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El Barrio Lindo: Chicana/o and Latinx Social Space in Postindustrial Los Angeles

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in Sociology

by

Jonathan Daniel Gomez

Committee in charge:

Professor George Lipsitz, Chair

Professor Jon Cruz

Professor Gaye Theresa Johnson

January 2018

This dissertation of Jonathan Daniel Gomez is approved.

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Jon Cruz

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Gaye Theresa Johnson

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George Lipsitz, Committee Chair

September 2017

El Barrio Lindo: Chicana/o and Latinx Social Space in Postindustrial Los Angeles

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by

Jonathan D. Gomez

Dedication

This project is dedicated to every social justice seeker that has carved out spaces for us to congregate, organize, and mobilize for freedom.

This is for my first teachers. For my Big Dad, David R. Carrillo, who began working full days as a farmworker after the third grade, who proudly worked the ten-inch mill at Bethlehem Steel in Los Angeles, California for thirty years, who sat me on his lap to tell me stories about what it was like to be a *pachuco* in East Los Angeles in the early 1940s, who always did so much to ensure that we never had to miss a meal. For my Big Mom, Lydia Carrillo, who was pushed out of school after the fourth grade because she did not have shoes, who smiled whenever she reminisced about being a *pachuca* in East Los Angeles, who invited neighbors less fortunate than us into our home to share a meal, who showered me with love, and who made sure that we always stood together.

This is for my Nina, Sandra Carrillo, a tough Chicana with a rebel spirit and a lot of guts, who gives me nothing but *cariño* and honest advice. For uncle Bob (RIP), who use to remind me to be who I needed to be and to never be ashamed of what that was. For my aunty Viv, who always gives me blessings and does not let me leave any visit without letting me know that she loves me. For my nino Frank (RIP), who was a joker, an artist, and a giant presence in my life. For my Nini and uncle Bert, who opened their home to me when it was needed most, and who continue to be my biggest fans. For my cousins Greg and Dave, two brothers who shared their room with me and always informed everyone on the schoolyard that I was their baby cousin. For my *primas hermanas*, Lil and Steph, who always root for me, show me big love, and always save a seat for me at the table. For my *primo hermano* Frank G. Anaya II, who taught me how to stand tall, stand strong, and who always reminds me that the *barrio* is in the heart.

This is for my big brother, Henry D. Gomez, who took me for rides on the rear pegs of his bicycle down Hammel Street hill, who taught me how to put my nose under a pop fly to get the out, and who took me to his math classes at USC to "see what college is like" when I was only a boy. For my sister-in-law Danielle, who stands tall no matter what. For my nephew Jacob, who is a mighty force of light and love in my life. For my god son Adam, whose entrance into this world changed the direction of my life for the better, and who makes me proud to be his nino.

This is for my Sissy, Kimberly D. Gomez, who watched over me on the school playground, who never let me go without anything I needed, and who continues to meet me beyond half ways.

Most of all, though, this is for my marvelous mother, Diane J. Gomez. When life seemed uncertain her strength and persistence to make sure we had what we needed made me feel safe and sound. Through thick and thin, she always showed up, and continues to. She has taught me so much about taking hold of opportunities, caring for others, and giving thanks for each day and night. We do not choose who we are born to, but I thank the heavens that I was born to her. She is the best.

I have a village behind me. I am so thankful for the love and support I have received coming up, and that I continue to receive. I come from a sturdy stock of *barrio* people who give it their all and then some. My first teachers have given me so much. I am blessed. *¡Gracias!*

Acknowledgements

The dissertation before you is the product of a collective effort. But there are people who have really had my back and rolled with me. Ana Maria Gallegos holds it down, showing me by example that an engaged educator means listening and learning from those that we are assigned to teach. She reminds me to keep poetry and art at the center of daily life. She asks what she can do to help, and always follows through. Her love, through thick and thin, up-close and far away, in waking life as in dreams, is marvelous like the music of Brenton Woods- I share this triumph with her! Our dear *gata* Dolores kept me company as I wrote at all hours of the day. Jorge Ramirez and Ismael Illescas shared heart, voice, food, and drink with me, encouraged me to keep going, and invited me to take part in important conversations about the Black Radical Tradition. These friends have helped me to stand tall through the good and bad of this process. I am proud to say that together we continue to figure out how to walk with "modest audacity." These life forces have blessed me with more than they know.

Jordan T. Camp helped me develop my undergraduate senior thesis into a writing sample for the graduate school application. He was selfless in the amount of time he gave to me to sharpen my ideas and questions. To this day, he continues to inspire me with his scholarship and vision. Bridget Harr helped me to make it through the early rounds of graduate school at UCSB. Sociology cohort buddies and comrades in the struggle, I am so grateful for her kindness, big heart and brains. Tomas Carrasco helped me to delve into the poetics of life each time he invited me to the stage. Steven Osuna and Daniel Olmos welcomed me to Santa Barbara, and made sure to include me in their circle of critical reading and friendship.

Denise Segura and Victor Rios were wonderful first year mentors in the sociology department. They always showed great support throughout the entire process. Jon Cruz, Gaye T. Johnson, and George Lipsitz formed my committee dream team. No question was ever too small or too big for them to tend to. I am thankful for all their mentorship and guidance. Howard Winant has been a wonderful teacher. He has always kept his door open to me. I am grateful for the lessons I learned from him as his Teaching Assistant and as his Research Assistant at the UCSB Center for New Racial Studies. Avery Gordon took the time to sit with me to think through questions and search for answers. Kum-Kum Bhavnani, Maria Charles, Reginald Daniel, Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, Geoffrey Raymond, Bill Robinson, and France Windance-Twine contributed toward making my experience pleasant and memorable.

Sharon Applegate is an amazing Graduate Program Advisor! On many occasions, she invited me to sit and talk with her about my progress. If I needed something, she tried her best to make it happen. Thank you! Lisa Blanco, Madhu Khemani, Vera Reyes, Kim Summerfield always made me feel welcome and a part of a team.

The UCSB, Center for Black Studies Research was my base throughout most of my time in graduate school. I was invited here by the late Professor Clyde Woods. Professor Woods took me under his wing. From him, I was provided a lot of love, critique, and responsibility. To this day, I give big thanks to Professor Woods for inviting me into his world of rigorous scholarship and love. Following his passing, Professor Diane Fujino became the Director of the Center. With her, I have been able to do wonderful things. I do not have the words to thank her for everything she has done for me and everything she has included me in. Together, we co-facilitate the Transformative Pedagogy Project. In this endeavor, we have created a space where students, professors, community members, and visiting artists and activists come together to envision the world we want to live in. In addition to all of this, she invited Ana and

I into her home and the world she shares with her amazing husband Matef Harmachis, and lovely children, Kano and Seku. I am very thankful for this dynamic mentorship. A special thank you goes out to Mahsheed Ayoub and Rosa Pinter, two Business Officers who hold it down in more ways than one! Thank you for your kindness and support!

Early on the Department of Black Studies became a space for me to think and act seriously as a scholar. Professor Woods took on a group of sociology graduate students as his students, and made us sharper for it. Gaye T. Johnson showed me that work in the classroom and in the community, go together. Reading her scholarship as an undergraduate empowered me. Following a visit to her classroom, I remember thinking, “wow, I want to have that kind of impact on the students in my classes,” and then I hit the library to get started. When I think up the words to thank Professor Lipsitz for everything that he has done, and continues to do, for me over the years, they form a poem. He leads by example and his word is his bond. Wherever I go in the world, scholars, poets, activists, and artists on the ground standing up for social justice know who he is. His name brings a smile to their faces, from ear to ear. I am very proud to call him my mentor, ask anyone. I work hard to carry forward the lessons he has so selflessly taught me here at UCSB. Professor Cedric Robinson always took the time to sit with me to discuss ideas from course readings and from life in general. I’m so grateful to him for allowing me to see up-close how he moved in the world. I once approached Professor Robinson upset about my surrounding in the university. He looked at me and said, “you are searching for love in a place that doesn’t love you. What are you going to do to create the spaces that do?” Following this interaction, I looked at graduate study in a different light, and took a giant step forward in life. Damien Sojoyner took time away from his dissertation writing to sit and talk with me about my work. I am honored that he continues to do this for me in his position as a professor. Gracias! Claudine Michel, Douglas Daniels, Earl Stewart, Jeffrey Stewart, Christopher McAuley, and Terence Keel are all part of making my experience in the Black Studies Department a special place.

The El Puente Poetry Workshop, El Centro, Lower Westside Santa Barbara Community Center, and the Santa Barbara Community College Student Equity Committee are projects that I am proud to be a part of. Each place has invited me to do meaningful work to achieve broad forms of social justice. I am a better person and educator because of these places and the people that hold them together. Elizabeth Robinson has been there for me in many different ways. I know that I am a better thinker and actor in the world because of the walks we have taken together. She is someone that I am very proud to call my teacher! Thank you for always welcoming me into your various circles of love and friendship. Sonya Baker, another marvelous person and friend who helped me stay grounded throughout the entire processes. Zaveeni Khan-Marcus is a social justice leader on the UCSB campus. I am honored that she invites me to sit at her table. Rick Benjamin is a gem of the UCSB campus, and I am very grateful to call him a friend. His poetry always teaches me so much about kindness and when to stand up and say that it is time.

When I was away from Santa Barbara, I met wonderful people who gave me the tools to finish. Michael Castaneda and Angela Fillingim have been supportive and enthusiastic about my journey since the day we met. Michael welcomed me to UC Berkeley when I sought mentorship in the Department of Ethnic Studies. In that time, we learned how to study and laugh together so that we could keep moving forward. Laura Perez was a wonderful mentor in my time at UC Berkeley. Her knowledge of and belief in Chicana/o art as a vehicle to achieve liberation is remarkable. Thank you for taking me on as your student. Mr. Leo Stegman taught

me that my formal education is “a” tool and not “the” tool. Walking with Mr. Stegman has made me a better person. Tiny, Muteado, and the POOR Magazine *familia* welcomed me into their circle of freedom fighters. Ana and the Castlemont High School Arts Collective taught me about the hard work and power of “art-based community making.” Avotcja introduced me to so many wonderful people while I was in the Bay Area. Palabra Musical will forever be a part of who I am. I cannot thank these groups of marvelous people enough for the love and light they filled my life with.

All of this would not have happened without the mentorship of Christine Rodriguez at East Los Angeles College (ELAC). Rosie Bermudez took me under her wing at ELAC to show me the ropes. I would not have gone very far as a student without the dedication of my Extended Opportunities and Educational Opportunities academic counselors.

At UC Santa Cruz, Paul Ortiz, Rosalee Cabrera, Larry Trujillo, and Melanie DuPuis, Olga Najera-Ramirez, and Russell Rodriguez provided me with the support and care that made it possible for me to develop an identity as a critical thinker and serious student. Larry Trujillo introduced me to studies that centered my own lived experience. It was in Larry’s classroom that I first read scholarship by George Lipsitz. I said to myself, “who is this person?” It was the first time that I had read something that recognized my community of East Los Angeles as an important and beautiful place. In Paul’s classroom, I was hit over the head with the magnificence of Black and Brown histories. Paul’s willingness to challenge me to read and write helped me to take myself seriously as a thinker and actor in the world. I’ll never forget how he always made sure we had access to the books we asked him about, or simply mentioned in a conversation with him. He was also the first professor to march with students and workers on and off campus. Following my studies at UCSB, Paul continued to provide me with the support I needed to complete this dissertation. With all the important work he does, I am so thankful that he finds the time and energy to bring me a long with him. I owe a lot to the Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program, and my mentor Olga Najera-Ramirez. She gave me responsibilities and support that made me feel like I mattered on that big campus. The EOP Faculty Mentor Program and my mentor Melanie DuPuis gave me the time and space to systematically think about culture and politics. Rosalee Cabrera always made sure I had a space on campus from which to read and write my poetry.

I am so grateful for all of this support and love. I am most grateful, however, to the people who invited me into their worlds and taught me so much about creating spaces for democratic deliberation and the practice of mutual respect- Norma Montoya, Jimmy Alvarado, John Riojas, Rebecca Gonzales, members of P-47 and Sin Remedio, and Cadillac Steve.

Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. University of California, Santa Barbara, Sociology, 2018

M.A. University of California, Santa Barbara, Sociology, 2012

B.A. University of California, Santa Cruz, Sociology, 2008

Transfer East Los Angeles College, Sociology, 2005

DISSERTATION

El Barrio Lindo: Chicana/o and Latinx Social Space in Postindustrial Los Angeles

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Chicana/o Studies,
Instructor of Record, 2017-2018

Lower division courses:
Community Studies

University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Black Studies,
Instructor of Record, 2016-2017

Upper division courses:
From Plantations to the Prisons

University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Sociology,
Instructor of Record, 2014-2017

Lower division courses:
Introduction to Sociology

Upper division courses:
Criminal Justice and the Community
Chicana/o Communities
Latina/o Youth Cultures
Deviant Behavior
Social Inequalities

University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Sociology,
Teaching Assistant, 2011-2015

Lower division courses:
Introduction to Sociology, Lead Teaching Assistant

Upper division courses:
Chicana/o Communities
Cultural Theory
Juvenile Justice
Methods of Research
Sociology of Education

Course Instructor, Black and Chicano Histories, Los Prietos Boys Camp, Santa Barbara Youth Authority; University of California, Santa Barbara; Santa Barbara City College, winter & spring 2016

Co-facilitator, Transformative Pedagogy Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, Center for Black Studies Research, winter &spring 2015, winter & spring 2016, spring 2017

Workshop Leader, Chicana/o Studies R1A, California Sueños: Chicana/o and Latina/o Identities in Literature, Visual Art, and Culture, Summer Bridge Program, University of California, Berkeley, summer 2013

Student Teacher, Pescadero School Program, Educational Opportunity Program, University of California, Santa Cruz, 2005-2007

GRANTS AND AWARDS

2016-2017, Graduate Affiliates Program Scholarship, Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, University of California, Santa Barbara

2016, Anita Mackey Scholarship and Service Award, Center for Black Studies Research, University of California, Santa Barbara

2015 & 2016, Graduate Student Research Grant, Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara

2015, Dissertation Research Grant, Chicana/o Studies Institute, University of California, Santa Barbara

2013-2014, Graduate Opportunity Fellowship, Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara

2012, Conference Grant, Chicana/o Studies Institute, University of California, Santa Barbara

2011, Small Grant, University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States (UC MEXUS)

2011, Action Research Grant, Center for New Racial Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

2010 & 2011, Summer Fellowship, National Science Foundation, University of California Diversity Initiative for Graduate Study in the Social Sciences

2009-2010, Graduate Opportunity Fellowship, Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara

2008, Noche de Estrellas Award, Excellence in Undergraduate Research, Merrill College, University of California, Santa Cruz

PUBLICATIONS

Gomez, Jonathan D, Diane C. Fujino, Esther Lezra, George Lipsitz, Jordan Mitchell, and James Fonseca, "A Transformative Pedagogy for a Decolonial World" (Under review, *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies)*

Gomez, Jonathan D. with Sonia Martinez, "It's Not Too Late for Love: Empowering Black and Brown Solidarity on the UCSB Campus," (*UCSB Diversity Forum*, Spring 2017)

Gomez, Jonathan D., "The Social Practice of 'Being Ready': A Review of *The Other Malecon: A Photographic Essay by John Paul Gallagher," Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies,* (Forthcoming, Spring 2017)

Gomez, Jonathan D., with Jorge Ramirez and Ismael Illescas. "Cedric J. Robinson: The Black Radical Tradition and Modest Audacity," *Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies,* (Fall 2016)

Gomez, Jonathan D. "'There Was No Spartacus Here:' Norma Montoya and Art as Abeyance of the Estrada Courts Mural Program," *Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies,* (Fall 2015)

Gomez, Jonathan D. "Latina/o Labor Organizer," in Eds. Suzanne Oboler and Deena J. Gonzalez. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Latino/as in Politics, Law, and Social Movements,* (2015)

Gomez, Jonathan D. with Salvador Güereña. "At the Crossroads of Chicana/o Art and Music: East L.A. Muralists and Punk Rockers. *UCSB Diversity Forum*, Fall 2014, Vol. 9 No.1

IN PROGRESS

Gomez, Jonathan D., "'I Want a City Where Everyone Has Food to Eat': An Interview with Auntie Frances, Founder of the Auntie Frances Love Mission, Oakland, California."

Gomez, Jonathan D., "Every City Has a *Centro:* Chicana/o and Latinx Poetic Geographies in a Time of Hate."

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2014-Present, Research Assistant, Center for Black Studies Research, University of California, Santa Barbara

2013, University of California Scholar Exchange Program, Department of Ethnic Studies (Sponsor: Dr. Laura Pérez), University of California, Berkeley

2011-2012, Research Assistant, The Center for New Racial Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

2007-2008, Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program (URAP), Department of Anthropology, (Sponsor: Dr. Olga Najera-Ramirez) University of California, Santa Cruz

2006-2007, Faculty Mentor Program, Department of Sociology, (Sponsor: Dr. Melanie DuPuis), University of California, Santa Cruz

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2017, "Boulevard Nights: Citywide Car Club and the Collective Interruption of "Unexpectancy" in East Los Angeles, California," National Association for Ethnic Studies Conference, San Francisco State University, March 23-25, 2017

2016, "'Where Can We Pee?' POOR Magazine, Counter-Ideologies, and the Human Right to Housing in Oakland, California," Human Rights in the Americas, Fourth Biennial Conference of the International Association of Inter-American Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, October 4-6, 2016

2016, "Enacting El Barrio Lindo: Norma Montoya and Art-Based Community-Making in the Chicana/o Mural Movement," Chicano Power! Conference: The Chicano Movement, Past and Present, University of California, Santa Barbara, February 26, 2016

2015, "The Dee-Colonize Academy at PeopleSkool: Arts-Based Pedagogy and the Black Radical Tradition of POOR Magazine in East Oakland, California," Cultural Studies Association Conference, Riverside, California, May 22, 2015

2014, "Interrupting Unexpectancy and Claiming the Right to the City: Chicana/o and Latina/o Narratives in Short Stories, Mural Painting, and Punk Rock Music," American Studies Association Conference, Los Angeles, California, November 7, 2014

2014, (Organized with Dr. Paul Ortiz, Rebecca Gonzales, and Iris de Anda) "Chicanas/os and Latinas/os Read James Baldwin," Roundtable Discussion, Eastside Café, El Sereno, American Studies Association Conference, Los Angeles, California, November 6, 2014

2012, "Going and Coming to School: Poetic Responses to the Criminalization of Youthscapes in the Working Class Communities of Santa Barbara, California," American Studies Association Conference, San Juan, Puerto Rico, November 15, 2012

2011, "For Their Own Use: Working Class Self-Activity and East Los Angeles Punk Rock, Mid-1990s to the Present," National Association of Chicana/o Studies Conference, Pasadena, California, April 2, 2011

2011, "3 Bucks a Head: The Backyard Gig, Class Struggle, and the East Los Angeles Community" EMP Pop Conference, University of California, Los Angeles, February 26, 2011

2010, "Mutual Aid and East Los Angeles Punk Rock: Rethinking Community Relationships," American Studies Association Conference, San Antonio, Texas, November, 2010

2010, "Re-Creating the Backyard, and Taking 'Missions' with East Los Angeles Punk Rock," South West Labor Conference, University of California, Santa Cruz, May 7, 2010

INVITED PRESENTATIONS

2017, "'Remembering Out Loud': Latinx Public Art and Performance in a Time of Organized Forgetting," Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida, Gainesville, April 13-14, 2017

2016, “The Art of Cultivating and Informing the Right to an Equitable Higher Education for Latinx Students” Equity Dialogues, Santa Barbara City College, December 6, 2016

2016, “Sociology as ‘A Heart-Felt Quality of Fairness:’ Lessons from W.E.B. Du Bois for the Twenty-First Century Student,” Equity Dialogues, Santa Barbara City College, October 21, 2016

2016, “Sociology as ‘A Heart-Felt Quality of Fairness:’ Lessons from W.E.B. Du Bois for the Twenty-First Century,” Associated Students, Student Initiated Recruitment and Retention Committee, Guiding Under-represented Individuals in Developing Educational Success, Transfer Summer Orientation Program, University of California, Santa Barbara, August 25, 2016

2016, “Art-Based Community-Making at the Estrada Courts Housing Projects, 1973-1978,” iPATH Transfer Program, Santa Barbara City College, July 15, 2016

2016, “‘Para Los Niños del Mundo:’ Envisioning and Enacting Social Space in Chicana/o and Latina/o Los Angeles,” Graduate Student Professional Development and Graduate Student Association Lunch and Learn Series, University of California, Santa Barbara, April 1, 2016

2016, “The Important Work of Chicana/o Art in the World,” Ethnic Studies: Chicana/o Art, Santa Barbara City College, March 3, 2016

2016, “How Critical Pedagogy Takes Place: Reinvigorating ‘Civic Literacy” in Our Times,” Global Studies 110: Global Culture and Ethics, University of California, Santa Barbara, January 13, 2016

2015, “Cultivating an Imagination More Real than ‘Reality,’” Introduction to Art, Madison Park Academy, Oakland, California, September 11, 2015

2015, “Why Building Community Counts: The Promise and Power of ‘Story Circle Learning,’” Back of the Yards Immigration Committee, Holy Names Church, Chicago, Illinois, August 22, 2015

2015, “Critical Study of the Word and the World,” The East Los Angeles Community Union (TELACU), East Los Angeles, California, June 9, 2015

2015, (Presented with Dr. Diane Fujino and Dr. Esther Lezra), Transformative Pedagogy Project, UCSB Center for Black Studies Research, Del Pueblo High School, Educational Equity, and Excellence Meeting, Santa Barbara, California, March 16, 2015

2015, “‘Listening to Learn, and Learning to Listen:’ Central Roles of Chicanas in the Chicana/o Mural Movement,” Documenting the Ethnic Studies Struggles through Oral History, Prescott College, Tucson, Arizona, March 5, 2015

2014, “Locating ‘Constellations of Struggle:’ African American and Chicana/o Histories of Solidarity,” Garfield High School, East Los Angeles, California, September 9, 2014

2014, “Callejera Punk Rock: Border Hoppin’ Hardcore Music and Politics,” Department of Sociology Colloquium Series, University of California, Santa Barbara, April 23, 2014

UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

2017, Facilitator, “Talking About Race: Black and Brown Unity for Today,” Black Greek Lettered Organizations, University of California, Santa Barbara, February 16, 2017

2016, Member, Student Equity Committee, Santa Barbara City College, Santa Barbara, California, 2016-present

2015, Workshop Leader, Talking in Class Program, Just Communities/Communidades Justas, San Marcos High School, Santa Barbara, California, April 15, 23, 27, 2015 & October 6, 9, 16, 2015

2012 - 2015, Graduate Student Mentor, Sociology Honors Program, University of California, Santa Barbara

2012, Panelist, Cultivating Semillas Conference, “Cultivating Semillas from the California Community College to UCSB: Chicana/o Studies Moving Adelante,” University of California, Santa Barbara, April 21, 2012

2011-2013, Graduate Student Advisor, Armenian Student Association, University of California, Santa Barbara

2003-2005, Peer Advisor, Extended Opportunities Programs and Services, East Los Angeles College

UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING

2017, Moderator, *The Prison in Twelve Landscapes,* MultiCultural Center, University of California, Santa Barbara, October 17th, 2017

2016, An Evening of Self-Expression with Rebecca Gonzales, MultiCultural Center, University of California, Santa Barbara, May 26, 2016

2016, Theatre of the Poor/Teatro de los Pobre: Decolonization Degentrification Seminar, MultiCultural Center, University of California, Santa Barbara, May 6th, 2016

2016, Community Discussion, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*, Santa Barbara City College, Luria Library, April 21, 2016

2016, An Evening of Self-Expression with Lisa Gray-Garcia, MultiCultural Center, University of California, Santa Barbara, March 1, 2016

2015, Community Discussion, "Rethinking Freedom," Santa Barbara City College, Atkinson Art Gallery, December, 3, 2015

2015, Art Lecture, Abraham Lizama, "'Choosing My Words Wisely': The Role of Poetry in Community Organizing Against the Proposed Gang Injunction in Santa Barbara, California," University of California, Santa Barbara, September 2, 2015

2015, Co-organizer (with Ana Maria Gallegos and the Transformative Pedagogy Project, Center for Black Studies Research), Story Circle Dialogue and Artivism: In Honor and Celebration of the Lives of Malcolm X and Yuri Kochiyama, University of California, Santa Barbara, May 12, 2015

2015, Planning Committee, New Politics and New Polities: Equity-Oriented, Race-Conscious Social Movement Mobilization in California Communities Two-Day Symposium, University of California, Santa Barbara, Center for Black Studies Research, May 8-9, 2015

2014, Norma Montoya Art Lecture, "Estrada Courts Mural Program 1973-1978," University of California, Santa Barbara, July 23, 2014

2012, The Power of Poetics Lecture and Showcase, University of California, Santa Barbara, June, 28, 2012

2012, Symposium Co-organizer (with Chandra Russo and Greg Prieto), "Doing Good Work? Bridging Activism and Scholarship in Latina/o Immigrant Communities," Center for New Racial Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, May, 25, 2012

2012, Conference Co-organizer, The Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Music, *Music and Crisis,* University of California, Santa Barbara, April 14-15, 2012

2011-2012, Co-Founder (with Ana Maria Gallegos), El Puente Creative Writing Workshop, El Puente Community Schools of Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California

2008, Student Planning Committee, "Black and Brown Roundtable: Collaborations Across Difference," University of California, Santa Cruz, April 19, 2008

ARTISTIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Gomez, Jonathan D. "Have You Seen Alberto?;" "Sergio Needs More," *Fifteenth Round Press*, (Goleta: California, Summer 2016).

Gomez, Jonathan D. “Who Ever Knew a Pillow Could Be So Heavy,” *POOR Magazine/Prensa Pobre,* (Oakland: California, Fall 2014).

Gomez, Jonathan D. “There Are No Criminals Here”; “Piñata”; “The Rain Washes East Los”; “Massacre of the Kisses” in Eds. Santino J. Rivera, *Ban This! the Bsp Anthology of Xican@ Literature* (Los Angeles: Broken Sword Press, 2012).

Gomez, Jonathan D. (2010). *There Are No Criminals Here: Writings of East Los Angeles, and Views from City Terrace Hills* (Austin: Red Salmon Press, Salmoncito Series, 2010).

Gomez, Jonathan D. (2010). “Rosa” in *LOUDmouth Magazine,* Issue 17, Transformations (Los Angeles: California State University, Los Angeles, Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, 2010).

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

American Sociological Association
American Studies Association
Cultural Studies Association
National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies

Abstract

El Barrio Lindo: Chicana/o and Latinx Social Space in Postindustrial Los Angeles
Jonathan Daniel Gomez

El Barrio Lindo: Chicana/o and Latinx Social Space in Postindustrial Los Angeles explores how youths and young adults cognitively map and physically traverse space in the postindustrial city. In the neoliberal era, when dominant social groups promote a world that revolves around materialistic gain and hyper-individualism, I reveal how artist activists author and authorize multiple and diverse visions of social membership. *El Barrio Lindo* focuses on how Chicanas/os and Latinxs re-appropriate social space through painting, music performances, poetry readings, marches and other forms of collective activity, carried out in the backyards of houses, in alleyways, in freeway culverts, in the areas that surround taco trucks, in common areas in public housing projects, and along busy boulevards across the city. I document and analyze repertoires of expressive culture that include "alternative archives" about race, gender, class, and power. These archives provide a critical reading of methods used by Chicana/o and Latinx communities for waging material and symbolic struggles for visibility and mobility. My sources include oral history interviews, community newspaper stories, archival documents, poems, song recordings, visual art, and observant participation.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Why Social Space Counts……………………………………………………1

Chapter One: El Barrio Lindo: The Estrada Courts Mural Program and the Production of Art and Artists……………………………………………………………………………………14

Chapter Two: Rainbow Alley: Youth Centers, Neoliberal Abandonment, and the Creation of Punk Rock Social Spaces………………………………………………………………….49

Chapter Three: Taking a Mission: Backyard Gigs, Punk Rock Music, and the Right to Public Spaces……………………………………………………………………………………..72

Chapter Four: Border Hoppin' Hardcore: Transgressing Third Border……………………109

Chapter Five: 'Taking Back the Boulevard': Politics of Place and Space on Whittier Boulevard…………………………………………………………………………………...138

Chapter Six: Conclusion: Race and Place in Los Angeles…………………………………169

Introduction: Why Social Space Counts

This dissertation investigates how disenfranchised groups cognitively map and physically traverse space in the post-industrial city. It rests on examination and analyses of the spatial imaginings and entitlements inscribed in works of expressive culture such as murals, music, and poetry, as well as convening in backyards, alleyways, sidewalks along busy boulevards, and common areas of public housing projects. Focusing expressly on Chicana/o and Latinx popular cultures as social practices that illuminate complex realities facing working class people in the city, I explore the ways in which these groups produce physical and discursive spaces where neoliberal dispossession is both registered and contested.[1] I document, describe, and analyze how creative placemaking in over-policed yet under-served neighborhoods mounts collective challenges to traditional practices of exclusion and subordination based on race, place, gender, class, citizenship status, and generation. Furthermore, I explore how the spatial imaginaries of aggrieved populations pose direct challenges to dominant conceptions of race and space in Los Angeles. In so doing, I contend that they function as a local manifestation of global responses by aggrieved groups to urban displacement and dispossession.[2]

In this study, I ask and answer several research questions in relation to the collective production of social space by Chicana/o and Latinx communities in the postindustrial city: 1) How has the transition from industrial era social democracy to neoliberal unexpectancy required aggrieved Chicana/o and Latinx communities in Los Angeles to negotiate new spatial

[1] Eds. Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, *The Chicana/o Cultural Studies Reader*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), pp. xix.

[2] Gaye T. Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013); Michelle Habell-Pallan, *Loca Motion: The Travels of Chicana and Latina Popular Culture*, (New York: New York University, 2005).

realities? 2) How do the cultural practices of aggrieved Chicana/o and Latinx communities form theoretical tools to provide critical readings of the social and material conditions of everyday life in the city? 3) Which social spaces reveal the committed actions of aggrieved communities to not only survive unfavorable social and material conditions in the city, but also to enact epistemologies and ontologies rooted in practices of mutual respect, peace, and social justice? 4) What does the aggressive policing of working class communities teach us about the power of the collective creation of social space that takes place at different geographic scales? 5) Lastly, if to be Latinx in the contemporary U.S. is to participate in social processes of complex cultural syncretism, how might the everyday activities of Chicana/o and Latinx people to create social spaces in the city become a vital political component for achieving mutual respect, peace and social justice in U.S. society at large?

Since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 space has played a central role in the racailized gendered oppression of Mexican and Mexican ethnic communities in the U.S. Southwest.[3] Throughout the twentieth century the coupling of race and space would inform policies and practices that create "sorted-out cities" where racialized people and places of the city are partitioned from other people and places.[4] This coupling would also play a determining factor in determining who would become owners of property, which places and people would have access to political representation, and which places and people would not.

