91 degrees Fahrenheit at the time the rally began.

[2] The Fremont Street Experience is a seven-block entertainment area that boasts three outdoor concert stages and "Viva Vision, the world's largest video screen" (Fremont Street Experience). It was a $70 million dollar project that changed the "face of downtown Las Vegas" when it opened in 1995 (Las Vegas Convention Center and Vistors Authority, 2019a) and it was meant to draw tourists to downtown Las Vegas.

historia de esta ciudad, vamos a marchar todo el Strip!"[3] The crowd continued to grow, spilling out from under the Fremont Street Experience canopy into the streets. Remembering this moment, some of the people I interviewed for this project described it as a sea of people, eventually surging to become an uncontainable ocean, spilling into traffic lanes, shutting down the Strip as the crowds marched on for miles from downtown Las Vegas to the New York-New York Hotel and Casino. Later, using data based on the size of crowds at previous New Year's Eve festivities, experts would say that about 63,000 people were present, while the official records on behalf of the police department would conservatively estimate the crowds at about 8,000 (Kihara, 2006).

The success of this march was made possible through the collaboration of many different actors. The key actors included a group of high school and college-aged youth who had been organizing student walk-outs and marches earlier in the year during March and April; an established labor union, the Culinary Union; established immigrant organizations (Mexican hometown associations); and people from the community (Revilla, 2012; Tuman, 2009; Lazos, 2007). In this research project, I focus on the stories of the youth who were organizing for immigrant rights, building community connections across the Valley, and developing an intersectional feminist consciousness. I draw on qualitative research and critical spatial analysis of their activist stories about Las Vegas gathered from interviews, mental maps, and newspaper analysis, to demonstrate that the Latinx community is powerful and present, capable of rallying together to shut down an area of highly concentrated wealth and capital, ultimately showing that this community is not just a human backdrop to the glitz and glamour of the infamous Strip.

[3] In English this translates to, "For the first time in the history of this city, we're going to march down the entire Strip." [Evelyn in Yuen-Thompson's (2006) "May Day 2006" YouTube video]. It is important to note that the Strip has been the site of other protests, like the 1971 fight for welfare rights (Orleck, 2006) and a union rights rally in the 1990s. However, it is likely that this march was one of the largest in Nevada's history (Kalil, 2006).

The Las Vegas Strip might seem like an odd place for immigrant rights activism, but a review of the recent demographic shifts in the Valley helps explain why this momentous action might not be so surprising. The Las Vegas valley forms part of a metropolitan area,[4] coextensive with Clark County, and is comprised of small cities, suburbs, and unincorporated territory, all nestled in and around this desert valley (Clark County, n.d.). It has grown rapidly in recent years. The expansion of the tourism industry and growth of casino resorts, especially along the Strip, has marked the valley since the 1950s. And communities have grown in relation to the boulevard and its tourist industry (Moehring & Green, 2005, p. 164). For a visual representation of the cities and unincorporated areas that make up the Las Vegas Valley, please refer to Appendix A for a current jurisdictional map of this area (Clark County, 2020).

From 1990 to 2000, Las Vegas was the fastest growing metropolitan area, directly impacted by the growth of the Latinx population,[5] which rose by 753% from 1980-2000 (Suro and Singer, 2002, p. 10). According to the most recent census estimates (2018), the Latinx population accounts for 31.4% out of the 2,231,647 people who live in Clark County. This southern Nevadan population is heavily reliant on the tourist industry, demonstrated by the fact that 367,900 jobs were supported by tourism in 2018, making up 37.6% of the total workforce (Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, 2019a). And historically, the "hospitality sector employs the largest share of Latino workers in Nevada," with construction work accounting for

[4] According to the United States Census Bureau (2019), "a metropolitan area (MA) is one of a large population nucleus, together with adjacent communities that have a high degree of economic and social integration with that nucleus" and "must contain either a place with a minimum population of 50,000 or a Census Bureau-defined urbanized area and a total [metropolitan area] population of at least 100,000." The Las Vegas valley is part of the Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise Metropolitan Statistical Area and also corresponds to the same area as Clark County.

[5] The term Latinx is used throughout this paper instead of Latino and/or Hispanic (the term used by the U.S. Census Bureau) because Latina/o does not include gender identities outside of the female/male binary. In addition, all outside sources used in this paper utilized only the term Latino/Hispanic, and did so interchangeably. When discussing the findings, some participants used the actual term "Latinx."

another key labor sector; in 2006, at its peak, "24.2 % of employed Latinos were in construction" (Tuman, 2016, p. 8). In addition, the American Immigration Council found that, "Immigrants are a vital part of the state's labor force across sectors, accounting for nearly 40 percent of all workers in the hotel and food services industry as well as over a quarter of those in the arts, entertainment, and recreation industry", with Mexico (39.5 %) , the Philippines (14.3%), El Salvador (5.2%), China (3.1%), and Cuba (3%) accounting for the top five countries of origin (2017). Together, these statistics and demographic shifts regarding the Latinx population and other immigrant populations in Las Vegas are understudied, yet have repercussions not only for the Southwest but the nation as a whole since Las Vegas's recognition extends beyond the domestic sphere to attract almost six million international visitors annually in recent years (LVCVA, 2019c).

Immigration activism has most often been studied from the location of larger cities, like Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, that have long histories of social movements and immigrant rights activism. Though Las Vegas does not have a similar history, it, too, had a large turnout in the 2006 May Day march down the Strip (Revilla, 2012; Revilla and Rangel-Medina, 2011; Tuman, 2009; Lazos, 2007). This thesis examines how, in a metropolitan area that is associated most with the slogan "What happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas," and the popular moniker of "Sin City," immigrant rights activism has developed and grown. The dominant narrative about Las Vegas creates a popular illusion of the city as a tourist playground, and often overshadows the large influx of immigrants from Latin America, particularly from Mexico and Central America, that have shifted the demographics of this valley since the 1980s. My research intervenes in current understandings of Las Vegas history and asks: 1. How did Las Vegas activists engage in spatial resistance through their involvement in the immigrant rights

movement beginning in 2006? 2. What organizing methods and/or tactics did they utilize? And 3. What did it mean to engage in immigrant rights activism in Las Vegas, an internationally-renowned tourist destination? By bridging scholarship across different disciplines and subjects, from Las Vegas history, to immigration studies, and geography, I argue that Las Vegas immigrant rights organizing was spatial resistance to illegality, racism, and classism as it was produced and practiced in Las Vegas. By resisting erasure and advocating for immigrant rights, the primarily youth and feminist-led activism made a lasting impact on Las Vegas.

Literature Review

Situating Las Vegas: Tourism, Demographic Shifts, and Local Activism

Las Vegas is an important site to consider because it occupies a particular role in the national imaginary. Undertaking a strategic marketing campaign on behalf of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Center (LVCVA) beginning in the 1990s, LVCVA (2019b) "launched a campaign to market Las Vegas as more than a convention or gambling destination" and "evolved its marketing of Las Vegas to capture and convey the emotional experience Las Vegas offers." The LVCVA evolved from the Clark County Fair and Recreation Board, created in 1955 by the state legislature. Currently, the LVCVA is comprised of elected officials and six representatives from the private sector. According to the LVCVA website, its primary mission is to "promote Las Vegas as the world's most desirable destination for leisure and business travel," as "it provides a vital service for the public by contributing to the growth of the economy in all of Southern Nevada" (LVCVA, 2019b).

Guided by extensive marketing research, the LVCVA identifies this emotional experience as "the unique, liberating differentiator of 'adult freedom' that Las Vegas promises" (LVCVA 2019b). Trademarking the phrase, "**WHAT HAPPENS HERE, STAYS HERE®",**

the LVCVA campaign "showed average people doing things in Las Vegas that they wouldn't necessarily do at home" and this campaign is regarded as one of the most successful, achieving "widespread recognition by the advertising industry" (LVCVA, 2019b). As such, the city is widely perceived as the nation's— and even the world's—playground, drawing 42 million people to Las Vegas in 2017 alone, with most visitors arriving to primarily engage in the tourism and gaming industry (LVCVA, 2019d).

Campaigns like this one, as well as the many different types of casino resorts, attractions, and experiences in Las Vegas come together to influence how visitors and potential tourists perceive the city. On the five miles along the Strip, visitors can feel like they are experiencing cultures from different parts of the globe with casino resorts like the Venetian, Paris Hotel and Casino, Caesar's Palace, the New York-New York, and the Luxor. With other casinos like the Excalibur, which represents a medieval castle, visitors can even feel as if they are in different historical and spatial dimensions. In this way, "the Las Vegas Strip is a perfect illustration of a magical space that masks the absence of the real" (Irazábal, p. 201, 2002), where "visitors can suspend the alienation and estrangement of the contemporary city. In the city as fantasy, the pathologies of conflictual urban identities and impoverished citizenship are swept aside, albeit temporarily" (Irazábal, p. 200). When Las Vegas is understood as this fantastical place, where actions are deemed without consequence, it is difficult to imagine it inhabited by real people, or even families. But Las Vegas is a place like many others in the United States, and has faced similar issues to other growing cities.

Las Vegas is the ancestral home of the Paiute Tribe, whose ancestors the Tudinu (or Desert People), "occupied the territory encompassing part of the Colorado River, most of Southeastern Nevada and parts of both Southern California and Utah" (LV Paiute Tribe, 2019).

Las Vegas grew in response to its major economic industries, and was shaped first by its role as a railroad transportation hub in the early 1900s; then through its defense industry during World War II; and finally as a city of resorts and casinos beginning in the 1960s (Moehring, 2000; Simich & Wright, 2005; LVCVA, 2019b). This initial period of development, which drew white settlers through the railroad industry, "brought an end to the Paiutes' free movement and traditional way of life, making them landless laborers in their own land" (LV Paiute Tribe, 2019). Throughout its development, Las Vegas has been diverse in terms of ethnic, national, and racial origins (Simich & Wright, 2005). The 1910 census captures this early diversity, and demonstrates that only 50.4% of the adult population in Las Vegas claimed American born parents.

As the casino industry grew, it increasingly relied on the labor of working class people and people of color. Indeed, racism and segregation have been a part of the labor history of Las Vegas tourism. Las Vegas historian, Eugene Moehring explains, "To curry favor with the growing swarm of white tourists in the late 1940s and early 1950s, resorts on the Strip and Downtown informally banned minorities from casinos, restaurants, and hotel rooms, while at the same time eagerly hiring them as custodians, room maids, and porters" (2005, p. 6). So while the labor to construct these buildings and keep them in business has been deeply reliant on people of color, the tourist and leisurely spaces of the Las Vegas Strip were segregated until 1960. This practice led some to refer to Las Vegas as the Mississippi of the West (Moehring & Green, 2005, p. 164). In this way, access to the space of Las Vegas has been racialized and restricted.

Communities of color in Las Vegas, however, have found ways to resist. For example, Orleck documents how Black mothers fought for welfare reform in Las Vegas in the 1970s. She documents a history of migration from the South to Las Vegas beginning in the 1940s (Orleck,

2006). In order to draw attention to the activism, they engaged in various actions on the Las Vegas Strip, and made significant strides to provide poor communities with much-needed resources. In yet another example of resistance, in "The March that Never Happened: Desegregating the Las Vegas Strip", historian Claytee White (2004) historically analyzes how Black communities in Las Vegas engaged in activism to desegregate the Las Vegas Strip. White explains how racism, discrimination, and segregation functioned in Las Vegas from the 1930s and onward and finds, "Discriminatory practices became a relentless factor of every day life. Still economic in nature, the exclusionary unjust customs settled in the casino industry, the largest employer in the town, with attitudes spilling over into surrounding restaurants and theatres, essentially consuming the entire town" (White, 2004, p. 71). Turning to the contemporary moment, McKee (2014) examines the activism of Black mothers as they organized against the construction of walls in their neighborhood due to the construction of Interstate 15 Highway (I-15). He demonstrates that while legal segregation has not existed for decades, its legacies are alive and well in Las Vegas. Together, the scholarship of White (2004), Orleck (2006), and McKee (2014) demonstrates how race, geography, and resistance have been historically present, and are critically connected to spatial matters and injustice. The spaces of the Strip, the interstate highway, and everyday living have been historically significant in Las Vegas, shaping the experiences of communities. As demographics in Las Vegas rapidly change, it is important to recognize and honor this history and spatial activism, especially because similar patterns of discrimination, erasure, and resistance seem to persist.

Demographic shifts paralleled the development and growth of the city, and are most drastic when viewed from the 1960s and 2000. In the 1960s, as casinos continued being built, the Hispanic population in Clark County was 3.6% of the population but by 2000, it grew to 22.2%

of the population (Moehring, 2005, p. 6). Interpreting how demographics shifted in the fastest growing metropolitan areas from 1980-2000, Suro and Singer (2002) name Las Vegas one of the "new Latino destinations" (p. 4). Along the same lines, urban theorist Mike Davis (2008) notes, "Thirty years ago, the gambling oasis had hardly any Spanish-speaking residents, and the casino industry relied on a segregated Black population for its supply of maids and janitors. Today, nearly 300,000 Latinos outnumber [Black people] in both 'back-of-the-house' occupations and the general population" (p.8). As of 2010, the Latinx population in Las Vegas amounts to 29.1% of the population in Clark County, a total of 568,644 people out of 1,951,269 (Flanigan & Hardcastle, 2014). So while the tourist industry historically relied on the labor of African Americans, this reliance shifted to Latinx immigrant labor over the last few decades.

The demographic shifts in Las Vegas and the rate at which they occurred had many implications for the growing Latinx community. Rothman (2010) found that this rapid growth in population also meant that Las Vegas could not sufficiently provide adequate support for newcomers. With the rapid growth:

> The state faced many new challenges. Never before had Nevada seen the influx of so many people, many of whom were in need of government assistance… thousands of potential workers- many with families in tow- arrived in the Silver State. A significant percentage were Spanish-speaking… The state's mechanisms were not set up to provide the level of social service the new residents needed. Even worse, the state's taxation system did not allow the generation of new revenue at the rate necessary to provide for the needs of newcomers (2010, p. 159).

While Las Vegas has not been studied widely in regards to Latinx immigration, "one need only scratch the surface to find people from around the world living and working in Las Vegas…

much of today's rich diversity is the product of changes in the past two decades" (Simich and Wright, 2005, p. ix). My research acknowledges that these demographic and immigration shifts have impacted the racial demographics of Las Vegas, as well as the material realities and the geographies of Latinx immigrants in the city. Building on important scholarly research about the 2006 immigrant rights moment in Las Vegas, my research project incorporates a spatial analysis to recognize immigrant rights activism in Las Vegas as spatial resistance.

Anita Revilla, who is also an interview participant in my research, wrote "What Happens in Vegas Does Not Stay in Vegas: Youth Leadership in Immigrant Rights Movement in Las Vegas, 2006" (2012). Drawing on five years of participatory action research, one on one interviews, and focus groups with youth who called themselves "The Las Vegas Activist Crew," Revilla situates this work within education and youth activism using Latina/o critical race theory and examines how students engage in activism to "improve their own social conditions and those of their communities." Through interviews over a five-year period of time with youth and students who participated in walkouts influenced by anti-immigrant sentiments in Las Vegas and across the nation during 2006, Revilla (2012) finds that student activists formed part of the larger immigrant rights movement happening nationally, and shares, that "when students walked out to protest HR 4437, they were actually walking out in protest of the wide-ranging injustices they faced as youth of color, Latin[x people] in the United States, working-class people, children of exploited laborers, feminists, queer people, and much more" (2012, p. 109). Drawing on their stories of activism, she argues, "The goal of resisting ageism, sexism, and homophobia is integrally connected to the immigrant rights movement in Las Vegas because the students have made it so," (2012, p. 108). This was apparent in the Las Vegas Activist's Crew approach to activism, which was "committed to honoring youth, queer people, and feminists" (Revilla, 2012,

p. 106). While her work does not specifically examine the May 1, 2006 march and instead looks at the student walkouts and activism that preceded it, she demonstrates that the students who led walkouts in response to anti-immigrant and racist sociopolitical climate, were also key actors in planning the larger march that would follow.