The real estate industry played a large role in the outcome of this racial and spatial coupling and sorting-out process.[5] For instance, the California Real Estate Association developed a

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[3] Raul H. Villa. *Barrio Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

[4] Mindy Thompson Fullilove. *Urban alchemy: Restoring Joy in America's Sorted-out Cities*. (New York: New Village Press, 2013).

[5] George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

"code of ethics" that declared no realtor should ever introduce into a white neighborhood any racialized groups that would have a negative impact on property values.[6] Racially restrictive covenants became key tools in giving material force to these ethics, as it has been documented that realtors went door-to-door to influence people to contractually agree to keep their communities racially segregated.[7] The outcome for white people in the city was the creation of neighborhoods that would increase their economic wellbeing, political representation, and cultural dominance.

The impact of this dominant urban ethic on people of color was devastating. Segregation and hierarchical planning went further than consigning different racial groups to different places of the city. It characterizes the places where racially aggrieved people live as places that lack morals in relationship to places where white people live.[8] Unfavorable physical characteristics and social conditions were not understood as a result of injustices stemming from racialized policy and practices by real estate industry, government officials, and urban planners. Rather, decrepit material and social conditions were understood by dominant social groups as an accumulation of bad choices on the part of eastside residents. Injustices suffered by racially aggrieved communities were not used to register and redress inequalities caused by the decsisions of public officials and private citizens who benefited from the dominant urban ethic. They were used to justify attendant consequences of urban renewal and professionalized policing of law-enforcement agencies that undergird the development of the modern U.S. city.[9]

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[6] Daniel HoSang. *Racial propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010). Pp.145.

[7] Daniel HoSang. *Racial propositions*.

[8] George Lipsitz, "The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape." *Landscape Journal* 26, no. 1 (2007): 10-23.

[9] Edward J. Escobar, "Bloody Christmas and the irony of police professionalism: The Los Angeles Police Department, Mexican Americans, and police reform in the 1950s." *Pacific Historical Review* 72, no. 2 (2003): 171-199.

Engaging how race and space are leading variables in determining people's life chances in Los Angeles, Chicana/o and Latinx communities offer one of the most vibrant public expressions of refusal to live according to dominant tenets of this racialized and spatialized order. My methodology utilizes a social-historical approach to the study of culture and politics at the grassroots in the neoliberal era of capitalism. I provide a reading of the city that takes account of how policies drawn up and practiced by elected officials in the past continue to play a role in how dominant social groups attain wealth and power in the present. I access diverse sources of knowledge including oral history interviews, community newspaper stories, poems, song recordings, and visual art. My acts of accompaniment with the different social justice seekers that inform my study have required me to turn "participant observation" into "observant participation."[10] From this stand-point, I have chosen to study with people about the problems that are most pressing in their lives so that we might figure out ways to collaboratively solve them. My goal is to register how racially aggrieved communities face up to hierarchy and oppression, and simultaneously create alternative social spaces and relations based on mutual respect and aid.

I pay close attention to how despite a range of unfavorable consequences emanating from the operationalization of a dominant urban ethic of segregation by dominant social groups across time and space, racially aggrieved communities have found ways, and continue to find ways, to create spaces in the city that are based in mutual respect and social justice. The social processes of turning "segregation into congregation" has been a key feature to challenging, if

[10] Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz. "American Studies as Accompaniment." *American Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2013): 1-30.

not transgressing, the dominant urban ethic.[11] I am principally interested in documenting, describing, and analyzing the collective social processes that Chicana/o and Latinx communities fashion to counter displacement, demonization, and policing from the 1970s through the present. For Chicana/o and Latinx communities in Los Angeles this process has taken place in a range of cultural arenas, it has included multiple forms of social protest, and it has benefitted from diverse kinds of interethnic, interracial, and intergenerational transactions of knowledge.[12]

Confined to the eastside by policies and practices structured by the dominant urban ethic of segregation, Chicana/o residents were limited in their choices in housing, employment, education, as well as in places to recreate.[13] Different forms of oppression and indignity sprung from this experience, but different ways to achieve freedom and dignity were also developed.[14] As social scientists and historians have illustrated, Mexican and Mexican Americans went to great pains to develop a willingness and ability to bend the bounds of the *barrio*, as well as create new social identities, new social relationships, and new social spaces within it for their own liberation.[15]

I contend that the creation of social bonds from conditions that often led to social breakdowns and radical divisions in the *barrio* occurred through a dialectical process. The efforts undertaken by dominant social groups to secure power have never absolutely achieved

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[11] For a conversation on social cultural practices of making congregation from segregation see, Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991): 109.

[12] Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

[13] See Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930*, (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2005).

[14] Raul H. Villa, *Barrio Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); See Rudolfo Acuna, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, (Boston: Longman, 2011).

[15] Raul H. Villa, *Barrio Logos*; Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of conflict, Sounds of Solidarity.*

their intended results. While policies and practices of segregation, urban renewal, and other racialized forms of domestic colonialism have created economic wealth and political power for dominant social groups, forms of displacement, dispossession, and daily disrespect became issues around which people became politicized. Moreover, they became issues over which ordinary people rallied around to overcome in arenas open to them and with the tools available to them.

An important development in response to enduring forms of oppression, as well as emergent conditions of exploitation effecting *barrio* residents, the historical Chicano movement would arise as a predominant example of the ability of aggrieved people to imagine forms of knowing and being in the world that sought to do away with racialized hierarchy and exploitation that created radical divisions in their neighborhoods and communities.[16] In the effort to address and redress injustices that Chicana/o communities faced in their everyday lives, the creation of social spaces would serve to bring people together in efforts to transform their neighborhoods while they fought to change the world.[17] While the movement would produce distinct reforms to different injustices, some of its most powerful expressions lay in the establishment of community-based forms of organization and mobilization that gave new meaning to *barrio* space.[18] It would be from the very spaces that were treated as criminal by dominant social groups and political pundits that working-class Chicanas/os would create new social identities as activists and artists. Taking social space seriously, activists of the historical Chicano movement gave shape to a vibrant political culture that operated from the bottom up, and branched outward across the city from some of the most over-policed, under-served, and

[16] Carlos Muñoz. *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement*. (London; New York: Verso, 2007).
[17] Dylan Miner. *Creating Aztlán: Chicano Art, Indigenous Sovereignty, and Lowriding Across Turtle Island,* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2014).
[18] Dylan Miner. *Creating Aztlán.*

misunderstood places of the *barrio*.[19] Social spaces were forged to create empowering communal relationships stemming from their own "dreams, goals, tenacity, and intellect."[20]

Global political changes at the end of the 1970s coupled with hyper-policing of aggrieved communities by various state agencies, and the growing material needs of working class communities would frustrate the victories achieved by social movements during the 1960s on a broad scale. In the neoliberal era, when dominant social groups promote a world that revolves around hyper-individualism, accumulation by dispossession, and disposability of racially aggrieved communities, my study is concerned with showing how Chicanas/os and Latinxs maintain the ability to struggle for their rights. The organizational expressions of their actions pervade numerous popular cultural and political practices: I observe them in Chicana/o and Latinx punk rock music culture, poetry, visual art, and even car customizing practices, based in different eastside neighborhoods of Los Angeles, and extending beyond any given location. I reveal how through these collective practices Chicana/o and Latinx communities author and authorize visions of social justice, citizenship, and social rights to the city that rests on informative beliefs in community empowerment and mutual respect.

Today vulnerable communities are regularly displaced from meaningful places. When they are displaced from these places, they are also dispossessed from people that care for them. According to urban studies scholars, the agony of displacement and dispersal in the neoliberal era is often frustrated by public policy that wrongly isolates and quarantines the uprooted from the broader urban ecology that disempowers them. Mindy Thompson Fullilove contends that

[19] Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino, "Space, Power, and Youth Culture: Mexican American Graffiti and Chicano Murals in East Los Angeles, 1972–1978," in *Looking High and Low: Art and Cultural Identity*, ed. Brenda J. Bright and Liza Bakewell (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995).

[20] Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of The Shadows.* Pp. 82; Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*, (New York: Knopf, 1979).

isolation from the rest of the city and from people exacerbates urban problems by creating "physical and psychological barriers" between people and places of the city.[21] The texture of everyday life in cities for people considered the problem of urbanity in a neoliberal context becomes characterized by "unexpectancy."[22] A neologism gathered by Fullilove from a respondent in her study about the changing beliefs about and access to opportunity structures in deindustrialized cities across the U.S., unexpectancy for racially aggrieved groups speaks to the "downward spiral" in their relationships to places, people, and power.[23] The result of the downward spiral of unexpectancy for these groups in the neoliberal era is literally not knowing where to go for help, who to count on for support, or what lies around the corner, figuratively and literally, which are all detrimental to material, social, and mental wellbeing.[24] Zygmunt Bauman writes that in such a context, young people have been "cast in a condition of liminal drift with no way of knowing whether it is transitory or permanent."[25]

The concept of "precarity" properly calls attention to the unpredictability and insecurity that comes from joblessness and poverty in the neoliberal era.[26] Unexpectancy, however, adds an emphasis on the time specific dimensions of precarity, how endless disruptions and interruptions can make long term rational planning unlikely. But the art that emerges from unexpectancy expands the temporality of the present by reaching across time, by reviving practices and beliefs from the past. The very "unexpectancy" can be turned on its head by members of aggrieved communities who use improvisation, imagination and action to create

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[21] Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Urban Alchemy.*
[22] Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Urban Alchemy.*
[23] Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Urban Alchemy.*
[24] Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Urban Alchemy.*
[25] Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*, (Oxford: Polity, 2004). Pp. 76.
[26] Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, "Precarity as a Political concept, or, Fordism as Exception." *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 7-8 (2008): 51-72.

short term events in temporarily seized social spaces, such as mural site, staging punk rock gatherings in alleyways and backyards, assembling for low rider "hops," or re-arranging urban spaces to make life livable for houseless people.

To cure the city of unexpectancy, Fullilove contends that we must create relationships to and between places and people that "keep the whole city in mind."[27] This starts by first finding the places where people come together and where ordinary people embed into the landscape their imaginations of a city and world free of hierarchy and exploitation. Through a close look at how people reappropriate social space through music, painting, poetry, and other forms of creative collective activity, carried out in the backyards of houses, in alleyways, in freeway culverts, in the areas that surround taco trucks, in common areas in public housing projects, and along busy boulevards across the city, I contend that these actions are a generative call by racially aggrieved communities to collectively re-empower themselves and the world we all live in. Exploring the physical travels and cultural practices of my research participants as they represent themselves and organize across city limits of Southern California, and throughout the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, I contend that their cultural politics operate at diverse and multiple geographic scales.

The spaces they create are not a utopic place. Rather, I understand them as creating a time and space generated by people from their own self-active creativity in the midst of unexpectancy. Unexpectancy divides people, and the social spaces I examine unites them. They create opportunities to identify and work through differences and contradictions.

The enduring utilization and different scales at which social space takes place as a generative aspect of achieving social justice speaks to the promise of what Stuart Hall calls

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[27] Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Urban Alchemy.*

cultural “transformation,” which he describes as “the active work on existing traditions and activities, their active reworking, so that they come out a different way: They appear to ‘persist’- yet, from one period to another, they come to stand in a different relation to the ways working people live and the ways they define their relations to each other, to ‘the others’ and to their conditions of life.”[28] In this light, social space is less a final product governed by fixed rules of organizing than a complex social process that relies on political willingness of people ready to act in the face of intersecting systems of social control.

In my effort to trace the actions of social space -makers and -seekers, I am in dialogue with scholars whose work documents, describes, and analyzes the racial and spatial configurations of urbanity in a neoliberal context, and how aggrieved communities use expressive culture to respond to it. Often overlooked by social scientists, everyday transformations of space and assertions of cultural citizenship have created the conditions for future successes in organized social movements. Following Gaye Theresa Johnson, Michelle Habell-Pallan, Tricia Rose, Luis Alvarez, and Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, I suggest that expressive culture functions as a diagnostic tool that illuminates the what Johnson calls “complex interworkings of historically changing structures of power.” Understanding expressive culture in this way, she explains, “renders everyday acts of resistance and survival demonstrative of more than just the courage of” social justice seekers.[29]

Chapter one discusses the transition from industrial era social democracy to neoliberal unexpectancy. The social historical context surrounding the creation of the Estrada Courts Mural Program illustrates how impoverished Chicana/o communities were being abandoned

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[28] Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing the Popular,” in *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 228.
[29] Gaye T. Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict Sounds of Solidarity*.

by political officials who turned away from social welfare programs. People faced with the emergent conditions associated with neoliberal abandonment had to learn how to address and redress the unfavorable conditions that marked their lives. Utilizing art to create opportunities to work together respectfully and collaboratively, they changed themselves and their understanding of social relations, and invented new ways of working together across genders and generations.

Chapter two examines the actions of Jimmy Alvarado, a Chicano reared in the *barrio* of City Terrace, to create social spaces in the alleyways in his neighborhood during the 1980s. Alvarado took part in federally funded Teen Posts during the late 1970s and early 1980s. When they were systematically closed in 1981 his life was unfavorably impacted by the loss of a safe and welcoming place to go. I consider how the divestment of federal funds associated with the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty influenced him to negotiate new spatial realities that were quickly becoming impacted by urban unexpectancy in the 1980s. This negotiation consisted of repurposing overlooked and often demonized alleyway spaces with Chicana/o punk rock cultures. When efforts to transgress demonized representations by dominant social groups and members of one's own neighborhood prove to be ineffective by Alvarado, embracing identities in exaggerated form became a means of creating something that looks and feels like agency.

Chapter three explores the embodiments of dissonant subjectivities and enactments of spatial missions by youths in Los Angeles at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. My analysis focuses on the formation of social identities that register and contest conditions of hyper-policing by considering how Chicana/o and Latinx youths deploy punk rock gigs as a means to transform the backyard of a house from a private oriented place into a

public sphere. I conclude the chapter with an evaluation of how Chicano teens use the streets, freeway culverts, taco trucks, and public transportation systems to maintain their mobility and visibility in public space.

Chapter four explores the formation of transcommunal and transnational identities in the context of Los Angeles in the 1990s and early 2000's. Beginning at a punk rock gig in Orange County where Sin Remedio, a punk rock band whose members are based in the San Gabriel Valley and East Los Angeles, my analysis moves across multiple geographic scales. Sin Remedio's music and live performances are a couplet of loud cultural critique of the "Latino threat narrative" that attempts to limit the social cultural, political economic, imaginary and spatial possibilities of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os in the U.S., and an eloquent creation of a transnational spatial mission and social space. This chapter further explores the discursive space of Chicana/o and Latinx cultural production through analysis of the poetry of Rebecca Gonzalez. What emerges from these artists is a powerful cultural critique of the racialized gendered and patriarchal power dynamics of urban order in the postindustrial city.

Chapter five registers the presence of lowrider car culture in the creation of social space for working class Chicanas/os and Latinxs in the city. I examine "Boulevard Nights," an event organized to take back Whittier Boulevard from the police by Cadillac Steve of Citywide Car Club. I highlight the use of music, cars, and internet technology to challenge closures of public space by dominant social groups in the city. I also explore the enduring use of the "hop," a contest to determine whose automobile hydraulic system is superior, as tactical movement to horizontalize racial and social hierarchies of urban order.

Chapter six is the conclusion to my study. This chapter serves to illustrate the political economy of neoliberal abandonment in Los Angeles. I provide an t analysis of what

Moctezuma and Davis call the “first,” “second,” and “third border.” Each of these instances evidences the ways in which people who have been dispossessed and displaced take possession of abandoned and forgotten spaces as strategies for refusing the unlivable destinies to which they have been relegated. These microsocial activities have macrosocial causes and consequences. They are material manifestations of dramatic changes in urban form and social organization. Read carefully and correctly each border records a hidden history of Los Angeles.

Chapter One: El Barrio Lindo: The Estrada Courts Mural Program and the Production of Art and Artists

In the early 1970s, tenants of the Estrada Courts housing projects in Boyle Heights began to change the format of community council meetings. Instead of lodging complaints against each other to be adjudicated by housing authority personnel, they discussed how to best solve the problems they faced together. Their discussions focused on identifying the kinds of living conditions they believed they deserved.[30]

The meetings were filled with emotion. The exterior of the Estrada Courts might have looked nice to outsiders considering the housing conditions that existed throughout different *barrios* of East Los Angeles, but the interiors of homes contained leaking pipes, mold, and cracks that spread across walls, floors, and ceilings. Policing of the Estrada Courts development had become a point of serious concern to the community, as tenants believed that police agencies harassed their children yet did nothing to rid the community of people who gathered there to peddle drugs.[31]

Recounting her memories of these meetings, Chicana mural artist Norma Montoya details, "the community shed tears, they were very upset, very upset about these things [the unfavorable conditions at Estrada Courts]."[32] Face-to-face conversations with one another sparked the creation of new social bonds. Montoya remembers the meetings as "hot," or lively gatherings where tenants would argue back and forth with one another with zeal about what they could do to meet the needs of their children.[33] On occasion, tenants would move the meetings from the community center into their homes and share meals with their neighbors

[30] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[31] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[32] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[33] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

while offering advice on mundane matters such as what kinds of adhesive tape work best to patch up leaking pipes or mend broken windows. The sanitation services crew would sometimes go weeks without emptying trash bins at Estrada Courts, so in response tenants created their own methods for packing dumpsters with as much waste as possible to discourage stray dogs and other animals from coming into their neighborhood. Tenants would also share information about how to win battles against cockroaches and mice. Through hours of serious face-to-face deliberation, Estrada Courts tenants looked to one another for information about how to maintain their homes with care and dignity when housing officials were unwilling, or even incapable of doing so.[34]

Recognizing the shared efforts that they made to organize and attend these meetings in 1972, Estrada Courts tenants began to refer to themselves as Residentes Unidas, or United Residents.[35] As a collectivity, Residentes Unidas was determined to change the unfavorable social and material conditions that negatively impacted their daily lives. They sought to build the capacity to become human resources for one another and others in the larger community.

According to Montoya, Residentes Unidas was especially successful in assigning "tasks to people that were out of work, you know, things for them to be in charge of."[36] Aware of the debilitating social effect that joblessness can have on the morale of working class people of color, Residentes Unidas sought to create new opportunities for dignity and recognition. In the absence of child care that attended to their varying work schedules, they created their own systems for watching over the children of their community. When rumors would spread about a family in need, or a family experiencing conflict, Residentes Unidas would look into the

[34] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[35] Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino, *Mi Casa No es Su Casa.*
[36] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

situation for themselves and figure out how to respond.[37]

Following their first year of organizing, Residentes Unidas inspired different community members to take action about what needed to be done in their housing complex. In one instance, they encouraged Montoya and a group of youths in their late teens and early twenties to form the Estrada Courts Mural Program (ECMP). The mural program sought to provide teenagers with paid work, training to become leaders in their community, and the ability to forge solidarities among different Chicana/o social groups of the *barrio*.

Meeting almost daily, these youths utilized the ECMP as a point of entry into the Chicano movement. The ECMP employed collective art-making as a tool for social justice activism. Collective creation of works of mural art played a central role in constructing social bonds in an otherwise unraveling social fabric. The year their program begun marked a point where opportunities for full-time, union protected, and high wage work in heavy manufacturing begun to shrink rapidly.[38] For the rest of the decade, Los Angeles working class communities would be hard hit by the changes that transformed the city from an industrial manufacturing center to a service-oriented economy that provided largely part-time and low-wage work with no union protections. California voters supported a corporate funded taxpayer revolt that ushered in a tax system that favored big business and produced drastic cuts in funds for schools and other public services.[39] Between 1970 and 2003, California public schools went from the best funded in the nation to the worst. Many students who previously might have looked forward to highly paid jobs in industry, were left with the prospect of poorly paid irregular

[37] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[38] Susan A. Philips, *Operation Fly Trap*. Pp. 7.
[39] Clarence Lo, *Small Property Versus Big Government: Social Origins of The Property Tax Revolt*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

short term work. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore explains, a surplus in labor and a surplus in capital combined to produce a crisis in California that was resolved by a massive program of prison building. From the year that the ECMP was founded to 2003, the state built and opened twenty-eight prisons and filled them through the fastest rate of incarceration ever in the state's history.[40]

The deindustrialization of Los Angeles was most heavily felt in communities like the Estrada Courts that were made up of a predominantly working class Chicana/o demographic. Changes in the economy and opportunity structure encouraged an increasingly individualized sense of self consistent with neoliberal politics and culture.[41] The emergent carceral state that was created to siphon off surplus labor and suppress dissent in racially aggrieved communities, left people without resources and unsure of where to go for assistance, who to turn to for guidance, and literally not knowing what lies around the corner. Mindy Thompson Fullilove calls this condition "unexpectancy."[42] In East Los Angeles, unexpectancy came in the form of a social environment that Chicano activist artist and Boyle Heights resident Harry Gamboa Jr. called, "el varrio loco."[43] Gamboa describes this state of being as "an aggressive turn to violence of the most frightening kind."[44]

At the Estrada Courts, el varrio loco manifested itself in the form of cut-throat competition among residents over scarce resources and limited opportunities. Clashes between neighbors

[40] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag;* Susan A. Philips, *Operation Fly Trap*. p. 7.
[41] Elizabeth Kai Hinton. *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).
[42] Mindy Thompson Fullilove. *Urban Alchemy: Restoring Joy in America's Sorted-Out Cities*. (New York: New Village Press, 2013).
[43] Harry Gamboa Jr., *Urban Exile: Collected writings of Harry Gamboa Jr. Eds. Chon Noriega. (*Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998)
[44] Harry Gamboa Jr., *Urban Exile: Collected writings of Harry Gamboa Jr. Eds. Chon Noriega. (*Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Interview with Harry Gamboa Jr. Friday June 5th, 2015th Los Angeles, California.

provoked regular hostilities and even some physical clashes. Material breakdowns in the housing complex's facilities provoked radical social divisions among people facing similar hardships. In the most tragic manifestations of el vario loco in East Los Angeles, intracommunal quarrels led to killings. Young people began to fight over who had the right to claim certain streets and alleyways as their own territory.

Perhaps one of the greatest lessons taught to the community by the Chicano movement came from activists' ability to turn the radical divisiveness created by structural racism and exploitation into forms of radical solidarity.[45] Residentes Unidas was part of this effort to create social bonds among people faced with the breakdown of social cohesion emanating from neoliberal abandonment. There was no one way to do this work. Activists had to use the tools available to them strategically, and to act within the arenas that were open to them. Artist activists like Gamboa sought to make art that would "pay homage in the work" to the "needs of people who suffer" from social injustices.[46] Because the conditions of el varrio loco could be deadly, Gamboa holds, people who face up to it must sometimes become "crazy themselves to make it through the encounter."[47] Craziness in this situation is not an irrational, aberrant or destructive consciousness. Rather, it expresses "knowing how to be in control of what this system tries to destabilize."[48] It is, Gamboa continues, the "ability to adapt to an environment that is in flux."[49] Gamboa explains what he means by people becoming "crazy":

> "Sometimes it's fruitless to fight, so you must engage in the psychological martial arts. How do you utilize unfavorable energy coming at you to create an opening to maneuver? It's like utilizing the physics of aeronautics of flying. You must fly, or lift yourself in situations that often cause others to fall. If you

[45] David Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors*

[46] Oral history interview with Harry Gamboa, Jr., 1999 Apr. 1-16. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[47] Interview with Harry Gamboa Jr. Friday June 5th, 2015th Los Angeles, California.

[48] Interview with Harry Gamboa Jr. Friday June 5th, 2015th Los Angeles, California.

[49] Interview with Harry Gamboa Jr. Friday June 5th, 2015th Los Angeles, California.

> face fear with fear, there's a chance you will push beyond the boundaries set for you. But you must be willing to take a chance, or you will never know if you have it in you to push beyond."[50]

Gamboa identifies the *vario locas/os* as people willing to engage in "the psychological martial arts" to "face fear with fear" as a tactic to create a "chance" for an opportunity to "push beyond the boundaries set for you."[51] Residents Unidas and its mural artists were among those people.

Gamboa practiced the willingness that he preached on the front lines of the Chicano movement as a student activist. Moreover, he was in constant conversation with other artist activists who were using art to face up to social injustice. Some of these artist activists were invited by the ECMP to paint murals at Estrada Courts. Facing up to el varrio loco, ECMP sought to create unity through collective art-making. They staged large events at the commencement and completion of each mural, seeking to create a space for the grass roots empowerment of the community. Approaching mural art as a collective practice to achieve broad forms of social justice, these artists understood their actions as part of the Chicano movement. In an article for the *Eastside Sun*, Residentes Unidas member Cora Salazar wrote that the ECMP was actively creating with mural art a "unified community" that she described with the term "el barrio lindo" – an entity that existed in opposition to el varrio loca.[52]

El varrio loco divided people, but el barrio lindo sought to unite them. For Montoya, el barrio lindo was a call to collective action to address and redress decrepit housing conditions in East L.A. Moreover, it was an invitation to Estrada Courts youths to envision and enact the kinds of beauty they wanted in their lives, even though they were poor. In this way, el barrio

[50] Interview with Harry Gamboa Jr. Friday June 5th, 2015th Los Angeles, California.
[51] Harry Gamboa Jr., *Urban Exile.*
[52] Marcos Sanchez Tranquilino, *Mi Casa No es Su Casa.*

lindo was a struggle for physical visibility and social mobility in the face of being structurally forgotten. The outcome was a shared sense of project that coalesced around efforts to affirm the beauty of the people's culture, community, and neighborhoods.

Mural art came to undergird the ECMP at the Estrada Courts in the 1970s. El barrio lindo became an important social and cultural force for social justice. Both the art and the artistic vision of el barrio lindo emerged from the social and historical context of public housing in Los Angeles. When Montoya and other members of the ECMP began to attend meetings organized by the Residentes Unidas in 1972, they were emboldened by the collective's decision to stand up to injustices. In a place where apartments needed repair, where families had to ask neighbors for food, and where young people were routinely humiliated by unwanted stops and pocket checks by police officers and security personnel, residents found themselves blamed for conditions that they did not create. Yet this linked fate did not automatically create unity. Instead, it produced a radical divisiveness. People saw a reflection of their own subordination in the faces of people who looked like them. They felt chained to that common destiny and blamed each other for it. Housing authority policies exacerbated disunity. It encouraged residents to report neighbors they suspected of violating housing agency policy to the authorities.

Meetings of Residentes Unidas promoted a different understanding of the linked fate of the inhabitants of Estrada Courts. Initially, they convened people mostly to share food and voice moral support. As these gatherings became more frequent, however, and the numbers in attendance grew, some people began to speak boldly about the conditions that were causing heartache and sorrow. Without money, influence, connections, or even respect from outsiders, Estrada Courts residents built a common project grounded in what they did have: each other

and the spaces of the projects. They were fully aware of the "what is," but nonetheless envisioned possibilities in the "what can be." Despite the wary and watchful surveillance of housing authority managers, Cora Salazar and other residents transformed everyday taken-for-granted spaces like the stoops of their individual apartments into places for lively conversations about what was going on in the projects. A picnic eating area that had been primarily used for birthday parties became an ideal space for open meetings, as people could use the tables as surfaces for taking notes and sharing food. The basketball gymnasium that had traditionally been used only by men became a meeting place where women raised issues that concerned both genders. Even the outside walls of dwellings that had been blank or blanketed with threatening graffiti came alive with mural paintings made up of big and bold images that related to common concerns and experiences. As they gathered in these different spaces, residents developed an augmented sense of things that they could do for themselves to make their community a better and more beautiful place in which to live their lives and raise their families.

Within this social milieu, the word "resident" took on political significance. People who lived in public housing came to feel demeaned by being described only as tenants, because that term connoted only a business relationship with the housing authority and obscured the complex forms of identity and social membership that living in close proximity produced. By referring to themselves as residents, they presented themselves as something more than consumers of subsidized state services. As residents they presented themselves as members of a community, not simply as atomized tenants living in single units. Identification as residents connected individual rights to social rights, while at the same time aiding their efforts to solve the injuries and hurts caused by the crises of the economy and the radical divisions inside their own community. Yet they did not dispose entirely of the identity of tenants. Through that word,

they had specific legal rights that they did not wish to surrender. Like most people subordinate to power throughout history, they could neither fully embrace nor completely evade the terms used to define them, but had to maneuver strategically back and forth to inhabit the identity that would give them the most agency at any particular moment.

At each meeting, Residentes Unidas members contributed to building a social network that reached across the projects. The new social atmosphere was one dedicated to building up their own capacity to do for themselves what the housing authorities failed to do for them. They provided moral and material support for neighbors in many ways. Soon, however, questions about the physical structures of their community took center stage. Graffiti covered the walls of homes, and many residents believed that this was a leading reason why housing officials dismissed them as criminals and did not pay attention to their needs. Complaining about graffiti writing and reporting suspected writers to the authorities became a source of division among residents. As Montoya recalls, "people would go and say [to housing authorities], 'this kid over here is writing all over the place.'"[53] Then "the parent of [the accused] kid would go to HACLA and say, 'my kid didn't do it, this kid over here did it,' and on it went like that."[54] Having even one member of the household accused of tagging was enough to get the entire family evicted from public housing. Following heated debates about how to address this growing problem, a collective solution began to be forged. It was decided that Residentes Unidas would paint over the writing on the wall. The goal was twofold. On the one hand, it would serve to fend off the negative attention the neighborhood graffiti attracted from city officials and the public. Even more important, however, getting rid of the writing on the walls, residents believed, could increase unity and community among the people in the projects. Instead of blaming each other

[53] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[54] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

they could work together to make their own statements on the walls. These ends, they hoped, would provide residents with more respect from housing officials when they spoke out against the decrepit conditions in the projects, while at the same time addressing the radical divisiveness in their own ranks. Mural art emerged as a practical solution to concrete practical problems.

In his study of the relationship between graffiti and mural art at the Estrada Courts Housing Projects during the 1970s, Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino contends that people thought of graffiti in relation to vandalism of private property, but viewed mural art as a more evolved and respected form of expression. Instead of reading graffiti as less valid than mural art, however, Sanchez-Tranquilino introduces the term “barrio calligraphy” to reveal connections and common origins that link graffiti and muralism. Sanchez-Tranquilino’s analysis understands barrio calligraphy at the Estrada Courts during the late 1960s and 1970s as a “cultural system” of communication that took shape in and through historical discourse with other systems of signification to provide its authors with meaningful visibility.[55] He explains that artistic writing on gates, entry ways and path ways is a long and honorable tradition in Mexico that dates back to the apex of Mayan culture. He shows that graffiti is not random scribbling, but a vital part of everyday life as a communication system used in daily life by racially aggrieved, economically impoverished, and politically marginalized youths as their means to keep “a check on the abuse of power in the streets.”[56] Graffiti could speak truth to power, affirm the dignity of mistreated people, and express a collective intention to survive and thrive against seemingly impossible odds. Writing on the walls was an act whereby Chicana/o youths identified and condemned in public what they believed to be offenses by

[55] Sanchez-Tranquilino, *Mi Casa No es Su Casa*.
[56] Sanchez-Tranquilino, *Mi Casa No es Su Casa*. Pp. 3.

other youths, where they worked out the boundaries of the moral economy of their worlds. Yet graffiti also spoke to the representatives of systems of social control, affirming a collective response to the individuating practices and policies of the police, housing authorities, and social workers.