Analyzing the 2006 immigrant rights marchas within the larger national context of the gran marchas, Sylvia R. Lazos (2007) deconstructs the grassroots mobilization aspect of this moment, and applies a micro- and macro- analysis to understand why the march in Las Vegas was "so successful." She identifies other key actors involved in the immigrant rights march, and argues that the march has made an impact on Las Vegas. Lazos notes, "This city has many immigrants but few immigrant organizations and no notable history of political activism. The marches would change that. New players, students, and hometown associations would have to invent coalitions and strategies" (2007, p. 808). Focusing on H.R. 4437, she finds that this piece of legislation was the catalyst for the large turnout of protesters from March-May 2006 for three main reasons. It caused a widespread response because of its criminalization of undocumented people and immigrant communities; this criminalization spurred a strong emotional response; and it was a reminder that in the United States, Latin[x] communities are a racial minority (Lazos, 2007, p. 805). As Lazos (2007) argues, in Las Vegas, the marches were transformative for the youth involved because:

> For one spring, they led, they challenged the establishment of Las Vegas, they ignored the Latin Chamber of Commerce, they negotiated with the Las Vegas police department, among the best in the country, and they fought with the Culinary Union. On May 1 they were rewarded by seeing 63,000 follow them down the streets of Las Vegas to shut down the Strip. They now know that they can lead and make a difference (p. 846).

My research builds on Revilla and Lazos's work, and looks back at this moment by incorporating a geographic lens to further understand the stories of Las Vegas activists and how they situate their impact on Las Vegas, over thirteen years since this moment. While the activism of students and community members may not have been examined through a spatial frame, the significance of space is still present in this scholarship. Revilla (2012) and Lazos (2007) explain why 2006 was a critical time for the Latinx and immigrant population in Las Vegas; the unprecedented and unexpected student walkouts were a response to the increasingly anti-immigrant and racist climate, and were necessary precursors to the large march that closed down the Strip. They recognize the importance of youth activists in Las Vegas, and place them in the context of the larger nationwide immigrant rights movement. In a report on Latin[x] civic participation in Las Vegas, Tuman (2009) includes the perspective of a student organizer, who shares that the May 1st march was an "exciting event that demonstrated the potential political weight of Latinos in southern Nevada" and that the protest was "a way of reclaiming the 'space' of the Las Vegas strip and forcing the city to acknowledge migrant workers" (p. Tuman 2009, p. 35). Revilla (2012) includes a powerful poem written by a student organizer called Rita, and shared via MySpace, a popular online forum for organizers. The poem represents this "reclaiming" of space that Tuman mentions as Rita declares:

Walkout!

Walkout!
NO it is not a cry from the outside,
It is a call from the inside of our schools,
Not from a video or a newspaper,
— But from our reality,
From our *estudiantes*.

Tourists do not clutter our Las Vegas sidewalks today,
The *causa*, our movement, our rage, our passion, our cry for justice,
That is what fills the streets today!

Casinos line the background,
Trees and grass in a desert,
A constructed world,
Finally slapped with a dose of reality,
Immigrants and allies fill the streets,
Por mi Madre,
Por mi Padre,
Por nuestra Raza!

Our presence blocks the freeways, puts traffic on pause for a second,
But do not forget that the rest of the day it is our ongoing presence and
work that keeps this country going.

Our children long underestimated have stood up!
And finally no other option but to stop and listen is yours.
Our fists stand in the air, unmoved,
But they are not alone, for in this *causa* we stand together.
You may question our motivation, our reasons,
But one thing is clear,
We are all here.[14]

Figure 1. Image of Rita's Poem, "Walkout!" From Revilla (2012, p. 102).

In this poem, Rita asserts the agency and power of student leaders. She explains how students who walked out of schools and participated in the marches did so because they were informed by their "realities" and moved to channel their rage and passion in the pursuit of justice. They challenged the casino-lined desert and this "constructed world" of Las Vegas by filling the streets, pausing traffic, and blocking the freeways to stand together. Activists literally decentered the tourists who "clutter our Las Vegas sidewalks" and defied the erasure of immigrant labor by

declaring “we are all here”. Thus, a spatial thread is woven throughout Rita’s powerful poem, indicating the importance of space in the context of immigrant rights organizing in Las Vegas.

Immigration, Illegality, and Intersectionality

The next portion of the literature review places immigration scholarship in conversation with the work of scholars who examine concepts of gender and humanity. I connect scholarship across disciplines because space is a critical aspect to consider alongside immigration and activism, and can help frame a deeper understanding of the material. In addition, while space might not be a primary consideration in this scholarship, there are often embedded elements of space that further illuminate the role it plays in daily life and broader social structures (in this case—immigration). Together, the scholars in this section evoke the need to further examine immigration law, policies, and practice to understand that gender, race, and perceptions of who can be human determine who gains access to space in terms of migration, mobility, and access. They demonstrate that the enforcement of space and place is informed by racialization and sexuality, remnants of liberalism and settler colonialism that often determine who can be seen as human, and thus deserving of access to rights, including the right to migrate.

Feminist geographers Peake and Kobayashi situate the importance of interdisciplinary considerations within a geographic context and explain, “The law plays a significant role in defining the qualities of place(s) as well as the spatiality of social conditions” (2002, p. 52). They continue, “We need to understand the law as a fundamental form of racialized social relationships that affects how people inhabit their homes, streets, and workplaces, and to comprehend the ways in which their experiences to those places are conditioned by their racialized treatment” (Peake and Kobayashi, 2002, p. 53). In my research, I focus on this particular idea of “inhabiting” a space and apply it to the context of Las Vegas, examining how

participants experienced and interacted with this space, to then understand how the marchas encompass spatial resistance. Anzaldua looks at bodies as a particular type of geographies, and explains, “Our bodies are geographies of selves made up of diverse, bordering, and overlapping ‘countries’. We’re each composed of information, billions of bits of cultural knowledge superimposing many different categories of experience... As our bodies interact with internal and external, real and virtual, past and present environments, people, and objects around us, we weave (tejemos), and are woven into, our identities” (2015, p. 69). This means that as people inhabit the spaces they occupy, they are both being shaped by *and* shaping the world around them in a dialectical relationship.

For my research, it is important to connect Peake and Kobayashi (2002) and Anzaldua (2015) with embodiment theories and activism. In their work concerning activist pedagogies and adult education, Ollis (2008) explains that for adult activists, learning is not only informal and social, but a holistic, embodied experience. This means that "learning is embedded in the everyday interactions of practice with other activists, and is intrinsically connected to the mind, the physical body and the emotions" and that emotions like "[p]assion, anger, frustration and a desire to change the world drive motivation and action" (2008, p. 328). Ollis contributes to the growing literature on activism in Australia, and demonstrates that for activists, learning happens holistically through intelligence, the physical body, and emotions. Ollis (2008) argues that for activists, embodiment and emotions are connected to everyday experiences. And as Anzaldua (2015) captures, these experiences exist in a dialectic relationship with physical spaces, or “environments”, which have already been embedded with the effects of “racialized treatment” enforced and entrenched through laws and policies (Peake and Kobayashi, 2002, p. 53). My research project builds on these ideas of feminist geographies and activist embodiment, and

utilizes them as a framework to examine the way people of color and immigrant communities in Las Vegas are often written out of the narrative of Las Vegas. As I demonstrate in this paper, popular marketing narratives, in turn, shape Latinx Las Vegas residents' ideas and experiences about humanity, citizenship, and belonging.

Immigration as an area for concern has been at the forefront of national discussions for the last few decades, but immigration is not a new or isolated concern. It has been debated, regulated, and controlled throughout history. And while the United States continues to perpetuate an ideal of fairness and equality, it creates systems that largely disadvantage many based on national and racial boundaries (Ngai 2004). The work of migration scholar Eithne Luibhéid reflects this understanding and includes gender, sexuality, and normativity as additional boundaries to migration. In the introduction to *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings*, Luibhéid (2003) explains that while scholarship on migration and related globalization patterns is plentiful, there is a gap when it comes to evaluating how sexuality informs migration policies and practices. Luibhéid argues that the practices of immigration control are heteropatriarchal constructions centered on heteronormative families, regulating what is socially considered to constitute the ideal family.

Luibhéid provides a historical overview of U.S. policies and laws through the 20th century, showing how regular immigration control came under federal government management in the late 1800s, guided by idea that "sovereign nations have the right to control the entry of noncitizens into their territories" (2003, p. xii). Luibhéid cites policies like the 1875 Page Law, which marked the beginning of a restrictive regime of federal immigration control by excluding Asian women thought to be coming into the country for 'lewd and immoral' purposes. Later, lesbian and gay exclusion would be codified in laws, labeling queer migrants as "persons with

abnormal sexual instincts" (in 1917) and banning them on the basis of a presumed sexual deviancy (in 1965) (Luibhéid, 2003, p. xii). Since its creation, therefore, federal immigration control focused on sexuality as the grounds for entry; this operated simultaneously with gender, racial, class, and cultural considerations. From this perspective, federal immigration law becomes visible as a mechanism which determines who can be admitted into and who can belong in the United States.

We can also consider Siobhan Sommerville's piece, "Sexual Aliens and the Racialized State: A Queer Reading of the 1952 U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act," to further capture how sexuality, gender, and race can provide a basis for surveillance and exclusion in the guise of citizenship. Sommerville closely examines the 1952 McCarran-Walter, or Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), and argues that while this policy was seen as progressive because it no longer contained explicit racialized language, in actuality race and sexuality worked inseparably as points of exclusion within U.S. immigration and naturalization policy. Examining through an analytical lens that centers queerness, Sommerville analyzes archival information, emphasizing questions of normative and nonnormative sexual identities and practices. By historically tracing language and focusing on immigration policy and legislation, she finds patterns excluding migrant women on the basis of gender, racializing Asian women as prostitutes for example, and consequently, potential threats to emerging notions of morality and normativity beginning in the late 19th century. In addition, legislation targeted homosexuality through pathologizing it as psychopathically inferior and linking it to communism, evoking sentiments of threat to national security during the 1950s Red Scare. Sommerville "demonstrates that the INA's construction of sexual aliens was embedded in and maintained a thoroughly racialized model of national citizenship..."(2005, p. 77). Perceptions of gender and sexuality were used to construct the

(un)desirable immigrant coded in state practices and national discourse. Nonnormative sexualities are connected to race and racialization processes in the realm of immigration, mobility, and exclusion.

To control and police humanity and citizenship, dominant narratives have been used to determine who belongs, and who does not in the United States. For those who have not belonged, who have not matched the overrepresented narrative of human or citizen in the judgement of western policies and law, there is a high price to exist under these regimes, paid through victimization, violence, death, and subordination. Ngai, Luibhéid, and Sommerville demonstrate how this has functioned historically through exclusionary immigration policies in the U.S. Next, it is important to shift to the contemporary moment to understand how this exclusion has continued through the production of migrant "illegality" (De Genova, 2013). De Genova theorizes about immigrant exclusion and explains how "illegality" is a sociopolitical production built and produced to rationalize and justify a legal system built on racialized differences. This system creates and relies on popular and widespread anti-immigrant sentiment in order to continue profiting off of the labor of racialized people. In their article, "Racializing 'Illegality': An Intersectional Approach to Understanding How Mexican-origin Women Navigate an Anti-immigrant Climate," García builds on De Genova's work on "illegality" and finds that during heightened moments of anti-immigrant sentiments, "race, legal status, nativity, and generation status become conflated" so that ethnoracial markers as well as gender and class are compounded and result in discrimination. This means that regardless of citizenship status, under the current anti-immigrant context, Mexican women are perceived as undocumented through the process of racialized "illegality", and with this perception comes discrimination and violence.

Through the work of immigration scholars, immigrant policies in the United States can be understood as structural mechanisms to exclude and criminalize groups of people based on differences of racial, gender, and sexual identities. In fact, considerations of immigrant belonging and exclusion connect to questions of immigrant humanity. In Sylvia Wynter's "1492: A New World View," Wynter demonstrates how colonization and liberalism has made it so only particular people can occupy this space of humanness, and access the rights and protections that seem inherent to the category of human. What does it mean to be human? Wynter argues that western ideas often restricted humanity to a select few and that this singular narrative is overrepresented, which makes sense when considering historical patterns of European political domination relied on the exploitation of colonized and enslaved peoples.

I connect Wynter's arguments concerning the idea of human to the othering of immigrants and political exclusion in the current sociopolitical climate which is enacted through illegality. In addition, Wynter's perspectives on humanity are similar to Cacho's (2012) ideas regarding social value, social death, and nonpersonhood. Cacho (2012) finds that in the United States, notions of human rights are shaped by neoliberal perspectives that prioritize capitalist gain and rely upon the creation of devalued, criminalized populations. Theorizing personhood and social value, Cacho argues that the struggle to be seen as human, or accepted as a citizen in the context of the United States, is a relational process that requires obtaining social value at the detriment of an "other", where the opposite of social value is social death.

Geography, Space, and Spatial Resistance

In addition to the racialized and gendered ways that migration is policed in the United States, space, place, and geography also matter in the ways dehumanization affects immigrant communities. First, it is necessary to understand what exactly space, place, and geography mean

and signify. In the field of geography, space can be thought of as a container, an abstract space, a physical space, and/or the shape of a terrain.[6] More specifically, place is space that has memory, it is meaning-filled and embodies something, like capital or power. Henri Lefebvre's work, a French Marxist philosopher and sociologist, is foundational to the study of human geography, and heavily informed the spatial turn in the social sciences. In his work, Lefebvre asks for scholars to review how space is considered and approached. Spaces are not empty areas, waiting to be developed, but implicate much more than just the physical (Lefebvre, 1991, p.1). This is important to consider, because while inequalities can be mapped onto landscapes and regions through the enforcement of dominant structures, spaces are also recreated through resistance and reclamation.

In his work, which builds off of Lefebvre's theories on space and contextualizes them to understand sociospatial processes in U.S. cities, Eugene McCann analyzes racial geographies of Lexington, Kentucky. McCann utilizes Lefebvre's triad theory of space to explain how some spaces, particularly U.S cities, are often presented as ahistorical, open spaces when they are actually racialized and embedded with social practices that "facilitate the exercise of state power and the free flow of capital" (1999, p. 168). To put space further into perspective, we must also consider the work of Don Mitchell alongside McCann's notion of racialized spaces. In *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space,* geographer Don Mitchell evaluates how spatial resistance is enacted in cities. Recounting Lefebvre's work, Mitchell explains the most important of his arguments concerning right to the city is that of "Lefebvre's normative argument that the city is an oeuvre—a work in which all its citizens participate" (2003, p. 5). Mitchell examines what the word citizen connotes, focusing on how cities exclude certain

[6] Space defined by Dr. Genevieve Carpio during a lecture for Chicana/o Studies 291-2: Racial Geographies.

people, namely those who are unhoused/homeless. Ultimately, his work demonstrates, "Space, place, and location are not just the stage upon which rights are contested, but are actively produced by—and in turn serve to structure—struggles over rights" (Mitchell, 2003, p. 81). Applying Mitchell's spatial justice to the experiences of Latinx immigrant rights activists helps question and break down how citizenship, belonging, and consequently humanity is rearticulated in the process of reclaiming space and a right to live in the United States, especially during times of anti-immigrant antagonism, like in 2006. In my work, by examining immigrant rights activism in Las Vegas and the march down the Las Vegas Strip, I question what the seemingly abstract space of the Las Vegas Strip might conceal, especially in the context of the immigrant rights marcha on May 1, 2006.

In his book, *Latino Mass Mobilization: Immigration, Racialization, and Activism,* Chris Zepeda-Millán (2017) analyzes this key 2006 moment, where large marches in support of immigrant rights happened across the nation specifically in opposition to H.R. 4437. The Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. H.R. 4437, or the Sensenbrenner Bill "intended to punish individuals who assisted – even in the most basic ways – any of the nation's estimated 11 million 'people without papers' (undocumented immigrants), by threatening to impose monetary fines and incarceration, potentially criminalizing everyone from teachers and family members to employers and social service providers" (Zepeda-Millán, 2017, p. 2). Focusing on the marches in New York, NY; Los Angeles, CA; Chicago, IL; and Fort Myers, Florida, Zepeda-Millán finds that the H.R. 4437 anti-immigrant rhetoric racialized illegality as "generally Latin[x], but more precisely Mexican" which impacted the demographics of key organizers and protest turnouts in each city (2017, p.132). This meant that even in the racially and ethnically diverse New York, where the policy would affect many non-Latin[x]

immigrants, because H.R. 4437 targeted Latinos, this seemed “to have mobilized and triggered feelings of group consciousness and linked fate primarily among Latin[x]s compared to non-Latin[x]s” (2017, p. 132). And in the much smaller setting of Fort Myers, "it was primarily Mexicans and not Cubans, Haitians, Columbians, or Puerto Ricans that mobilized against H.R 4437” (2017, p. 132). While Zepeda-Millán does not include Las Vegas in his analysis, he explains that the racialized illegality produced from H.R. 4437 is "why cities with large U.S.- and foreign-born populations of Mexican descent (e.g. Los Angeles, Dallas, and Chicago) had the biggest demonstrations in the nation during the protest wave” (p. 132). More importantly, May 1st was strategically chosen as the date for mass political mobilization action because of its historical connection to labor rights. As Zepeda-Millán explains, activists wanted to challenge the claim that immigrants are a drain on the economy, and thus planned to shut down the American economy in sectors most dependent on immigrant labor (2017, p. 95). While Zepeda-Millán’s work does not take a spatial (or geographically-informed) approach, he demonstrates how demographics and space influenced the ways people organized and planned these marches. This is helpful in understanding the significance of May 1st in the local setting of Las Vegas. With the rising Latinx population in Las Vegas tied to the tourist industry and its labor, it is no wonder the march down the Strip drew thousands.

Portillo, Ma, Macías, and Varela’s article, “The ‘Good,’ the ‘Bad,’ and the Queer Invisible: The Los Angeles May Day Queer Contingent” also examines May 1st marchas, focusing on the role of queer activists within the immigration rights movement. Portillo et al. (2015) trace how the immigrant rights movement and the LGBTQ community connected through the political mobilization of queer immigrant activists in Los Angeles. They note that since 2007, there has been a large presence of LGBTQ supporters and activists at the annual May 1st

marches, and call this group the May Day Queer Contingent, or MDQC. According to Portillo et al., this coalition is one of the first and most successful groups to demonstrate and lead the intersectional merging of LGBTQ rights and immigrant rights movements. They urge us to question how centering common narratives espousing good immigrants is harmful and falls in line with heteronormative and patriarchal views. In the context of Las Vegas, Revilla (2012) also speaks to the multidimensionality of May 1st marchas. This is reflected in students' dedication to question patriarchal ways of organizing, and to instead center women's and queer peoples perspectives when leading local organizing efforts in Las Vegas.

The May 1st marchas and other public acts of disobedience are some ways activists embody spatial resistance. Activist reclamation of the streets, especially by undocumented, and/or immigrant rights activists, is a political act of exerting right to exist and right to live in the United States. This spatial resistance requires putting bodies on the line in visible public spaces because often, the violence and oppression inherent in border policing and deportations occurs in what become invisible, forgotten spaces through the work of dominant institutions that normalize these activities or justify this violence.

Undocumented folks and immigrant communicates have engaged in resistance and refusal in different ways and across different spaces. As Zepeda-Millán (2017) and Portillo et al. (2015) demonstrate, it is helpful to evaluate how activism, through mobilizations like May 1st, can encompass a spatial resistance response to illegality, humanity, and exclusion. Space is another dimension that impacts how people live, resist, and struggle. Within this frame, we can begin to see how the space of the Strip also functions to erase and dehumanize the immigrant and people of color community. Therefore, the protest and marches that happened in Las Vegas, Nevada in 2006 act as a way to occupy public spaces to demand the right to exist in this national

context while reframing ideas of traditional citizenship, humanity, and belonging at the local level. By analyzing the stories of activists who have engaged in organizing in Las Vegas, my research recognizes the importance of analyzing how race, geography, and immigration inform how policies are enforced and resisted, and turns to Las Vegas as an important site to understand and analyze as well.

Methods

The research methods for this study include eight in-depth qualitative interviews with eight people, and archival analysis of newspapers and online materials about immigration and activism in Las Vegas (particularly around the 2006 May 1st march). I conducted interviews with participants who 1) used to live or currently live in Las Vegas, 2) participated in immigrant rights activism from 2006-2012 there, and 3) were involved with or connected to the United Coalition for Im/migrant Rights organization (UCIR). I focused on UCIR and organizers involved with the organization because the coalition was created during the height of the immigrant rights movement in Las Vegas, and because UCIR held two immigrant rights conferences in 2008 and 2009. This involvement meant that many of UCIR's organizers were interviewed by the press, and were visible to the public in this way. Because of this public visibility, and to account for their own agency and consent, I use participants' real names in this paper. However, to preserve a bit of their privacy, I choose to use only their first names in the paper.

I chose to focus on the years of involvement from 2006-2012 for two primary reasons. First, 2006 was an important year in the immigrant rights movement both at a national and local scale; millions across the nation marched in opposition of anti-immigrant legislation, with thousands marching on the Las Vegas Strip in opposition as well. A key aspect of this research

project seeks to understand how the marcha in Las Vegas impacted the local community in the years following, and so 2012 was selected as a marker because it allows enough time to understand possible effects in the six years since 2006. In addition, 2012 is another key chronological marker in immigrant rights history because former President Barack Obama announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy.

Before beginning each audio-recorded interview, I shared an IRB-approved letter of consent with participants, and also verbally explained to participants the information contained in this letter. I informed participants that I planned to use their first names when discussing their interviews and this research, but that they were welcome to use a pseudonym of their choosing instead of their first name, for any reason if they wished. All eight of the participants told me to use their names. This might be because of their age, the fact that interviews were conducted more than 10 years since the time I focus on in this research project, and/or because many were already publicly visible and associated with immigrant rights activism in Las Vegas.

Interviews were guided by a list of questions that included a range of topics from personal and family background, to participant experiences living and organizing in Las Vegas. A key point in the interview involved having participants draw a map of Las Vegas, a method drawing from the work of U.S. urban planner Kevin Lynch (1960, p. 141 and 154).[7] Interviews were conducted semi-formally as conversations between researcher and participant. So while I used the interview questions as a guide during the interview, I allowed the conversation to flow in response to participants' replies and reactions. I used this method because I was involved in immigration activism during my undergraduate career at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas,

[7] I came across Lynch's work on mapping when I read urban planner Adwoa Afful's "Land Marks: Subversive Cartography Maps the Margins" in Bitch Magazine. Afful's text discussed countermapping projects in Toronto, ON, CA and informed my approach to participant mapping of Las Vegas.

so I knew six out of the eight activists in a familiar and/or friendly capacity. Table 1. "Participant Information" contains background information including their current age, gender and/or pronouns, sexuality, birthplace, nationality and/or ethnicity, years in Las Vegas,[8] and their current occupations.

Table 1

Participant Information

Name	Age	Gender and/or Pronouns	Sexuality	Birthplace	Nationality/Ethnicity	Years in Las Vegas	Current Occupation
Adan	30	He/Him/His	Joto	Phoenix, AZ	Chicano	17*	Graduate Student
Anita	46	cis, She/Her/Hers	Queer, Fluid	San Antonio, TX	Chicana, Latina	15	Professor
Claudia	29	Cis-female, She/Her/Hers	heterosexual	Salt Lake City, UT	Latina	3	Social worker, Counselor
Evelyn	36	She/Her/Hers	heterosexual	Zacatecas, Mexico	"Mexican in solidarity with the Chicanx movement"	10*	Director at non-profit org and lawyer
Joanna	31	Woman, She/Her/Hers	Queer	central CA, CA	Chicana, Latina	10	Professor
Kenia	32	She/Her/Hers	Fluid	Nicaragua	Nicaraguan-born U.S. citizen, Latina	10*	State director of voting organization
Liz	29	Woman, She/Her/Hers and They/Them	Bisexual, Queer	Mexico	Mexicana, Latina	20*	Hospitality, Casino/Resort
Meño	35	Cisgender, He/Him/His	Queer, Gay, and Fluid	Avenal, CA	Chicano, Mexican American, Mexican	7	Graduate Student

Initially, I reached out through a social media message, email, or text message and asked some leaders from UCIR whether they would like to be involved and if they could share my information with additional potential participants. After they agreed to participate and consented

[8] I place an asterisk* to indicate if participants were currently living in Las Vegas at the time of the interview in 2019.

to my audio recording of the interview, I conducted the in-person interviews in Las Vegas, at the location of their choosing. If participants were unable to be interviewed in person because they no longer lived in Las Vegas, I asked if they consented to interviews via video chat (Facetime) which were also audio-recorded using computer software (QuickTime Player). After the interviews, most participants recommended additional potential participants. Interviews ranged from about 50-100 minutes. I transcribed and conducted all interviews.

After transcribing the interviews, I manually coded interviews in two cycles. In the first cycle of coding, I utilized holistic coding, an exploratory coding method that "applies a single code to each large unit of data in the corpus to capture a sense of the overall contents and the possible categories that may develop" (Saldaña, 2012, p. 41). Then, to transition from the first cycle to the second cycle of coding, I code-mapped all the codes that emerged, and placed them in categories based on similarities. In the second cycle of coding, I re-coded interviews to "develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual and/or theoretical organization from [the] array of First Cycle Codes" (Saldaña, 2012, p. 207).

In addition to the interviews I conducted, I also collected and analyzed newspaper articles to help contextualize immigrant rights activism from 2006-2012. I accessed newspaper articles online, using NewsBank's extensive collection of archived and current news sources. NewsBank contains "information from thousands of newspaper titles, as well as newswires, web editions, blogs, videos, broadcast transcripts, business journals, periodicals, government documents and other publications" (NewsBank, 2019). I focused my search in their "Access World News-Historical and Current" collection on "USA- Nevada," which includes 64 Nevadan news sources. In order to limit my search results to information relevant to this research project, I utilized the search phrases "immigrant rights AND Las Vegas," as well as "immigrant rights AND May

AND Las Vegas." I used the Boolean operator "AND" in each phrase to narrow searches to results which contained all terms in each phrase. For each search, I utilized a date filter, limiting search results to March-June of each year (2006-2012). In total, I collected 38 news articles that discussed the immigrant rights marchas in Las Vegas. The majority of these news articles were published in 2006 (24/38 articles), with a few published (2-4 articles) steadily published each subsequent year. For the 2011 timeframe however, I found no articles in the NewsBank database referencing an immigrant rights march in Las Vegas. This is discrepancy is interesting to note, and may be a result of a lack of media coverage.

Findings

The findings section is divided into three main parts. First, I analyze how each participant describes their initial entry into activism as embodied responses to injustice, or responses that are deeply connected to their experiences with immigrant rights and/or with poverty. Then, I look at activist maps and news articles to understand how this embodied response was not only informed by H.R 4437 as a catalyst on the national level, but was also a response to the local racialized geography of the Las Vegas Valley and the persistent erasure of communities of color. In the last section of the findings, I analyze how activists engaged in this spatial resistance through May 1st organizing, to find that in Las Vegas, youth immigrant rights activism was informed by intersectional feminism, and that May Day 2006 was a critical moment with continued reverberations for the Las Vegas Valley.

Embodied Injustice: Anti-Immigrant Legislation as a Catalyst for Activist Engagement

Reflecting back on their activist origin stories during their interviews, many of the participants told similar stories about feeling a sense of injustice and inequality in their lives, but not having the "language" to explain this in relation to their activist involvement. The activists

were motivated to become involved in immigrant rights activism for many different reasons, with most connecting these motivations to their lived experiences and feelings in response to anti-immigrant narratives and policies heightened after H.R. 4437, or the Sensenbrenner Bill. It was because these policies would affect them, their families, and their communities, that many of these participants would become involved in immigrant rights organizing during their youth, through the 2006 high school walkouts in Las Vegas and the May 1st marchas. Examining the stories of Las Vegas activists who are looking back and making sense of when and why they became activists, it is clear that their perceptions and embodied response to injustice were catalysts for becoming engaged in activism.

While Liz describes herself as quiet and timid growing up, she still had the reputation of being a "street lawyer" and saw herself as a "little kid fighting for justice," who defended other students when teachers accused them of being troublemakers. Remembering her childhood, she recounts, "I had this little spark of injustice of [thinking] how can I use my voice?... I was a very timid person. When I was little, I didn't talk. I wasn't the type of person that would spark conversations. But the older I got, the more I realized I had a voice and the more I would speak up or challenge." Liz traces back her activist origins to these early memories, but she identifies her involvement in the student walkouts in 2006 as a particularly significant moment.

Recalling the high school walkouts in Las Vegas from late-March to early-April of 2006, Liz remembers being frustrated by the lack of understanding and blatant disregard expressed by some of her high school teachers and peers. She shares:

> In 2006 it was like this is the moment… the moment you've been waiting for to do something. I felt powerless and voiceless for a long time. I used my voice the little that I could in school [to defend other students perceived as troublemakers]. But again, I didn't have the language. I didn't have even the backup— like my mom has always been a fierce person, but she doesn't know the language. So I had to vouch for myself and defend myself. But in 2006, it was kind of like that idea of it's not just me alone anymore. Other

> folks and people are down and like, fuck it, let's do it. And like I said, we didn't really understand policy. We just knew that [anti-immigrant legislation] was fucked up. We just knew that we were targets. We just knew that our families were affected. So we went onto the streets. And people always made fun of us when we left [school] because they're like, “They didn't even know what they were doing.” And it's like, no, [we] knew. [We] just didn't know how to be politically correct and tell you that. And tell you policy, and tell you we just knew that, "Well, I'm just walking out for my family." [And they would ask:] "Well, why?" [But] why does it need to matter? So, that's really where it started for me.

Like Revilla (2012) and Lazos (2007) mention, the students who walked out of high schools and middle schools in the spring of 2006 were largely received negatively by peers and educators, portrayed as ignorant or naive, and perceived as simply wanting to ditch school. Yet in this quote, Liz recalls feeling “little spark[s] of injustice” that would lead her to challenge these perceptions and to first become involved in the student walkouts in Las Vegas, and then later in immigrant rights organizing and feminist activism more broadly. While she did not have the “language” to express how this sense of injustice connected to structural inequalities and injustices, her lived experiences combined with the emotional impacts of the anti-immigrant legislation and ultimately compelled her to engage in activism by physically going “onto the streets.”