Yet for all its practical utility, barrio calligraphy was still viewed by many adults and youths residing at the Estrada Courts as an act of vandalism. Moreover, they still argued that its creators should be punished by law enforcement officials, even to the point of eviction from their homes. These residents displayed an embrace of the dominant ideas in society that characterized public housing as home to crime and criminals. Even while coming together to stand against social and material injustices, they still tended to look down on what they characterized as the "criminal" element in the Estrada Courts.[57] Mural painting never completely ended this way of thinking, but it troubled it by recruiting many of the youths defamed as criminals to be co-creators of a collective community vision.

Residentes Unidas launched a collective effort to paint over barrio calligraphy in the spring of 1972. The collective painting effort was considered a success by its organizers. Sanchez-Tranquilino reports that the painting efforts attracted large groups of people. Youths who had been responsible for the writing on the walls were often so moved by the actions of adults that they put away their spray cans and picked up paint brushes to help with the effort.[58]

This success was short lived, however. After the initial excitement about the collective painting effort had faded away, youths began to write again. Residents would paint over barrio calligraphy near the main office on Estrada Street in the afternoon, but by the next morning more of it appeared in the same place. The back and forth between barrio calligraphy and

[57] Interview with Norma Montoya, July 6, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[58] Sanchez-Tranquilino, *Mi Casa No Es Su Casa*.

efforts to paint over revealed and exacerbated tensions among residents. Accusations were hurled at young people who were believed to be responsible for the writing.

Following meetings facilitated by Residentes Unidas, Montoya recalls that the inability to keep writing off the walls at Estrada Courts generated doubt about whether Residentes Unidas could achieve its goals of creating unity, whether the residents could be taken seriously by officials from the Housing Authority. For Montoya, however, failure was evidence of questions not yet asked or answered and of problems waiting to be solved. She viewed the back and forth battle between barrio calligraphy and efforts to paint over it as productive impetus for asking new questions about what actions could create unity. Following several conversations with Estrada Courts residents, she joined with Charles W. Felix, Oscar "Eagle", Roger Provencio, Sonny Ramirez, Beto Ramirez, and "Smiley" in concluding that "graffiti" on the walls was not simply a set of scribbles but a form of art important to its creators. Montoya remembers that she and her colleagues understood the writing on the walls at Estrada Courts as "a sign that the kids needed help, and fast."[59] Her group of young artists and community activists were all in their late teens and early twenties. Some of them had never picked up a paint brush before this moment. Yet they joined together to initiate art-making activities, hoping to bring people together to solve the social breakdowns that they faced at Estrada Courts. They believed that Residentes Unidas were onto something important, but by merely painting over the symptoms of the *locura*, they were not getting at the root causes of the problems that plagued the people. ECMP believed collective art projects could create unity among Estrada Courts residents. Their visions of el barrio lindo entailed creating organic alternative academies as well as formal classroom instruction in schools in which their culture would be the cornerstone of knowledge.

[59] Interview with Norma Montoya, July 6, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

They envisioned youth centers where young people could receive a wide range of care and resources, as well as job training that was also badly needed by adults of the *barrio.*[60]

Montoya and her allies established the ECMP in 1973. It lasted till 1978. To the ECMP, the calligraphy on barrio walls at Estrada Courts expressed a deep frustration shared among young people about the everyday conditions at the housing projects and in the larger community. Yet graffiti also evidenced a desire to create and communicate, to be seen and noticed, to make a mark on society by making marks on the walls. What might seem to uninitiated outsiders to be futile expressions of grief -- such as drawings of the cross with a name next to it or images of the name of a loved one who had been recently incarcerated -- were in fact ways to value lives that society did not value, to turn humiliation into honor, to say that these lives mattered and that these people would be missed.[61] The youths who wrote on the walls produced an art-making practice that fused the needs of youths to the concerns and aspirations of adults.[62] Artists could not guarantee what the outcome of this blending would be, but they were certain that the emergency conditions that Estrada Courts residents faced in daily life required urgent action. Their plan was to use mural art to paint large and "positive" images on apartment buildings throughout the Estrada Courts.[63] Montoya contends that the emphasis on positive imagery was due to their desire to highlight "that the kids of Estrada had a culture to be proud of."[64] The ECMP, however, did not yet have approval from Residentes Unidas, or the housing authority to move forward. Pockets of Estrada Courts residents expressed concerns about having even "larger graffiti" than barrio calligraphy on their homes, when in their view the

[60] Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino, *Mi Casa No Es Su Casa;* Norma Montoya, Arts Lecture, September 15, 2014, Monterey Park Bruggemeyer Library, Hispanic Heritage Month, Monterey Park, California.
[61] Interview with Norma Montoya, July 6, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[62] Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino, *Mi Casa No Es Su Casa.* Pp. 3.
[63] Interview with Norma Montoya, July 6, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[64] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

point should be to get rid of it entirely.[65] Other residents expressed concern that art might attract people even worse than the drug dealers who already had a presence in the housing projects. They associated artists with "crazy, wild activity."[66] What gave artists like Montoya hope, however, was that there were still other members of the Estrada Courts community that expressed curiosity about mural art as a productive way to provide youths with something positive to do after school.[67] It was only after many discussions with adult members of Residentes Unidas and with youths that the ECMP felt confident enough to ask for official authorization to paint murals on apartment buildings at Estrada Courts.

Months passed before the housing authority authorized the artists to paint on its property. The artists, however, did not merely stand by and wait for the housing authority to reply to their request. They invested countless hours in developing their skills in painting, so that they would be ready to execute the project that they had envisioned when the right time came. Most members of the ECMP did not have formal training in mural art. The artist known as "Cat" was the only member of the group with extensive formal art training and experience at having his art work displayed at galleries. Montoya had been trained at the Los Angeles Trade Technical College in sign painting. Many of the others had engaged in barrio calligraphy, but had never executed a painting that took up an entire wall. To meet the challenges they faced from having limited experience as artists, Felix secured opportunities for the group to experiment, to make different kinds of art by painting signs at local taco shops, meat markets, and corner stores across East Los Angeles. The art schools and conservatives did not invite them, so they invited themselves into an academy they crafted themselves inside the image

[65] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[66] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[67] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

making apparatuses of commercial culture. Montoya remembers that this practice helped her cultivate a self-confidence that enabled her eventually to claim a public wall for herself. In return for the art work, the owners of these businesses would sometimes pay artists with cash, but in most cases only provided them with food. Once the work was completed, however, the owners of these businesses would spread the word about the work by the ECMP artists to other business owners, and that led to more opportunities to paint and sometimes to earn money. In addition to learning how to paint on a wall size scale, the ECMP devised a method of collaborative art-making that prized art processes as well as art products. Yet they found that announcing that the goal of this project was bringing people together was much easier than actually learning how to work collaboratively. They had to learn how to do this, to not only produce community-based art, but to work together respectfully and collaboratively. In making this art they changed themselves and their understanding of social relations. They invented new ways of working together across genders and generations. The artists started out with an ambitious project of community-based art making but stumbled into an even more difficult project, one of art-based community making.[68]

Part of the work of the ECMP entailed investing time in the creation of genuine and honest social relationships with the young people at Estrada Courts. Montoya recalls that they "met them [the youths] on their turf, the places where they socialized, to listen to them talk about the issues that mattered to them."[69] From these conversations, the artists learned that youths were facing issues related to drug use, incarceration, unemployment, lack of food, decrepit housing conditions, and other pains associated with their impoverished circumstances and

[68] George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 181.

[69] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

political marginalization. Although the youths they met with felt passionately about the issues they raised, Montoya remembers that they did not want to talk about them aloud at Residentes Unidas meetings for fear of adding more stress and worry to adults who they perceived would not understand what the young people were going through.[70]

Walking away from the sites where youths gathered and from the spaces where Residentes Unidas meetings took place, members of the ECMP felt that waiting for authorization from housing officials to paint murals was not coming fast enough to meet the needs of Estrada Courts residents. If they did not act immediately, Montoya recounts, "we were going to miss out. Something had to be done because people were losing hope, they were going to think we were out there selling wolf tickets."[71] According to Montoya, waiting for authorization created an environment where "people were getting anxious, and wanted to see progress. The community was tired about the bureaucracy, the plans [to paint murals on apartment buildings] kept getting pushed back and back [by the housing authority]."[72] Propelled by the hurts that they saw registered in barrio calligraphy, by anxiety about inaction they perceived during face-to-face conversations with adults and teenagers, and by the hopes they had for art making as a way to create unity and community among residents, the ECMP designed a plan to paint murals on the walkway walls of the projects. They sought to have what Montoya refers to as a "community impact" that could compel people to "come together."[73]

The ECMP was aware that these walls were engaged with daily. They ran almost entirely around the housing project. Breaks between walls served as entrances to the development. The concrete sidewalks led to different sections of the housing project. It was from this knowledge

[70] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[71] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[72] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[73] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

of the practical uses of walls and sidewalks at Estrada Courts that artists knew that many people were going to see what they were doing. Montoya recalls that they were hopeful that "people were going to get excited, and join the activities."[74] Tested.

The walkway murals were painted with a repetitive design and color. What may have seemed at first to be abstract patterns were in fact Pre-Columbian signs and symbols.[75] Informed by the forceful rhetoric of community empowerment that undergirded the Chicano movement, the choice to deploy Pre-Columbian designs was a means to declare that the Chicanas/os at the Estrada Courts housing projects had an enduring presence in the region that went back centuries, they declared their ancestral right to occupy the land.[76] This declaration contrasted greatly with dominant mass-mediated representations of Chicanas/os in the U.S. as new arrivals and lesser citizens. This was especially so for impoverished residents in public housing projects. Lee Bebout contends that Pre-Columbian signs and symbols like those painted on the walkway walls at Estrada Courts enacted a form of "mytho-historical intervention" through which Chicanas/os utilized Aztec imagery to contest their unfavorable treatment in the U.S.[77] Considered to be not American enough in the U.S., nor Mexican enough in that country, Chicanas/os engaged in the movement deployed signs and symbols that predated the histories of both nations and belonged solely to neither one, that evoked an empowering historical narrative about themselves that transgressed the authority of both the U.S. and Mexican nation states.[78] Montoya's account of why the images were selected supports the mythohistorical thesis, as she recounts, "we used the hieroglyphics because we wanted a

[74] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

[75] Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino, *Mi Casa No Es Su Casa*.

[76] Guisela Latorre. *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).

[77] Lee Bebout. *Mythohistorical Interventions: The Chicano Movement and Its Legacies*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

[78] Lee Bebout. *Mythohistorical Interventions.*

mural [design] that added connectivity to the past, a pattern representing the cohesiveness of the community at Estrada [Courts]. The community wanted that." Furthermore, Montoya explains of the design, "it looked like a class act, it said we were important."[79]

The murals along the walkway walls at Estrada Courts achieved several goals for the artists. First, Montoya believes that it was the success they achieved at completing the walkway murals in a timely manner, over several hundred feet of murals during the summer, that led Housing Authority officials to grant them authorization to begin painting on apartment buildings. As important as the authorization was to what would follow over the next five years, Montoya holds that the more important achievement of the walkway endeavor was that it allowed them to enact a genuine collective project among Estrada Courts residents that had only been envisioned up until that point. The exploratory fashion in which people approached mural-making, coupled with tenets of collective community work championed by social movement activists of this era fashioned a form of mural art receptive to different political imaginaries simultaneously.[80] The outcome for the ECMP was the production of an artistic form that was different from, but still representative of, the multiple currents of self-active creativity that cultivated it.[81] By producing concrete social bonds in the course of their artwork, the artists moved the dialogue at the Estrada Courts from centering on the "me" to the "we." The act of painting changed the form of communication that centered on what people were against, to

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[79] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

[80] Eva Sperling Cockcroft, John Pitman Weber, and James Cockcroft, *Toward a People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement* (New York: Dutton, 1977); Peter Selz, *Art of Engagement: Visual Politics in California and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

[81] Eva Sperling Cockcroft and Holly Barnet-Sanchez, *Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals* (Venice, CA: Social and Public Art Resource Center, 1993).

instead focus on what they were for, on what they wanted for their community, and how they could bring it into being.[82]

Following the success of the walkway murals, Montoya and the other artists that organized and facilitated the mural project officially established the Estrada Courts Mural Program in the late spring of 1973. Creating a plan to paint murals all throughout the projects, ECMP artists informed the original impetus for painting with a pointed refusal to be "forgotten" by society. In a statement titled "Open Letter to the Residents and Merchants of Boyle Heights," published in the *Eastside Sun* on June 14, 1973, ECMP project managers urged the community to get involved in the mural project. They proclaimed the importance of the program as follows:

> To draw attention to the fact that this neighborhood has been forgotten; to induce the rest of the community in the Estrada area to participate in any way whether through donations or actual work; to awaken owners of all the small and large businesses and professional stores and offices in the entire Boyle Heights Area to the fact that many jobs are needed by the kids now; last but not least, that the Estrada neighborhood urgently needs a youth center where the young people could have a place to meet, a place of their own, and where they could get counseling they desperately require.[83]

The artists did not use the term forgotten lightly. After working with youths of the Estrada Courts daily over the course of six months, Montoya perceived many needs. On weekdays, she would arrive at the Estrada Courts during the early afternoon to find children walking around when they should have been in school. In other instances, teenagers would confide to her that they had not eaten and that there was no food in their homes.[84] Still, other youths received attention from housing officials only when they were suspected of doing something that broke with housing regulations. Amid these experiences, the ECMP sought to create a neighborhood

[82] Dylan Miner. *Creating Aztlán: Chicano art, Indigenous Sovereignty, and Lowriding Across Turtle Island* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2014).

[83] Quoted in Sanchez-Tranquilino, *Mi Casa No Es Su Casa*, appendix A.

[84] Phone conversation with Norma Montoya, December 2, 2014, Santa Barbara, California.

youth center where the adults of the neighborhood could provide young people with a range of resources to meet their needs.[85]

Through the mural program, ECMP secured hundreds of jobs for youths funded by the federal CETA Program. Working with these young people, the ECMP collectively produced eighty-eight murals. The murals are now recognized in retrospect as one of the most important sites of public mural art in the country. It gained national recognition in 1976, when it was hailed by President Gerald Ford. The ECMP welcomed the recognition that their work received, but they believed that regardless of outside approval or disapproval, mural art had important work to do in the community.[86]

Over the next five years, the ECMP mobilized the concept of el barrio lindo as a way to draw hundreds of youths and adults from street corners and different pockets of the Estrada Courts to collectively paint the largest concentration of murals in the world. Together, the ECMP created an informative notion of unity; one grounded in art-based community making and creating a new collective public sphere where people identified how to solve the problems that plagued the Estrada Courts, especially problems facing the youths. They fused civil rights initiatives and economic demands with art, Montoya did not stumble upon the Estrada Courts by happenstance. She was drawn to East Los Angeles by the historical Chicano movement. It was her participation in marches and demonstrations that brought her face to face with the very community members who invited her to attend meetings organized by Residentes Unidas.

In high school in 1968, Montoya took part in the East Los Angeles school "blowouts," an action that she says, "changed my life."[87] Mexican American students across the Southwest

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[85] Phone conversation with Norma Montoya, December 2, 2014, Santa Barbara, California.
[86] Quoted in Sanchez-Tranquilino, *Mi Casa No Es Su Casa*
[87] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

were reported to have a dropout rate of at least 60 percent when Montoya attended school. Among those students who did graduate, their education consisted mainly of vocational and domestic training programs.[88] Montoya remembers that her teachers never mentioned the history of Mexican Americans in any serious light. Similarly, as an elementary school student in the late 1950s, Harry Gamboa Jr. remembers experiencing the wrath of corporal punishment for speaking Spanish in the classroom. In one instance, Gamboa was forced to sit in the corner of the class wearing a "dunce cap" that that read "Spanish" across the top. In another instance, Gamboa remembers his physical education teacher demanding that Gamboa and his peers fight each other for course credit. Facing injustices similar to these, Mexican American students across the Southwest took part in a school strike known as the "Blow Outs," or the "walkouts."[89]

Montoya participated in the walkouts at Belmont High School. She remembers "feeling really good for it [taking part in it]."[90] It was the first time in her life that her peers had taken collective direct action to challenge the conditions that unfavorably affected their lives. On March 1st through the 8th, 1968, roughly 15,000 students walked out of classes in seven high schools, demanding an end to corporal punishment, the start of equitable education, the introduction of a culturally relevant curriculum, and access to a voice in how their schools were administered.[91] Speaking to her experience walking out of Belmont High School, Montoya holds, "I'll never forget it. I remember walking down the [school] hallways, and in the streets.

[88] Mario T. Garcia and Sal Castro, *Blowout!: Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).
[89] Mario T. Garcia and Sal Castro, *Blowout!.*
[90] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[91] Mario T. Garcia and Sal Castro, *Blowout!.*

We were shouting, 'Chicano power!' real proud. I had my fist like this [holding a clenched fist in the air]. It changed my life."[92]

Montoya moved to East Los Angeles from downtown after she had graduated from Belmont High School in 1970. As she remembers it, "I was called [to East L.A.] by the movement."[93] Montoya recounts that at that time the U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam played a large role in how working class Chicanos were being treated in East Los Angeles. The war devastated the social infrastructure of Vietnam, and claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese civilians.[94] In addition, however, working class Chicanas/os and members of other racially aggrieved communities were being sent to fight in the war at a rate that was disproportionate to their percentage of the U.S. population.[95] Montoya was aware of a lot of stories about men who returned home from war in body bags, or psychologically maimed. Believing that she had to take a stand, Montoya was one of the thirty thousand Chicanas/os that marched in the streets of East Los Angeles for an end to the war on August 29, 1970. They gathered under the banner of the National Chicano Moratorium Committee. Concluding at Laguna Park (now named Ruben F. Salazar Park), Montoya recalls that police officers violently dispersed the people who had been peacefully gathered at the park. In the end, hundreds were seriously injured by police gun fire, batons, and tear gas. The police killed three people, including Chicano news reporter Ruben F. Salazar.[96]

Reflecting on this moment, Montoya holds that she and other leading artists of the ECMP wanted their part in the Chicano movement to speak to the "beauty in the culture" of Chicanos

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[92] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[93] Interview with Norma Montoya, July 6, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[94] Lorena Oropeza, "Antiwar Aztlán: The Chicano Movement Opposes US Intervention in Vietnam." *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945–1988* (1945): 201-20.
[95] Lorena Oropeza, "Antiwar Aztlán."
[96] Lorena Oropeza, "Antiwar Aztlán."; Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

that were being brutally and broadly repressed by the state.[97] El barrio lindo was not something artists simply found at Estrada Courts; it was forged there through daily practice. Montoya and other artists showed up at Estrada Courts every day, including weekends. From the early morning until sunset, Montoya facilitated painting projects with teenagers who lived there. Most of the youths targeted for the initial programming by the ECMP belonged to the Varrio Nuevo Estrada (VNE) gang. These were the youths that ECMP believed were being forgotten about by political representatives. Montoya holds that it was extremely important not to "sell wolf tickets", or make empty promises to these youths. Facing different struggles related to their impoverished conditions in the *barrio*, they endured regular disrespect from school officials, police officers, and housing administration.

Many of the men who played a leading role in the ECMP were themselves once active members in East Los Angeles street gangs. Cat was recognized as a "veterano", or veteran of gang life. Instead of denying his past as a former gang member, Cat owned up to it and drew on it as a useful form of knowledge that could be used to assist the youths of Estrada Courts to navigate their social environment. This identity was an important part of what gained him and others respect from the youths. Adding to this, Montoya recounts, "Cat was always there for the kids. If they needed to eat, he'd bring them food. He would go visit them at their homes, talk to the family. He would organize trips to [Dodgers baseball] games, the beach, places they wanted to go."[98]

Another veteran, Smiley, played an important role in the ECMP, even though he did not pick up a paint brush. Walking with a "bad limp" that was caused from a childhood battle with polio, Montoya remembers that Smiley made it into "a tough, cool walk." Smiley was known

[97] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[98] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

by friends and enemies as a "tough gangster that you don't want to mess with."[99] Reminiscing about the old gang days, ECMP members would talk about how although Smiley's leg did not allow him to run, he would be "the first one from the gang to be in the middle of the rumble."[100] This toughness followed Smiley even after he was no longer active in VNE. ECMP did not condone gang fights, but Smiley did not shy away from his past. In fact, he used it to get close to some of the youths who were known as the "hardest" among the group. Speaking with them about what they were doing, Smiley was able to employ youths in the program that were often overlooked by many others in the community.

Showing up every day, ECMP members gained the respect and trust of youths who would go on to collaborate on the production of murals. The work they did with teenagers who were often looked down upon as criminals gained them the respect of elders in the community who were watching what they were doing. Recounting this respect, Montoya believes it led to important breakthroughs for their program. They turned disadvantage into advantage. For example, the Housing Authority did not provide artists with supplies, wages, basic work amenities, or places to wash up or to use the restroom. While men, who made up the majority of artists associated with EMP, could urinate behind trees (albeit at the risk of arrest by police and punishment by housing authorities), Montoya chose to ask residents if she could use their restrooms. As she remembers:

> There were no public restrooms there [at Estrada Courts], so we [women] had to use the ones [restrooms] belonging to residents, and when you'd go in there, they'd invite you to watch a *novela* with them, sit for a coffee, or a little something to eat, or just to sit down and talk. . . . When you were in there, someone in the house, you know, after they felt comfortable with you, they would share their artwork with you, and ask, "What do you think?" A janitor and his [art] workstation and woodcarvings, or a grandma and her knitting,

[99] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[100] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

> proud of their work. . . . The kids too . . . drawing, making their own toys. It was so beautiful to see so many artists there [at Estrada].[101]

Discovering artists among grandmothers, fathers, and especially children—in apartments where city and housing officials often acted as if only criminals lived—provoked Montoya to work hard to expand the sphere of mural making at Estrada.[102] In this sense, the Housing Authority's sexist oversight unexpectedly led to the development of new relationships with residents at Estrada, who learned about mural art and who spoke about their own creativity with Montoya. It also helped her see that her community had innumerable untapped talents and resources.

Montoya produced three murals at Estrada Courts that reflected the intersections between Chicano mural art and children's imaginaries. Montoya believes inviting children into the art-making activities of ECMP was an important achievement in the group's work. In her view, children were not shielded from the conditions that wreaked havoc in the lives of teenagers and adults. While speaking with them about their needs, Montoya felt encouraged to paint images with them that brought to life some of the questions they asked, and the dreams they confided to her. At the end of 1973, Montoya supervised the production of *Dream World*. Located on an interior wall of Estrada, the mural stands eighteen feet by thirty feet and contains many figures painted in vibrant colors.[103] In the bottom left corner of the mural is a sleeping young woman who lies inside the reaching wingspan of a figure resembling the *huelga* eagle of the United Farm Workers. It is this young woman's dream that we enter. Framing the entire piece is a large sun with orange rays of light that cut through a yellow sky and move towards

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[101] Interview with Norma Montoya, July 6, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

[102] Interview with Norma Montoya, July 6, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

[103] Photos of various murals painted by Norma Montoya are available at her website: http://normamontoya.com/.

the walls' respective edges. Directly in front of the sun is a pond of water, with a planet that resembles the earth juxtaposed against hills, palm trees, and multicolored flowers. Above the sleeping woman is a black spider climbing up a rainbow-colored web that disappears into the horizon. With snails, butterflies, and small characters throughout, the mural suggests a world of joy and peace.

After demonstrating to Residentes Unidas and to the ECMP that she was capable of successfully collaborating with Estrada youths on a wall-size mural, Montoya was invited to paint a second piece at Estrada Courts. This mural was located on an exterior wall of the housing projects, located on Olympic Boulevard. Created in the latter part of 1974, *Innocence* was painted with the intention of depicting the innocence of barrio youths, which is often denied to them through the processes of demonization and criminalization.[104] An indigenous child painted in a dark brown stands at the center of the wall. Behind her appears a body of water and a house that is just beyond her shoulders. She is wearing a white dress with gold earrings, and holds a white dove in her hand symbolizing an offering of peace to those who pass along Olympic Boulevard. In the background are other children of color smiling and waving hello to the public. The children play and have fun with giraffes on hillsides above a large field scattered with cactus, which Montoya employed to symbolize "*cultura*, water, food, our roots here in this land."[105] Vibrant sun beams reach across the sky and continue past the edges of the walls. Surrounding *Innocence* are designs painted with different shades of blue, grey, and black. There are many moons above the young lady to her right, from crescent to full, which Montoya used to represent a "woman's life cycle, and the cycle of art, like nights and days just working to give life to an idea. The moons are a cycle of creativity, of

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[104] Interview with Norma Montoya, July 6, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[105] Conversation with Norma Montoya, July 15, 2015, Los Angeles, California.

community."[106] On one side of the mural there is another full moon behind a cloud, which has a thunderbolt producing rain. The drops of water sprout multicolored hills with wavelike patterns that lie behind the young lady. In the foreground is a large colorful flower with a vine that reaches behind the young woman and connects to one of the beams of the sun.

Painted in 1976, *Fish of the Future* would turn out to be the third and final mural Montoya would create at Estrada Courts as a lead artist.[107] Spanning another large wall, this mural sought to bring the sea to Estrada Courts. After having heard countless times from children that they longed to visit the beach, Montoya decided to bring the ocean to their home on the East Side of Los Angeles. As it turned out, many families did not visit the beach because they lacked discretionary funds or their family vehicle was unreliable.

In the mural, a dark blue backdrop connotes an endless body of water. In the foreground, multicolored fish swim throughout the piece. A photo of Montoya by the mural reveals that the fish are much larger than life. In the photo she can be seen at the top of the mural on a large scaffold, painting a fish that will be larger than her own body once it is completed. Like the styles of other murals she painted, this one includes the use of many different colors, shapes, and sizes. The patterns she uses for fish scales consist of zigzags, squiggly lines, stripes, swirls, and dots. Speaking to the collective process of this mural, Montoya remembers that as the piece was underway, a child artist on the project asked her, "Can someone lose a *chancla* [sandal or shoe] in the sea?" Montoya responded, "Yeah, I guess one can lose a *chancla*." Following this

[106] Conversation with Norma Montoya, July 15, 2015, Los Angeles, California.

[107] Following the completion of this mural, Montoya was hired by Chicana mural artist Judith Baca through the Mural Resource Center to paint a mural at Dakota Street Elementary School. The school is located across the street from the Estrada Courts Housing Projects. In this endeavor, Montoya was assisted by mothers, grandmothers, children, and teenagers whom she had already painted with at the EMP. Together, they painted a 150-foot-long train. Conversation with Norma Montoya, July 15, 2015, Los Angeles, California.

conversation, Montoya inserted a shoe into the mural design to register the youth's imagination.[108] Montoya notes that the children's curiosity and imagination spoke to a "joy" that exists in the housing projects which she wished to record in the mural.[109]

The collective mural was the realm that Montoya chose to teach the youths how to materialize their dreams. In contrast to the "nightmares" and "hardships" they faced every day, Montoya sought to use this mural to remind "the children of Estrada [Courts] that they can be proud of their dreams. People use to think they didn't [have dreams]. Just because they live at Estrada [Courts], it was very sad to see the way people treated these kids."[110] *Dream World* was Montoya's declaration that children who are impoverished dream big. Innocencia was a statement about how children are the innocent victims of social injustice. In her view, *Fish of the Future* invoked "magical possibilities of what is deep beneath us."[111] It was always difficult for Montoya to listen to stories of hardship from these youths, yet instead of pitying the youths, she worked with them to identify, process, and when possible resolve for themselves the problems that they faced as best as they could. Mural art was the ECMP's central work at Estrada, yet it was not an end in itself, but also a way to create opportunities for children to take hold of the dreams that they held deep within them, so they might be materialized.

The ECMP quickly achieved many of the goals it had established for itself at the beginning of programming. Continuing to attend meetings organized by Residentes Unidas, Montoya ensured that the ECMP aligned its art-making with the larger goal of attending to the social and material conditions of the Estrada Courts. Reflecting on the immediate impacts of their

[108] Norma Montoya, Arts Lecture, July 23, 2014, Broida Hall, University of California, Santa Barbara.
[109] Norma Montoya, Arts Lecture, Monterey Park Bruggemeyer Library, Hispanic Heritage Month, Monterey Park, California, September 15, 2014.
[110] Phone conversation with Norma Montoya, December 2, 2014, Santa Barbara, California.
[111] Phone conversation with Norma Montoya, December 2, 2014, Santa Barbara, California.

mural making on youth employment, Montoya recounts that "we really focused on that [youth employment], and we did it."[112] Additionally, the more attention the murals brought to Estrada Courts, the more residents reported having their maintenance requests being answered more quickly. Garbage was no longer scattered about the grounds, and barrio calligraphy was kept off people's homes and communal areas. Although these achievements came into being because of the efforts of the ECMP, the Housing Authority did not assist the artists in any significant way.

The lack of support from the Housing Authority bothered artists of the ECMP, yet they did not allow it to divert their attention from the community. Even when the Housing Authority took credit for what the unpaid labor of ECMP produced, Montoya and the other artists focused their energy and time on the residents of the Estrada Courts. In the end, it was intergenerational collaboration and daily interaction with residents that made their work possible. Montoya remembers that in 1976 and 1977, officials from the Housing Authority responded to a drought in California by removing keys from the outside water pipes. This was done to prevent unauthorized use by residents and artists. The sudden lack of access to water almost brought the mural program to end. Having to purchase water added an extra financial burden to people who were already faced with having to stretch scarce resources and work long hours for no pay and without proper facilities. But the group improvised by drawing on their own ingenuity and the solidarity that pervaded their local networks. Remembering that they got hold of several water keys that fit different pipes at Estrada, Montoya recalls:

> Water was needed, it kept our paintbrushes wet, and you know, without paintbrushes there's no painting . . . no movement. We weren't wasteful, we were very respectful and used what we needed. When they took the keys away, we said, "What the heck, man?" You know, what are we going to do? But then we got a hold of a key, somebody got it from somewhere, I don't know.

[112] Phone conversation with Norma Montoya, December 2, 2014, Santa Barbara, California.