Adan also tells a similar story of how his experiences and those of his family and peers were at the heart of his activist engagement. In his case, both his mother’s deportation orders and anti-immigrant rhetoric at his high school proved to be a catalyst for action. Reflecting on his high school experience and why he began organizing, Adan says:

> [O]ne time these fucking kids started passing out these flyers, like, “Tell these beaners to go back to Mexico,” or something like that. And the teachers would literally tell us, “Go march back to Mexico.” Like that's what they [would] literally tell us in class. And so I was like, “Fuck y'all.” And so me and my friends, we were like the ones who would always get sent to detention, who would always get sent out of class. We're like, “Fuck this.” We started organizing, we did sit-ins, we were walking out of class, we would start texting each other [to plan the walkouts]… And we would not stand up during the American flag. We're like, “Fuck this Pledge of Allegiance… to what?! Hell no.” And so

> that's [what] we did on our terms, based on how we were being treated. And we started getting involved. We're not the people you say we are. So in some ways that's how I started my activism. Whatever I did, it was based on what I had experienced, what I saw my friends experiencing. But it changed when I started college por que I started learning like, how is this systemic?

Adan does not frame his early activist engagement in lacking the "language," instead he directly states that he started his activism based on what he had personally experienced with discrimination and racism at his school, and also what he witnessed his friends experiencing. Like Liz, Adan also defended himself and his peers in school, and would later connect these embodied experiences of injustice to larger systemic issues. In addition, this 2006 moment demonstrated to Liz and Adan that they were not alone— what they were feeling and experiencing was not an isolated experience but one that was felt in different schools across the Valley.

Across the nation, the 2006 period was an especially turbulent time of anti-immigrant rhetoric and sentiment. And at the local level, students of Latinx descent and their immigrant family members were racialized and subject to the discrimination created and supported by illegality. This is apparent when examining the response to student activist walkouts and the May 1st marcha. Figure 2 shows a letter to the editor of the *Las Vegas Review- Journal* written by a Clark County employee that illustrates anti-immigrant sentiment.

Boycott a teacher's dream come true - Las Vegas Review-Journal (NV) - May 4, 2006 - page 8B

May 4, 2006 | Las Vegas Review-Journal (NV) | Page 8B

To the editor:

I want to publicly thank all those who marched Monday to show support for illegal immigrants in Las Vegas. Thanks to their boycott, my school was 25 percent empty.

It was one of the most pleasurable days I've had teaching in the past several years. The thought occurred to me that if I could have more days like this, I could actually get to the business of helping students improve their test scores and getting my school off the No Child Left Behind watch list.

If school was boycotted more often, we would have no need to build more schools, no need for teachers to look for translators at parent conferences, no need to spend time remediating, no need to pay taxes for free or reduced-cost lunches and no need to try to discover a new teaching method to help English learners acquire the skills necessary to become proficient in testing.

So I thank all those who kept their kids out of school to participate in this march. I can't wait until another march is planned. You have my full support.

Perhaps you could all march south and become a burden to Mexican school districts.

Hoai-My Winder

Las Vegas

The writer is a Clark County School District teacher.

Figure 2. "Boycott a teacher's dream come true" (Las Vegas Review-Journal, 2006).

This letter depicts how nationwide anti-immigrant sentiment was interpreted and framed within local demographic changes and their subsequent impacts on the education system. The Clark County public education teacher lists issues facing the changing needs of the school district (i.e., "build more schools", "translators", "taxes for free or reduced-cost lunches", and "English learners") and seems to blame the changing demographics of the Latinx population. They end their letter by wishing that those who participated in the march return to Mexico and "become a burden to Mexican school districts." This demonstrates how Latinx students and their parents were subject to racialization, associated as a burden fueling the rapid growth of Las Vegas, and students' agency and involvement in organizing was undermined and erased.

In yet another example of this racialization and erasure, we can turn to a newspaper article describing school district response to the student marchas and May 1st march. Clark

County School District official Walt Rulffes discouraged staff and students from participating in any daytime May 1st boycott activities, threatening district staff with disciplinary actions for any non pre-approved absences. Kalil and Planas (2006, p. 1A) explain:

> Rulffes expressed hopes that a repeat of the massive March 31 demonstration does not occur. On that day, 2,800 people marched to downtown Las Vegas, most of them high school and middle school students who ditched class from 19 district campuses. Rulffes said that it costs about $10 million a day to operate the school system. He said it's not fair for students to burden taxpayers by skipping class. "With those kind of resources going into public education, there should be no reason for students not to attend every minute of class they can."

In this quote, important connections are made between student walkouts and the subsequent May 1st marcha. In fact, Rulffes' comments about public education costs and taxpayer money, seems to guilt and blame students for even considering "ditching school," saying there can be "no reason" they should not attend. While this message might not be as overtly discriminatory as the letter to the editor, it utilizes similar anti-immigrant rhetoric, especially in regards to public burden claims in education on behalf of immigrant children. And perhaps Rulffes might not have been aware of the seriousness of this H.R. 4437 moment, but students were walking out in defense of immigrant and labor rights in Las Vegas, and against racism and anti-immigrant sentiments in their very schools. This is a compelling reason for many, indeed.

Like Adan and Liz, Joanna also identifies the 2006 period as important in her activist origin story because anti-immigrant legislation created a sense of urgency. She remembers that the first action she attended in Las Vegas was for the Dream Act. Joanna states:

> At that time I didn't know very much other than what the Dream Act was. I didn't have a critical sense of whether the Dream Act was good, or what aspects of it I was not in support of. I just knew that it was a path to residency or citizenship for undocumented youth…And then shortly after that a lot of legislation started getting introduced. That was that moments wave of anti-immigrant legislation that would further criminalize immigrants. So H.R. 4437, which was the Sensenbrenner Bill, got introduced in 2005. And that was a huge moment of… it wasn't consciousness. It was like, "I'm feeling a need to act"… So the largest way I got involved was organizing student walkouts. I was

> in my senior year in high school when students started walking out on a large scale in Las Vegas. And that was really what pushed me to really be at the forefront of that organizing.

Joanna says that she did not have a "critical sense" of immigration policies, but that by experiencing the impact of anti-immigrant legislation and criminalization of immigrants, Joanna felt a "need to act." So even though she did not have a critical "consciousness," like Adan and Liz she also felt the embodied impacts of injustices because of her experiences in an immigrant family and broader immigrant community. She was also moved by this collective sense of action, represented by the large-scale walkouts from schools across Las Vegas.

In this next quote, Joanna shares what motivated her to engage in activism and says:

> It's a lot of things. I think if I go back, like all the way back, to my personal and family history… My family is a mixed-status family. I have like tios and tias who are undocumented. I have family members who have been in prison, who were deported after they got out of prison. Even growing up as a kid, I remember my [friends] arriving from Mexico and being undocumented. And understanding that my life experiences were very different from them and that I was very privileged in having citizenship. I remember as a child… I grew up realizing that the border was unjust. That a lot of my family did not have security in this country. That as a person who had citizenship it was not only my responsibility to help people in any way, and to ensure that people were not disposed of or treated unjustly because their status was different from mine. And that was a very clear lesson that I learned in my family, and that I learned from my parents, and that I learned growing up the way I did. But I also feel like being raised and growing up in San Jose and in the Central Valley also impacted me and introduced me to a history of people organizing.

For Joanna, growing up in an immigrant family meant knowing that the "border was unjust" which helped her develop a sense of "responsibility" to fight against dehumanization and criminalization of anti-immigrant legislation and policies. She sensed this injustice through these experiences, but it was also her experiences of living in San Jose prior to moving to Las Vegas that exposed her to the history of farm labor organizing, which also showed her that people have historically fought against these very injustices. So when she was attending high school in Las Vegas at a key moment such as 2006, Joanna was already poised to become an activist organizer.

Because she was exposed to a history of community activism, Joanna was able to bring that spirit with her to Las Vegas, and it allowed her to make connections with injustices that were happening locally.

While Liz, Joanna, and Adan trace back their activist origins to their involvement with the 2006 student walkouts as high school students, Evelyn and Kenia also mark this 2006 walkout moment as significant, even though they were both college students at that time and no longer in high school. Evelyn explains,

> I started getting involved in the marches. There was the student walkouts because the H.R. 4437 passed the committee in Congress and basically the bill would have made it illegal for a person to come into contact with an undocumented person. The pushback to students walking out was that, "Oh, well you shouldn't walk out, you should walk into a classroom." But our approach from MEChA was like, "Oh no, well we need to support them. They're trying to say something." And so it was huge. The walkouts happened nationally. We had a lot of students just from high school and middle school marching for immigrant rights. And then that's how we started getting involved.

While Evelyn shares why 2006 was a key moment, beginning with supporting the high school and middle school walkouts, she also traces back her activism to growing up attuned to a sense of injustice and discrimination. She shares:

> There was a little box in my history book in eleventh grade where I read about Thurgood Marshall. And remember, I grew up with a lot of sadness around how I saw what I now call discrimination play out in my world. And so when I first read about how they dismantled legal segregation, it was the first time I was like, "All right, I think I'm going to do something like that... for immigrants." That's what I said. So that's how my seed was planted or kind of watered. The seed was inside of me. And I just think I remember growing up undocumented and thinking about how super poor [my family was] in southern California. Thinking about how money, like paper and identity papers shouldn't be a marker for humanity [or] how you're treated. [Or] who you are as human being.

In this quote, Evelyn identifies growing up with a sense of sadness connected to discrimination and experiences around poverty and her documentation status. This was the embodied sense of injustice, the seed that was inside of Evelyn, that would later grow into a deep conviction to fight for immigrant rights.

Kenia was not involved in the high school walkouts of 2006 as a high school student, she provided support as a college student who had already been engaged in activism in organizing because of her own experiences advocating for the Dream Act during her own high school days. With lots of laughter, Kenia fondly recalls being motivated to participate in a rally in downtown Las Vegas after hearing a "physically persuasive" and "really cute guy" speak about the rally for the Dream Act. She explains the rally and says,

> We showed up at the Lloyd George Federal Building and there must have been about 17 folks there, maybe 15, no more than 20. And never in my life had I ever seen folks holding signs… But this was like a group of 15 to 20 folks who were like, "Pass the Dream Act now!"[And] like, "Latino students in higher ed!" So concepts that, at the time, I did not know what they meant. But I will never forget. There was a young person who was already in college. He was older than me who [was] leading chants and I never even led a chant before. And so I'm following along. And mind you, we're on the footsteps of the Lloyd George Federal Building in the afternoon. Nobody's there, just us. And he passes the megaphone over to me and he says, "You lead the chant." I choke up because I had never heard my voice amplified ever. And I heard my voice amplified for the first time and got hooked. I was like, is that cute guy here? I don't even see him.

Kenia also had this sense of not fully understanding certain concepts regarding immigration policies, but attending this rally, however small it might have been, significantly impacted her. It altered her worldview, revealed she had a personal stake in these issues, and provided an avenue for her to hear herself, develop her voice, and empower herself. Her story demonstrates that engaging in immigrant rights activism in Las Vegas is personal and powerful, and that building connections with different student activists was a catalyst for developing a critical consciousness about immigration policies and about Las Vegas itself.

Kenia goes on to explain that after the rally, as she was walking to the bus stop on her way home, she came across an anti-immigrant billboard. While she had not been aware of this billboard beforehand, she remembers hearing some people planning actions to get the billboards taken down at the rally. But once she got to the bus stop, still feeling the buzz and excitement of

participating and leading a chant for the very first time, Kenia was shocked to come across such a blatant discriminatory, anti-immigrant billboard. She recalls:

> At the same time there was a billboard… that had a picture of the United States in black, Mexico in red. And arrows [pointing] from Mexico to the U.S. and had some stuff plastered on top of it that was basically like, "You're not welcome here, Mexicans." Mind you, I'm not Mexican, right? I'm fucking Nicaraguan. But I remember chanting and just coming from this really incredible rally, all 17 of us is my definition of incredible. I was like, "We did that! We're gonna pass this Dream Act!" And then being viscerally reminded of how unwelcome we were… And I remember that being just such a monumental shift in my life, that it was sort of like a light got turned on. That I was like, "Well, what else is wrong in the world?" I was like, "How many bus ads are there?" And so I'm looking around and I don't even have like a bigger consciousness. It [was] limited to my small thing.

Like Evelyn's seed and Liz's spark, Kenia's embodied sense of injustice in response to anti-immigrant legislation and a discriminatory atmosphere caused a light to be turned on for her. While she did not have a "bigger consciousness" at the time, she experienced strong contrasting feelings— empowerment during the rally, and outraged shock at the discrimination and injustice of anti-immigrant sentiment in Las Vegas.

Looking back at her early engagement, Kenia aligns it with current issues. Making critical connections between the present and the past, Kenia shares:

> I think back to where young people are today with the Stoneman Douglas School. I think about the actions in Chicago. I think about Eric Garner's death in New York, Philando Castile's in Minneapolis. And I think that cities have these ruptures. And I happened to come of age during a moment of rupture in our own city. We ended up protesting those ads, ended up getting them taken down.

From the narratives of five participants, we learn that injustice was felt in their bodies and their experiences as they grew up feeling discrimination and sensing the injustice of barriers and borders. While Liz, Adan, Joanna, Evelyn, and Kenia did not have the "language" or "consciousness" to explain why they were engaging in activism at the time, they grew up sensing and feeling these "sparks of injustice" as Liz phrases it. Their awareness of injustice was felt and

experienced as they physically navigated different spaces from schools to public areas across Las Vegas as young Latinx people. This is important because it shows how space is critical to examine *along* with immigration policies and activism— anti-immigrant sentiments on a national scale manifested into material impacts that constructed the space activists navigated locally. Just as their responses were shaped in part by their experiences in different physical spaces, their reactions to injustice involved physical responses and engagement, from organizing school walkouts, to protesting for the removal of anti-immigrant billboards, and marching along the Strip.

In her work on the May 1st marchas across different cities, Lazos also remarked on the powerful emotional response to anti-immigrant legislation. Lazos finds that H.R. 4437 deeply impacted the Latinx community, in particular the youth, and frames their activism within a broader history of activism. Lazos explains, "Like the Civil Rights marches of the 1960s, students led their elders, showed more courage than their parents,[9] and showed up the professional elites who run casinos, unions, and professional ethnic organizations. They understood the challenge immediately; H.R. 4437 was unjust and Latina/os must come together as a political community to challenge it" (Lazos, 2007, p. 850). In my analysis of participant narratives, which is informed by Peake and Kobayashi (2002), Anzaldua (2015), and Ollis (2008), I view these emotional responses as intimately connected to how activists physically moved through their lives in Las Vegas. Space, as well as the material realities and experiences shaped by space, become important aspects to analyze in this context.

[9] Here it is important for me to say that I do not agree with the "showed more courage than their parents" portion of the quote. And in fact, while many students were key organizers of the march, it was also in collaboration with the Culinary Union and local Mexican hometown associations, AND through the support of many of their parents that this was possible (Tuman 2009).

In their work historicizing the student walkouts in Las Vegas, Revilla and Rangel-Medina (2011) argue that this form of knowing was grounded theory in action. They explain "On a daily basis, the Activist Crew members developed their grounded theory in their struggle for social justice. The activists engaged in a collective conscientización that produced and developed the theoretical concepts to explain their experiences… Activist Crew grounded theory delves into the different forms of internal and external resistance and the levels of consciousness in which this resistance exists—consciously, spiritually, and physically" (Revilla and Rangel-Medina, 2011, p. 185). I build on their argument by incorporating a spatial analysis, and argue that activist embodied perceptions of injustice were informed by the spaces they occupied as well— federal immigration policies filtered down to the local context of Las Vegas, and manifested in various emotions, feelings, and actions on behalf of local residents, which actually constituted a form of knowing, or epistemology. This indicates that just as activists were making sense of these national policies and anti-immigrant sentiments, it was witnessing how this impacted Las Vegas through anti-immigrant billboards and anti-immigrant and racist remarks on behalf of school teachers that allowed them to make critical connections at the local scale.

By acknowledging and honoring early youth activism as a form of knowing, and by making sense of injustice as an embodied experience, we can understand student engagement in walkouts and marchas in 2006 as spatial resistance, symbolically joining historical legacies and current pockets of nationwide resistance and dissent. These symbolic connections are visible when Kenia makes connections to Stoneman Douglass and Black Lives Matter, both movements that utilized marches and protests in their many actions for gun reform and against police violence. We also see this when participants directly reference the activism of Black communities in Las Vegas; Evelyn, Anita, and Joanna all mention the activism of Black mothers

fighting for welfare reform in the 1970s and view this as critical activism and an integral part of the history of Las Vegas.[10] Student activists in Las Vegas, like many other activists at various historical moments, resisted the dehumanizing rhetoric of illegality. Their bodies and public resistance in the streets become avenues for voicing refusal to be erased, rendered invisible, or disregarded as ignorant. By joining the walkouts, and later leading the May 1st marcha, Las Vegas activists mobilized and engaged in spatial resistance motivated by an embodied sense of injustice. They would join together to demand justice, declare their humanity, and build connections to the broader Latinx community in Las Vegas.

"There's Life Beyond the Strip"- Persistent Erasure and the Racialized Geography of Las Vegas

In the previous section, narratives of initial activist involvement during the 2006 moment demonstrate how lived experiences, perceptions of injustice, and embodied ways of knowing deeply impacted immigrant rights activism in Las Vegas. An increasingly anti-immigrant climate served as a catalyst for strong emotional reactions for many Latinx youth, as was evident through the student walkouts across the Valley. These student walkouts acted as crucial precursors to the May 1st march on the Las Vegas Strip because by organizing them, students gained skills in outreach, organizing logistics, and developing political messages, all skills which were critical in planning the May 1st march. Perceptions of injustice were important forms of knowing for the young activists who were making sense of policies and discrimination to their communities and families. These forms of knowing were informed by their lived experiences, that is—how they

[10] While I did not directly ask specific questions about their statements about this point, many participants directly reference the book *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* during different points in their interview. I found this reference interesting and important, and realize it is important to note that this book was published in 2005, just one year before the high school walkouts and immigrant rights marches.

physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually moved through the world impacted their lives and helped shape this knowledge and motivation for justice.

In this section, to further understand how activist spatial resistance unfolded in the context of Las Vegas, I analyze activists' narratives concerning persistent erasure of communities who live in Las Vegas, in contrast with their mental maps that depict a Las Vegas beyond just the Strip. This reveals that Las Vegas, like many other places, is impacted by racism and classism, but that the spectacle of the Strip conceals this reality. Through this analysis, I demonstrate that while the anti-immigrant rhetoric was the immediate catalyst for their spatial resistance, activists were also responding to the ways immigrants and communities of color are historically written out of the narratives about Las Vegas.

I demonstrate that what happened to cause the 2006 walkouts and marches in Las Vegas was a two-fold process. On one hand, activists responded to the anti-immigration rhetoric that was happening on a national scale, initiated primarily by the anti-immigrant policy H.R. 4437. And simultaneously, activists in Las Vegas were reacting to this as it filtered to the local arena; their response to anti-immigrant views was layered onto how they experienced the erasure and racialized/classed treatment of themselves, their parents, families, and friends as immigrants and laborers, tied to the local tourist industry of the Las Vegas Strip.

The participants' understandings of space in Las Vegas, represented through their interviews and maps, are important and matter because they demonstrate how geography is embedded in physical manifestations of power that inform their lived experiences and how they engaged in activism. And in Las Vegas, like many other places, power is inextricably linked to capitalism, money, and major moneymaking industries. Power in Las Vegas has been traditionally tied to tourism, hotels, and gaming, a fact that all participants were aware of during

the interviews. This influenced their perceptions of a different Las Vegas... the Las Vegas that tourists and outsiders perceive (the one that is marketed to the world through campaigns like LVCVA's "What happens in Vegas"), and the Las Vegas lived and experienced by residents and people who view it as more than just the Strip. This was evident when the activists shared how perceived tourist and outsider perceptions about Las Vegas are connected to persistent erasure. Notably, many participants believed Las Vegas was primarily (if not completely) equated to and/or or represented by the Strip. Evelyn explains how people react when they find out she grew up in Las Vegas. She says:

> Well, that reaction that we get is, "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." That's the kind of the reaction I get the most. [But] we have a whole community here, right? We have a whole history of organizing that's rooted in Black people. Black people were the folks, especially Black women, who created the pathway for us to be able to organize here and not live legally segregated. We're segregated by a lot of structural barriers but not legally. I think our [people of color] community is growing and growing here more, and our families are here, so we see it beyond the strip of land that represents Las Vegas. And the majority of people don't see it that way, especially if they've never been here or they never visit outside of the Strip.

Evelyn shares that people outside of Las Vegas and tourists have a limited view and understanding of Las Vegas which does not acknowledge Las Vegas as a product of structural inequalities. Not only that, but because Las Vegas grew and marketed itself as a space for consequence-free partying and consumption, it has relegated invisible the communities and labor that make it possible, and along with it, the rich history of organizing for justice that has occurred in Las Vegas.

Anita shares similar perceptions as Evelyn, and says:

> I think [people who have not lived in Las Vegas] primarily think of the Strip. Some of my students and colleagues have even said that people ask them, "Oh, well how do you ever get any work done when you're always on the Strip?" They imagine us hanging out at the Strip. Some of them (silly enough) think that we live on the Strip. They can't get their mind around the fact that there are whole communities outside of the Strip. And I don't know that they can imagine what the university is even like. Yes a lot of our students

> work out [on the Strip], and yet there are so many other places that people haven't even considered exist. Like the natural spaces, the outdoor spaces, the food spaces, and community spaces.

In this passage, Anita shares that the Strip seems to occupy so many people's imaginations, that they cannot comprehend that Las Vegas is also home to communities and different places outside of the Strip.

Claudia believes that most people view Las Vegas through stereotypes, and that this indicates that cannot comprehend that people have lives outside of the Strip. She says:

> They understand [Las Vegas] stereotypically. It's seen as this place where you go to do drugs and drink and have sex. When people think of Las Vegas, I don't think they actually realize the community that is there and [that] other people who actually live "normal" [lives]… They live life outside of partying and doing drugs and sex and things like that. That's part of how people see Vegas."

Another participant, Adan, is exasperated by this limiting view of Las Vegas. During his interview, when asked how other people perceive Las Vegas, he explains that most people who are not familiar with Las Vegas believe,

> that there's nothing here. That there's only this Strip like, oh Las Vegas equals the Strip. That's literally what's mentioned. Like the first thing that comes up. And it's like nothing else comes up to their mind… and there's people that live beyond the Strip. There's life beyond the Strip. Like, óyeme! It's infuriating. People with their pendejadas. Like girl, do you not know there's communities out here?!"

Claudia and Adan describe how the Strip as the primary site for tourism in Las Vegas is what most people envision when they think about Las Vegas. This dominant perception functions as a form of erasure, one that further marginalizes communities of color by erasing their presence and contributions in this space. In these ways, the Strip acts as an all-consuming symbol that absorbs the labor and communities which helped construct it and that inhabit the broader Las Vegas Valley.

To continue with Adan's words in mind, we can turn to the interviews and participant maps to recognize that "there's life beyond the Strip" and to further understand how space is racialized in Las Vegas and embedded with structural power.

Situating Las Vegas through Participant Maps

The work of Lynch (1970), Wendy Cheng (2013), and Lilia Soto (2018) informed both how I approached the interviews at the protocol creation stage, and also how I analyzed participants maps and the space of Las Vegas following the data collection. In my interview, I utilized Lynch's work on urban planning and cities to ask participants to create a map of Las Vegas depicting its main features. Like Lynch, I asked participants to create the map as if they were describing Las Vegas to a stranger. I explained that the map did not have to be accurate, and that they could take as long as they needed. Some participants drew the map and explained their process and reasoning as they drew, while others preferred to draw quietly, and then explain once they were done. Through the mapping assignment, I found that most participants depicted the Las Vegas Valley with specific perceptions of racial/ethnic and economic divisions informed by their daily lives. This prompted me to look towards Cheng's work in *The Changs next door to the Díazes: Remapping race in suburban California (2013).* Cheng examines the San Gabriel Valley and creates the term regional racial formation by working at a local scale to understand "everyday landscapes a crucial terrains through which racial hierarchies are learned, instantiated, and transformed" (2013, p. 3). And for participants, the everyday landscape of Las Vegas seemed to be intimately connected to the tourist space of the Las Vegas Strip. In this way, Soto's work on tourism and the Napa Valley was crucial to consider in connection to Las Vegas. Soto breaks down how Napa Valley is imagined as a tourist's wine-filled paradise. Napa is constructed as an Eden at the expense of Mexican and Central American communities who are

racialized and written out of this narrative and space (2018). Many connections can be made between tourism, immigrant labor, communities of color, and their erasure in Napa and Las Vegas. Participant maps offer important depictions of the everyday landscape of Las Vegas, and how this geographic space is connected to racialization, erasure, and resistance.

I begin with Kenia's map in Figure 1. Kenia situated Las Vegas within a regional context. To the left of her map, she drew a regional map of Nevada and its neighboring stat es to represent these connections. This is important to Kenia because as she described during her interview, Las Vegas was created and formed because there was a need for a trade post to connect Salt Lake City, Utah and Los Angeles, California, and has since acted as a regional hub in the Southwest. On the right of her map, to depict the key areas and markers of Las Vegas, Kenia drew the mountain ranges surrounding Las Vegas, the highway/freeway systems (I-15, I-95), the "World Famous Strip", the local university (University of Nevada, Las Vegas, or UNLV) , different cities/neighborhoods/areas (Mountain's Edge, Spring Valley, Summerlin, the Historic West Side, Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, the "eastside", and Henderson), and the Wetlands. Kenia described her map as she drew it, and told me about the different cities, unincorporated towns, and neighborhoods that make up the Las Vegas Valley. She shares:

> Las Vegas is a city that has been historically segregated. So there's a part called the historic West Side… I would say folks of color are primarily north and northeast. So then you get what's traditionally called the East Side… The city is divided by the Strip as sort of east and west, and the Stratosphere serves as the belly button of the city… the city is connected via two freeway systems. So there is the 95, and then the 15. And the I-15 connects folks to Los Angeles and Salt Lake City. And the 95 connects folks to Arizona and Reno and northern Nevada.

Her map contains regional contexts, historical information, and the key markers that display how she views Las Vegas. It shows an understanding of a Las Vegas that contains racialized spaces. The "Eastside" is associated with Latinx communities, the historic Westside is associated with

black communities, and Wetlands and mountain ranges represent “where indigenous people spent their time” historically.

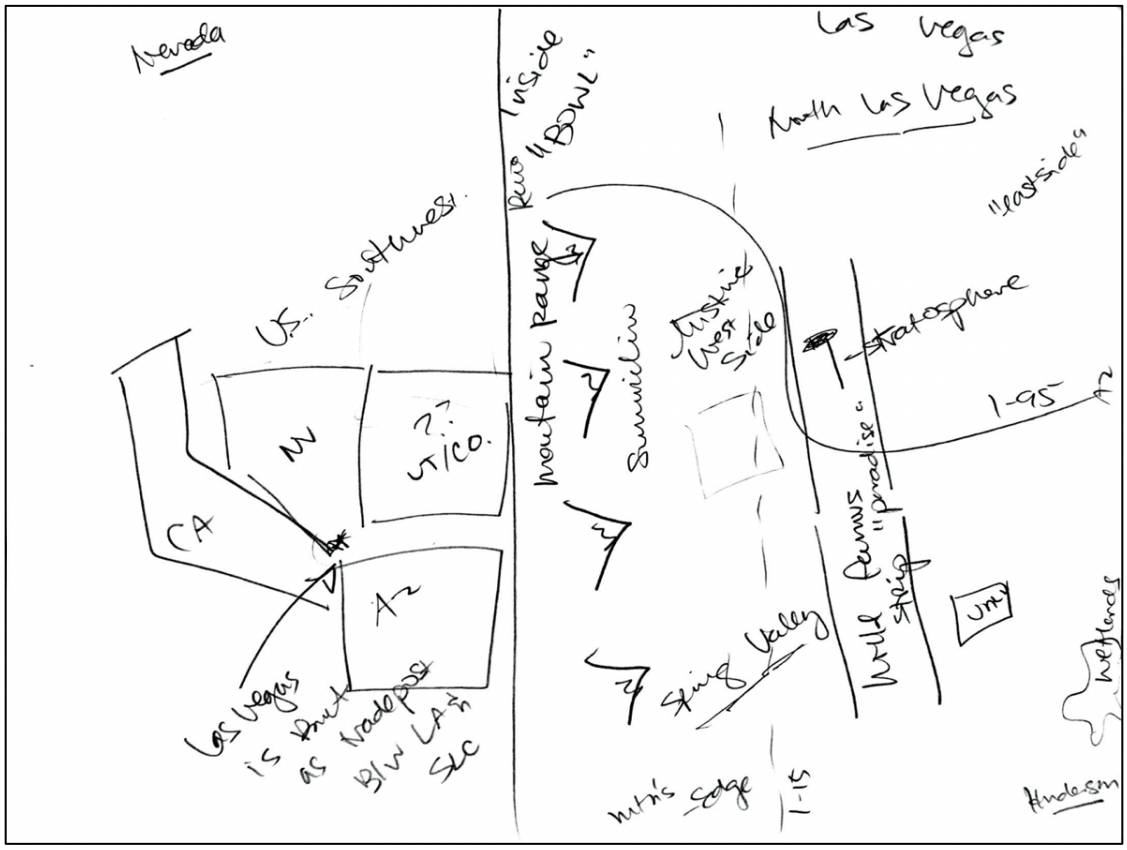


Figure 3. Kenia's Map

Like Kenia, Anita also began her map of Las Vegas (Figure 2) by drawing attention to the regional connections to Salt Lake City and Los Angeles via the freeway system. For Anita, the primary markers of Las Vegas are the I-15 highways “going north and south, coming from Los Angeles, going up north to Salt Lake City and even northern Nevada”, as well as 215 running east to west, UNLV, the Las Vegas Strip and downtown Las Vegas (separated visually by the Stratosphere on Sahara Blvd), and the different neighborhoods and areas around the Valley. Reflected on her map and through her verbal descriptions, Anita thinks of Las Vegas in relation to UNLV. This might be because Anita moved to Las Vegas to work as a professor in the women’s studies department, and worked at UNLV during the 15 years she lived in Las

Vegas. On her map, she visually represents the space of Las Vegas through her perceptions of race/ethnicity and class-based demographics.