> Anyways, we would smuggle it to different sections of Estrada, you know, where people were painting, hiding it so no one knew we had it…The kids would run it over here and over there for us, wherever people needed to get water…Housing Authority would come and say, "Hey, who is using water? We know you guys are using the water," and the kids would say, and all of us would say, "No one," or "I don't know?" They [the kids] got a real kick out of it…And that's how we kept painting, you know, things like that kept us going.[113]

Acts such as these were not isolated. These actions did more than keep paintbrushes clean and safe from drying up. They lifted the morale of everyone involved in the ECMP and crafted stronger lines of intergenerational solidarity between members of the group. To this day, Montoya does not remember who got hold of the key, but the important thing to her is that artists like herself and the young people they mentored crafted an alliance that kept the whereabouts of the water key hidden from the officials who desired to keep them from using water. Administrators from the Housing Authority often acted as if they knew everything about Estrada Courts. Conversely, they treated residents as if they knew nothing. By securing and safeguarding the water key, the residents kept the mural project going. Moreover, they developed thicker bonds of trust while at the same time sharing a laugh about the people in power. In recounting stories to themselves about this caper, ECMP artists drew on a long tradition of self-activity and storytelling that turns "hegemony on its head" by inverting power hierarchies.[114] Savoring their own ingenuity, they continued to paint together despite challenging material and social conditions.[115]

The solidarity that was crafted among ECMP artists and residents of the Estrada Courts helped them to develop their own personal methods of art making, but also to forge a collective

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[113] Phone conversation with Norma Montoya, December 2, 2014, Santa Barbara, California.

[114] Joane Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Pp. 27.

[115] Americo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958).

ethos for mural making premised on collaborative community action. Bearing resemblances to the aesthetics and activism of the Black Arts Movement, the ECMP created art that was less invested in creating monetary gains for individual artists than in producing platforms for arts-based community making and social change.[116] In his marvelous study *Black Arts West*, historian Daniel Widener illuminates the dedication and commitment of Black artists to creating places for Black people to gather throughout Los Angeles in order to relate art to their lived experiences. Transforming "segregation into congregation," ordinary and un-credentialed people became art makers and appreciators, as well as part of active social groups throughout their neighborhoods. Artists in the Black Arts Movement, like the Residentes Unidas and the ECMP, demonstrate that concerns about aesthetic creations are not about mere ornamentation and decoration. Rather, they are "configurations of experience" that can be utilized to create new social spaces and new collective modes of knowing and being in the world.[117]

When credit is given to Montoya and ECMP for creating an ethos of sharing and caring, she tells people that the ECMP contributed to what was already widely practiced among people in other communities where they painted. "We didn't create that," Montoya declares, "we might have given to it, but we didn't create it. What about the señoras who were Residentes [Unidas]? That's silly."[118]

People who cannot control the exchange value of the place where they live must deepen its use value. People who are resource poor have to become network rich. Alone, they had little;

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[116] Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

[117] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Ed. and Translated by Gabriel Rockhill. (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). Pp. 3.

[118] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

together, they had more. Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino contends that the collective mural art of the ECMP was not an inherent or fixed practice, but rather a cultural system that took shape in and through historical discourses and other systems of signification in the 1970s. Crucially, it was informed by developing social movement activism, youth cultures, and social conditions of the *barrio* at this particular time.[119]

Documenting and analyzing the work of EMP artists Estrada during the 1970s, Sanchez-Tranquilino describes deftly how identifiable social, historical, and political contexts of possibility informed mural art during this time and led to new definitions of what counts as art and who counts as an artist.[120] Through establishing their own social networks of arts apprenticeship outside the reach of dominant institutions and social groups, the ECMP made mural art into a verb. They emphasized the creative act rather than the created object. They forged social spaces where the residents of Estrada Courts learned from one another about art, community organizing, and each other's dreams, while they painted together.

The history of working class Chicana/o political activity is filled with the carving out of spaces and developing social identities that nurture community organizing. What had changed in the era at the dawn of postindustrial neoliberal abandonment in the 1970s was the location of where this organizing would take place. No longer in the factories as they had been, they took place in public housing where impoverished people of color had to contend with draconian regulations as tenants. With the disarticulation of labor production in the postindustrial city, impoverished people's engagement with work and state bureaucracies in everyday life changed dramatically. During the 1960s and 1970s anti-racist social movements expressed powerful visions of democracy and human dignity. Within this social milieu, the

[119] Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino, *Mi Casa No Es Su* Casa.
[120] Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino, *Mi Casa No Es Su* Casa.

ECMP emerged as a vehicle for ordinary people to take action in their communities and neighborhoods. In the effort to address and redress injustices that Chicanx communities faced in their everyday lives during this moment, the transformation of overlooked places into art-based social spaces served as an invaluable tool to bring people together in efforts that spoke to their own needs. While the larger Chicano movement would produce distinct reforms addressing different injustices, some of its most powerful expressions lay in the establishment of community-based forms of organization like the ECMP that gave new meaning to *barrio* space, the term resident, and the concept of social justice.

The Estrada Courts Mural Program figured prominently as a creative social force to address and redress the injuries that the *locura* had caused in communities and neighborhoods. The injustices that plagued the barrio were created by people and institutions from outside of the barrio, but ECMP sought to respond by creating social spaces, relationships, and institutions in the *barrio.* People ready, willing, and able to stand up to the ugly consequences of injustice, created something beautiful for themselves.

The ECMP decided to conclude their efforts at Estrada Courts in 1978. A lack of funding, the need for ECMP artists to secure paid work, and growing restrictions from the Housing Authority over what kinds of images could be painted fortified the decision to end the program.[121] Montoya recalls that in shaping the processes of making meaning through art in Estrada Courts "we had to pay attention to the little things."[122] For her, the big murals that are still present at Estrada Courts were not the end of their work. It could have been easy for her and other impoverished artists of the ECMP to "get lost" in the attention of "the Lookie Lou's," as she puts it. These were people with influence in the dominant art world of Los Angeles, who

[121] Phone conversation with Norma Montoya, December 2, 2014, Santa Barbara, California.
[122] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

admired the art, but not the vision of the ECMP. The artists could have attempted to monetize their temporary fame to build careers in art.[123] For them, however, the art was not separable from the people. Montoya explains "We knew we were doing our job because wherever we went at Estrada [Courts], a garden would blossom. People would be sitting around planting their corn, breaking the dirt, the hard dirt that was there to plant flowers, talking to one another. It was really beautiful."[124]

In recent years, Montoya has organized events to commemorate ECMP members who have passed away. At a celebration of the 40th anniversary of the ECMP, Montoya interrupted a politician's individualist framing of the ECMP to remember the ordinary people, and especially the women, who get left out of dominant commemorations of the mural program. "There was no Spartacus here," Montoya proclaimed to the crowd; "We were a movement!" After a short pause, Montoya explained that no one person can take responsibility for what happened at Estrada forty years ago or for the state of mural art at the present moment. Without countless efforts and sacrifices made by "many people," the murals at the center of the commemorative event would not have been possible.

Montoya took special note of the many young women who played a pivotal part in the long-term, everyday organizing and painting that made the ECMP possible, yet whose work often goes unmentioned in retrospective accounts. Calling out the name of Lidia Dominguez, a young artist from the neighborhood who designed and painted her own mural along with other youth artists from Estrada, Montoya also gave credit to the many mothers, children, and "homies" who painted murals at the Estrada Courts. The phrase "no Spartacus here" was meant to critique a dominant tendency to individualize events where in fact many people took part.

[123] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.
[124] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 8, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

Speaking to this tendency in chronicling the production of art, Montoya urged the people in attendance to walk away knowing that the EMP was made up of "residents of all ages and genders" working with recognized local artists "to express their pride and love of their community."[125] Insisting again that "there was no Spartacus here," she identified what the ECMP did at Estrada Courts as part of a wider movement of grassroots activism for social justice and international solidarity with peoples' liberation movements. In concluding her remarks, Montoya advised her listeners that the deleterious material conditions that sparked collective art-based social movements four decades ago have only gotten worse for working-class groups today.

Montoya often argues on behalf of a particular kind of art-making process that facilitates the creation of community, sparks questions about social justice, and calls people into action for broad social changes. She believes that the creativity of ordinary people, geared to address and redress the unfavorable conditions that people face in their daily lives—especially in places like Estrada Courts—can create the solutions to the problems we face. "Now is the time," she announces, "to put paintbrushes back in the hands of our youth at Estrada . . . to let them paint, so they can teach us about what it [mural art] means . . . [and] what the movement needs to do today."[126]

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[125] The Estrada Courts Mural Blessing Committee formal invitation, in author's possession.

[126] Interview with Norma Montoya, November 28, 2014, City Terrace, Los Angeles, California; Notes from the event are in the author's possession.

Chapter Two: Rainbow Alley: Youth Centers, Neoliberal Abandonment, and the Creation of Punk Rock Social Spaces

An intricate web of concrete alleyways reaches throughout City Terrace, an unincorporated *barrio* of East Los Angeles. The web is situated south of the San Bernardino Freeway, north of the Pomona Freeway, west of the Long Beach Freeway, and east of the Santa Ana Freeway. The widest alleyways are located along City Terrace Drive, behind a row of shops and apartment buildings that face the busy street. Narrow alleyways reach up into the hillside, sitting in between rows of Spanish style homes.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, county officials and officers from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department closed off many of these alleyways with wooden boards and chain link fences. Crime prevention was the stated purpose for closure. In places where there were no fences, youths who socialized in the alleys were still questioned and frisked by police officers.

Walking through an alleyway located on North Brannick Avenue near Floral Drive, I encountered an empty space. At one end, there was a stack of discarded brown boxes, an assortment of empty forty ounce bottles of malt liquor, and empty boxes of wine tangled in thigh high grass. People living in a house that faced this alley looked at me with concern. Peering over the wooden fence that closes off the alleyway between Floral Drive and Folsom Street, I found a deflated basketball and broken green glass sparkling in the sun. In another alleyway located just behind Woolwine Drive near Hazard Avenue, I found a stuffed white teddy bear hugging a red velvet heart that reads, "I Love You!" It leaned against a dark brown wooden telephone poll near an assortment of candles with pictures of the Virgen de Guadalupe and Saint Jude. No name accompanies the gifts, but it is likely that they were left behind for a person whose life was brought to a tragic end.

Before they were closed-off, people commonly used the alleys to put out garbage cans for

weekly trash pickup by county sanitation workers. Some people parked broken down vehicles in them. Still, others used alleys to discard couches, television sets, and refrigerators. Youths began to use these spaces as social sites in the 1970s. City Terrace resident Jimmy Alvarado was warned to stay away from the alleys by his older brother and parents. The warnings stemmed from the fights that broke out between young men over who could claim a particular alley as their own. In addition, some adults and especially police officers looked down upon these sites and sometimes physically accosted youths who used them as their social gathering places.

In 1972, artist activist and City Terrace resident, Willie Herrón III painted a mural in an alleyway near City Terrace Drive and Carmelita Avenue that speaks to the clashes that took place among youths over alleyway spaces. The mural is entitled, "The Wall that Cracked Open." The artwork overlooks the ground where Herrón found his older brother stabbed with an ice pick and severely injured as a result of a gang fight that had occurred earlier in the evening. After leaving his brother at the hospital, Herrón returned to the alley to paint the mural around a crack in the wall, incorporating its signs of decay and chronicling the radical divisions that emerged between youths who sought to call these spaces their own.[127] The mural pleaded with the gang members to stop the violence, to respect each other, and to think about the pain their fighting caused the families of their victims.

Cautioned about the physical dangers of the alleys, Alvarado stayed away from them throughout his childhood. As a teenager in the 1980s, however, Alvarado began to look to alleys as places for spending time with friends. Alvarado found the alleyways to be places where he could be with other youths and stay out late, where he could escape adult surveillance

[127] Eva Sperling Cockcroft and Holly Barnet-Sanchez eds, Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993). Pp. 95.

and supervision. In this chapter, I examine how and why working class Chicanx youths came to claim alleys as social spaces. Claiming these spaces required an advanced knowledge of neighborhood geography in respect to deciding which alleys were best suited to serve as meeting places. Shared immersion in the punk rock subculture provided the impetus for these meetings and shaped the activities that took place in the alleys. Young people gathered to share the music that mattered to them in spaces they carved out for themselves.[128]

Alvarado invited friends to join him listening to punk rock music played on a portable boom box stereo in the alleyways of his neighborhood. They used the music to transform cold concrete alleyways into places where youths could come together and have a good time. Placing a boom box on a concrete ledge, repurposing discarded articles into furniture on which to sit, and turning a space people warned them to stay away from into a prized social destination enabled Alvarado and his friends to create a punk rock public sphere rich with meaning. They attracted the attention and attendance of other youths from the *barrio* and neighboring cities, but their meetings also brought surveillance from adults, county officials and police officers who viewed their gatherings as illicit and threatening.

Alvarado and his peers remember being suspected of being "tough" kids for listening to punk rock music in alleyways. Older men who encountered them in the alleyways would challenge "oh, you think you're tough? I'll show you who's tough."[129] In other instances, older youths chased them out of an alley that they believed was their "turf." Police officers regularly asked them what they were up to, and even frisked them for no reason.

Alvarado and his peers drew on punk rock music cultures to help them mark alleyways as spaces that broke with the norms of the neighborhood. The music moved him viscerally. He

[128] Grady Clay, Close-Up: How to Read the American City, (New York: Praeger, 1973). Pp. 65.
[129] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

recounts that the loud and aggressive music of Black Flag, a hardcore punk rock band from Huntington Beach, "was the embodiment of everything I was feeling at the time. I was this really, really pissed off kid… [Black Flag music] was heavier than anything I'd ever heard, and meaner, and everything I felt pent up inside it had just been embodied in that music, in that particular band."[130]

In *The Philosophy of Punk*, Craig O'Hara argues that punk rock music is an expression of a "gut rebellion" and "a formidable voice of opposition."[131] Jon Savage contends that punk rock music's rough edges originated in young people's responses to the global politico-economic crisis of the 1970s. Savage observes that, "in becoming a nightmare" to dominant social groups, punk rock youths "could find [their] dreams."[132] Dick Hebdige argues that punk rock cultures in the U.K. produced a cultural "break" with the parent culture. The varied styles of music and dress associated with punk, Hebdige maintains, reveal a complex amalgamation of West African, Caribbean, and White working class cultural styles that emerged at a time when prevailing government policies and practices gave rise to conflicts among racialized groups.[133]

Gaye Theresa Johnson's study of punk rock cultures in Los Angeles asserts that Black, Chicana/o and Latinx youths used punk to fuse together lessons they had received from older generations with their own desires for meaningful egalitarian publics in the present.[134] At a time when federal support for youth centers and after school programs was declining and the social safety net was being shredded, punk gatherings created a valued public space for young

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[130] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

[131] Craig O'Hara. *The Philosophy of Punk: More Than Noise!* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1999). Pp. 41.

[132] Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond,* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1991). Pp. xiv.

[133] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1991).

[134] Gaye T. Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

people that permitted them to register and contest the deleterious social and material conditions produced by the punitive political and economic landscape of the 1980s.[135] The closing of youth centers and recreation spaces left Alvarado and his friends on their own to create spaces for socializing. Yet in inventing their new social world, they drew on lessons they had learned about social responsibility and community empowerment in those now closed places. They used punk rock culture as the vehicle for preserving and expressing the oppositional stances and collective consciousness they had leaned in social sites made possible by the social movement mobilization of an earlier era.

"The Doors Were Always Open for Us Kids"

Jimmy Alvarado was born in the late 1960s. He describes his childhood as riddled with different kinds of struggles. Yet he is quick to insist that his childhood was also filled with a range of "outlets" supported by the social programs made possible by the War on Poverty. Alvarado recounts, "If I was hungry, I knew I can go to the [City Terrace] park and get something to eat, or I can run over to the community center and see what they had there. We were flat out broke most of the time, we were familiar with government cheese, but we could always get a meal from different outlets."[136] Social outlets also included public playgrounds, sports fields, and a swimming pool at City Terrace Park that were well maintained, supervised by a team of staff members, and attended by an array of people from his neighborhood. During the afternoon and on weekends, Alvarado had access to the green spaces that were located at different public schools in the area. When these places did not amuse him, his parents encouraged him to see what was going on at the Salesian Boys Club or at St. Lucy's Church,

[135] Gaye T. Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). See especially chapter fours, "Teeth-Gritting Harmony": Punk, Hip-Hop, and Sonic Spatial Politics."

[136] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, August 21, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

which were both short distances from his home. Speaking of these places, Alvarado remembers, "the doors were always open for us kids."[137]

Alvarado regularly attended a local Teen Post youth center near City Terrace Drive and Hazard Avenue. Responding to organized mobilizations by civil rights groups, Congress passed the Equal Opportunity Act, which established local Community Action Agencies (CAA) to launch the War on Poverty.[138] CAA secured $4,614,680.00 from a Federal Projects fund to found the Teen Post program.[139] Program pamphlets described the constituency of the center as "hard-core youth" who like socializing "where the action is."[140]

Teen Posts and other youth programs emerged from the recognition that macrosocial institutions impeded the ability of members of aggrieved racial groups to achieve upward mobility at the micro level.[141] War on Poverty programs sought to assist impoverished youths across the nation to achieve a proper transition from youth to mainstream adulthood.[142] Elizabeth Hinton notes that these programs were established at the same time that the Law Enforcement Assistance Act of 1965 was passed. The "carrot" of the youth centers had a parallel "stick" in increased expenditures for policing and incarceration.[143] Daniel Widener argues, however, that government officials could not absolutely suppress the cultural production of racially aggrieved youths that took place inside of different community youth

[137] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, August 21, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

[138] Michael L. Gillette, *Launching the War on Poverty: An Oral History*. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Pp. 236.

[139] Executive Directors Reports 1966-1967; Teen Post "Crash" Program 1965, Box 1, Folder 6, Economic and Youth Opportunities Agency of Greater Los Angeles records, Collection no. 0473, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California; Robert Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty*. Pp. 25.

[140] "Los Angeles Area Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers Incorporated, Annual Report, 1966," Economic and Youth Opportunities Agency of Greater Los Angeles records, Collection no. 0473, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.

[141] Robert Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty*. Pp. 18; Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs*, (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960). Pp. 175.

[142] Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity.*

[143] Elizabeth Kai Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime.*

centers.[144] Social programs associated with the War on Poverty did not solve the problems at the root of racialized and gendered hierarchy and exploitation, but they did make inroads in creating access to material resources that were previously denied to racially aggrieved communities.[145] Members of racially aggrieved communities used resources made available by government social programs to create an atmosphere where their own needs could drive decision making processes to achieve the goals they had set for themselves.

Alvarado credits the Sesame Street Preschool Program at a youth center with teaching him how to read at a young age and assisting him in developing an early appreciation for books. The Teen Post provided him with regular opportunities to think more critically about education, to earn pocket money, and to consider job training programs that he might enroll in while in high school. On most days, Alvarado would attend this center to play different games with friends from the neighborhood, read magazines, listen to music, and "encounter neighborhood characters" who saw it as their business to see what was going on inside of the youth center.[146] The different and many available social outlets at Teen Post made him feel that "any kid could come in off the street and participate."[147]

In the mid-1970s Teen Post programs began to emphasize the establishment of indigenous leadership in relationship to the cities where community youth centers were located. Alvarado's father became Director of the City Terrace Teen Post. Facilitating what was referred to by Teen Post pamphlets as "dialogical group sessions," Alvarado's father sought to create an environment where young men could sit face-to-face, make art, and talk about the

[144] Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
[145] Gerald R. Gill, *The Meanness Mania: The Changed Mood*, (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980.). Pp.18.
[146] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[147] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

problems they confronted in their lives so they might resolve them.[148] Alvarado believes that his father's passion for this work was informed by his own struggles with his eldest son, Alvarado's older brother, who was a member of a local gang.[149] The goal of this work was to create youth centers as what Alvarado describes as "neutral zones," to give young people a "safe, neutral place for youth from different neighborhoods to hang out."[150]

Attending these spaces almost daily, Alvarado recalls "It meant a whole lot to me to see all these adults in my neighborhood care about us kids. People care about their own kids, sure, but they cared for the kids in the neighborhood. Whatever they could do to help out there [youth centers], they did it."[151] Helping out included teaching children how to read and write, talking with young people about their lives, and even providing them with school supplies, new shoes, and clothes when needed. On different occasions, Alvarado accompanied his father to deliver food to families in the neighborhood who were in dire need of it. Alvarado learned that the adult staff members went beyond their job descriptions to assist youths mediating social tension in the neighborhoods, and even working with youths and their families to help resolve problems at school, in the home, and in the court system.[152]

Community centers had to constantly adjust the quantity and quality of services to keep their doors open. In 1981, the federal government ceased funding local programs targeting specific needs.[153] The result was the closure of many community-based organizations and the termination of the War on Poverty. The systematic closure of these community spaces was a

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[148] "Questions and Answers about Teen Post," Economic and Youth Opportunities Agency of Greater Los Angeles records, Collection no. 0473, California Social Welfare Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.
[149] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[150] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[151] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[152] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles.
[153] Keppel, Bruce, "Who Will Provide?" *Los Angeles Times,* September 24, 1981. Pp. B1.

result of a monumental shift in federal priorities and principles. Faced with a growing crisis in capitalism in the early 1970s, the postwar Keynesian agreement of deficit spending had become too expensive for dominant social groups to maintain. With a drop in profits, business elites and political officials were faced with a set of decisions to make about how they would move forward. Choosing to maintain economic power, they turned to a set of political economic principles and policies best described as neoliberalism.

As youth centers closed, the Los Angeles Police Department established the Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums (CRASH) unit in 1979. The main objective of CRASH was to rid the streets of gang violence. A heightened emphasis on policing Latino immigration coupled with enduring forms of racialized policing led to placing an entire generation of impoverished youths of color inside a punitive gang database that led many behind bars.[154] Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley overwhelmingly supported the development of the city's expanding downtown commercial district over the needs of racially aggrieved communities that had been abandoned by capital on the one hand, and hyper-policed on the other. Oliver et. al. contend that in Los Angeles during the 1980s, joblessness became the central problem for Black males, and the concentration in low-paying jobs became the main problem for Chicana/o and Latinx males.[155] In this context, both groups shared a common fate in the postindustrial city, which included civil rights retrenchment, wages below the poverty level, and heightened forms of racialized gendered policing by a range of law-enforcement agencies.

"Rough Times"

In the postindustrial city, political officials privileged the needs of capital over the needs of local communities and neighborhoods. Alvarado remembers a social gloom taking over his

[154] Mike M. Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. (London; New York: Verso, 1990).
[155] Oliver et al. "Anatomy of a Rebellion: A Political-Economic Analysis."

neighborhood just before Teen Post had closed its doors. His older brother had been sent away to a juvenile hall facility. The lush green grass at City Terrace Park went yellow. Playground equipment went unrepaired and unpainted. The tunnels of the prized playground castle at the center of the park began to smell of urine and its exterior walls were tagged with graffiti. School yards that had always been open to him and his friends in the afternoons and on weekends were now off limits. Alvarado recounts, it was a "strange feeling to jump fences because the gates were locked."[156]

Gathering at street corners, Alvarado was reprimanded by adults from the neighborhood and ordered to depart by police officers. When his friends attempted to use vacant lots in their neighborhood to play football, they were run-off by older youths. In one instance, a group of men who were annoyed by their presence at a vacant lot hurled glass beer bottles at them. Shortly after this incident, Alvarado and his friends gathered at the same lot to play football when out of nowhere a car began to shoot at a group of older youths who were nearby. Alvarado remembers, "one minute we're playing ball, and the next minute we're running for our lives. It was a rough time for us kids, but we stuck together."[157]

Alvarado and his younger brother were sent to an alternative junior high school located in Highland Park to give them access to educational resources their parents recognized did not exist in the *barrio*.[158] Alvarado was drawn to the actions of two classmates. They scribbled band names on their lockers such as Bow Wow Wow and the Circle Jerks. They listed the names of music magazines. They recommended music to Alvarado, and he was immediately hooked by the raw and powerful sounds of Black Flag.

[156] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[157] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[158] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

It did not take long for Alvarado to delve into punk rock music making. Yet he did not have access to the amplified music equipment that was needed to make the sounds he was drawn to. Unaffected by this limitation, he practiced punk rock chords on his parents' acoustic guitar. Working with his younger brother John to find ways to create the sounds they desired, an idea came to them unexpectedly while watching a film with their family. Alvarado's father was not able to take them on the long vacation outings they desired, so he tried to make up for this by bringing home audiovisual equipment from the youth center so they could watch movies in their living room. Alvarado remembers watching "*Teatro Campesino* shorts, you know, the one's that Luis Valdez made like *Los Vendidos* and all those projected onto the living room wall."[159] Watching these films, Alvarado remembers thinking to himself, "I can do that…I bet if I take this microphone and I wrap it in toilet paper because it's feeding back all over the place, and I take it and shove it into the hole of the acoustic guitar and I strum it, I bet you we will make noise through the movie projector, so let's try it."[160] After several attempts their idea worked. He was soon able to produce a noise with his parent's acoustic guitar that sounded like "two trains colliding" with every strum.[161]

To compliment Jimmy Alvarado's electric sounding acoustic guitar, John began to tinker with a toy drum set that they had received as a gift from their aunt. Not bothered by its aluminum frame and plastic heads (unlike the membranes used in the high-quality drum sets), he experimented with how to make it produce different sounds. Wooden drum sticks would rip a hole through the plastic heads, so they began to use pencils and pens as drum sticks that produced a "raw" sound that they approved of. By the time John mastered the toy drum set,

[159] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[160] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[161] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

Jimmy had borrowed an electric guitar from a friend at his junior high school. Following a few "noise" sessions, they established their first band, Butt Acne.

Before owning a boom box or tape recorder, the Alvarado brothers recorded their music creations with the same audiovisual equipment they began to tinker with. Alvarado explains the complicated process that led to their first music recording. Before beginning to play he would:

> "plug the electric guitar into a reel-to-reel cassette recorder so that it was like an input, and I'd use that like a pre-amp, I guess, or a distortion box. And then the output jack's for the reel-to-reel cassette player, we took a pair of cheap pencils and ran them out of the output jack and then taped them to a Radio Shack stereo, you know, like a portable stereo. They have these built-in condenser mics, we'd tape these headphones to these condenser mics on one side and then my brother would bang on these drums and scream through the mic on the other side, so that we had a clear channel so we could record him and then I had the left channel which had the guitar blazing through it, through these head phones and we made tapes that way…And that's pretty much how we started."[162]

As the years passed, the band moved through a series of lineups before they settled on Alvarado on guitar, John "Justice" on drums, and Scott Rodarte on bass. Butt Acne would produce two official releases in their run as a band.[163] The first was a split cassette tape with the band Voice of Authority from the city of Glendale, and two tracks for the first punk compilation for *Thrasher's Digest*. Both were released in the mid 1980s by P&S Productions, a Chicago tape label led by Pat Houdek who the Alvarado's met at their middle school.[164] Songs such as "Beware," "Hit Me With a Nuke," and "Felix the Cat," provided the cassette with obnoxious, offensive, and recurring raw rhythms. It was the exact sound they were looking for to express feelings of rage that had built up within them.

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[162] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, August 12, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

[163] Alvarado, Jimmy, "Teenage Alcoholics: Punk Rock in East Los Angeles," http://www.musictap.net/DuanesPunkPitNotes/elapunk.pdf, last accessed on August 20, 2013

[164] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, August 12, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

Butt Acne's song, "Tom Bradley" speaks unflinchingly about the Mayor of Los Angeles. The lyrics to the song screamed, "kiss my ass, kill Tom Bradley, kiss my ass, you smell badly."[165] Speaking harshly about the Mayor of Los Angeles over a screeching guitar riff and a fast tempo drum beat, Alvarado claims that he and his brother created songs like this one with the simple intent to create a good laugh at the expense of people in power like the mayor.

Home Bases

Travel outside of East Los Angeles to middle class suburbs such as Montebello presented another set of struggles for punks, such as being followed and forced to leave if they did not have a "purpose" police believed to be worth their presence outside the *barrio*. Alvarado and his peers decided to turn to the desolate alleyways of City Terrace. He recognized that older youths that gathered in the alleyways of the neighborhood had been pushed out by the police, many had been incarcerated. With older youths gone from these spaces, the more the punk rockers congregated in alleyways, the more they could make them their "home base" to spend time with one another.[166] By the time that they produced their own music, they had become part of a growing punk rock street scene in East Los Angeles. With increasing numbers in their network, they faced fewer challenges to their claim to different alleyways in their neighborhood. The men and older youths that might attempt to physically assault them would look at their green Mohawk hairdos and ripped up clothing and say, "you guys are fucking crazy."[167] Responding to these insults in a raucous manner enabled Alvarado and his peers to claim the alleys for themselves.

[165] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[166] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, August 12, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[167] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, August 12, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

In their vacant state, alleys offered "a little free breathing room to be able to cultivate this weird little [punk] culture that we got involved in."[168] With different alleys to choose from, they often congregated at the Olympic Car Wash on City Terrace Drive. Alvarado explains, "my friends Topo and his brother Happy lived in that alley, and they still do. My friend Tito lived in that house on the corner [at Van Pelt Avenue] right next to the car wash with his brothers, so that was like *home base*. I mean we were there most nights, you know, and most nights you'd have like anywhere between 10 and 100 punk rockers."[169] Alleys as a home base were places where youths could talk about important events with friends, listen to music in a communal forum, and pass the time together. Alvarado asserts, "I remember being in the alley late at night, stumbling home to pass out, then waking up and heading back before noon to start all over again…Weekends involved either a gig, practice or hanging out in the alley or someone's house, and [it] ended with us hanging in the alley."[170]

Compilation Cassette Tapes and Building a Collective Punk Vernacular

Spending time together in alleyways offered Alvarado an opportunity to work through the negative feelings that accompanied the loss of cherished youth centers in their neighborhood. The transformation of alleys into lively social spaces, however, was aided by available music technology. Compact cassettes that emerged in the late 1960s revolutionized the social relations of music production and consumption. Cassette tapes, as they are more commonly known as, became widely available for purchase, and would hit their peak in sales during the 1980s when their sound quality would surpass that of 8-track players.[171] Accompanying

[168] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[169] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[170] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, August 21, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[171] E. Weiss, (2000). Magnetic recording, the first 100 years. *Annals of the History of Computing, IEEE, 22* (1), 90.

technology such as portable "boom boxes" that appeared in the mid 1970s and handheld Sony Walkman's in 1979, consumers had the choice to decide where, when, and with whom they were going to listen to music. These technologies allowed musicians to record directly onto blank tapes over the speakers of these players, or with a mic that could be plugged into them.

Listening to compilation cassette tapes was a popular pastime in City Terrace. For Alvarado, memories of his childhood revolve around listening to music in public. "A lot of funk music," he recalls, "Santana type stuff, Tower of Power, [and] the Commodores."[172] The music he heard came from stereos blaring from cruising and parked cars, from speakers on front porches or from the inside of houses, and from portable boom boxes that older youths placed on public sidewalks while they socialized with friends.[173] Alvarado carried over this tradition in his punk rock music listening activities that took place in the alleys of his neighborhood. Alvarado and his friends listened to music that they created. They even made compilation cassette tapes with their favorite music.

Each cassette had a unique sensibility depending on the person or group of friends that made it. The mix tape served to inform others of what the creator preferred to listen to. Alvarado recounts, "I was big on hardcore, older punk stuff, skinhead stuff, Bowie, ska/two tone, reggae. My brother liked the crazy fast shit like DRI, the Neos, Pig Children, U.K. punk, skin stuff, ska, mod stuff. The twins (Randy and Scott Rodarte) liked a lot of the same stuff but were coming from a more skater direction, and they loved Zeppelin. Topo loved it all, but also threw in the Doors. Art and his band No Church on Sunday also threw in Mexican punk stuff like *Solución Mortal* and *Atoxxxico*."[174] Such differences in listening tastes suggest a multitude of

[172] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[173] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[174] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

subjectivities within punk rock in City Terrace. Robert Walser contends that different styles of music can speak to diverse outlooks of self and beliefs about community.[175] The assortment of bands and music styles on punk mixed tapes also speaks to the fluidity of music genres even though there is coherence within them as well. Market strategies have a lot to profit from when creating a music niche, even if it does not speak to actual music listening practices of fans, or even how musicians within particular music genres self-identify the music they create and perform.[176] Overall, these atomizing practices of the music industry overlooked the complex composite coalitions forged by music cultures like punk rock ethos in City Terrace.[177]

It Was Brutal Being a Punk

The numbers of punk rock youths that gathered in the alleyways of City Terrace did not make being a punk rocker easy at home. Alvarado recalls that dominant representations of punk rock on popular television shows such as *Quincy* and *CHIPs* portrayed punk rockers as "crazy, dangerous, violent, icepick yielding, axe murderers" who casually slash each other with knives and kick each other in the face at music functions.[178] While Alvarado's father was generally supportive of his endeavors, it was different with punk rock music. On one occasion, Alvarado found his father sitting on the edge of his bed looking at a stack of records. As soon as Alvarado stepped into his room, his father aggressively blurted out "I don't want this fucking Feaders record, or whatever the fuck it is, I don't want it here, I don't want it in this house, you

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[175] Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993). Pp. xii.

[176] Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil.* Pp. xii.; See also Daniel Cavicchi, Susan Crafts, and Charles Keil *My Music, (*Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993).

[177] For composite identities see, George Lipsitz, "Walleye Warriors and White Identities: Native Americans' Treaty Rights, Composite Identities and Social Movements," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 31:1, pp. 101-122.

[178] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California; For a list of Quincy episodes see, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Quincy,_M.E._episodes; Mattson, Kevin, "Did Punk Matter?: Analyzing the Practices of a Youth Subculture During the 1980s," *American Studies,* Vol. 42, No. 1, (Spring 2001), pp. 69-97.

get it out of here. If you don't get it out of here by tonight I'm going to kick the shit out of you!"[179] As a devoted Catholic, Alvarado's father had been offended by the record cover that had a photograph of a young boy sitting in front of a Christmas tree holding up picture of Jesus Christ with a message that read, "I hate him and I want him dead." Alvarado believed that such a photo was not a religious insult. Rather, he understood it was the comedic side of punk rock that he loved, and wanted to emulate.

Following his high school graduation at the height of his punk rock activity in 1986, Alvarado worked full-time at the Barber-Webb company for just under four dollars an hour.[180] Specializing in making liners and plastic products for the containment of landfills and hazardous materials, Alvarado describes the working conditions on the job as taxing on his body. Working through the winter of 1986 he recounts, "it was 40 to 50 degrees outside and 115, 120 degrees inside that place."[181] To help ease the effects of such conditions he recalls that supervisors "would give you salt pills, and the reason they give you salt pills was because some of the people kept hallucinating because of the heat [from] giant ovens…the size of like semi-trucks, *huge* ovens, and you had to walk in and out of them [to dispose of chemicals and scrap metals]…It was crazy."[182] Adding insult to injury, Alvarado remembers that even working full-time here earned him just enough to have only a small amount of discretionary spending money after he helped his parents pay household bills.

Pressure from employers to provide proof of his legal U.S. citizenship due to the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 created a police-like atmosphere at

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[179]Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

[180] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California; see also, http://www.dir.ca.gov/iwc/minimumwagehistory.htm, last accessed August 1, 2013.

[181] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

[182] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

work. [183] Alvarado declares, "[the government] came up with some new thing that they were doing where everybody had to provide a birth certificate or something to prove that you were legal… I didn't want to go looking for my birth certificate, or my baptism certificate to prove to them, so I just didn't show up to work anymore. It was a bullshit job anyway."[184] It was within such social fissures at home and at work that alleyways provided a flexible space for youths to maintain some quality of control over their lives.

Spending a lot of time in alleyways listening to music, Alvarado and others desired a restful environment. While broken down, or abandoned cars may seem like trash to most people, Alvarado discerned them as potentially cherished possessions, places to sit with each other more comfortably. The punk rockers in the alleys used pieces of discarded cardboard to reconfigure concrete ledges into benches. Discarded refrigerators became tables to play cards on. Blasting music to a radio's full volume sufficed to block out the constant humming of cars traveling along the San Bernardino Freeway.

Congregating in alleyways provided youths with a break from the mundane hardships that marked their communities. Their path, however, was not a path of least resistance. Scott Rodarte recounts "violent physical confrontations were not uncommon" when socializing in alleyways.[185] When confrontation with other youths, neighborhood adults, and police officers became too "scary," they moved further into their community to places that presented the best opportunities to socialize with their friends with the least worry. Rainbow Alley was one of those places.

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[183] De Genova, Nicholas P. "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life" *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 31 (2002). pp. 419-447

[184] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

[185] Quoted in Jimmy Alvarado, "Backyard Brats and Eastside Punks: A History of East LA's Punk Scene," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies,* Volume 37, Number 2, Fall 2012. Pp. 167.

Rainbow Alley

Alvarado travelled deep into the hillsides in search of places to socialize with his peers more freely. Plagued by insults and threats from older youths in the alleys, they sought a place further out of sight of persons not within their social network. "We had our pick of alleys," Alvarado continues, "but none were like Rainbow Alley."[186] The alley is located just off Eastern Avenue, behind City Terrace Elementary School. Today, the alleyway is a dirt strip, the length of thirteen houses. In the 1980s, it was a mural-lined concrete walkway with planters and benches for people to sit on. Youths had tagged their names and members from different gangs in the area went there to leave their mark on what had once been murals. Just feet from the alley were different bus line stops with service east toward the San Gabriel Valley and west toward Downtown Los Angeles. These bus stops enabled youths to travel to City Terrace to congregate at Rainbow Alley.

Before the walkway was known as Rainbow Alley, Norma Montoya had named the area, *El Paseo De Los Barriles* [The Barrel Passageway]. This walkway was designed by Barrio Planners. Like other projects they had built, the plan here was intended to "let a thousand *placitas* bloom" through the creation of spaces that invited people to decorate the landscape collectively with their own cultural practices.[187] Commissioned by the Los Angeles Parks and Recreation Department in 1976, Montoya was given a one-thousand-dollar stipend to design and paint a mural that would cover the long concrete length of the passageway.[188] Recruiting members of the neighborhood to paint with her, Montoya accepted the offer from a director of a local youth center at Cleland House to provide about twenty youths. By this time, Montoya

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[186] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

[187] Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US City* (London: Verso, 2000). Pp. 66.

[188] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 13, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

had learned how to paint murals collectively through the Estrada Courts Mural Project. (See Chapter 1) In return for their participation, Montoya offered the youths instruction in painting, discussed with them community-based tenets of the Chicano Mural Movement, and sought to make the point that Chicanas/os in East Los Angeles could make their communities into beautiful places.[189]

Prior to the creation of the concrete passageway and mural, Montoya remembers a desolate strip of dirt, the size of a small road. It passed between two rows of houses where homeless people often slept and where youths went to sell and use drugs. *El Paseo De Los Barriles* [*El Paseo*] created a safe passageway for youths to use on their way to school. Montoya's photographic archive of the mural project shows teens laughing while they work together on different sections of the mural. There are a few photos that show the youths eating food that was delivered to them by personnel from a lunch program that operated in the community. Other photographs show Montoya and the youths sitting together laughing.

Shortly after its creation as a neighborhood social space, youths and older persons in the community began to use *El Paseo de Los Barriles* for picnicking with neighbors. It did not last long. Local youth gangs in City Terrace began to compete with others in their community to claim the passageway as their own turf. Shortly after it was opened to the public, the county abandoned it. By the time that Alvarado and others began to hold punk rock gatherings there, weeds filled the walkway. Police would physically remove anyone they caught there. Graffiti covered the walls, and adults and children who lived in the neighborhood adjacent to it stayed away. The crowds of young people that congregated there nonetheless changed the name of *El Paseo de los Barriles* to "Rainbow Alley." The name youths had given the passageway was

[189] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 13, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

partly because Montoya had chosen to paint the surrounding walls in *zarape* colors, but also because graffiti marked the walls in many different colors.

Left to themselves, Alvarado and his peers stayed at Rainbow Alley all night. Packing the alleyway with dozens of youths, "we were kind of left there to our own devices and we'd stay there all night, hang out and drink before stumbling home."[190] Summoned by the vibrant ambiance of the alley and its location out of sight from people on the busy streets of Eastern Avenue and City Terrace Drive, young people who gathered there turned a place that was forgotten into an important punk rock social space that they attended for several years before county workers destroyed the walkway and removed all of the concrete.

Chicana/o and Latinx Punk Rock Subjectivity

When Norma Montoya began painting *EL Paseo de Los Barriles* in 1976, she was excited by how enthusiastic people from the surrounding neighborhood were about the project. When it got underway, she was most fascinated about how the young people she was painting with interpreted the project. Montoya recounts, "They'd talk about when we were done, they were going to come back with their families and have picnics, you know, right by the part of the wall where they painted. They wanted to show their family, they were so proud of what we were doing there."[191] The youths gave Montoya a great hope about the future in a moment when she was not sure about what was going to unfold in the world.

As a lead mural artist in the Estrada Courts Mural Program, Montoya encountered many families whose material conditions worsened throughout the 1970s. (See Chapter 1) Listening to their concerns at securing food, work, housing, and dealing more frequently with the police, there were many things that worried her about where society was heading. Deepening her

[190] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[191] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 13, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

worry at a moment that presented a glimmer of hope, Montoya met a young man at *El Paseo de Los Barriles* who slept there each night. He would stand around and talk for a while before he left Montoya and the children to their paintings. One thing that has stayed with Montoya throughout the years about this encounter is the fact that this man shared with Montoya that he looked forward to the day when he could return to prison. Montoya asked him why he would want to wish such a thing on himself. "Because in there," he replied, "I am a barber, I am a somebody. Out here, I am nobody. I can't find a job and my family doesn't want anything to do with me."[192] As Montoya continued to paint with the youths, her conversations with the young man made a big impression on how she approached the mural and this space.

Montoya hoped that once the project was done people from the surrounding neighborhood would come together and provide each other with the kind of support she believed the barber to be lacking. Unfortunately, once the mural was completed in 1976, the Los Angeles Parks and Recreation Department did not maintain the area. After several attempts by neighbors to keep the area clean of trash and weeds, it was overtaken by people who continued to use alleyways as dumping grounds, and as a site to use and sell drugs. In the early 1980s, Rainbow Alley became known as a place to stay away from.

Montoya relates that her mural projects sought to unleash a drive to create and to register what brings "joy" to the youths who participated with her.[193] As an artist and a part of the Chicano mural movement, Montoya promoted a collective ethos that called ordinary people into self-active creativity in their own communities. To Montoya this ethos meant that a paintbrush is more than a tool to paint; it is also an instrument to facilitate democratic

[192] Interview with Norma Montoya, September 10, 2016, Los Angeles, California.

[193] Norma Montoya, Arts Lecture, September 15, 2014, Monterey Park Bruggemeyer Library, Hispanic Heritage Month, Monterey Park, California.

deliberations about the art being made and about how social change happens. Reflecting on the destruction of El Paseo de Los Barriles in the early 1990s, she was saddened by the fact that county officials took this space away from youth of the community without making something else for them. Montoya was happy, however, that the "ruins" of the abandoned project still enticed Alvarado to spend time there with his friends on their own accord.[194]

To many people, inside and outside of the *barrio,* alleyways were to be avoided. To Alvarado and his peers, however, alleyways provided them "a little free breathing room to be able to cultivate this weird little [punk] culture that we got involved in."[195] Calling themselves "punks," they formed a new identity for themselves, encouraged by the "boldness" to be present in the community that was practiced by adults at the Teen Post and other community spaces that they frequented. This boldness was informed by the pressing need to find a place in their neighborhood which they could inhabit and call their own. As Chicana/o youths, they were likely to be pushed aside, if not physically beaten up, by older youths and adults who were bothered by their presence. As punks, however, they could come together and put up a fight for their right to the city.

[194] Interview with Norma Montoya, August 13, 2013, Los Angeles, California.
[195] Interview with Jimmy Alvarado, August 12, 2013, Los Angeles, California.

Chapter Three: Taking a Mission: Backyard Gigs, Punk Rock Music, and the Right to Public Spaces

In the late 1980s, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department heightened their policing of Chicano youths who socialized in alleyways throughout City Terrace. Like other teenagers, Jimmy Alvarado regularly encountered verbal reprimands from and physical searches by police officers simply for standing around with others in these spaces. According to Alvarado it was towards the end of the 1980s when the occasional encounters with police became both regular and rough. In response to large groups of teenagers listening to music and younger children playing football games, the Sheriff's Department began to close alleyways along Hazard Avenue. Alvarado remembers that youths were subject to searches and possible citations for trespassing if caught hopping over a fence to enter these spaces.[196] At the same time, younger teenagers from neighborhoods that surrounded the remaining open alleyways began to establish place-based ownership of them, frustrating Alvarado's desire to socialize with his friends in these spaces. If you did not live near an alleyway, popular belief held that you did not belong there, and that you should leave. These place-based affiliations contradicted the fluid and mobile-based sense of place that Alvarado and his friends had enjoyed within punk rock cultures.

Faced with limited access to physical places for socializing with others, young people began to look to the backyards of houses in City Terrace as sites to fulfill their needs. Gathering anywhere from a handful of people to several dozen for live music performances, the "backyard gig" became an unexpected venue for participatory public life. Youths across East Los Angeles began to recognize the private backyard as a desired destination and potential

[196] Phone interview with Jimmy Alvarado, April 20, 2013, Oakland, California.

public place for hosting their favored activities. Throughout the 1990s and into the first decade of the 21st century, the backyard became a regular site for the creation of live music performances and the fashioning of broad social relations. In the midst of increasing divisions among working class Chicana/o and Latinx communities, the backyard gig served as a spatiality of resistance, joyful fellowship, conviviality, and solidarity. Faced with heightened social control of their communities and neighborhoods, Chicana/o and Latinx youths from across East Los Angeles enacted a Chicana/o spatial imaginary to fashion the backyards of the homes across their neighborhoods into sites to perform punk rock music and in the process, produce new social identities.

The Backyard Gig

Beginning at sunset, a backyard gig can last for three to four hours. Will Higuera of the punk rock organization, Hed Trip, generally seeks to book six bands at each gig. Ideally, each band will perform a thirty-minute set, with about ten minutes between sets. More often, gigs will only allow for three or four of the bands to perform. Unlike mainstream concerts, at punk events the most well-known band will perform somewhere in the middle and the least known band will open up the show. All of the scheduled bands may not be able to perform due in large part to the heightened policing residents experience in East Los Angeles.

In the numerous backyard gigs I have attended, I have observed the police closing down gatherings because of complaints about loud music by neighbors invoking nuisance related municipal codes that prohibit amplified noise. In many instances, police officers arrive with sirens blaring. They give orders to disperse over loud speakers. In a squadron of six to ten police cars, the officer in the lead vehicle will announce over a loud-speaker that the night's events are over and everyone must disperse. Police cars block the street, and a dozen or so

officers stand on the sidewalk down the block, while others position themselves in the street. Officers usually hold something in their hands, typically either a club or a flashlight. In different instances I have witnessed, police officers have rested shotguns on their shoulders as they look over the crowds of youths dispersing from the backyard. Because most, if not all, organizers of backyard gigs and the residents of these homes do not secure the expensive permits the city requires for such events, they do not resist the police. If they do, it can lead to a stiff fine.

In the face of this pressure from the police, event organizers explore ways to conceal the gathering as much as possible. This is a difficult task, but a practice that Will and other backyard gig organizers sought to perfect. Will was part of a network of punk rock youths in Boyle Heights and the greater eastside that participated in the "backyard scene." This self-created social network created opportunities for punk rock bands to perform and for a range of people to socialize in the backyard of a home.[197]

An important part of organizing a successful event entails making room for large groups of people to gather in a backyard. This includes collective efforts to clean a yard of trash. Almost all the times that Will organizes a gig, he shows up with other members of Hed Trip several days in advance to mow the lawn, move large objects to a perimeter of the yard, locate a power source to plug in electrical equipment and lights, designate a place in the yard where bands will perform, and identify a place where people can urinate throughout the night.

Will generally takes stock of how a particular yard interacts with the larger landscape. For instance, the rolling hills of certain sections of East Los Angeles are recognized as capable of

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[197] Alan O'Connor, "Local Scenes and Dangerous Crossroads: Punk and Theories of Cultural Hybridity," Popular Music, Vol. 21, No. 2 (May, 2002), pp. 225-236.

buffering the amplification of speakers. Houses on the side of a hillside or where a backyard faces an open area will fare better with neighbors than a house located in the center of a residential street or places with a backyard that faces a neighbor's bedroom window. In the latter instances, neighbors will call the police more often to complain about the music. Additionally, yards with trees are preferable to backyards with nothing to cover detection by police helicopters. In many instances backyard gigs are moved into garage spaces or under patios. Trees and patio roofs act as sight and sound buffers. In other instances, the tarps that are placed over broken down cars are pulled off to cover as much of the yard from street view as possible. Will remembers, "We started doing a bunch of stuff, man. Whatever helped and what worked, we made sure to let other cats [people in the scene] know. We had to pull together and think about things seriously, you know. Believe that we could do it before we did it. On gig nights, you wouldn't even know we went through all the shit we did to make it happen, it's funny that way."[198]

During the night, the preparations made by Will and other organizers often go unrecognized. At the very least, they are not spoken about. At different events I attended, I noted that people attend trusting that when they arrive they will not have to put in any physical labor. In instances where the organizers might need assistance that goes beyond what they can do by themselves, they will ask people who show up early to help out in return for free admission to the event. In the instances where I saw this happen, gig organizers provided people who helped out with rewards of free entrance and even free music CDs.

When a gig is underway, a high level of energy fills the yard. People in attendance scream and applaud in joy. Once the music begins to be performed, many people in attendance enter

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[198] Interview with Will Higuera, May 3, 2010, Boyle Heights, California.

the "pit" where they crash into one another. The atmosphere is filled with laughter and excited banter as youths put their arms around each other while they enjoy music performances and share cigarettes and drinks they have brought for the night.

When a band begins its performance the loose crowd becomes tightly packed around them. There is no stage that separates the band from people who watch. In many instances, people in the audience share the microphone with band members to sing the lyrics to a song, or scream together. When a band performs music that appeals to a group of people, their dancing sets off a chain reaction of movement. In a tightly packed backyard, this can pull people into the pit even if they did not intend to dance.

An energetic ambiance is regularly cited as a leading reason why people attend Backyard punk rock events. Robert "Beaver" Garcia, recounts, "When I roll up to a gig, I can feel the music. I can feel the drums. All the people walking to the spot, man. Hell yeah, it feels so good, it makes me want to cry."[199] Leticia Calderon states that her main reason for attending gigs is "to party" and enjoy the music. She elaborates on how the two go together, "the music was loud, and it just made you want to have a good time with your friends."[200] Anthony Zaragoza enthuses, "I fucking love gigs…the main reason I attended gigs was that I enjoyed the political aspect of the music… But I also loved to just straight up party with my friends."[201]

Loud music and energetic crowds drew listeners and dancers to a gig, but performing music in front of a large enthusiastic crowd creates the appeal for musicians to play at the events. Christy Perez, guitarist and vocalist in the band Sin Remedio describes performing as an "exhilarating experience." She continues, "not many things come close to it."[202] Brenda

[199] Interview with Robert "Beaver" Garcia, July 2, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.
[200] Interview with Leticia Calderon, April 7, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.
[201] Telephone interview with Anthony Zaragoza, August 31, 2011, Goleta, California.
[202] Telephone interview with Christy Perez, February, 22, 2014, Oakland, California.

Chavelas, the drummer and vocalist of Sin Remedio describes her affect performing at gigs as "an exciting feeling. It's amazing really" she contends, "I guess seeing people enjoy your creation, something that's yours. That is an amazing feeling."[203] Jose, the former drummer of the band Terrorism, says that there is nothing like the feeling of performing, adding "it's really cool to play something in front of people that you worked your ass off to get down [learn how to play]."[204] As he played on a double bass drum peddle, people in the backyard scene often showed their approval of Jose's skills by encircling him and shouting cheers and praise.

In the face of heightened policing of gigs, it might seem that the number of people attending them would grow smaller. Unexpectedly, however, when police pressure increased, the backyard scene grew both in terms of bands and people who attended. Will recounts, "A lot of kids from L.A. and the SGV (San Gabriel Valley) started showing up" in East Los Angeles.[205] Speaking to what he meant by "a lot of kids," Will describes, "like hundreds, like two hundred [people] filling up the backyards."[206] While the backyard scene began to grow in the number of people who attended a gig, the invitations to hold them in different locations began to add up as well. It is safe to assume that other backyard gig organizers experienced a similar rise in requests as Will did. He explains, "there was two, three gigs in one night, all in East Los [Angeles]." At each one the back yards would be filled to capacity. Will relates "there had to be like six or seven bands playing at them [each gig] and at least a [one] hundred people at each one."[207] While one band might perform at multiple events in one night, the increase in the

[203] Telephone interview with Brenda Chavelas, April, 10, 2014.
[204] Interview with Jose Arrevalo, June 20, 2010 and October 14, 2014, Boyle Heights, California.
[205] Interview with Will Higuera, May 3, 2010 and September 28, 2014, Boyle Heights, California.
[206] Interview with Will Higuera, May 3, 2010 and September 28, 2014, Boyle Heights, California.
[207] Interview with Will Higuera, May 3, 2010 and September 28, 2014, Boyle Heights, California.

number of gigs in the backyard scene led to a growing number of bands, and a still growing number of youths who attended each one.

With the burgeoning backyard scene being staged in many places in the late 1990s, the police intensified their methods of shutting down the gatherings. When police officers arrived, they began to appear with as many as a dozen police cars. Describing what she felt when the police arrived to break up a gig, Leticia remarks, "it was scary."[208] Beaver compares police tactics of breaking up gigs to "a riot squad, with helmets, pushing people around."[209] Will describes police officers who arrived to break up a gig as "really aggressive." When confronting the police who arrive in this manner, Will told friends, "don't fuck with them. Just stay out of their way."[210]

Thinking back to when he recognized a major shift in the policing of gigs, Will remembers that it was around the time that the East Los Angeles punk band P-47's song "Puta Jura" (Fucking Pigs) became popular in the backyard scene. In one instance when the police had entered a backyard to break up a gig while P-47 was performing, Will remembers that the band caught on to what was occurring. At this moment, Will continues, "they [P-47] played Puta Jura, and it made the backyard explode, people went nuts."[211] P-47's album of the same name was independently recorded and released in 1998. The band's lead singer, Erik Hernandez, contends that they had performed this song at gigs and had disseminated it through a demonstration tape for at least three years before they recorded their album. The lyrics to the song are screamed over fast music that sounds very much like a siren warning persons nearby of undesirable forces on the horizon. The lyrics go:

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[208] Interview with Leticia Calderon, April 7, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.
[209] Interview with Robert "Beaver" Garcia, July 2, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.
[210] Interview with Will Higuera, May 3, 2010 and September 28, 2014, Boyle Heights, California.
[211] Interview with Will Higuera, May 3, 2010 and September 28, 2014, Boyle Heights, California.

> "Puta jura/ kill the fucking pigs/ Take away my fucking beer/ take away my drugs/ Kill my fucking buzz/ Police brutality serve and protect/ beat me to the ground/ Read me my fucking rights/ disrespect my rage/ justice served me/ Racist pigs/ brutality, nothing done/ democracy start a war/ Fucking pigs/ control your lives/ terrorize all the citizens/ Corruption in the force/ This occurs all the time/ Fucking pigs control your lives"[212]

A guitar leads the song, accompanied by a steady and light drumbeat, bass riff and a lively tempo holds the music together. The song has a slow introduction, then it breaks into an uncontrollable tempo for the entirety of the song, making for a powerful track. As the song picks up speed, Will recounts that "people in the crowd would just scream 'puta jura'" while they danced together in a physical slam dance in the pit.[213]

While the song screams to "kill the fucking pigs," P-47 did not actually encourage violence against the police. Like rap music, punk rock music in East Los Angeles functions as a symbolic tool used by racially aggrieved communities to register and refuse power.[214] To people who make up the backyard scene, the song carries the promise of what Gaye Theresa Johnson calls, "spatial entitlement." Johnson argues that when Black and Brown communities are stripped of the protections and resources of full citizenship, they claim discursive spaces in which they repossess the rights culturally that they have been denied legally and socially.[215] In this light, P-47 used these lyrics and their loud performance to challenge the police symbolically for regularly breaking up their social gatherings. In their song, P-47 created an alternative outcome to the norm. In real life, band members went on their way following unlawful searches and seizures that took place in their neighborhoods. They did not have the

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[212] Lyrics received from Erik Hernandez, P-47 vocalist, co-author of the song.

[213] Interview with Will Higuera, May 3, 2010 and September 28, 2014, Boyle Heights, California.

[214] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994); Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

[215] Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity.*

financial or social resources to challenge police harassment in a court of law. In their song, however, they are in control and call out injustices aggressively.

According to Erik, Puta Jura was requested at every gig that they performed. Erik believes the popularity of the song was due to in part to the regular unfavorable interactions youths had with the police in East Los Angeles. As Hernandez puts it, “the more they [the police] harassed our communities, the angrier we got. The song was about us [members of the band], what we were going through. Other people in the scene were experiencing it [police harassment].”[216] P-47 guitarist Andy Magallon, explained to me that the song came about from “a bunch” of “fucked up experiences” band members had experienced with the police in East Los Angeles, and in the city of Montebello.[217]

The song can also be heard as a cry for a public sphere free of police harassment and based on free spatial mobility. Most of the members of P-47 attended Schurr Miller High School in the City of Montebello in the late 1990s. During their time there they witnessed sections of chain link fence being replaced by metal gates around the school. Band members saw the deployment of armed police officers from the Montebello Police Department on their school campus. Mr. Arthur Sanchez, a retired police officer, became the principal and created a strict punitive environment for students.[218] Students were disciplined for truancy by being placed in the “dog pound,” an enclosed area of the administration building with one-way mirrors, to await the arrival of a Montebello Police Department officer for citation. Erik remembers that many of his friends were sent to the dog pound for small infractions such as walking through the hallways without a pass.

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[216] Conversation with Erik Hernandez, July 12, 2012, East Los Angeles, California
[217] Conversation with Andy Magallon, July 13, 2012, East Los Angeles, California
[218] Interview with Adrian “Bobo” Quesada, July 14, 2012, East Los Angeles, California.

In this context, police seizures of drugs and beer at music events are symbolic of a larger longstanding collective grievance with the law. These confiscations function as a microcosm of the regular unwanted encounters youths experience in their daily lives with the police in East Los Angeles and the working-class sections of Montebello. P-47 is speaking to an audience that has long resented police officers in their neighborhoods confiscating goods and keeping what they take for themselves. Resenting this shared form of punitive social control, the youths did not cower. Instead, they chanted the lyrics, screaming over and again, "puta jura!" Following the performance of this song, Beaver recounts, "people in the crowd would be happy, we would be laughing, yeah, we would be yelling, 'hell yeah' and 'puta jura.'"[219] Will remembers, "people were celebrating."[220]

Gig as Fundraiser

There are different reasons why people attend and organize gigs. Many are drawn to the music. Others attended because these are places where they can congregate with a large group of people. Because of their appeal, gigs began to be organized as a source of income. At two to four dollars per person for entrance, with anywhere from 100 to 400 people in attendance, a successful event can earn anywhere from three hundred to twelve hundred dollars within a few hours. Word about the success that Will and others enjoyed organizing gatherings got around, and people began to inquire how they could get to earn a portion of this money.

The rule that developed over time is that the residents of the home where the gig is held will earn a portion of the door. In addition, they also controlled the supply of empty beer bottles and cans left after the event that could be cashed in as glass and aluminum recyclables. The portion of the door allocated to residents generally amounted to half of the door and all of the

[219] Interview with Robert "Beaver" Garcia, July 2, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.
[220] Interview with Will Higuera, May 3, 2010, Boyle Heights, California.

recyclables. Hosting punk gatherings became popular as a form of fundraising for a range of different causes, including the costs of recording albums and touring for bands, but also as ways of paying mortgages and medical bills for the hosts.

Involved in organizing backyard gigs since early 1996, Will recognizes a significant shift in the invitations he received to organize backyard events by the latter part of the 1990s. As Will remembers it, "a whole bunch of people started asking me if we could help them out" by organizing a gig for people who were not associated with the backyard scene.[221] A consistent aspect of the events until this point was that they were organized at the houses where scene members lived with their family.

What caught Will's attention was the reasons for their interest. As he remembers it, "money to pay the bills" was the main reason for a desire to hold a punk rock event at a home. These bills included rent to avoid eviction and payments to keep electricity and gas turned on.[222] The people who would ask Will about how to earn money were mainly Chicana/o and Latinx adults. They ranged in age from people in their early 30's to people in their 60's. Men and women, parents, and grandparents expressed interest. Some were homeowners, but most rented homes in Boyle Heights, or in City Terrace, El Sereno, and Lincoln Heights. Wherever Will organized a gig, he was sure to get approached by people from neighboring households.

From the late 1990s throughout the first decade of the 21st century there were hardly any gigs that did not function as fundraisers for someone in need of financial assistance for their household. In Will's own estimate, he believes that he organized "at least two gigs like this [fundraisers] each month" between 1998 and 2004.[223] In instances when Will did not want to

[221] Interview with Will Higuera, May 3, 2010 and September 28, 2014, Boyle Heights, California.
[222] Interview with Will Higuera, May 3, 2010 and September 28, 2014, Boyle Heights, California.
[223] Interview with Will Higuera, May 3, 2010 and September 28, 2014, Boyle Heights, California.

organize gigs as a fundraiser for others, members of Hed Trip would encourage each other to take a stance to help. Hed Trip's own goal was to organize backyard parties throughout the year to earn enough money to hold an annual punk rock festival known as Shit Fest. The pressure of having to earn at least ten thousand dollars throughout the year for Shit Fest expenses (such as rental fees for a music hall and security guards) made Will think twice about accepting the responsibility of organizing gigs as fundraisers. Yet he still staged them as a means to earn money for himself, often to pay his own bills. Balancing these tasks became more complex as more people began to ask for assistance with fundraisers. Belonging to a punk rock organization, however, made it possible to work collectively to achieve many goals.