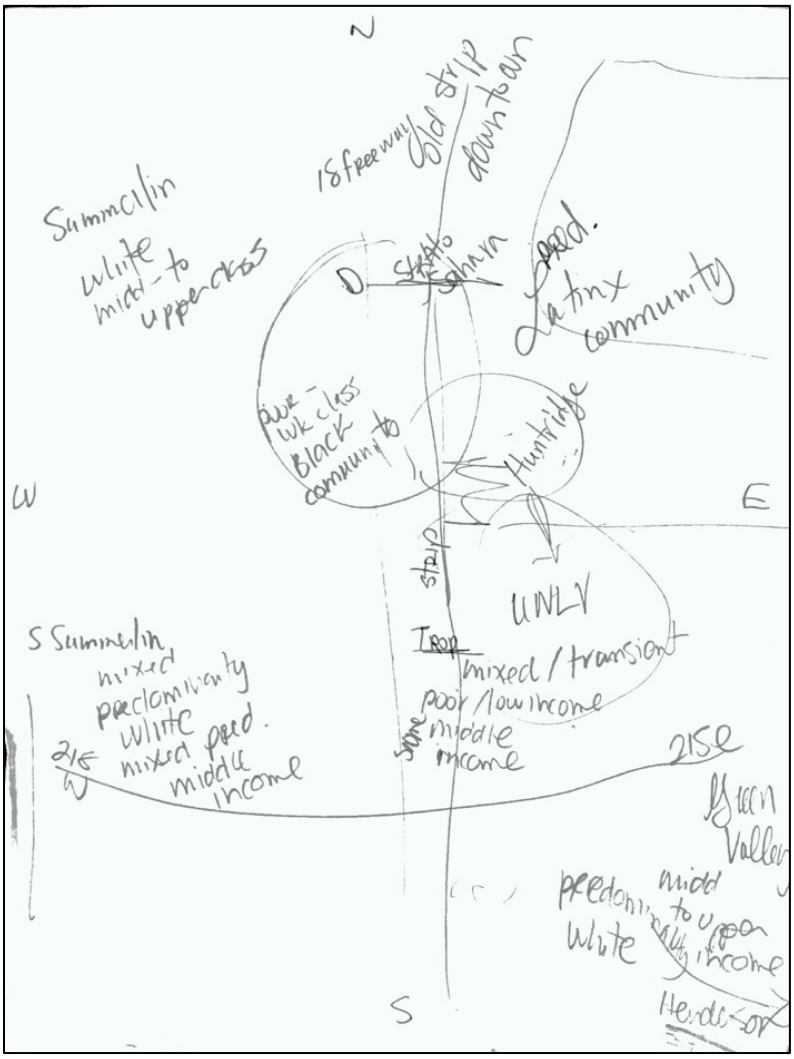


Figure 4. Anita's Map

Next, Evelyn's map (Figure 3), like Kenia and Anita's, includes freeways, and depicts the I-15 and I-95. During the interview, she explains, "I think of Las Vegas as a very segregated town that is strategically separated by freeways." In her map she demarcates areas as "white and Asian", "Black", and "Brown". In addition to the freeways, she includes the Rio Casino, the New York New York Casino, Clark High School, UNLV, Chinatown, the Fremont Experience, North Las Vegas, and the Community College of Southern Nevada as important key markers of Las

Vegas. For her, the schools she attended were important markers. She also clearly indicates the "2006 march", and represents the route from the Fremont Experience to the New York New York Casino with arrows.

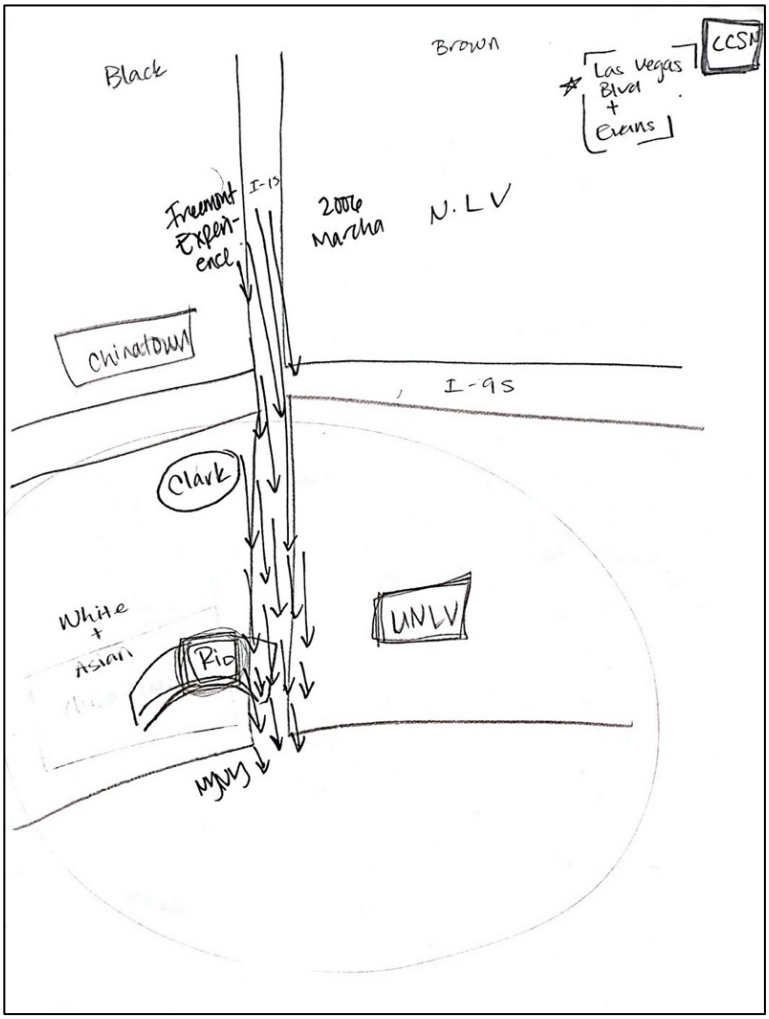


Figure 5. Evelyn's Map

Just as Evelyn has included the "2006 marcha" in her map above, we can look and see that Joanna also includes the same marker on her map below (Figure 4). At the center of Joanna's map lies the Las Vegas Strip skyline, which she associates with the "marchas" and "24 everything". Toward the western part of her map (depicted on the right side of her map), Joanna includes personal markers like the neighborhood where she grew up in west Las Vegas on Arville and Sahara, the high school in her neighborhood where she was involved with organizing

school walkouts (Clark HS), and its overall proximity to Chinatown, another immigrant space in Las Vegas that is important to Joanna. On this side of her map she also includes Mt. Charleston and Red Rock. Framing and connecting her map, the freeway systems are also depicted (I-15, 215, and the 95), with the southernmost part of the I-15 indicating LA. On the eastern part of her map close to the Strip, Joanna includes UNLV and the Boulevard Mall. She associates the "East Las Vegas" with the Latinx immigrant communities and good tacos, and North Las Vegas with the Broadacres swapmeet. She explains:

> The east side to me is really important because that's where we would go flyer. We felt like if you wanted to find brown people on the streets, access them and engage them-- go flyer the east side of Las Vegas. And then even like, it's just like so much of Las Vegas is so brown. But when you up to the east side, it's just unquestionable who lives here.

Other markers east of the Strip include Lake Mead, Henderson, Anthem, and some suburbs.

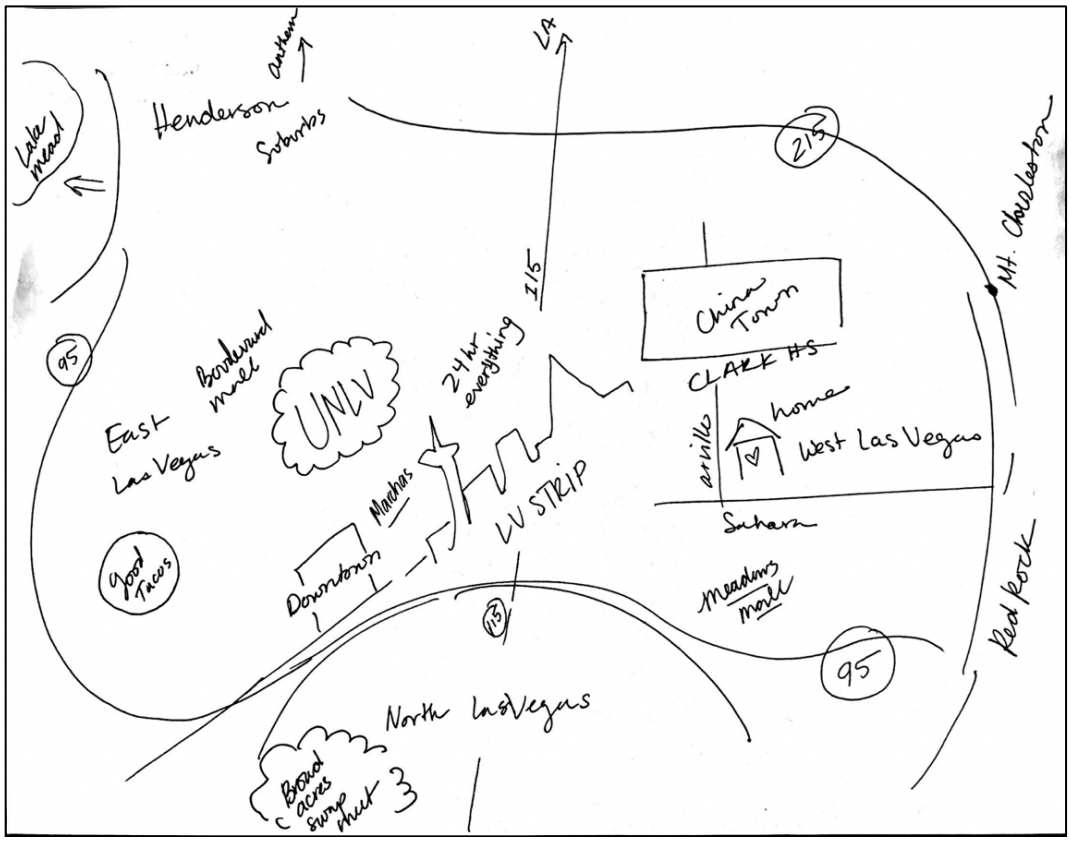


Figure 6. Joanna's Map

Liz's map below includes many of the same markers as other participants, including Red Rock, Summerlin, Mt. Charleston, North Las Vegas, Henderson/Green Valley, and East Las Vegas. And while she does not outright label the Las Vegas Strip, she indicates it via "Las Vegas Boulevard. She discusses it during her explanation of the map, and associates the Strip on Las Vegas Boulevard with significant wealth disparities. Using her map as a visual reference she explains:

> This is Las Vegas Boulevard and there's money all over here, here, right here. But if you go a couple streets down going north on Las Vegas Boulevard, as you start passing downtown and you start getting into this area where [it] kind of breaks off, where it's Jerry's Nugget, like right here. You see a high homeless population when there's just millions of dollars right up here.

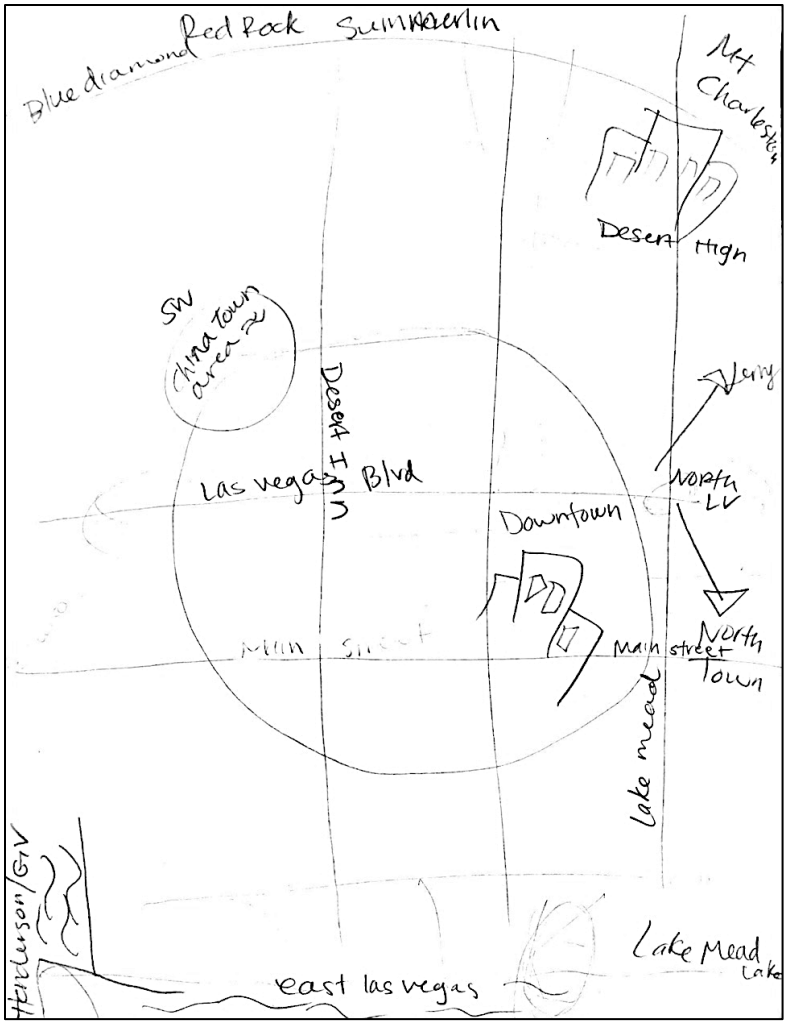


Figure 7. Liz's Map

Meño's map (Figure 5) is more conceptual. His important markers include places he called home while he lived here, the casinos on the Las Vegas Strip, the federal building where a lot of actions took place, the Sahara commercial center that was a meeting point for many protests, UNLV, North Las Vegas, and "immigrant community" spaces to the east part of his map. Meño describes his map and says:

> The way I understand Vegas is from the different places that I lived in west Las Vegas… The strip is a big slash that's in the middle and for me, the Strip was not important because of the casinos, but it was central to where a lot of the tourism happened. And I put it there because oftentimes when I've told people, "Oh I've lived in Las Vegas for seven years," they're like, "Oh where all the cas[inos are]..." You know, people are always thinking about the casinos and the Strip… And I also feel like it's a central crossing point to what was my daily route, which was to from home to UNLV. So I would pass the Strip all the time. On the far right side, I put just a big circle and square of like immigrant community representing the Latin[x] community. Just because I would go to a lot of the Mexican restaurants and businesses in eastern Las Vegas.

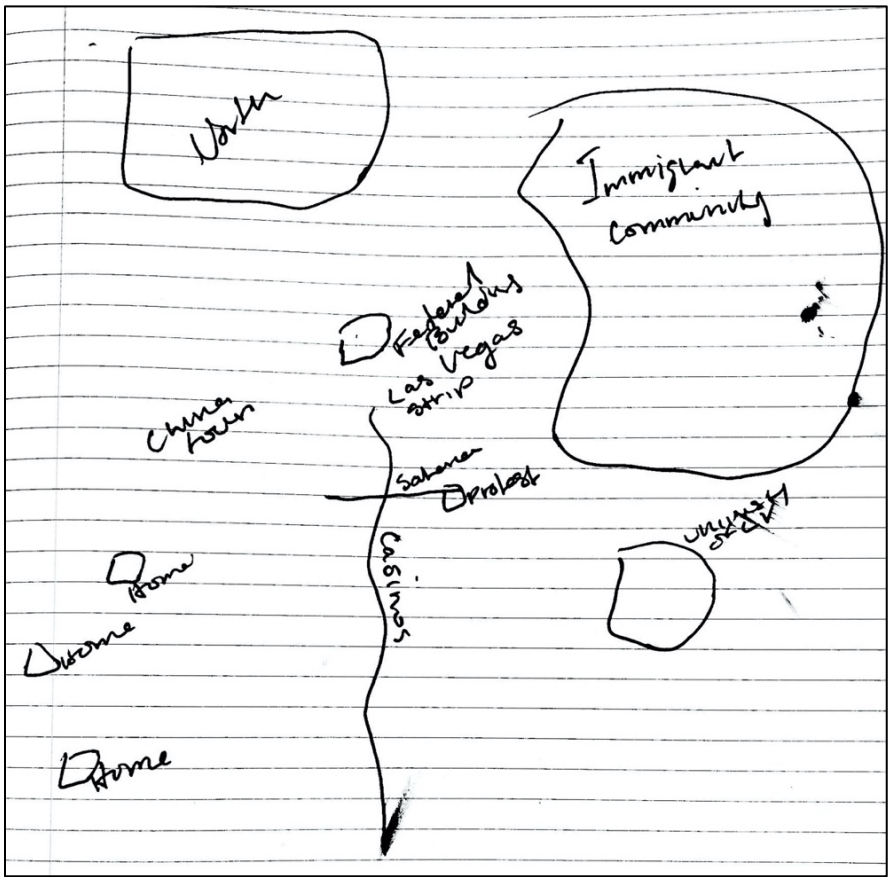


Figure 8. Meño's Map

Claudia's map (Figure 7) is zoomed in and focused around UNLV. Claudia lived in Las Vegas for 2-3 years while she attended UNLV, and this is indicated in her map. Explaining her map, she says:

> This is what I remember. So this will be the Strip. And then UNLV campus [is] over here. I remember la casita [referring to what is currently the Center for Social Justice] right here. And then the dorms right next to it, 'cause I lived in the dorms for a couple of years. And then like the student union over here and then this would be like Maryland Parkway and then there's just like more city over here… And then like I used to live out like Durango over by Summerlin.."