Assisting Will to organize fundraisers, different members of Hed Trip took on different responsibilities. Hed Trip had a website, but it functioned nothing like social media of today. Several Hed Trip members worked together to respond to people who reached out to them about gigs. Others worked on developing, printing, cutting, and disseminating paper flyers at different high schools across East Los Angeles, Montebello, and the San Gabriel Valley. Jaime Cruz relates "A lot of people had their lights turned off. I know what that's like. So, when I would hear about why a lady wanted a gig [at her house], I was for it. That simple."[224] Lekit Em also empathized with people in need of financial assistance. "It was the least I could do," she tells, "and when we made enough money [to assist a family pay a bill] it felt right."[225] Hed Trip members were all working class youths of color, many of whom were unemployed, and whose families faced struggles with impoverished conditions similar to those of the people they sought to assist.

[224] Interview with Jaime Cruz, December 27, 2011, Rosemead, California.
[225] Interview with Lekit Em, November 14, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.

Danny Bravo was one person who benefited from Hed Trip's gig organizing. Many years have passed since gigs were organized in his behalf in 2004, yet he was quick to comment, "sometimes a party [gig] can help you keep your head up."[226] Speaking more to this point, Danny shared with me that regular unemployment made it difficult for him to provide food for himself, his partner, and their daughter. For Danny, who in 2004 was a security guard in downtown Los Angeles, the summer months proved to be especially hard for him to secure even thirty hours of work per week. His willingness to work graveyard shifts secured him enough hours to pay rent and other household bills, but he had to rely regularly on family members for meals and clothes for his daughter. Danny shared with me that welfare officials usually made him feel worthless, or as he puts it, "like a dog," so he was reluctant to seek state assistance.[227] While trips to the welfare office did provide Danny with immediate help in the form of food stamps and cash assistance, he says, "the way they treat you, it's not worth it, but I did it for Zulema [his daughter]."[228] Being made to feel "like a dog" made it an extremely painful experience for Danny to seek government support. It was precisely these kinds of unfavorable encounters with government social workers that led Danny to ask his friend Richard to put him in touch with his nephews, two members of the punk band Feeble Attempt. Through their networks, they were able to get a hold of several organizers that were willing to lend Danny a hand. In the end, Danny chose to work with Hed Trip to organize three fundraisers at their home throughout the summer months of 2004.

Danny lived in an area of El Sereno, a barrio within East Los Angeles, where there are many hills and narrow streets. The location of Danny's home was on a dark street with limited space

[226] Interview with Danny Bravo, July 19, 2012, East Los Angeles, California.
[227] Interview with Danny Bravo, July 19, 2012, East Los Angeles, California.
[228] Interview with Danny Bravo, July 19, 2012, East Los Angeles, California.

for parked cars. The street ended in a cul-de-sac three houses over from Danny's home. Additionally, there were many trees in Danny's backyard. To people outside of the backyard scene this might seem like an undesirable place to hold a gathering. However, to insiders like Will and members of Hed Trip this location and these attributes offered opportunities to assist their efforts at organizing a successful event. In the nighttime, the trees that covered the yard would do well to shelter people from the view of police helicopters that regularly patrol the area. The cul-de-sac and limited space for parking meant that there would be limited traffic.

As he did with other gigs that Will had organized in the past, he reached out to neighbors a week in advance to let them know there was going to be an event, and inform them of what they could expect. Will also provided them with his cell phone number in case they wanted to get a hold of him with any questions.[229] At this time, cell phones were not as popular as they are now, which gave Will a sort of professional allure among East Los Angeles residents. Will claims that having access to a cell phone at this time helped him to smooth over problems that were raised by neighbors. Will claims, however, that most calls he received from people he had given his number to were to inquire how *they* might organize a gig at their residence. Hed Trip also developed a practice of placing large canvas tarps over front gates of houses, and they did this to Danny's home. This was done for several reasons. First, they did this to block the view of the gig from people in attendance. People who show up early usually choose to socialize in the street until they believed enough bands and people have arrived. After this, they will then pay their money and enter. Socializing in the street was what usually drew the disapproving attention of neighbors who then call the police. Secondly, they did this to block the view of people in general and the police in particular. The sight of a large group of youths

[229] Interview with Will Higuera, May 3, 2010 and September 28, 2014, Boyle Heights, California.

standing around was often enough to get people to call the police, or for the police to stop by and begin to ask people questions and search them. Next, several Hed Trip members would walk around the area to make sure people who were on their way did not stop to congregate on a neighbor's lawn, urinate in their bushes, or simply stand around at street corners. This was sure to catch the negative attention of neighbors, or of the police that frequently patrol these streets. Lastly, members of Hed Trip would figure out the best location for a band to perform in the backyard, and where and how to place their speakers. The last thing they wanted to do was to set up right beside a neighbor's bedroom window.

In an environment where there are no guarantees as to how long an event may last, attention to the landscape and the practices organizers developed served to better their chances of organizing a fundraiser that offered the invited bands enough time to perform, people in the crowd enough time to have a good time, and enough time for sufficient money to be earned to assist the beneficiaries. At Danny's, Will and Hed Trip members were able to execute these practices with such success that over the summer months they were able to organize three gigs there, which offered bands opportunities to perform, youths a familiar destination to socialize at, and earned Danny several hundred dollars each month to go towards food for his household.

Following the gigs that were organized at Danny's place, he and his family were eventually evicted for not being able to pay the rent. He was visibly pained reminiscing about this time in his life. Since then he has gone back to school, has obtained more stable work, and does not have to rely on family members for support. He remembered the gigs that were organized to assist him and his family as a "good time," and observed that it "felt good" to see different people assist him in time of need.[230]

[230] Interview with Danny Bravo, July 19, 2012, East Los Angeles, California.

In staging punk rock events as fundraisers, Will and Hed Trip turned music in East Los Angeles into a vehicle for mutual aid. Yet, not every event organizer chose to work with people in times of need. People who organized gigs had their own needs. For members of Hed Trip, however, making these decisions as a group allowed them to balance their goal of organizing Shit Fest with the meeting the needs of people who reached out to them. They turned the popular punk rock ethos of "Do-It-Yourself" into "Doing-It-Together."[231] There were even some instances where Hed Trip chose to give the entire amount of money earned from a fundraiser to a family in need. One event that stands out to Will in this light was one that Hed Trip organized for the family and friends of a young woman who was shot and killed in the Estrada Courts housing projects. Will was presented with a request by his younger sister Auro, also a member of Hed Trip, to assist her friend's family that was in dire need of financial assistance. Will recalls, it "was a benefit show for one of my sister's friends. I can't remember her actual name, but her nickname was Blondie. She was hanging out with her boyfriend in front of her house when some guys rolled up in a car and started shooting. She was shot and killed [and] left behind two kids…my sister decided to ask me if I could help her throw a [gig] benefit show to raise some money for her kids…"[232] In the end, Will is sure the gig earned enough money to cover a large portion of her funeral expenses.

Organizing the gig as a fundraiser caught the attention of people who attended. Christine Garcia attended Blondie's funeral fundraiser. She remembers "these shows [fundraisers gigs] just had a different feeling than the others…You feel the sadness and the joy at the same time…At Blondie's gig it was really sad because I remember hanging out with her not too long

[231] Profane Existence Collective, *Making Punk a Threat Again! The Best Cuts 1989–1993*. (Profane Existence Collective, 1997).

[232] Interview with Will Higuera, May 3, 2010, Boyle Heights, California.

before she was killed. I didn't know her, but just thinking that I hung out with her. I remember laughing with her, all of us having a good time together at gigs, you know? That was hard."[233] Such benefit shows were a mix of "good time" and "hard" times. She adds "It was good to see everyone that came out though to support." Auro's main reason for organizing this gig for Blondie was to stand with her family, or as she puts it, "so they [Blondie's family] wouldn't be alone" in their time of tragedy.[234]

Money is essential to survival in a capitalist society. Gigs are organized by working class and working poor people who need money to pay bills, put food on their tables, and even to bury a family member with dignity and respect. For Will, the gig had become a primary means of making money to pay his own bills, organize Shit Fest, and fundraise for people in need. Christine paid her money to enter a gig and in return, enjoyed live music performances, the social space of the gig itself, and the moral high ground of supporting people in need.

Taking a "Mission" to a Gig

The promise of good times at a gig draws people from different parts of the city to East Los Angeles. They offer people a break from the bad times of the impoverished living conditions and the humiliations and hassles of living in a hyper-policed *barrio*. The social spaces created in the home by the backyard scene were much different than the everyday spaces people encountered in their communities and neighborhoods. For John Riojas, punk rock events provided him with different kinds of experiences, with empowering experiences that contrasted sharply with what he found at school, in the quotidian atmosphere of his neighborhood, and in his home. For him, backyard gigs created such an inspiring atmosphere that he was willing to go to great lengths for the chance for a good time. To him, the social space of a gig -- the

[233] Interview with Christine Garcia, January10, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.
[234] Interview with Auro Higuera, September 28, 2014, Rosemead, California.

crowds, the liveliness, the music at high volume, and the physical contact with others -- provided an experience that could not be missed.

John was born in Boyle Heights in the mid-1980s to a working-class Chicana/o family. After moving to different neighborhoods throughout East Los Angeles, his mother and father secured residence in City Terrace with a Section 8 voucher. Settling here, his parents would have their last child, which brought John a younger sister. As the second eldest child of his parents and their only son, John was often the “man of the house,” as he puts it. His father was often in and out of prison because of his struggles with substance abuse. Even when his father was not incarcerated, he was generally gone from the house.

Growing up in City Terrace, John attended school with many of the people who would later become influential members of the backyard scene. John’s most active days in that scene were between 2001 and 2009. During this time, John attended several gigs each month. As he got older, he attended fewer of them than he did as a younger teen, however, the perception that “everybody is just having fun, a real good time” continued to call John back through his early twenties.[235] Enjoying himself in these spaces, John was willing to walk great distances to gigs that were located throughout East Los Angeles and in neighborhoods throughout Montebello, and occasionally even as far away as Rosemead. All he needed for these ventures was a few friends willing to take a “mission” with him to arrive to and return from gigs.[236]

It was through listening to John’s stories about traveling to and from gigs that I began to take a closer look at what working class Chicanas/os who lived in the *barrio* invested in their movement across space in the East Los Angeles. For these youths, a walk is not just a walk, but what they call a mission, a project comprising a form of travel practiced with great care to

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[235] Interview with John Riojas, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.
[236] Interview with John Riojas, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.

maneuver safely across the city. Safety in this context is gauged in relationship to unfavorable encounters with the police and chances of intra-communal conflict.

I accompanied John to ten gigs from the winter through the summer of 2009 to document, describe, and analyze the nature of "the mission." Our travel party included the people with whom he socialized the most, a group of young men in their late teens and early twenties like himself. Through the time of this research, I came to meet twelve of these men who made up "the crew" who would go to great lengths to support one another. Neither John nor his friends had their own vehicle, so we traveled to gigs via a mix of walking and public transportation, but mostly walking. In several instances, John asked his mother for a ride, but her lack of car insurance led John and the others to walk in most instances. Because money was tight in his household, John chose to walk to gigs rather than take public transportation that was expensive and often proved unreliable as well.

John explained that he had attended at least one punk rock backyard party a month for ten years. After his first experience, he was hooked. He describes himself as a "mellow kid growing up," but in his teens he became "pissed" at the circumstances he found himself in at home.[237] John credits his mother with doing her best to provide for their family, but he is quick to note that his father's incarceration added many difficulties to their lives that he wished they could have avoided. Witnessing how his father's incarceration created loneliness and anger in his mother made John become confused and often angry. Facing other issues caused by their

[237] Interview with John Rios, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California. Through the period that I interviewed John for this study he had moved out of his mother's house several times before returning back for reasons that had to do with employment. In the following year, John's mother had her Section 8 voucher revoked. Since this period, John has experienced many difficult situations of homelessness. Support from friends and family has kept him off the streets.

impoverished conditions, John turned to gigs as a release and especially looked to the pit as a place to express his anger and frustrations. John describes how this worked for him:

> I think the first time I ever went to a gig I was 14, or maybe like 15, and it was in Montebello. The yard was small and this place was just packed, like to the point where if you moved you were gonna step on someone's foot…punks were sitting on the neighbor's roof just to see. They were smart because when the music would start, man, the place went crazy and you had to go with it, you couldn't get out because of all the people…it was like a sink, or like a drain in a sink when the water spins in circles and everything just goes together. My body was all achy the next day and I had scrapes on my arms from falling down. Pretty much after that I was hooked.[238]

On our first walk to a gig located near Obregon Park in the El Hoyo *barrio* of East Los Angeles, the first thing I noticed was the effort that went into deciding which way John and his friends were going to travel. Sitting in his backyard with the others, an open discussion ensued about which streets should be taken. Nestor suggested that we walk east on Floral Drive and make a right on Eastern until we hit First Street. Immediately, Misael suggested that we take Mariana Avenue instead of Eastern Avenue. While Mariana Avenue would require us to climb a few steep hills, we chose this route anyway because there are fewer street lights and less car traffic on Mariana Avenue than there is on Eastern Avenue. John and his friends wanted to stay out of sight from family members and the police. The young men I accompanied were often unemployed, and their parents and siblings would inquire about their travels to a gig with great distaste, accusing them, of wasting their time. The police also objected to their journeys. A group of Chicano and Latino young men walking together in public was usually enough for them to get stopped and asked about where they were going, where they were coming from, and if they intended to start any trouble. In both instances, the more secluded and dark routes were preferable to the more well-lit and well-traveled routes in their neighborhoods. There

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[238] Interview with John Rios, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.

were no guarantees, however, as we often encountered both parents and police on these routes. However, it was on the least active streets where John and his friends felt like they had the best chance to arrive to and return from gigs without any hassles.

On our travels, I quickly noticed that John consistently looked back and had a concerned frown on his face. When I inquired about this, he explained that these were his "nerves acting crazy."[239] One evening as we sat in his room waiting for his friends to arrive, he explained to me that around 2003 he began to experience conflict with his peers from high school, and that memories of those fights continue to loom over him today. At first, John was embarrassed to explain to me how something from high school could still haunt him. The seriousness of the situation, however, quickly removed any sense of embarrassment, because of how physical these clashes had become over the years. John had fought several times with young men from his school in public. In one instance in 2004, a group attacked John with baseball bats, and one person wielded a knife. In 2005, someone drove by John's home and shot at a party taking place there. John believes the drive-by shooting was related to the people he had been fighting. The reason for this conflict stemmed from a romantic relationship that took place while he was in high school. John explains "Things got way out of hand. Pretty much I couldn't talk to my ex-girlfriend anymore because her new boyfriend didn't like it, and when I did, he got crazy [violent] with me…first it was fist fights, then broken windows, then knives and bats, it got serious."[240] Since that time, he continued to have a handful of physical encounters with these young men.

At the same time as he experienced this intracommunal conflict, contact with the police became a common occurrence. As he explains, "I'd be watching my back for those fools [high

[239] Interview with John Rios, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.
[240] Interview with John Rios, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.

school peers] on my way to school then I'd turn the other way, and I was getting pulled over by the cops."[241] In describing his encounters with the police, John is referring to the Los Angeles School Police that were stationed at his high school and at different locations on the route he took to school. Walking at a pace that was understood to be too slow for the taste of school police officers was enough to get him stopped and told to sit on a sidewalk. He recollects, "they stopped you because they thought you were ditching, right, and then they start checking you for weed, markers, asking me if you have any weapons, like that."[242] These instances had gotten John in trouble with school officials several times to the point where he had chosen on several occasions not to continue to go to school. Following the tenth-grade, John would not complete an entire year of school.

As an adult, John continued to keep an eye out for the police. He went from being concerned about confrontations with the school police to encounters with police officers from the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department. In my travels to gigs with John, we never encountered the youths he fought with in school, but we did get stopped for questioning by the police nearly every time we walked to gigs together. Partly because of these encounters with the police, John and his friends developed an elaborate range of tactics to travel across East Los Angeles and Montebello. Without access to cell phones, or any of the present-day mapping devices, they utilized knowledge from their explorations of their neighborhoods as children. John and his friends negotiated their way through a series of cul-de-sacs in their neighborhoods to reach places on paths that maps might not reveal. For instance, traveling from Floral Drive and Brannick Avenue to a gig near City Terrace Drive, John and his friends would travel north on Brannick Avenue until it turned into Miller Avenue. From there, they would continue past the

[241] Interview with John Rios, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.
[242] Interview with John Rios, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California

dead end and climb a steep cactus-filled incline to reach City Terrace Park. What looks like a dead end and a dangerous hill to climb actually has steps cut into the dirt and a path wide enough for people to pass through the rows of cactus. According to the group, the hillside was once used as a common plot of land where people in the neighborhood used to plant vegetable gardens. Today, the travel through it by people trying to reach the park keeps the path clear enough to get them to their desired location.

The use of paths like this was practiced to avoid being stopped by police. On my travels with John, it became clear to me that if there were more than six people in their party, they automatically knew it was best to divide into groups without question. What was debated was who was going to walk with whom. Once this was determined, half walked on one side of the street and the other half on the other. One group will generally lag behind the other group by a block or so. John let me know that their previous attempts to walk together in one large group brought unwarranted stops and searches by sheriff's deputies. For John and his friends this meant that they hardly ever walked to any gig with the entire group. Additionally, because of this, some of his friends chose not to attend gigs with them, usually waiting behind in John's room for us to return. John maintains "We knew being in a big group would mean getting stopped."[243]

Getting stopped entails being seated on the curb by police. In two instances, our group was stopped and seated in this manner. The first stop was to inquire if any person in our group had written on a wall down the street. In the second, no reason was given. In both instances, we were ordered to sit on the curb while the officers checked to see if any of us had outstanding warrants or were in violation of parole or probation.[244]

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[243] Interview with John Rios, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California

[244] Interview with John Rios, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.

Being forced by the police to sit on the curb was a common experience for John and his friends. In some instances, this took up to an hour of our time, depending on how large the group was, or how much time an officer wanted to take. John proclaims, "We got that shit all the time…One time, Nestor picked his butt when the Sheriff's wanted to smell our fingers for weed. We had to sit on the curb for forever."[245] The smelling of people's fingers was reported to be a popular practice among the police. It assumed that if a person's fingers did in fact smell like marijuana, they were subject to a search. In each instance when the police stopped us, they searched our belongings. Despite our specifically informing the officers that they could not search us or our bags, they proceeded to empty our pockets and dump out the contents of our backpacks. In one instance, as we sat down, Misael said out loud to the group that his uncle was a lawyer and he was going to report this to him. Calling his bluff, the sheriff's deputies spilled the contents of our bags all over the sidewalk. Eight out of the ten times during our walks together there was some form of police contact. In several instances, this came in the form of direct questions from an officer who stepped out of a police cruiser to talk with us. Inquiries in these cases pertained to where we were headed and where we were coming from, did we have drugs, were we members of a gang, and were any of us on probation or parole. Officers asked questions to find out if any of us had outstanding warrants, drugs, or any kind of weapon. Despite answering their questions, we were ordered to sit on the nearest curb while the police checked our names in their computer.

There was only one time on our missions that any of us considered making a formal complaint. At one stop, Ronnie had a glass pipe in his pocket. Under the conditions of his probation, he was not supposed to have this on his person. Having answered no to the police

[245] Interview with John Rios, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.

when they had asked him if he was on probation, once the pipe was discovered they took his wallet and searched his name. After a few minutes, they found out that he had lied to them about his probation and about the pipe, which placed him in a tough spot. One police officer, a pale white male with orange fluffy hair combed back, crossed his arms at his chest. This officer offered our friend an ultimatum; either get arrested for the pipe and for lying to a police officer about his probation, or get punched in the stomach. After a short moment, Ronnie looked at the rest of us sitting on the curb and then to the police officers. He informed them that he chose to get punched in the stomach. At this point, both police officers burst into laughter before the popcorn haired police officer spiked the glass pipe to the concrete like a football and ordered us to keep moving. Feeling abused by this instance the young man desired to make a complaint. After reflecting on his probation status, Ronnie decided that it was in his best interest not to. With no words, the group refocused its attention on getting to the gig.

In other instances, police officers stopped us to speak about daily happenings. In one case, we were stopped by two officers from the Los Angeles Police Department near the corner of First Street and Soto Street in Boyle Heights. John's friend Michael was wearing a Kobe Bryant Lakers jersey. The police officer began to ask Michael questions about why did he like Bryant and if he thought the Lakers were going to win another championship. He then proceeded to inquire about each person's favorite basketball team. The feeling was uncomfortable, but nonaggressive on the part of the police. We stood standing near the corner for about twenty minutes before we could move along. In another instance, a police officer stopped us for about thirty minutes to "introduce himself." Following the basketball incident, John and the other men gave Michael a hard time, but they knew there was a good chance that if they cut the

conversation short, the police officer might suspect that they were up to no good and begin to ask about their probation and parole statuses.

Other events on our walks included being blinded by the police spotlights that they pointed at our faces from their squad car. In such instances, there was no verbal interaction with the police. They stopped us, shined their spot light in our faces, looked us up and down, and then slowly drove away. While this treatment bothered many people in the group, there was a collective sense of relief in being confronted by them in a less direct manner. After the first spotlight occurrence that I experienced with the group, John told me that when this happens, he uses a tactic he describes as, making "the dumbest face I can." It is his belief that this practice makes the police officers "feel sorry for me and jam [leave], or at least laugh" before they drive away.[246] This may seem like a meager strategy, but John and the others believed in it very much. The idea behind this is that by making a dumb face, they are not "acting tough," but as John puts it, simply looking "dumb," or non-confrontational.[247]

When gigs were in locations that proved too far to walk, John and his friends chose to take public transportation. I traveled together with John and the crew on the bus a total of four times. We attempted two additional bus rides that did not work for us. We rode the Metro bus line 30 that travels along First Street, the 68 and 720 that travel along Cesar Chavez Avenue, and a Montebello bus line 40 that travels on Third Street in East Los Angeles and on Beverly Boulevard when in Montebello. In every instance, the wait times were longer than what their respective schedules stated them to be. The lack of direct routes to our destination required us to get transfers and to wait further. To make matters worse, there was one instance where a bus filled to capacity passed us by after we had been waiting for almost an hour. Looking at my

[246] Interview with John, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.
[247] Interview with John, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.

irritation, John jokingly laughed before explaining to me that the experience of being passed up, or waiting was a regular occurrence. In the most annoying occasion, we waited over an hour for a bus that never came.

The different unfavorable instances we experienced waiting for buses led to the group's decision to attend gigs mostly that were in walking distance. This was determined on a case by case basis. The longer the walk, the more important it became for John and the others to identify key points where they knew they could take a break. These points were usually to get cigarettes and beer, stand around, and to regroup before moving onward. There was no guarantee that a gig would last long after arriving, so it was important to John and the others that the travel by foot to a gig was also an enjoyable experience.

A popular location on our way to gigs in Boyle Heights was Tacos Lo Que Si Llena (The Tacos That Get You Full), a taco truck located near the corner of Rowan and Cesar Chavez Avenues across the street from El Super food market. John recounts, "The crowds of people buying and eating food at the truck helps us chill there too. Munch out [eat] if we want to, but mainly have a kick-it spot to take a break, you know."[248] In addition to the fact that this taco truck sold two burritos for five dollars, the flurries of activity from the parades of cars that entered and exited the market parking lot, and the large crowds of people gathered to buy food from the truck offered John and the others an opportunity to see and be seen, to be open in their socializing. Traveling in separate groups can get annoying, yet they knew that it lessened their chances for police harassment. So, in places like this, John and the others took delight in gathering as a group. At this place, they told me that they liked to take a break because they could stand around and talk, eat, share beer and decide which way they would go from there.

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[248] Interview with John, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.

When gigs were south of the Pomona 60 Freeway, John and his friends gathered along the inside of the sound barrier wall of the freeway between the Indiana Street and Lorena Street exits. When people would ask about this location, John would simply reply, "by the Freeways," meaning near where the Pomona 60 Freeway and the 5 Freeway merge. During the early 2000's, the state rebuilt the freeway walls and placed small doors for workers to enter the freeway. While they are locked with heavy-duty padlocks, people have pulled off the hinges that connected the lock to the concrete wall of one door. When it is closed correctly it looks as if nothing is wrong with it. This allows for the inside of the sound barrier wall to serve for John and others as a pre-gig meeting place, or a spot where people headed to socialize after a gig.

In one instance, I stood with my back to the sound barrier wall. There were fifteen people drinking beer and talking cheerfully with each other at this particular place. People who came in knew enough to close the doors so as to not give up our whereabouts to anyone passing by. As John put it, they did not want to "burn the spot."[249] Arthur played songs on his acoustic guitar. At this point a man and a woman crawled out from underneath a freeway overpass about twenty yards from where we stood. They said hello to us, and stood by to watch Arthur. At the conclusion of one of Arthur's songs, they asked us if we had any food to share with them. Looking around, a young man gave them what remained of a bag of chips pulled from his backpack. John's friend Garbo gave them two Tecate beers, and someone else gave them each a cigarette before they crawled back underneath the freeway overpass. At this moment, everyone decided to leave.

After making stops at the taco truck or the freeway sound barrier, we would split up into separate groups and continue on our way to the gig. Most times, no one would remember the

[249] Interview with John Rios, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.

exact address. Instead, they remembered intersections. Once we reached an intersection, the lively and loud atmosphere of a gig lent itself to its detection. If we could not hear sounds coming from the gig, we would follow other people on their way to it.

At a front gate, there was almost always a line. Gig organizers have established a practice of setting up a table at which someone sits with something to collect the money. Before reaching the door, everyone has their three dollars out. We hand the door person our money, and in return they mark our wrists with a marker. When walking to the backyard from the front, I invariably saw smiles on the faces of the people I was with. As the person in the group in charge of the beer, Nestor would immediately empty his backpack of the cans he had carried with him. Someone else in the group was sure to pull out a pack of cigarettes and offer them to others. Once everyone in the group had a beer, they drank. There was a certain awareness that they were toasting their successful arrival.

At gigs, the worry that normally showed on John's face was sure to be gone. Here, he would laugh a little more easily than when we walked the streets on the mission. The group of friends always grows larger when we arrive, as John or someone else invites friends they spot among the crowd to join our circle. Between bands, people talk with one another, and share beer and cigarettes. In several instances, it was during these moments that the organizers of the gig would come to the backyard from the front gate to inform us that enough money was earned to meet the needs of the household. To this news, there would be loud cheering among the crowd, adding to an even more celebratory environment.

John and the others would routinely venture into the pit. They would not go in, however for just any song. A song had to produce a good feeling, or "get you charged" to motivate entering

the pit.[250] Once the right song was performed, John usually threw himself into the sea of people who danced, screamed, and celebrated in the backyard. When he would return from the pit to the circle, his friends would hand him a beer, and everyone in the circle would embrace him and the others who had entered the pit with handshakes that turned into hugs. It is these moments of joy that I believe made the travails needed to arrive worth it to the group.

It is also these joyful moments that make it unsettlingly frustrating when the police arrive to put an end to the gig before all the invited bands have a chance to perform. Within minutes a festive ambiance becomes riddled with panic. Cheers turn into warning cries. The police arrive in full force. Circling above, a police helicopter floods a backyard with forceful light. Over a loud speaker, the officers inform the crowd that they must "disperse." If we do not leave immediately, they say they will arrest us.

Exiting a gig, we were sure to meet police officers standing in the street. If we did not move fast enough, the officers would enter the backyard and begin to shove people out into the street. Sometimes police officers hold batons in one hand and a Maglite flashlight in the other. In a few instances, they even hold shotguns. Some people are grabbed by the police and forced to sit on the curb for questioning. In the street, people branch out in different directions. To avoid being grabbed, John often directed me to walk with a large crowd. Together with his acquaintances and closer friends, we would walk to his home. When leaving a gig, we often walked through the main streets. With dozens of police officers occupied back at the gig, we did not face the same kind of abuse that we did on our way to a gig. When police did inquire about where we were going, they tended to let us go on our way once we explained that we

[250] Interview with John Rios, September 4, 2010, East Los Angeles, California.

were following orders to go home from the police. There were never guarantees that this would give us a pass, but most of the time it seemed to suffice.

Conclusion

Gigs are important to youths in East Los Angeles, but they are regularly shut down by the police. Shortly after our travels together, John decided it was no longer worth the hassle to attend backyard punk music shows. Pressured to sit on curbs and provide information to the police simply for walking through his neighborhood with friends, John decided to find other meaningful activities to express himself. Police officers closed gigs because the events countered, if not transgressed, the dominant understandings of public and private space in the U.S. national culture. A home is supposed to produce exchange value for its owner(s), to function as a private investment and refuge. Barred from access to public venues like the youth centers that had been closed because of curtailments of social welfare spending or commercial dance clubs which working class youths cannot afford and to which dress codes and outright discrimination would keep them from entering, punk rock enthusiasts in East L.A. turned private homes into public places, into sites for socialization, and generators of value for renters and owners strapped for cash. The reconfiguration of the backyard of a house into a backyard gig emphasizes community based needs and use values over individual property protection and asset accumulation. A gig makes the private home a public space meeting a range of needs.[251]

Another important threat to the moral geography of the private, prosperous and properly gendered nuclear family home sparked by backyard gigs, is the invitation to people from neighborhoods from across the city to congregate in a place not controlled by wealthy investors, owners or high-end consumers.[252] In what Mindy Thompson Fullilove calls the

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[251] David Harvey, "Space as Key Word."
[252] Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *Urban Alchemy.*

"sorted out" city, a home is associated with a particular neighborhood, and neighborhoods in the U.S. are racialized, and spatialized from other neighborhoods and people.[253] When the police began to see Asian American, Black, and white youths from across the city show up to a gig in East Los Angeles where a predominantly Chicana/o and Latinx demographic lives, it shakes up the racial and spatial order of Los Angeles. The result from authorities is often immediate suspicion and suppression. Overall, the backyard gig transforms the home from a private oriented place into a semi-public venue, organized according to the changing needs of people who, by dominant legal notions of the home, are considered not to belong to these places in this way. Travel to the gig requires missions by people who do not own cars in an automobile centered center. Pedestrian and bus travel are transit routes of last resort in the eyes of authorities. Those means of travel are associated with criminal behavior in a way that most automobile travel is not. Yet the racial profiling experienced by drivers of color demonstrates that even automobile ownership is not enough. The housing segregation that relegates people of different races to different places requires a defensive localism and hostile privatism protecting by racially differentiated policing.

The moment that P-47's song became a backyard anthem, and when Will began to have adults from different neighborhoods throughout East Los Angeles inquire about organizing a gig as a fundraiser to assist them to pay rent and other household bills, was a moment in which punk rock music in Chicana/o and Latinx communities experienced a resurgence across the nation. In the 1999 documentary, *Mas Alla de Los Gritos/ Beyond the Screams*, Martin Sorrondeguy, producer and lead vocalist of the Latinx punk rock band Los Crudos, contends that the targeting of Latinx communities by powerful social groups led to a dialectical

[253] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place.*

reaction.[254] This targeting gave rise to punk bands who sang in both English and Spanish about social justice. Jose Palafox contends that Latinx punk rock across the U.S. "exploded because all of a sudden we had a hell of a lot to sing about…What started happening politically in the United States pissed us off so much, and we were feeling so targeted and cornered as a community, that we began to write songs about it…'"[255] Examining the political economy of the 1990s reveals multiple reasons why Chicana/o and Latinx communities turned to punk rock.