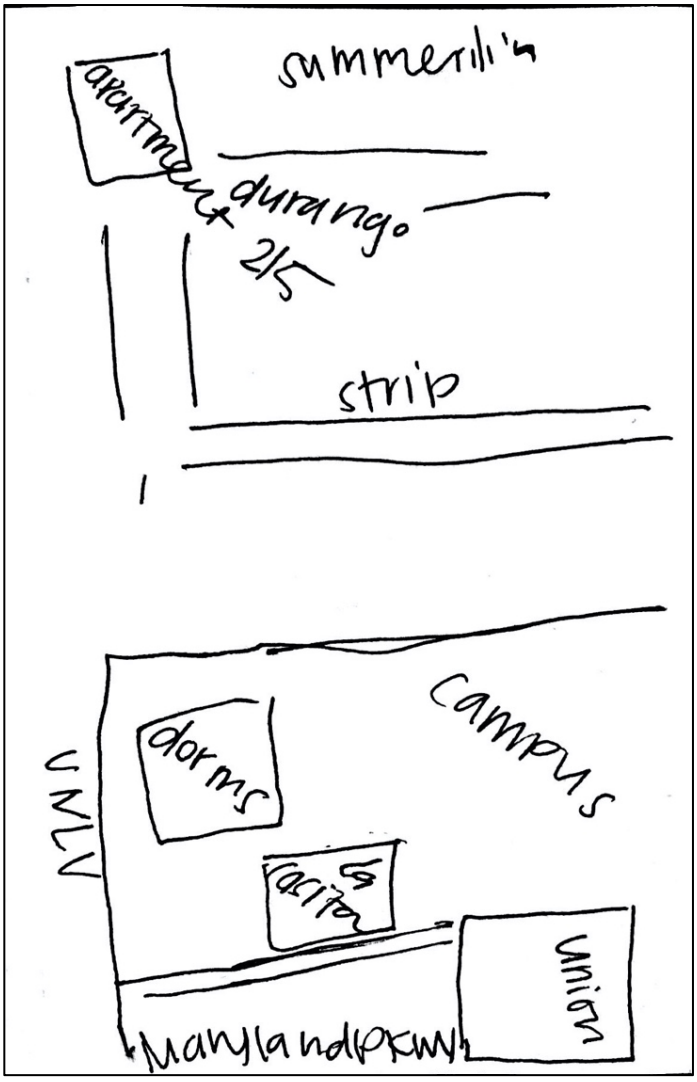


Figure 9. Claudia's Map

Adan's map is conceptual in nature as well, and depicts the apartment he lived in near the Las Vegas Strip when he first moved to Las Vegas. As he reflects on the map making activity, Adan shares that drawing this map was difficult and states:

> The reason I drew this is because when people ask me about Las Vegas… We lived like within a mile radius [of the Strip] growing up for a really long time. So we didn't really know what was outside of Vegas, like all around the Valley. Just what was around the apartment complex. And the Strip was like something that was, even though it was really close, it was like really far. Actually when we first got here, we used to live in Living Desert, those apartments right across the street from UNLV. But we didn't know what the university was like. We literally lived right across the street, but we didn't know what it was. We grew up not knowing what it was. Like it's there with these big ass buildings, but it's like there was this border around it. Like we don't have access to it, [even though] we can walk across the street. And so growing up, when people ask me about Vegas, I [was] like, "Yes, there's a Strip, but there's so much more to it." But at the same time it's kind of like... what to tell people about Las Vegas when there's so much more to it, but we don't really know what there is? I don't know how to explain that.

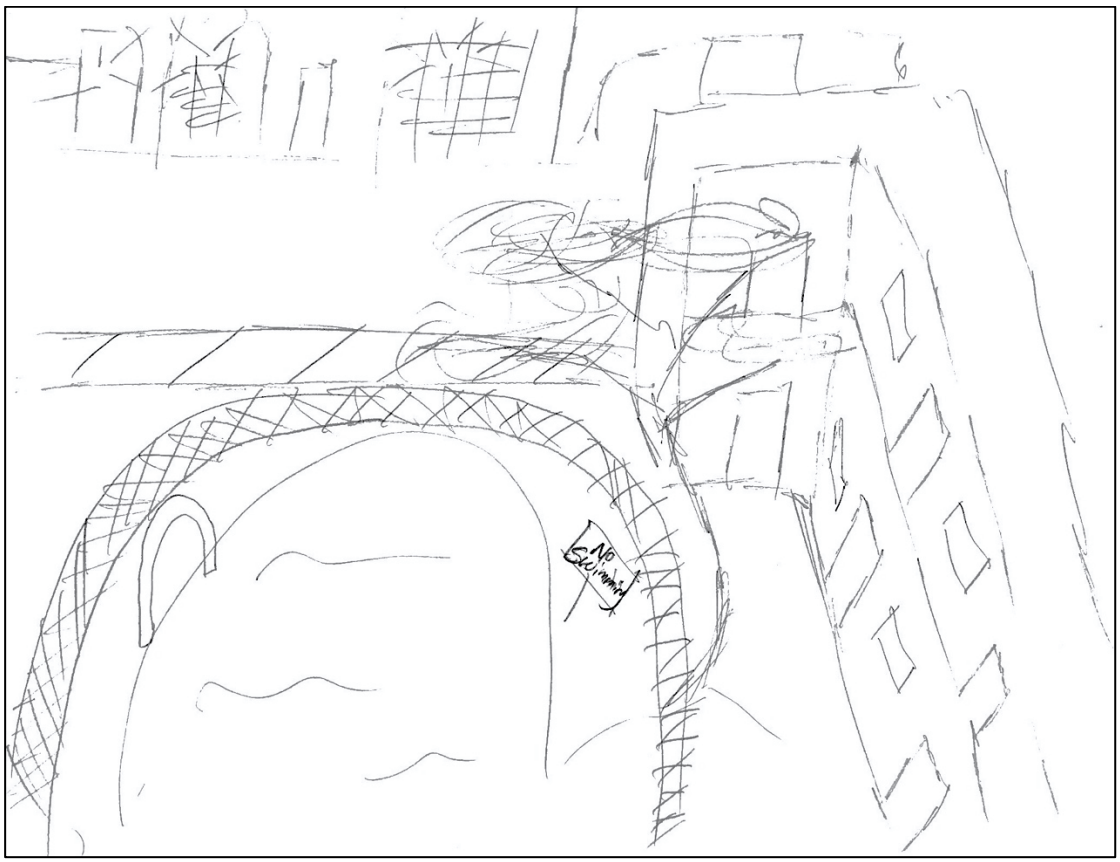


Figure 10. Adan's Map

Here, Adan makes important remarks about access, mobility, and isolation in Las Vegas. He represents the Las Vegas he knew (or did not know) as he was growing up in the early 2000s. In contrast, most of the other participants approached the map from a broader view of the entire Valley. While participants approached their maps in different ways, most include similar markers and reflect on different spaces in Las Vegas that are important in their lives. Their maps reveal varying degrees of familiarity with the Valley, and as Adan's remarks illuminate, even while living in Las Vegas, access to mobility is hindered and constricted, limiting the spaces you can experience. There are hints of this in maps of the other participants in the way they focus and spotlight the areas they lived in and were most familiar with… their familiarity with Las Vegas was informed by where they lived, worked, and went to school. Later in her interview, Kenia speaks to this familiarity and isolation as well. Having grown up in west Las Vegas, Kenia describes that it felt like other high schools, like those in North Las Vegas, were in different worlds at times. But it was through organizing in high school and college where she learned and connected to others in different parts of the valley. She says:

> I grew up in this very specific geography of 89103 and 89102, and being engaged in organizing really taught me that our city was bigger. Um, and there were a ton of people on the other side of the Strip…Being involved in organizing and activism really taught me that my community was larger than my zip code and also helped me understand where Las Vegas was situated within the broader regional ecosystem. And I think in a lot of ways, even the national.

Overall, the participant maps and interviews depict complex representations of racial and classed spaces, all centered around the Las Vegas Strip, divided and separated by Las Vegas Boulevard and the intersecting freeways. The hyper focus on the Strip and its spectacle conceals how this center of capital and power impacts and shapes the constructed spaces across the Las Vegas Valley. Participants often felt as if communities of color, their lives, and contributions are erased and invisible to tourists. Their maps counter this erasure, and instead represent the places

and areas important to them. Through their maps, participants demonstrate that there is life in Las Vegas beyond the Strip. They also demonstrate that the Strip is an important place that has been a site of continued resistance, critically connected to regional and national spheres.

May 1st Marchas - Radical and Intersectional Immigrant Rights en el Valle

For many of the participants, it was through living and engaging in activism in Las Vegas that they connected the injustice and inequality in their lives to overarching, unjust systems of power affecting the nation. To resist these injustices, activists formed connections and relationships across the Las Vegas Valley and gained feminist understandings of immigrant rights, race, class, and labor in Las Vegas. This feminist and intersectional understanding is evident in the ways they organized around immigrant rights and in their interpersonal relationships. In this section, I examine how participants engaged in spatial resistance through their continued commitment to the annual May 1st march organizing and subsequent organizing efforts that grew from the first May 1st march in 2006. I found that for participants, engaging in the May 1st marchas in Las Vegas was a way to continue resisting erasure of their communities while working against racism, classism, and anti-immigrant sentiments.

Reflected on many of their maps of Las Vegas, local high schools, the community college, and UNLV were important markers on their Las Vegas maps. This is because all of the participants engaged in activism as students (Adan, Evelyn, Kenia, Joanna, Claudia, and Meño) and/or educators (Anita and Meño) through student and community organizations like MEChA and UCIR. In these spaces, participants accessed each other, peers further along in the program, and educators like Anita who were invested in feminist visions of justice. This informed how they engaged in activism in the space of Las Vegas. Liz captures how interconnected and impactful activism, feminism, and community organizing were for her. She explains:

> For me, activism has been shaped by feminism. And here in Las Vegas, it has meant everything for me because it has really shaped the way I go into these activist and organizing spaces. Las Vegas is not known for organizing, right? But there's been a shit ton of organizing for a *long time*! But like I said, *where* I learned activism shapes literally my whole vision on Vegas… Because for me it's all connected. Activism itself is not the only reason why I view Las Vegas the way I do. Because through my feminist lens is *why* I do activism the way I do in Las Vegas.

So while activism has been a large part of her life, informing how she navigates this world, it was feminism learned from peers, friends, and mentors in student groups like MEChA that informed and shaped her understanding of Las Vegas. And even though Liz grew up in Las Vegas, it was not until engaging with an activist and feminist community that she learned about the history of activist organizing in this city.

As Evelyn reflected on the 2006 march, she makes similar observations to Liz's about the role feminism played in their approach to immigrant rights organizing in Las Vegas. She explains, "We started doing protests and marches. But it wasn't until I came to UNLV that we started doing a lot more, that I started getting more politicized around the MEChA group and around feminist and queer activism and intersectional activism. That's what I call it now." As Anita sees it, young activists like Evelyn and Liz were already thinking about injustice, feminism, and queer issues by the time she arrived in Las Vegas in 2004. But the drive for action demanded by H.R. 4437 proved necessary to bring activists together. She recounts:

> There were young queers and young feminists who were not even calling themselves feminists at the time, who were already pushing forward a feminist and queer analysis in the activism. But what I realized was that they were waiting for something to bring them together to allow that. I was a part of the 2006 immigrant rights movement, which was led by feminist and queer students and their allies, which included community members who weren't feminists and/or queer necessarily. But were really open to working with feminist and queer students and community. It was a really amazing time because prior to that, I was teaching the Chicana feminist course, which was the first at UNLV. I realized that these students were already feminist students. Some of them had already come out as queer, but having the course and the course materials gave them the language and means by which to start talking about the need for feminist and queer space in activism. Simultaneously, the 2006 immigrant rights movement emerged nationally and they came

> together. And so Vegas had this really crystallizing moment where it was like, "Okay, our activism is immigrant rights and it's also feminist and it's also queer."

This passage reflects how the local and national came together through the youth-led, intersectional immigrant rights activism in Las Vegas because of this 2006 moment, or as Kenia describes it earlier—this "rupture" in Las Vegas. Anita examines this in her work, and at the time, referred to this as part of their multidimensional resistance (Revilla 2012). Remembering 2006 and the years of activist involvement that followed, Joanna says:

> It's weird to talk about it now as an adult. I'm 31-years-old now, but at the time, we were 16, 17, many of us in high school. And the people who were in college were like 20, 21, 22. So now to say "youth-led" it feels different as an adult… but to have an entire movement led at that time… Now looking back, I'm like, "That was powerful!" And it cultivated a space in which we created a queer and feminist vision for what immigrant rights were. We mentored each other to ensure that organizers who probably would have not been welcomed elsewhere, did have a space to organize. And more than that, I feel like we did it in a loving way in which we really worked to ensure that we all survived and were able to do the work. In other places I don't see that kind of concern for people's personal well-being and growth. I definitely feel like people were putting in a lot of work to not just educate us as young people, but collectively to work on our consciousness and to grow together. I never felt pushed out. I felt like a very real investment in us committing to the work, but being also brought up to do the work.

Joanna's quote is important to consider, especially because committing to learning together and engaging in a feminist approach to immigrant rights meant facing recurring backlash and misunderstandings. Despite the continued activist efforts of participants that required hard work, powerful insight, and time, their efforts were often challenged and written off. As Anita discusses in her work, students faced backlash within organizing spaces because they challenged heteropatriarchal practices, and also more broadly across of Las Vegas largely because of ageism (Revilla 2012). Anita also argued that this tension was present in the organizing of the very first May 1st march, and also continued in subsequent marches like the 2009 May 1st march.

In my own work, as I reviewed and analyzed newspaper coverage of the May 1st marchas from 2006-2012, the discounting of the activists' efforts was apparent, and seemed to move

beyond discrediting the youth as naïve, to minimizing and erasing their efforts in Las Vegas. From the very beginning, various key actors in Las Vegas worked to discourage casino workers from participating in the Day Without an Immigrant boycott on May 1, 2006. D. Taylor, secretary-treasurer of the Culinary Union stated, "May 1st is just one day. On May 2nd, May 3rd or May 10th, we still have to get a bill through Congress that is comprehensive and addresses the core issues (of immigration reform)" (Stutz 2006, p. 4A). Instead, according to the Las Vegas-Review Journal (Stutz 2006, p. 4A), Culinary Union officials worked with casino executives to offer alternatives, like a petition pushing for immigrant reform that would be sent to Congress, as well as hosting a rally in downtown Las Vegas that would "recognize the contributions immigrant labor has made to the gaming industry."

These efforts were made to pacify immigrant workers and discourage participation in the boycott on May 1st, because "a large rate of employees staying away could have a 'potentially devastating impact' on the services offered by Las Vegas hotel-casinos" (Stutz 2006, p. 4A). Joanna, who was 17 at the time, remembers this moment, and explains that in spite of this diversion, grassroots organizers were able to forgo the Culinary Union's discouragement, and plan for a march down the Strip following the rally. Working through the tension, activists were also able to coordinate with the Union for Evelyn, Kenia, and other two other women to speak at the rally. Joanna remembers planning for the rally and march and shares all the work this required:

> For example, we were coordinating with businesses. We were flyering at the businesses but also telling them like, "Van a cerrar su tienda, o van a cerrar su negocio para el primero de Mayo?"[11] And also another major thing that was happening is we were trying to get the union on the Strip, the Culinary Union to endorse the boycott so that all the employees on the Strip would also shut down the entire Strip. 'Cause the goal was really like, "We're going to create the national boycott." But the Culinary Union... They were not in support. So that's how we arrived at having an evening action because we're like,

[11] This translates to, "Will you be closing your store or will you be closing your business for May 1st?

> "Well a lot of people will leave work and school, but those who can't, at least the majority of the trabajadores will be out of work by 5 [PM] and it would be cooler, less hot. But there was like a national team of organizers, too that were like randomly going to cities and they set a morning marcha, too. So that day there was two marchas, one in the morning, which we did not organize, but some of us attended. And one en la tarde. And that's the one that we organized. The one in the morning, had like maybe 10 or 20,000 people. It was still very well-attended. It was a big marcha. But the one in the evening, honestly, when we were organizing [it], we could not have... I still couldn't have imagined how many people would actually attend the marcha, even though we were working so hard.

Joanna recounts memories of engaging in outreach by distributing flyers both in the day and night, reaching out to local businesses, Latinx bars and bailes, and printing and cutting flyers at the Women's Studies department at UNLV. For her, these May 1st memories stand out because of the impact they had on Las Vegas and in her personal life. She recalls:

> People were pouring into the Fremont Experience, but I couldn't really tell because it's enclosed and everybody's crammed in and there's already a lot of people there. I couldn't really tell who all was actually there for the marcha, outside of the people who were like standing directly in front of the stage. And people were getting like antsy, they're like, "Okay, we're ready to marchar, let's go." So finally we started marching and when we started leading people out of the Fremont enclosed area… it was like people *pouring* out. And then they just kept pouring out for [what] felt like miles. When they did an aerial view of it, like literally the marcha was extended as long as a mile. And we took over both sides of the Strip. Like it was thousands of people in projections afterwards. Initially they were low, but then afterwards when the actually analyzed it, it was estimated to be like 80,000 to 100,000 people. So it was just transformative. I feel like in terms of my experiences, that was one of the most transformative moments of my life.

Evelyn also remembers this march as a critical moment for Las Vegas and in her personal life. She shares:

> The 2006 march, when casino owners saw the Strip being completely closed when even the deal with the labor union that they made here… like Culinary didn't stop us, didn't stop the people from expressing their voice. And expressing their power. And they called called Reid, and Reid met with us the next day. He was the most powerful senator at the time in Congress. And so that's not the measurement of power [getting the meeting with Reid], the measurement of power was how people who, you know… we were taught to be silent for a reason and when our voice was just expressed so beautifully and powerfully and that stops a bill that was gonna criminalize our very existence even more... That just showed me that transformation is possible within ourselves. And it's the most important transformation within our communities.

From Joanna's and Evelyn's recounting of the May 1st marcha, we see that officials, and even organizers themselves, could not have accounted for the unprecedented turnout at the evening rally and proceeding march.

Despite this turnout, which some acknowledged to be a "historical moment," [12] and a "highly unusual event in Las Vegas,"[13] many newspaper accounts still depicted this as an inconsequential and burdensome moment. For example, while it seems that there are no projected accounts of the economic impact the march had on evening casino operations, Bill Young, sheriff at the time said, "We don't need any more marches," because they were a distraction to the police department's daily operation (as cited in Curtis 2006, p. 1A). The unexpected evening turnout meant that traffic had to be diverted on the streets and highway from the Las Vegas Strip exits, an occurrence that generally only happens during the New Year's Eve celebrations.

Yet even while the impact of the march is undeniable in this way, a reporter for the *Las Vegas-Review Journal*, John L. Smith presented a different story. He explains how on May 1, 2006, "he drove around the valley Monday looking for signs of the impact of A Day Without Immigrants" to "relate in spirit to the movement" as he was "not sure how walking off the job and cutting class sends a mature message about the plight of the illegals and their impact on our economy" (Smith 2006, p. 1B). Smith goes on to explain the various stops on his drive to negate any indications of a potentially significant impact. He shares:

> I stopped by several construction sites and found them bustling with activity. Whether it was a housing tract or a commercial job, there was no shortage of brown faces building an ever- expanding Las Vegas… University Medical Center's emergency room, where so many illegal immigrants receive treatment, appeared to have no shortage of customers. And you'll probably notice the birth announcements have a very Hispanic flavor. Like

[12] (Kalil 2006, p. 1A).
[13] (Kihara 2006, p. 1B).

> other uninsureds, illegal immigrants use the ER as their doctor's office… At public schools across Southern Nevada, the children of illegal immigrants are educated, with a costly emphasis on their lack of proficiency in English. It's a good thing all the children of illegals didn't cut school and join that demonstration. The streets would have been many times more crowded… Illegal immigrants contribute in many ways to our economy, but they also take from it. And much of the income they generate in Las Vegas doesn't stay in Las Vegas. They shouldn't be maligned or herded into pens, but it's insanity to reward them with the rights of citizenship for breaking the law.

In this account, the same anti-immigrant narratives emerge in citing taxpayer money and public education concerns, so that once again activists efforts were associated and connected to a growing Latinx "illegal" immigrant population problem in Las Vegas. Again, this perspective illuminates the ways students activists were undermined, racialized, and subject to anti-immigrant perspectives in their fight for justice. I argue that perspectives like this contribute to the erasure of Latinx communities, and also the erasure of their struggles and their activist efforts.

In spite of this persistent erasure, activists chose to continue engaging and participating in annual May 1st marchas since 2006. For Claudia, this commitment to continuing her involvement in May 1st and immigrant organizing in Las Vegas was connected to her muxerista community. The term muxerista originates from Anita's research with Raza Womyn, a student organization at UCLA, and was shared with student organizers at UNLV, who have used it to come together, organize, and connect. A muxerista refers to a Chicanx/Latinx activist committed to a "feminist vision for social change committed to ending all forms of oppression" and social injustice (Revilla, 2009, p. 48). Claudia shares that she continued engaging in organizing, even when it meant being constantly busy because this meant organizing alongside her muxerista family. She explains:

> I remember us identifying as muxeristas… there's something about being a womanist, being a feminist, someone that understands the intersectionality of being a feminist. The camaraderie, the support, the love, the understanding… This connection, right? And [this

> understanding of] what does it mean to be a muxerista? That defies gender, that defies sex, that defies where you're from… It's this identity… to be proud of. Being brown women committed to social justice was an important part of the connection that we had and have continued to have. That's part of why I identify as a muxerista."

So muxerista organizing and community-building was the way some organizers engaged with the intersectional and multidimensional demands of immigrant rights. As the participants repeatedly explained in the interviews, immigrant rights organizing and May 1st in Las Vegas was about so much more than immigrant rights—it had to do with gender, sexuality, economic inequality, worker's rights, and erasure of communities of color and queer folks. Anita explains:

> [Las Vegas immigrant rights] activism made me realize how important it is to share information, share space with other activists. And how important it is to consistently bring in these other dynamics that make it an intersectional analysis. Feminism and queer activism should always be a part of any social movement. And often that's one of the biggest mistakes. We tend to re-marginalize those two categories or aspects. But being involved in Vegas and made me realize how powerful it is when you bring those aspects into immigrant rights activism. And I think there are other parts of the country that did that, whether intentionally or unintentionally. But I think Vegas in particular has a very distinct way of practicing [what] I would call generically an intersectional feminism. Specifically I would call it a muxerista activism, or a muxerista consciousness. It made me realize that this is possible. It's possible to do this kind of work. It's just got to be very intentional and it can be very powerful and long-lasting.

The marchas have continued and were organized to illuminate these intersectional connections. Liz explains this when she shares why she believes marchas to be significant:

> They're symbolic. May 1st is International Workers Day. So all of the people working are out in the streets, all over the world. So it's a symbol of unity. It's a symbol of literally those working for instance, here in Vegas. Workers are housekeepers. But every year we have less and less people going. When there's a major event, major policy, then that's when we have the most people out there. So it's a political symbol to have a May 1st. Every year police knows there's going to be something right there. They're calling key [organizers] to say, "Hey, are you [organizing] anything?" It's symbolic for people because it's us taking over the streets. It's us saying like, these are our streets. We demand justice. We're united and we're still working on something. May 1st is [the] worker's day. But we also know that being a worker means being undocumented. Not all people, but it connects. And when I think of that, I think of intersections. All of these intersections are connected and all of these identities are overlapping each other. And it's a symbol of who we are to take over the streets and to say we're here. And even though you might think

> that we're invisible, today's the day that we're visibly here and you can see us and you can see what we demand.

In this quote, Liz speaks to the spatial significance of the marchas in Las Vegas. The May 1st marchas are intersectional and symbolic. They encompass spatial resistance, and demonstrate to the world that in Las Vegas, labor is increasingly tied to immigrants, and that while these communities may be invisible to some, they continually resist erasure, demand to be seen, and demand justice.

Conclusion

Beyond the noise and the bright lights, there is more happening in Las Vegas than most people assume. Because of marketing campaigns tied to the exponential wealth of the hotel and entertainment industries centered on the Strip, most only imagine Las Vegas (and perhaps even the whole state of Nevada) in certain, limiting ways. When this perception is not challenged, much is occluded, like the communities of color whose labor builds and sustains Las Vegas. The 2006 immigrant rights march that occurred in Las Vegas on May 1st was a form of spatial resistance. By coming together and organizing actions in public spaces, like the march down the Strip and the student walkouts that preceded it, activists engaged in spatial resistance against illegality, racism, and classism as it was produced and practiced in Las Vegas, Nevada.

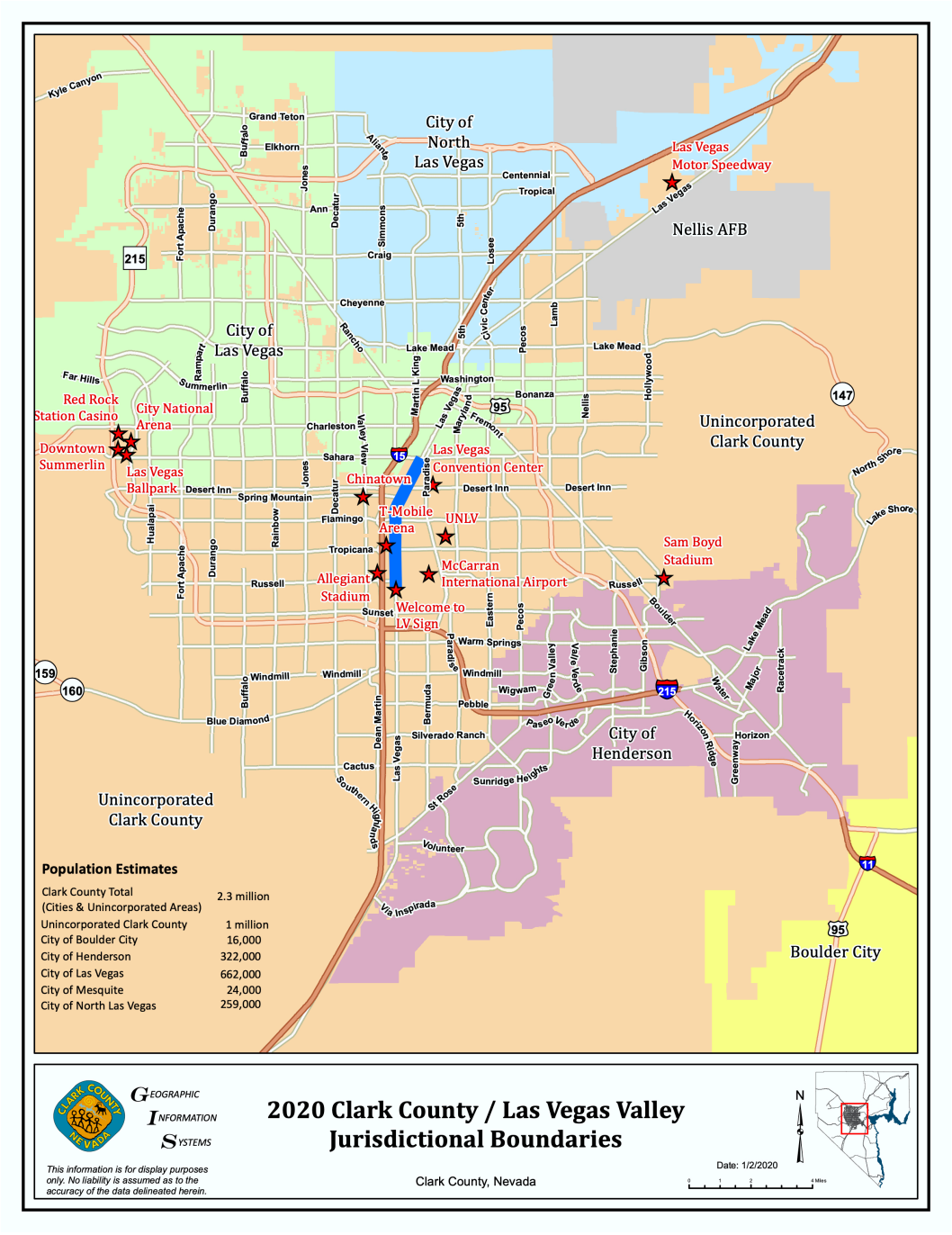
Latinx communities and communities of color are being erased from the history of Las Vegas. Through my work, I argue that in 2006 local activists were responding to H.R. 4437 as a matter of national significance, but they were also challenging this persistent erasure at the unique local level. And so, the feminist queer activism that emerged in Las Vegas was intersectional in that activists were motivated and mobilizing around immigrant rights, labor rights, LGBTQ rights, and gender rights. The student walkouts happened in 2006 because of anti-immigrant rhetoric and racism filtered into local schools and directly impacted the lives of

students. In this way, the space of Las Vegas is subject to, shaped, and impacted by racism, classism, and illegality. This is visible in the separation of neighborhoods, differences in quality of education, and exposure to anti-immigrant rhetoric in public spaces. It is critical for more people to expand their perception of Las Vegas to understand that there are communities who live in this space.

Communities have done impactful work around feminist and radical immigrant rights activism in a place believed to be a care-free center of entertainment. My research disrupts this notion of Las Vegas as a place for inconsequential fun, and demonstrates that like every other city, the geographic space in Las Vegas is shaped and formed by dominant structural powers like racism and classism. Activists have come together to challenge this and resist, both through physical manifestations of people power, like the march that took place on May 1, 2006, and also by living and finding joy in personal relationships and experiences in these spaces. Despite the work activists engaged in after the march, the invisibilities of their work and their communities continues. Under capitalist demands and continued anti-immigrant policies, it is difficult for local communities to engage and continue in resistance, and it is critical to continue examining how capitalism and resistance functions and grows in this desert. Projects like this are important because they combat erasure by documenting the meaningful lives, contributions, and resistance of marginalized communities at local levels. And in our increasingly connected world, it is necessary to make connections between dehumanization, erasure, and marginalization of communities at local, national, and global levels.

Appendix A.

The following map, "2020 Clark County/ Las Vegas Valley Jurisdictional Boundaries," provides a visual representation of this geographic area.



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