In 1992, the Los Angeles Rebellion rocked the city and attracted the attention of the nation. The not guilty verdict in the case of five Los Angeles police officers charged with the brutal beating of Black motorist Rodney King resulted in a multiracial rebellion.[256] While people were indeed frustrated by the court ruling, it was not the only factor that had pushed them over the edge. At the time of the rebellion, Black and Latinx youths lived in neighborhoods that were devastated by economic recession, unemployment, and deindustrialization.[257] Social unrest had been building from years of deindustrialization, shrinking social services, and violent policing of racialized and working class communities. In 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and California Proposition 187 represented a contradiction. On the one hand, NAFTA undid barriers for the movement of capital and goods across international borders. On the other hand, undocumented immigrants

[254] Martin Sorrondeguy, *Mas Alla de Los Gritos/ Beyond the Screams.*
[255] Jose Palafox, "Screaming Our Thoughts: Latinos and Punk Rock," http://www.alternet.org/story/9674/screaming_our_thoughts%3A_latinos_and_punk_rock, last accessed 10/16/2012.
[256] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles,* (London; New York: Verso, 2006).
[257] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles,* (London; New York: Verso, 2006).

crossing the border and within the nation became targets for draconian and punitive measures of social control.[258]

The agony of oppression in racialized communities was made worse with the creation of other punitive laws throughout the decade and into the new century. Under U.S. President Bill Clinton, the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act institutionalized hostile restrictions on access to federal support for impoverished communities. The act compromised the social right to federal assistance by imposing time restrictions on how long welfare benefits could be paid to any one individual and by imposing disciplinary surveillance and punitive treatment on recipients through the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families act. This legislation also framed poverty as caused by laziness and a lack of initiative. It forced people off federal assistance and into a low-wage work. In the same year, Clinton signed the Housing Opportunity Program Extension Act, which authorized the eviction of public housing residents for a range of behavioral issues. This was mainly a racialized form of social control aimed at mostly Black and Latinx public housing residents.[259] Chicana/o and Latinx communities were further targeted by the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act, a system of penalties and social control measures aimed at punishing undocumented immigration that resulted in the detention and deportation of undocumented Latinx immigrants.

These pieces of legislation would result in racialized outcomes. Politicians, however, structured their arguments according to seemingly race-neutral discourses of citizenship, work,

[258] Nicholas de Genova, "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life," Annual Review of Anthropology, Volume 31 (2002).

[259] Dana-Ain Davis, "Narrating the Mute: Racializing and Racism in a Neoliberal Moment," Souls, 9:4, 2007, 346-360.

and housing for people who abide by law and order.[260] It was in this milieu that Chicana/o and Latinx punk bands like P-47 created narratives that spoke of the kinds of racialized forms of policing that impacted their communities and neighborhoods. P-47 was only one band among many in a growing backyard punk rock scene in East Los Angeles. The assertiveness of P-47's music was part of a local sound of rage and refusal in response to growing structural injustice and inequality across the nation. The music created by punk bands and performed at backyard gigs would draw hundreds of youths from across the city, and even across the larger Los Angeles region to attend gigs nearly every weekend. It was also this context that presented Will and Hed Trip with people who presented to them opportunities to support fundraisers that they chose not to turn away from. Will, Lekit, Jaime, and others in Hed Trip knew that they could not solve completely the problems that people came to them with. They did, however, make a choice to do something about those problems with the resources and networks of the backyard scene. Setting up a gig to help earn enough money for rent, food, and even for funeral expenses offered other punks in the scene an opportunity to put their money, music, and presence towards something that would help people in their community.

The promise of good times at a gig drew people like John and his friends from City Terrace to different parts of East Los Angeles, Montebello, and the San Gabriel Valley. The good times at a gig were more than a party, they served as a break from the hard times that existed within everyday lives. Walking with John, I was taken aback by the ways police stops had become a regular expectation in his travels through public space. John and the other young men I travelled with never got used to these stops, even when the police simply "want to talk" as they put it. They expected them, but did their best to avert them.

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[260] Dana-Ain Davis, "Narrating the Mute: Racializing and Racism in a Neoliberal Moment."

The planning and thinking that goes into mapping out the path toward a gig, the humiliation of sitting on the curb waiting for police to discover outstanding warrants, and the effort and time that goes into organizing a gig as a fundraiser are all part of a racial tax on time.[261] John and his friends were impacted by the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, and by the Broken Windows theory of policing. While the former placed more police on the streets, the latter functioned to criminalize activities deemed injurious to business desires.[262] Walking at night with a group of friends proved threatening to a city that sought to secure peace and quiet for those in power. The Broken Windows theory is most evident in the policing of place and the taxing of time in places like Skid Row in Los Angeles where houseless people are harassed, fined and jailed relentlessly. However, the policing of place and taxing of time was also made evident and opposed by the struggle of the Community Rights Campaign (CRC) to decriminalize truancy. Between 2005 and 2009, the CRC reported that Black and Chicana/o high school students within the Los Angeles Unified School District were cited by the Los Angeles School Police with over 13,000 truancy and daytime curfew tickets that operate under the Los Angeles Municipal Code 45.04 (LAMC 45.04).[263] While this practice is thought to be a deterrent to the practice of ditching school by students, the CRC argues that it plays a large part in why students do not complete their high school educations.

There are many issues to take into consideration when thinking about low graduation rates among aggrieved communities, but in Los Angeles police citations and consequent court fees have become obstacles to young people feeling like valued members of society. Walking too

[261] See George Lipsitz, "Policing Place and Taxing Time on Skid Row." Eds. Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*. (London; New York: Verso, 2016).

[262] See George Lipsitz, "Policing Place and Taxing Time on Skid Row."

[263] See Community Rights Campaign, http://www.thestrategycenter.org/project/community-rights-campaign

slow or too fast alike served as probable cause for police officers to stop young people on our missions and inquire about where we were going. Many of the youths who are judged to be cutting class, even if they are not, are then cited and sent to court. In some instances where the parents of students can not miss work to attend court because of the likelihood of being fired, fines added up and their cases were turned over to the juvenile criminal court system.

Awaiting young people without a high school diploma but with a criminal record is a labor market with soaring unemployment rates, which for Black teens between the age of 16 and 19 has reached twenty percent.[264] The California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System collected data related to high school graduation rates for the class of 2010 and revealed that upwards of ninety five thousand students from the class of 2010 did not complete high school, and approximately fifty thousand of those high school students were Latinxs.[265] As these numbers predict, a large proportion of California's prisoners come from the working classes of Los Angeles, and the majority of these persons lack a high school diploma. A 2003 study by the U.S. Department of Justice noted "that two in five prison and jail inmates [throughout the U.S.] lack a high school diploma or its equivalent."[266]

Everything associated with using a home to address the needs of the most aggrieved communities has become a challenge. While it does not look good for Chicana/o and Latinx youths in working class neighborhoods across East Los Angeles, they have not given up on the belief that they have a right to be in public in ways that speak and act according to their own needs.

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[264] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/22/california-unemployment-r_n_933393.html

[265] http://asmdc.org/members/a69/news-room/press-releases/item/3068-comprehensive-california-high-school-drop-out-audit-findings-now-available, last accessed June 3, 2012.

[266] C.W. Harlow, *Education and Correctional Populations.* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003).

Chapter Four: Border Hoppin' Hardcore: Transgressing Third Borders

On January 31, 2009, Anthony Razo, an off-duty Los Angeles police officer, was shot outside his home near the corner of Blanchard Street and Gage Avenue in City Terrace. Razo claimed he was approached by "two Latino males" in their "teens" with "bald heads" carrying a revolver.[267] At this point a struggle ensued and in the foray, Razo's gun was taken from him by one of the youths who proceeded to shoot him. Because Officer Razo worked in the LAPD's Hollenbeck division's gang unit, police officials assumed that the assailants were gang members seeking revenge. At a morning news conference, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, declared to the public, "Now you understand why gun and gang violence should be our priority."[268]

In the wake of this incident, officers from Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LACSD) and Los Angeles Special Weapons and Tactics Team (SWATT) descended on the City Terrace *barrio*. Within minutes of the shooting, police agencies had set a perimeter that reached to Cesar Chavez Avenue at the south end, to Rowan Avenue at the west end, to Pomeroy Avenue and sections of Wabash Street at the north end, and to Hazard Avenue and sections of Bonnie Beach Place and Hammel Street at the east and south east end. Officers established road blocks and dispatched teams to walk inside this area. The latter group was dressed in military garb and carried high powered rifles. They were accompanied by K-9 units as they spread out through the windy streets of the hillside *barrio*.

People attempting to leave the perimeter were stopped. Women and children were pulled from their vehicles, and patted down while officers searched their cars for the culprits. Police

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[267] http://abclocal.go.com/story?section=news/local/los_angeles&id=6635431
[268] http://lapd.com/news/headlines/lapd_officer_shot_with_own_gun_city_news_service/

dragged away young men who matched the description of the shooters from front yards and off their porches. In the sky, two police helicopters hovered above palm trees and telephone poles for the entire day. The police helicopters were accompanied by numerous helicopters from different television stations. For hours, a police loud speaker continually ordered young men to come out with their hands up. For weeks following the incident, police units set up informal road blocks near where the incident took place. Officers kept watch inside the gates of the Razo home, where they asked teens and other people walking by to show identification.

Months would pass before the public would find out the truth. Officer Razo had in fact shot himself.[269] A week before the shooting Razo had also torched his luxury car in an attempt to secure insurance money.[270] When word came out that Razo had lied about the incident and that he had shot himself, the checkpoints disappeared and so did the officers who stood guard in front of his home. Not long after this, Razo put his home up for sale, and he and his family were gone too. Yet no apologies were offered to the people of City Terrace for Razo's actions and the city's gullible response to them. Mayor Villaraigosa did not return to the neighborhood to apologize for the aggressive military style response to the incident. In the end, Razo was labelled as the proverbial bad apple in an otherwise industrious and noble police force. Razo was eventually sentenced to a year in prison for his actions.

The Razo episode encapsulates the impact of heightened policing in public spaces occupied by working class Chicana/o and Latinx youths, especially in neighborhoods like City Terrace that have become what Joao Biehl terms "zones of social abandonment."[271] While there are of

[269] http://articles.latimes.com/2009/apr/08/local/me-officer8
[270] http://articles.latimes.com/2009/apr/08/local/me-officer8
[271] Joao Biehl, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p.14; Henry Giroux, "Neoliberalism and the Machinery of Disposability," accessed at, www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/22958-neoliberalism-and-the-machinery-of-disposability#XVI

course some individual families that experience upward social mobility, the overwhelming majority of people in these spaces remain impoverished.[272] The officials who oversee zones of social abandonment have created social and material conditions that keep impoverished people in place, or else uproot them with no place to go. Clyde Woods argues that in response to capitalist crisis, dominant social groups turned to racialized social enclosures that strip working class people of financial and social assets. They devise policies and practices that demolish hard fought public resources and services, and strip people of victories gained by working class and civil rights struggles.[273] The result has been the creation of cities that tend to the demands and tastes of wealthy people while overlooking the needs of their most aggrieved constituents.

Working class Chicana/o and Latinx consigned to zones of social abandonment face the conditions that Alessandra Moctezuma and Mike Davis subsume under the term the "third border."[1] Moctezuma and Davis assert that at the turn of the 21st century, the third border is a complex of racialized and class-based social systems of social control associated with barring people from social services and public life. This is the result of a merging of racialized, spatialized, and class-based forms of dispossession. It is part of an emergent neoliberal public pedagogy that holds privatized, policed, and predictable social relations as vital pillars of the production and maintenance of safe public spaces. The authors argue that a slumping economy and anti-Latinx xenophobia re-emerged across the U.S. to form an atmosphere where Chicana/o and Latinx communities were understood as undocumented social parasites feeding off of tax-paying citizens. These ideas were mobilized in efforts to privatize public resources

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[272] Razo belonged to one of these upwardly mobile families. His father owned several small grocery stores in City Terrace, and a handful of properties in East Los Angeles that the family rented.

[273] Henry Giroux, "Neoliberalism and the Machinery of Disposability" *Truthout* April 8, 2014 http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/22958-neoliberalism-and-the-machinery-of-disposability Accessed September 13, 2017
; Clyde Woods, "Les Miserables of New Orleans," *American Quarterly* v.61 n.3 (September) 2009

such as libraries, museums, and parks, and to thwart the movement of "undesirable" people from entering wealthy neighborhoods. Exacerbating this racialized and class-based system of social control was the government decision to militarize cities across the nation following the attacks on New York City on September 11, 2001. The result of this was a form of social control that stripped many working-class communities of their right to the city in anticipation of their criminal activity.[1] For working class Chicana/o and Latinx in Los Angeles, the third border often materializes in the form of policing the movement of ordinary people by the state. In its most brutal forms, it leads to incarceration and deportation.

This chapter documents and describes the consequences of heightened policing and spatial control of working class Chicanas/os and Latinxs in contemporary Los Angeles. I explore the self-active creativity developed and deployed by working class Chicana/o and Latinx youths seeking to contest the places where third borders have appeared in their lives. The punk rock band Sin Remedio and the poetry of Rebecca Gonzales exemplify this artistic and political stance. Sin Remedio and Gonzales register the Chicana/o and Latinx punk rock aesthetics of Doing-It-Together. In this case, "it" refers to the process of creating social relationships that invite and enable movement across racialized and gendered borders.

Sin Remedio and the Performance of Border Hoppin' Hardcore

The music of Sin Remedio [No Remedy] is commanding. In the early 2000s they were a central part of the East Los Angeles backyard scene. Their music is respected by both musicians and audience members alike. In 2009, Sin Remedio self-produced their first full-length album entitled, "Border Hoppin' Hardcore." Prior to the release of this album, the band had recorded a 7" record in 2005 split with another band from the scene: Life in Exile.

Members of Sin Remedio come from the San Gabriel and East Los Angeles. The group is composed of four members, two men and two women. Christy is a vocalist and plays rhythm guitar, Brenda is also a vocalist and plays the drums. Alex, who is Brenda's brother, plays guitar, and Adrian, who is Christy's brother, plays the bass. Together, they create a dynamic sound that includes heavy metal riffs, Spanish ranchera singing, and crust core hollering and growling. Their first show was in May of 2002, but each member was involved in the backyard scene prior to their union as a band, either part of other bands or dedicated attendees at backyard gigs throughout the 1990s.

"Border Hoppin' Hardcore" is an album that is stacked with one powerful song after another. Songs such as Sin Remedio and A un Despierto [Awakening] have a wide reaching impact on the scene due to their high energy, song structure and solidarity with many of the issues that face scene members, especially women. The song "Big Brother" captures much of the impact of contemporary mechanisms of social control in working class neighborhoods. Referencing the fabrication of lies by dominant media outlets that frame Latinx immigrant workers as social parasites in the U.S., Sin Remedio screams at their listeners to recognize the Orwellian social conditions that mark everyday life.

The authority of their music stems from the band's complex foundations in punk rock and metal, and their mastery of their instruments. Adding to their appeal, members of the band are recognized as people who genuinely believe in punk rock as a politics for social justice.[274] This view came early in the band's history. In 2002, Sin Remedio performed at a backyard gig in Orange County. According to Christy, despite the predominantly white audience, they believed that their performance had received a normal and welcoming response. After all, Christy

[274] Sin Remedio, *Border Hoppin Hardcore*, 2009.

recounts, “people were in the pit, and they seemed into” the performance.[275] However, returning home after the gig, they found a disturbing note on their band webpage.

Before there were social media sites such as Myspace and Facebook, members of Sin Remedio had created their own band website to interact with fans and share their music. A feature on the site was a message board that allowed for them to post dates of their upcoming shows. Additionally, the webpage allowed for fans to leave messages about Sin Remedio’s music and performances, as well as invite them to perform at gigs. Looking over the comments about the performance in Orange County, a white young man who was at the gig left them a message that read, “these spics are playing our kind of music, get back over there with that Border Hoppin’ Hardcore.”[276] It concluded the message with the statement, “Get out of my scene.”[277]

Taken aback by the comment, members of Sin Remedio organized a meeting to touch base with one another about the remark and to decide what they were going to do about it. After some thought, Christy expressed great concern about being called “spics.” Other members thought out loud about what the young man might have meant by “our kind of music.” Brenda resented the directive to get back “over there.”

Sin Remedio’s unexpected encounter with white supremacy had roots in punk’s vexed histories on both sides of the Atlantic. Dick Hebdige argues that punk rock has never been a singular culture, but rather a complex amalgamation of styles from white, Caribbean and West African working class cultures.[278] Despite Hebdige’s early insight and the legacy of

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[275] Telephone interview with Christy Perez, February, 22, 2014, Oakland, California.
[276] Telephone interview with Christy Perez, February, 22, 2014, Oakland, California.
[277] Telephone interview with Christy Perez, February, 22, 2014, Oakland, California.
[278] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1991).

productions by punk rockers of color themselves, punk is often represented as a quintessential expression of white, male, Eurocentric, and heterosexual culture.[279] Sin Remedio, however, engaged in punk rock fully aware and proud of their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities. When they read the hostile post on their web site, they thought they might assemble a multiracial caravan of women and men from the East Los Angeles backyard scene to drive to Orange County to confront the young man and his friends. In the end, they decided against it. Instead, Sin Remedio utilized this xenophobic and racist assault to open up a dialogue with each other about racialized and gendered conflict in the backyard scene. Brenda Chavelas recalls "The comment made real the kinds of racist and xenophobic barriers within punk scenes."[280]

Thinking deeply about what kind of punk rock culture they wanted to fashion in their music, members of Sin Remedio decided to speak up and not to be afraid to push back against the "racist and xenophobic barriers" they encountered in everyday life. Brenda recalls that towards the end of a band meeting they shared one powerful moment. Looking at one another, they said "wait, we *are* border hoppin' hardcore."[281] Alex, Brenda's brother adds, "we took border hoppin' hardcore, and we used it for ourselves."[282] Alex continues, "we are always transcending these barriers; we don't want to be held back from nothing, you know, be held back to 'our' group, 'who is our group anyways?'"[283] For Brenda, the derisive term border hoppin' hardcore "became a source of empowerment." She continues:

> a source of empowerment to just vocalize what I am feeling, and to be cognizant of the discrimination that exists, and taking away this sense of

[279] Stephen Duncombe and Maxwell Tremblay (Eds). *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*. (London; New York: Verso, 2011).
[280] Telephone interview with Brenda Chavelas, April, 10, 2014, Oakland, California.
[281] Telephone interview with Brenda Chavelas, April, 10, 2014, Oakland, California.
[282] Phone interview with Alex Chavelas, April 25, 2014, Oakland, California.
[283] Phone interview with Alex Chavelas, April 25, 2014, Oakland, California.

> disenfranchisement, because when someone tells you that you're playing "our" music, I can tell you, I felt like, what the fuck? You're tripping, this is everyone's music, you know? And just feeling that someone is taking this self-entitled position, this self-entitled position of superiority, because where does that leave me? And in many cases, it's the heterosexual Caucasian male [who is taking a self-entitled position of superiority] because there are so many privileges that they have in our American society. And what about the woman who's dark skinned, Mexican in the punk scene who happens to be a lesbian? Oh shit, she goes lower and lower."[284]

For Christy, the term border hoppin' hardcore signified a means to remember her own roots, especially her family's migration to the U.S. from Mexico. The stories she heard growing up about their crossing were devastating.

It was not enough for Sin Remedio to discuss how this white man offended them. They used this moment to speak with one another about racialized gendered issues within the East Los Angeles backyard scene, and within their own families. Christy and Brenda cited incidents where men across racial and ethnic backgrounds expected more from them than a music performance at gigs. Brenda was regularly belittled as playing "good for a chick."[285] In many instances, Christy and Brenda spoke about how their respective families had attempted to steer them into more feminine Mexican cultural practices such as folklorico. Members of Sin Remedio recognized that many borders, inside and outside of their homes, neighborhoods, and the backyard scene, would have to be hopped.

The songs on "Border Hoppin' Hardcore" are a testament to Sin Remedio's willingness, readiness, and ability to hop the borders of various punk genres. Furthermore, the album art also connotes the band's solidarity with all the Latinxs who crossed the geographic border. The album cover is a photo in black and white. It shows a punk rocker making an effort to climb

[284] Telephone interview with Brenda Chavelas, April, 10, 2014, Oakland, California.
[285] Telephone interview with Brenda Chavelas, April, 10, 2014, Oakland, California.

over a portion of the U.S. Mexico border fence to enter the U.S. The physical features of the person who hops the border are covered, leaving open to the imagination whether this action is carried out by a woman or a man. The featured person's Mohawk hairdo and jacket fashioned with studs are unmistakable. The album's back cover is a photo of a silhouette. The image shows three people, one adult carrying a backpack and two young children venturing through what can be assumed to be a desert.

Brenda explains that she created the cover art images by editing an original with a marker. She decided to add punk rock garb to it as a symbol of border hoppin' hardcore. "I wanted to create something that expressed what we were talking about [regarding border hoppin' hardcore]," she explains. "This person was hardcore, man. Look at the barbed wire on the fence; they didn't give a shit about that, you know? They were going to make it over that barrier, going to hop that border. Nothing was going to stop them. That right there is border hoppin' hardcore, what I believe our music to be about."[286] Members of the band chose the back cover image to speak to the families who must migrate to the U.S. for survival. Christy observes "the bag [the adult clutches] stood out to me. It reminded me of all the stories you hear about people packing the essentials and making their way across [the border]. You had punk on the front [cover], and this was the other side of that…the families that try to make it through."[287]

Sin Remedio sought to practice a political intervention and create music that provoked people to think critically about injustices related to national citizenship, race, class and gender. Christy remarks, "we wanted to create dialogue between people in the scene because there

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[286] Telephone interview with Brenda Chavelas, April, 10, 2014, Oakland, California.
[287] Telephone interview with Christy Perez, February, 22, 2014, Oakland, California.

were borders there too, separating us from one another…and punk rock allows us to cross them."[288] Working hard to hop borders at home, Sin Remedio then set out on an album tour in Mexico City following the release of their album. To their delight, they found a group of punks there who sported their band t-shirt with the punk rocker hoppin' the U.S.-Mexico border. When they performed, they were welcomed by a large pit and enthusiastic applause when they concluded their set.

Rebecca Gonzales, and the Punk Politics and Poetics of Rival Geography

Following the shooting of Officer Razo, police officers walked around the community to advise the residents of City Terrace to call the police and inform on people they suspected to have carried out the shooting. What resulted was an atmosphere of suspicion among neighbors. No one knows how many youths were pulled from the streets for questioning. City Terrace resident Sergio Ramos remembers that in the weeks following the shooting "There were lots of people talking about who did it, and who they were thinking did it…I know my mom and dad pointed fingers at people in the neighborhood."[289] In such instances, the policing project invades the minds of the policed, promoting a radical divisiveness among neighbors. The resulting finger pointing drains communities of the potential to create social bonds based in mutual respect and shared needs. In response, Chicanas/os and Latinxs need to forge creative and collective ways to move against oppressive social systems, deconstruct the oppressive architecture of policing, and reconstruct social spaces deemed worth inhabiting. This is especially the case when militarized policing is understood to be the solution to societal problems by those in power as was the case following Razo's false claim in City Terrace.

[288] Telephone interview with Christy Perez, February, 22, 2014, Oakland, California.
[289] Interview with Sergio Ramos, Los Angeles, California, December 22, 2015.

Not far from the site where Officer Razo falsely claimed to be assaulted by Latino youths, is the dwelling in City Terrace that Chicana poet, mother, and educator Rebecca Gonzales calls home. Like Sin Remedio, Gonzales engages in a form of border hoppin' hardcore that opens up a range of empowering social spaces.

At a roundtable discussion entitled, "Chicanas/os and Latinas/os Read James Baldwin" that took place at the Eastside Café in El Sereno, California as part of the 2014 annual meeting of the American Studies Association, Gonzales declared to the audience, "my poetry tells my truth, it's a way for me to talk about what people are going through, and it's a way for me to be connected to people."[290] Gonzales explains that poetry for her is about "learning different ways to express myself, to feel alive."[291] In addition to writing formal poems, she believes that "poetry is living creatively, consciously, and living with compassion" in the face of deleterious social forces that she has faced.[292]

At the age of six, Gonzales was taken away from her parents. Due to their struggles with drug and alcohol addictions, she was removed from her home in the San Gabriel Valley and placed with an aunt and uncle in City Terrace. This was an extremely difficult situation for her. Adding further difficulty to her circumstance was what she called "the church thing." This meant, "going from a no-rule having street kid existence to a life with rules against everything I did."[293] Her family's born again Christian faith often made her feel that she was a bad person for the way her parents had raised her.[294]

[290] "Chicanas/os and Latinas/os Read James Baldwin," Roundtable Discussion, El Sereno, California, American Studies Association, 2014.
[291] "Chicanas/os and Latinas/os Read James Baldwin," Roundtable Discussion, El Sereno, California, American Studies Association, 2014.
[292] "Chicanas/os and Latinas/os Read James Baldwin," Roundtable Discussion, El Sereno, California, American Studies Association, 2014.
[293] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[294] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.

By the time Gonzales was a teen, the different restrictions placed on her by her elders presented her with what she believes were two options, "either giving in (to guilt), or finding ways not to be."[295] Choosing the latter, Gonzales devised ways to create meaningful spaces for herself outside the watchful eyes and beliefs of her aunt and uncle. She explored ways to transgress their rules without having to leave the house physically or personally disrespect them. Gonzales remembers that at this time in her life the radio became a very important technology for her to create room for herself within the home. She remembers, "I would listen to the radio all the time. It was a way for me to be free."[296] Gonzales remembers that her first time listening to punk rock music evoked feelings that were very different from her everyday life at school and in the home. "At school," Gonzales explains, "the teachers paid attention to the good kids, and I was not that, so I didn't get the kind of attention that the other kids did."[297]

Listening to punk rock music for the first time in the mid 1990's, Gonzales turned the radio dial to KLXU 88.9 FM, an alternative radio station in Los Angeles. While she does not remember the name of the first band she listened to, she does remember why she remained loyal to punk rock music. "The feeling just took over my body," she recounts, "it was like this crazy feeling. It was amazing. The speed of the music, the sound, I mean it went all over my body. I felt so good, from feeling like everything is controlled, everything I do, to these feelings inside me that were wild. No one could control them, not when I was listening to punk. That's how it felt."[298] Describing herself as a "closet" punk kid because her aunt and uncle did not approve of punk rock music, Gonzales continued to listen to punk music on KLXU literally in

[295] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[296] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[297] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[298] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.

her closet.[299]

Upon discovering that there were punk rock gigs taking place in the backyards of homes in City Terrace, Gonzales remembers that she did not want to miss out on the opportunity to see live punk music performances. Attending gigs, she met people she believed were searching for spaces and relationships similar to what she was looking for. At gigs, "it was like this little world in my neighborhood…and all those feelings I got from listening to punk (on the radio) were intensified when I was there [at gigs]."[300] Backyard gigs presented Gonzales with an overwhelming sensation of "connection" to others, "happiness," and being "free," which made facing the different risks associated with leaving home without the permission of her aunt and uncle worth the possible trouble that loomed overhead.[301]

Gonzales respected her aunt and uncle very much for taking her in while her parents could not be there for her. However, she also strongly disagreed with their strict rules and religious beliefs. Gonzales believes that while their religious views did play a role in her aunt and uncle's negative perceptions of punk rock music, she believes they also drew their unfavorable beliefs about the working class youths in the subculture from the practices of the police. She recounts tactics utilized by Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department officers to break up a gig near her home in East Los Angeles:

> "The music was always loud, but I heard this [sheriff's] helicopter…living here [in City Terrace], I know the sound of it, so I look up, right, and there it is with this bright light shining on me, on all of us…and then they ordered for us to leave…Everyone started to leave because the cops were going to give a ticket to the family that lived there [the house where the gig was being held]. So everyone is leaving, no one is starting trouble, there's no problems, and when we walk into the street there they [police officers] are in riot gear…They had their guns out, some just with batons, helmets, and their cars were blocking the street, you know, and the helicopter is just

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299 Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
300 Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
301 Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.

> circling. It was crazy...I think things like that got people in the neighborhood to look at us like we were no good."[302]

Following such instances, she remembers her aunt, uncle, and neighbors harboring more suspicion toward her activities. In other instances, the police were called before a gig had begun. The sight of punk youths congregating caused people in the neighborhoods where they were held to call the police, assuming the youths were up to something devious.

Preston Guillery, a former deputy for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department in the late 1960s, disclosed, in an interesting, if not rare confession, a militarized approach to policing a section of East Los Angeles that includes City Terrace. At a legislative hearing on police-community relations held in East Los Angeles in 1972, Guillery stated that it was ordinary practice for police to stop, search, and physically brutalize Chicana/o and Latinx residents of East Los Angeles. The probable cause that justified this, he commented, was that they lived in that part of the city.[303] Guillery specified that for the duration of time that he was a Sheriff's Deputy, he and his fellow officers believed that working class Chicana/o and Latinx residents of East Los Angeles lived in a "more or less of an occupied area."[304]

In spite of hostile treatment from the police and the suspicions held by her aunt and uncle about her activities, Gonzales continued to attend gigs regularly. She remembers that live music performances by local bands such as P-47 and Suburban Chaos initiated a process of developing a "new philosophy" about herself, her community, and the world.[305] "When I was going to gigs," she relates, "it was a time where I was seeing all this crazy shit going on around

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[302] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.

[303] Ian Haney-López, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003). Pp. 142, 143.

[304] Ian Haney-López, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003). Pp. 142, 143.

[305] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.

me…Like in ‘92 when the uprising hit L.A., and then (California Proposition) 187 passed, and all the hatred from Pete Wilson was horrible it was horrible for our community.”[306] Faced with dominant stories in the media that often framed people like herself and others from her neighborhood as criminals, a “new philosophy” about life that she had gathered from punk music and gigs enabled her to ask questions about their source, and engage others in respectful dialogue about social issues that mattered to them. She remembers attending a backyard gig where punk bands talked about the effects Proposition 187 would have on their families. Thinking back to this time, Gonzalez remembers, “people were scared. They were worried about how people in their family were going to be deported.”[307] In another instance, Gonzales remembers that members of the bands Quetzal and Aztlán Underground performed, and in between songs they would engage with their audiences about what was going on in Los Angeles from a perspective that illuminated the complexities underlying the events that surrounded her life. Gonzales remembers that Quetzal engaged a crowd of people about the impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement on Mexico and the U.S., and about how the Zapatista movement was making important strides to create a different kind of world. “They’d get me thinking differently about things,” she recalls, “then they’d play songs about them (topics of conversation)…I remember feeling really good about being there, they (gigs) weren’t always punk, you know, but they were Chicano gigs, with people showing a lot of respect (to each other) and having these great conversations. That made me feel really good about being a part of it.”[308]

[306] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[307] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[308] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.

While Gonzales faced different obstacles in her attempts to attend gigs, she believes strongly that they allowed her to create a different relationship to the spaces and people of the city than was usually the case. She remarks, "Growing up in East L.A., you can be confined there, and it gets even more intense sometimes, right, because you even get confined to little parts of East L.A....for so many different reasons."[309] Gonzales adds, "the cops have a large role in this, they do play a role. Some people believe that if they step outside the lines set for them, like for me as a woman of color from East L.A., there's things people believe are my role, my place, and there's this feeling people have that they (the police) will let you know it (when someone steps outside their prescribed place). For us (people in East Los Angeles) that outcome can be deadly."[310] Gonzales relates that as a child dominant media images also played a role in influencing the way she thought about herself and how she moved in her neighborhood.

> "As a kid, watching the cops beat the shit out of (Rodney) King on T.V. for doing nothing, for doing nothing, that let me know right there that that kind of thing can happen to me and the people around me. I really believed that. They (the police) saw him as this animal that they were going to give a beat down. That's how it made me feel. I was a kid, and I really believed that when I saw it (on television). Even as a kid, I knew it wasn't right, it wasn't right for that to happen, and since back then I've always felt this thing, like I have to watch out so that doesn't happen to me."[311]

Engagement in punk rock cultures in East Los Angeles, especially attending gigs, enabled Gonzales to flip the script, to use the oppressive impacts of having to "watch out" for herself in public as a tool for her to successfully survey and navigate through the policed landscape of her home and community.

[309] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[310] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[311] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.

Gonzalez believes that her outlook on life emanates from her lived experiences with restriction. These served as a social and cultural force that propelled her forward to seek what she calls, a "feeling of being alive, and being free." In this respect, Gonzalez confides,

> "gigs offer another way to experience East L.A., you don't need much money because they're (gigs) like 2 to 3 bucks (dollars) to get in…and when you're in there the music takes over…I'd think about how I ended up in these places I'd never would have been before, mainly because I didn't know people that lived there, or because it's not my 'neighborhood'…(At gigs) it was like I got to change all that because I met some really cool people that lived in different parts of L.A., and just people from all sides of L.A. coming to the eastside. Gigs are like these connections, and I can recognize that because the feeling of being confined is such a different feeling…When you're there (at gigs), for me, it was like this feeling of being alive, and being free."[312]

Attending punk rock events offered Gonzalez opportunities to extricate herself from the over-policed conditions of her home and neighborhood, and to make meaningful connections to different places and people. Gonzalez credits punk rock cultures, and especially gigs with leading her to serious practices of reading and writing that she continues to this day.

Gonzalez observes "there's always a point that's always being made in punk (music)…I'd be listening to a song that was named after class war…At gigs, bands talk about a lot of things, or just things they're involved in, things they're going through, and after a while I felt like I had to go out and learn about these things. I had to read about that."[313] For the young poet, her passion to learn was not sparked in formal schooling, but by the lyrics and face to face conversations that took place in backyards across East Los Angeles. Additionally, Gonzalez was influenced by a range of authors, especially Alice Walker, particularly her short story, "Everyday Use."[314] Gonzalez explains, "I would read a lot, but I was really pulled into this one

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[312] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[313] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[314] Alice Walker, "Everyday Use" in Alice Walker, *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women*, (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973).

(Everyday Use) by the little sister that stood home, you know, the one that didn't go to college…I liked how she knew how important (family) quilts are, but only if you use them."[315] Reflecting for a moment, Gonzalez continues, "I'm like the little sister in that story, I mean, I didn't go to fancy schools, I don't teach at a fancy institution, I'm not a Chicana superstar, but I really believe that because I write about things that matter to me, and I use my poems to connect with people, to connect with life, I'm like those women (in the story)…They're not scared to use what they have. So, I thought, what do I have, what can I use?"[316] Although Gonzalez took to reading and writing poetry regularly, she believes poetry extends beyond the writing of formal poems, as she explains,

> "To be a poet, to me anyways, is living with my heart open, not turning my head when I see something I don't like, but really seeing it and listening to it, and doing something about it, you know what I mean? As a mother that's very important to me... I teach my son that we don't look away from people that are struggling, we look at them and we stand with them…My poetry is like that, like a conduit that connects me to a lot of things, to a lot of people, to myself too…The beautiful thing is that we (each) have our own way to do this work, and there's opportunities to use what we have every day."[317]

Gonzalez's particular understanding of poetry as a multiple practice to be used every day has allowed her to be involved in a range of efforts in the community to create social space to provide people opportunities to engage with one another in face to face conversations about a range of issues. Because there were bad components that accompanied the good in punk cultures, writing and reading proved to be important tools helping Gonzalez navigate contradictions and deleterious conditions. In instances when Gonzalez chose to stay home because the conditions of the home and on the streets proved to be too much to work through, Gonzalez wrote poetry that maintained her mobility vicariously.

[315] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[316] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[317] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.

"One Blocks East of El Pino" provides a narrative that illustrates Gonzalez's refusal to give in to the unfavorable conditions of her home and the streets of the city, yet it illustrates as well an attempt to connect with people and places in the city.[318] For the poet, claiming a space east of El Pino is to inform her readers that she is from City Terrace. El Pino is much more than the famed tree that appears in the *barrio* cult classic, *Blood In Blood Out*. In the movie, El Pino is a site where young men congregate and talk about ruling the *barrio*. For Gonzalez, however, this tree marked a sight and site in her neighborhood that indicated to her she was almost to her desired destination. As a pre-teen, Gonzalez would sneak out of her home in the early morning hours to go for jogs around the Evergreen Cemetery. The feeling of running until she was exhausted pulled her to the cemetery a few mornings every week. Although the cemetery was about six blocks away from her home, reaching it proved to be a challenge because she was certain that her neighbors would inform her family if they saw her on the streets, or the police would pick her up and take her home. To evade these possible informers, Gonzalez stayed away from the busier streets of Rowan Avenue and Cesar Chavez Avenue and instead took to Folsom Alley. In the long and dark strip of concrete that runs parallel to Folsom Street from Rowan Avenue to El Pino, the tree functioned for her as a landmark that let her know she was just a quick run away from the cemetery. In this light, El Pino is a symbol of her numerous efforts to create meaningful space in the city. Her mission begins as the "settling day" becomes night, "perched" in the hills of City Terrace, "Three blocks down is Cesar Chavez Ave., or Brooklyn, as my elders will refer to it still."[319] While Gonzalez's family respected the labor organizer and civil rights leader, they continued to call the avenue Brooklyn. The family

[318] Rebecca Gonzalez, "One Blocks East of El Pino," https://ladydrug.wordpress.com/one-block-east-of-el-pino/

[319] Rebecca Gonzalez, "One Blocks East of El Pino," https://ladydrug.wordpress.com/one-block-east-of-el-pino/

believed that before changing the name of the street, the city should have consulted the people who engaged with it on a daily basis.[320] As Gonzalez remembers it, "my family thinks that they (city officials) didn't ask people in our neighborhood (in City Terrace) what they think about it (change of name) because, well because they (city officials) don't really care what we think."[321]

The verse, "I call from the sidewalk toward my friend's window, about getting her ass out on time, she opens the curtains and perches her body out her bedroom window, 'I'm coming Chola!,' expresses more than simply calling to a friend to attend a gig. In a city where it is believed that those in power "don't really care what we think," the act of travelling together with a trusted companion is purposeful and strategic. This act becomes especially important for women of color faced with a patriarchal social order that deems public space a male space.

Gonzalez and her friend "roam" the streets together, "searching for the gig." "We are defiant girls with a Friday breeze on our cheeks" she writes, a proud declaration of her intent to move where the wind blows her. Because gigs may go all night, or they may end before they begin, moving with the "breeze" is an improvisational tactic that guides Gonzalez through the uncertainties of living in a hyper-policed, yet underserved community.[322]

Other punk youths appear in the poem who are also searching for the gig. Identifying as part of the group, although she does not claim the others to be close friends, Gonzalez and her friend take part in one of East Los Angeles punk rock culture's greatest functions, which is to serve as a force of social connection between diverse groups of people from different parts of the city. Furthermore, Gonzalez's identification as a "crusty" registers her own style within the

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[320] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[321] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[322] Rebecca Gonzalez, "One Blocks East of El Pino," https://ladydrug.wordpress.com/one-block-east-of-el-pino/

punk scene, and at the same time identifies the heterogeneity of punk culture that youths work across to build a collective culture known as the Eastside punk scene.

Arriving at the gig where "The chords being played from the guitars defy neighbors' opinions of real music," Gonzalez touches upon one of the most popular reasons why youths are drawn to gigs.[323] Gonzalez often felt "like I was entering a little world. The music takes you to another place. It's loud, and it's just so powerful to experience that." While the music may draw youths like Gonzalez to gigs, it simultaneously serves as the reason why police bring them to an end. When police do come to end a gig, Gonzalez remarks, "The music was always loud (at gigs), but I heard (the sheriff's) helicopter, living (in East Los Angeles), I know the sound of it."[324] In this way, Gonzalez highlights a contradiction in policing youths in East Los Angeles; that is, police respond to loud music, yet in their responses, they make loud noise with helicopters, loud speakers, and police car sirens. Their riot formations often last long after the gig has been cleared.

Gonzalez and her friend enjoy the music and the lively atmosphere. While her parents think she is at a sleep over, the girls are out and about, drinking liquor, "*echando desmadre*," creating absolute chaos, and "No we don't care what you think about us."[325] For Gonzalez, her desires to go to the gigs was not to integrate into status quo. She engaged in punk rock culture to transgress what she believed to be strict unwarranted rules, and to fight back against social abandonment. Punk enables her to gain a sense of life and freedom that was missing from home, school, and everyday life. Sometimes her actions to enter the public sphere without

[323] Rebecca Gonzalez, "One Blocks East of El Pino," https://ladydrug.wordpress.com/one-block-east-of-el-pino/

[324] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.

[325] Rebecca Gonzalez, "One Blocks East of El Pino," https://ladydrug.wordpress.com/one-block-east-of-el-pino/

permission and without a man, as well as to stay out late, may have led people to call her a menace, yet she was willing to be called these things if she was able to experience being alive and free, even if for only a moment.

Gonzalez and her friend claim that the gig does not satisfy her quota of defiance. Instead of going home when it ends, she and her friend looked for something more, or as the verse indicates, “so we move on, we can taste the early morning, but our energy defies the hour, we can feel more adventure about, to be found past Blanchard (Street) in City Terrace.”[326] In their search for more defiance, they return to the hillside section of her neighborhood. Past Blanchard Street on Gage Avenue, the poet arrives at places that are often considered dangerous by outsiders because these narrow streets curve and bend. People that walk these hillsides have created pathways that cut across empty lots, however, and make short cuts to different bus stops and corner stores. For many youths in the neighborhood, these pathways lead to places that offer a safe hiding place where one cannot be seen, yet can still see views of the city.

Gonzalez informs the landscape with her own ideas. As she writes, “Spray painting graphics and words and amendments…Those walls of concrete are what we defy, we decorate those walls with graphics as if making a wish list….”[327] As a symbolic system, graffiti is Gonzalez’s vehicle to create narratives that illustrate for her, “preferred images about what these streets really mean.”[328] As a method to communicate with others, she and her friend mark the walls to overwrite racialized, gendered, and criminalized narratives about City Terrace. In a section

[326] Rebecca Gonzales, “One Blocks East of El Pino,” https://ladydrug.wordpress.com/one-block-east-of-el-pino/
[327] Rebecca Gonzales, “One Blocks East of El Pino,” https://ladydrug.wordpress.com/one-block-east-of-el-pino/
[328] Rebecca Gonzales, “One Blocks East of El Pino,” https://ladydrug.wordpress.com/one-block-east-of-el-pino/

of the city with many gray concrete walls, Gonzalez acts in the tradition of muralists and barrio calligraphers that cover the area with colorful graphics, signs and symbols of empowerment and dignity in the face of oppression. Gonzales sees the writing as "wish lists" of people singled out for deportation, charged with crimes they did not commit, and consigned to have their needs constantly overlooked by people in power.

A part of Gonzalez's writing practice involves reading at events throughout Greater Los Angeles. Whether she reads at Siete Books in City Terrace, Corazon del Pueblo in Boyle Heights, Here and Now in El Sereno, Beyond Baroque in Venice, or at a range of smaller gatherings in the living rooms across the city, Gonzales believes that an important part of poetry is making concrete connections with the people and places of the city. While Los Angeles offers her many "inviting spaces," in the summer of 2014 she began to feel confined in it. Feeling as if she had "saturated L.A. in her body," she wanted to go somewhere else to "experience new sounds, new smells, meet people from other places to hear what they were talking about."[329] She felt a need to "get lost for a while." As a mother, educator, and dedicated family member who assists her aging parents, Gonzalez believes that her life has more recently become more and more planned by forces outside of her own choosing. Because of the stress and responsibilities of being a single mother, orders from school administrators, and the routes around the city that she has to travel to and from work to avoid traffic, Gonzalez longed for a moment where she could break away from the mundane and planned temporalities and spatialities of the city.

Finding a reason to travel outside of Los Angeles was easy for Gonzalez. Finding the time and money to do so, however, proved to be a challenge. As she confides, "I was going through

[329] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.

a lot in my life, and I thought about getting away from L.A. to get lost, to sort things out, but how was I going to do that? I mean, I would ask myself, how are you going to leave the city when you have no money?"[330] Working full time as a Special Education Teaching Assistant for the Los Angeles Unified School District allows the poet to pay her rent and other bills, but there is nothing left for discretionary spending. Along with fellow poets Iris De Anda and Xitlalic Guijosa Osna, she decided to organize a poetry tour, a trip that would enable them to "get lost." Because Gonzalez is from East Los Angeles, De Anda from north East Los Angeles, and Osna from south East Los Angeles, they decided to name the tour, ELA, NELA, SELA after their respective locations in East Los Angeles.

Gonzales remembers they felt an urgency to go where none of them had ever gone before, and that they wanted to "take East L.A. to other places."[331] The first step in their poetry tour was to pick where they wanted to go. After some thought and deliberation, they decided to travel across the Southwest U.S. Each poet chose a place of her desire. They journeyed to New Orleans, San Antonio, Austin, and Santa Fe in the spring of 2015. While the intent was to travel outside of Los Angeles, they remained bound to the places and people of their community. When they lacked the money to pay for the trip, fundraisers organized by local groups made it possible for the tour to proceed. Gonzalez remembers being overwhelmed by the support she received at a time when she felt uncertain about the trip, "I really didn't think it was going to happen, you know, because I just couldn't save money. Everything I make goes to the bills, for my son…And then all these people came together for us, organizing fundraisers, donating to the cause, whatever they could, giving us support."[332] Moral support proved as important as

[330] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[331] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[332] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.

financial help. As she explains

> "Sometimes, I'd think to myself, what am I doing? I can't do this. People would ask me, 'you're not scared to go?' and guys would even ask, 'as a woman, you're not scared to go?' But then people would send me messages (text and Facebook), and their words made me think the opposite…I had one friend, when we were in New Orleans, they wrote to me and said that they really really loved all the photos we were posting (on Facebook) because they made him feel like he was on tour with us, that made me feel really good too."[333]

Facing an array of issues related to work and family, Gonzalez sought to tap into her identity as a poet to overcome the temptations to pull out of the trip. Friends were not always supportive. She says it "was like they had a problem with me doing it…I felt like it had a lot to do with me being a woman, that I was going to miss work. Some people even asked me questions about [my son]."[334] In this instance, Gonzalez made a choice to focus on the networks of support emanating from the art based social spaces that she had been a part of across Los Angeles to maintain the dream of going on tour. Up until the point of leaving Los Angeles, Gonzales doubted herself, but it was because of the extra push from other poets and artists that she was able to follow through. She remembers boarding the place to New Orleans thinking

> "all of us were thinking of different excuses to tell each other so we wouldn't go…Osna (SELA) said she was going to back out that very day, and we laughed because we were all thinking the same thing…When we were boarding, I got a text from my sister saying that my mom was sick, real sick, in the hospital. I almost got up and went home because I thought she was going to die, she had been real sick lately, but she (her sister) said she was going to take care of her and that there was no way I wasn't going to go."

Landing in New Orleans on March 27, 2015 Gonzalez was overcome with joy for making it through what had been a hectic six months of fundraising to make the trip happen. Reading at a poetry space called the Tenderloin, Gonzalez was immediately gratified to see that people responded favorably to her poems. Staying in the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans for two

[333] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[334] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.

days, she sought to take in as much of her surroundings as possible. During her walks around the neighborhood she immediately noticed many abandoned buildings around her. In one particular instance, she had gravitated to a brick building. Gonzalez could not figure out why her attention was drawn to this building until one evening she noticed that the desolate place turned into a lively social space. After dark, the windows that had been shut were now open, and the plywood covering the doorway was removed. From the building, music, laughter, and people spilled out into the sidewalk and street. Gonzales felt this transformation of space was familiar, "I had seen this before. I knew about this. It was like what we do back home, that's what I was thinking, and I was just happy to see this, that people in the Ninth Ward, nine years after Katrina, people were laughing, and taking off wood from the windows (of the building) to have a good time. I knew about that. It felt good to experience that."[335]

Following the poetry reading in New Orleans, ELA, NELA, and SELA drove to San Antonio and Austin. On March 30, 2015, the poets read in San Antonio at a bar and performance space called the Squeeze Box. Again, Gonzalez was elated to see the crowds of people that arrived interested in her poetry, as well as those of the two women she travelled with. Following their reading, they attended other poetry events that night. The most exuberant place they visited was a bar called Hi-Tones. Gonzalez remembers, "we went there and that night there was a Selena birthday tribute…The energy in there was so great, so upbeat, and that's what I was looking for…I was really tired, but I didn't want to go to sleep, and I didn't want to be sitting down somewhere...People were dancing, and singing along to Selena's music. The DJ was really mixing in some great music."[336] Taking a break from dancing, Gonzalez walked around the establishment to take a look at the décor, which consisted of

[335] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[336] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.

posters of Chicana/o, Tejana/o, and Mexican music stars, as well as posters of civil rights leaders. Wondering about who had organized the place, Gonzales ran into the owner of the establishment behind the bar. As it turned out, he was a local Chicano, who had earned a degree in Chicana/o Studies from the University of Texas, San Antonio. In their conversation, he told Gonzales that he and his brother had never imagined themselves becoming owners of a bar until they began to think about creating a venue with music that they liked to dance to decorated with posters of musicians and civil rights leaders they looked up to.

The following morning, ELA, NELA, and SELA drove to Austin. Here they read at Resistencia Books, a place founded by the late poet and activist, Raul Salinas. To a packed house, the trio read their poetry. Again, they were overcome by the support they received. By this time in the trip, Gonzales was physically and mentally drained. These feelings began to make her doubt her ability to finish the tour with the group. She recalls, "It was a long couple of days. I started to feel it. I was feeling tired…Not having money was also on my mind." Referring to her inability to pay for food, or other amenities on their trip, Gonzales began to feel like she was taking away resources from the others.

Arriving in New Mexico proved to be a turning point for Gonzalez. Staying at the home of Tara Trudell, she began to feel differently. Beginning their stay with a visit to natural hot springs with Trudell and a group of women, the poet was overtaken by the energy from the water and their camaraderie. She learned that Trudell had recently re-engaged with her own art practices after having put them aside for decades. Gonzales remembers that Trudell told her that being married had proved to be a situation where she gave all of her energy to everyone else, and had nothing left for herself. After choosing to divorce her husband, she was determined to find balance in her life again, and become a stronger person for her children, but

first and foremost, a stronger person for herself. Trudell explained that her newfound strength helped her become active in protecting the land and water around her hometown, which is threatened by a potential fracking operation.

Physically reinvigorated Gonzales began to feel emotionally and spiritually centered. Listening to the stories of strength to continue pushing forward in the midst of struggle, Gonzales recounts,

> "It was a magical experience. I felt like being there was medicine for me…I listened to women that have been through some hard times, things that I've not experienced, and then they shared stories of things that we have in common…like being a single mother, raising children, and thinking about how to set an example for them to be strong and conscious people…I heard a lot about how important it is to take care of yourself before we attempt to take care of others. I knew that, but sometimes it's hard to follow. Listening to these women talk about this, and for them to show us how they practice it (take care of themselves), how they take care of each other, that was just so powerful. I gave thanks for being able to be there."[337]

With an evening of poetry ahead of them, Gonzalez pushed the idea of leaving prematurely out of her head. She felt motivated in the present moment.

Following their poetry reading in New Mexico, ELA, NELA, and SELA flew to Los Angeles on April 5, 2015. Arriving home to City Terrace, Gonzalez remembers feeling like she had accomplished what she had set out to do. She opines, "I began to think that in order for me to write, I had to experience something different. I wanted to feel the depths of a new place, and I wanted to crawl into the alleyways of another neighborhood in a city that I hadn't been to, and I did that (while on tour)."[338] Listening to punk rock music in the closet of her family's home, sneaking out of her home to attend gigs, writing about traversing across city space to attend gigs, and travelling on tour across the Southwest U.S. are not discrete acts for

[337] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.
[338] Interview with Rebecca Gonzalez, Los Angeles, California, December 21, 2015.

Gonzalez, but part of an interactive and multifaceted practice of feeling alive and free.

While people may think sneaking out of a home in the early morning hours to go running around a cemetery, defying house rules to listen to punk rock music in the closet, attending gigs, writing poetry, and going on tour are small acts, for people from aggrieved groups living in communities that have been stripped of social assets, these acts are vital to maintaining creativity and the joys of a world worth living in.

Conclusion

When Anthony Razo blamed his self-inflicted gunshot wound on two made-up baldheaded Latino youths brandishing a revolver in the early morning hours on a City Terrace hillside, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and other civic leaders deployed the racial coded terms gangs, guns, and bald headed youth to foment a moral panic used to justify massive police repression. This event typifies how working class Chicana/o and Latinxs experience the *barrio* as a zone of social abandonment where the most robust forms of government services come in the form of militarized policing.

By becoming border hoppers and callejeras, Sin Remedio and Rebecca Gonzalez utilized punk rock and poetry as tools to create for themselves new social identities and new social relationships. They authored stories that authorized themselves to be people who actively refused to be consigned to spaces of last resort subject to various forms of racialized and gendered second class citizenship.

Chapter Five: 'Taking Back the Boulevard': Politics of Place and Space on Whittier Boulevard

In this chapter, I examine how working class Chicana/o and Latinx members of lowrider car clubs reclaim a one-mile stretch of road on Whittier Boulevard in East Los Angeles. The history of attempts to claim this boulevard as a vernacular social space spans five decades. In my attendance at a series of lowrider car events known collectively as "Taking Back the Boulevard" and more recently referred to as "Boulevard Nights," I have come to understand that working class Chicanas/os and Latinxs utilize both place- and mobile- based identities as central tools in their attempts to successfully refuse being treated as "disposable" people in Los Angeles.[339] Neoliberal social policies and practices create conditions in working class communities that often force a retreat from established and approved public spaces. Sometimes these places are rigidly policed; at other times their demographics and costs of entry inhibit working class entry. Yet popular desires for public visibility and sociability do not disappear. Instead, they become channeled in creative new directions. Lowrider car club member Cadillac Steve of the City Wide car club organizes "cruises" to repurpose the boulevard as a place for large crowds of people to come out and exercise their social right to the city. Car cruises amount to more than simply driving along a street. Cruising is a means of deepening time, taking up space, and widening the possibilities for democratic social relationships. Customizing cars and staging a cruising event helps create a social world rich with display, performance, music, and face-to-face interactions. The temporality, spatiality, and sociality created by working class Chicanas/os and Latinxs who cruise "low and slow" attracts the attention of bystanders and onlookers, but also brings surveillance by county officials and

[339] Grady Clay, Close-Up: How to Read the American City, (New York: Praeger, 1973). Pp. 65.

police personnel who wish to keep this boulevard open for the exclusive use of consumers and business interests.

Cadillac Steve remembers listening to older car club members tell stories about the apex of the Chicano movement and the lowrider car events that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. Photographs that he has collected from *Lowrider Magazine* and from personal collections inspire him to try to match or exceed the joyous atmosphere that seemed to prevail in the "old days." He organizes events that are partly informed by the struggles with racial and social-spatial barriers that he has experienced, by direct and indirect memories of when people in the 1960s and 1970s transgressed similar barriers, and by his activity in -- and appreciation of -- inter-racial and inter-ethnic spaces in the city. Selecting Whitter Boulevard as the preferred site for cruising drew its inspiration and legitimacy from a collective historical memory that recognized the street as a site that has historically been claimed by the people as a public venue, that has been fought for resolutely despite official opposition and repression. A long history propelled Cadillac Steve and other car club cruisers to stage their shows on the boulevard.

The Making of Whittier Boulevard

In the popular imaginary of Chicana/o and Latinx communities throughout the southwest United States, Whittier Boulevard looms large as an honored destination where people can congregate. Yet despite this reputation, the boulevard has often been more of a contested space than a welcoming home. Before becoming the lively site that it is known as today, the site where Chicanas/os and Latinxs cruise and congregate, Whittier Boulevard was Stephenson Avenue, a narrow street that began at Boyle Avenue in Boyle Heights and ran east through the city of Whittier. The city, county and state advanced many different plans to develop Stephenson Avenue. Following the adoption of a state gasoline tax in 1924, engineers and

urban planners finally had access to a dedicated source of funding for highway construction. The creation of the Whittier Boulevard Highway initiated significant urban transformation in Los Angeles.[340]

The construction of the highway was a tremendous physical project. Mathew W. Roth argues that it was both an economic and a social project, especially since state engineers made decisions about its route for racialized reasons.[341] Roth shows that certain neighborhoods in the city were treated as dispensable and their residents as removable. For working class eastside residents, predominately Jewish, Russian Molokan, Japanese, Mexican, and Black, this formulation constituted an assault on the rich inter-ethnic and inter-racial world they had created and enjoyed.

Chief District Engineer Spencer V. Cortelyou of the state Division of Highways played a prominent role in this racialized planning process. The communities living on the eastside were represented in plans for the coming highway as nothing more than a "blank spot" slated for replacement with roads that Roth describes as the "most intrusive structures ever to be placed into an urban neighborhood" because of the size and number of freeways slated to cut through the terrain.[342] Under this logic, Whittier Boulevard was intended to become a route linking San Diego and San Francisco, part of a "modern" highway system linking California's geographically dispersed businesses and population.[343] The project expanded the narrow unpaved Stephenson Avenue into four wide lanes, introduced a paved surface of four-inch-

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[340] Matthew W. Roth, "Whittier Boulevard, Sixth Street Bridge, and the Origins of Transportation Exploitation in East Los Angeles," *Journal of American History,* December 1, 2004, 91: 1161-1214

[341] Matthew W. Roth, "Whittier Boulevard, Sixth Street Bridge, and the Origins of Transportation Exploitation in East Los Angeles." Pp. 732.

[342] Matthew W. Roth, "Whittier Boulevard, Sixth Street Bridge, and the Origins of Transportation Exploitation in East Los Angeles." Pp. 731.

[343] Matthew W. Roth, "Whittier Boulevard, Sixth Street Bridge, and the Origins of Transportation Exploitation in East Los Angeles." Pp. 731.

thick asphalt, wide curbs, and a gutter system along the entire stretch of Whittier Boulevard. According to Roth, the new thoroughfare achieved the status of being the "most expensive highway built by the state up to that time, both in total cost and in unit cost."[344] In the process, it ultimately demolished five schoolyards, and cut away parts of Hollenbeck Park and a city playground.[345] This path of destruction destroyed familiar public places in the neighborhood, and in the process damaged a collective emotional ecosystem. Today, mental health practitioners generally recognize that feeling secure in place has important emotional, economic, and social benefits, but the development mentality of 1920s city building and highway construction simply celebrated demolition, displacement and new construction.[346]

The logic that justified the destruction of cherished places and the removal of people from the highway's path had long been embedded in local zoning practices. In 1909, local officials approved a land use ordinance that designated areas as either residential, industrial or commercial.[347] The westside of the city was reserved exclusively for residential purposes, while the eastside was left open to industry.[348] Through the self-fulfilling trajectory built into these decisions, westside neighborhoods became ecologically safer and economically more valuable than those on the eastside. By the time the state broke ground for the Whittier Boulevard project, the racial and social-spatial order of the 1909 zoning ordinance had

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[344] Matthew W. Roth, "Whittier Boulevard, Sixth Street Bridge, and the Origins of Transportation Exploitation in East Los Angeles." Pp. 731.

[345] Matthew W. Roth, "Whittier Boulevard, Sixth Street Bridge, and the Origins of Transportation Exploitation in East Los Angeles."

[346] Mindy Thompson Fullilove, Urban Alchemy: Restoring Joy in America's Sorted-Out Cities, (New York: New Village Press, 2013).

[347] Constance G. Anthony, "Urban Forced Removals in Rio de Janeiro and Los Angeles: North-South Similarities in Race and City," *The University of Miami Inter-American Law Review*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Spring 2013), pp. 337-364.

[348] Constance G. Anthony, "Urban Forced Removals in Rio de Janeiro and Los Angeles: North-South Similarities in Race and City," *The University of Miami Inter-American Law Review*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Spring 2013), pp. 337-364; George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

thoroughly shaped the framework with which state engineers and local officials made decisions about the location of amenities, opportunities, hazards, nuisances, and transportation corridors.

Reclaiming the Boulevard

Despite the intrusiveness of the Whittier Boulevard Highway, people on the eastside did not shy away from the boulevard or other thoroughfares. During the 1960s, the streets emerged as important sites for political protest and mass mobilization. For example, on March 3, 1968, over one thousand students walked out of Abraham Lincoln High School and poured into the streets to protest racist school policies and practices. Students at five other schools across East Los Angeles walked out as well in a collective action that became known as the school "Blowouts." (See chapter 1) Turning streets from utilitarian venues dedicated for use as conduits for transporting goods into stages for festive congregation, celebration and mobilization disrupted business as usual, caught the attention of authorities and the general public, and offered participants a deeply embodied, affective and sensually captivating sense of their linked fate and potential collective power. The blowouts played a major role in launching the urban phase of the Chicano movement.[349]

Another effort to politicize the streets came through the creation of the Barrio Free Clinic on Whittier Boulevard, which opened on May 30, 1969. As Barrio Free Clinic administrator and Minister of the Brown Berets, Gloria Arellanes, remembers, Whittier Boulevard was a "perfect" location for their efforts because it was "the central avenue through East Los Angeles."[350] From this location, women on the Brown Berets clinic staff ventured out to distribute information in the many different residential neighborhoods adjacent to the

[349] Mario T. Garcia, *The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement*, (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015). Pp. 8

[350] Mario T. Garcia, *The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement*, (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015). Pp. 178.

boulevard. Going door to door or stopping passers by outside local high schools, Brown Beret clinic workers informed the public about a wide range of services offered free of charge. The Berets had started as a group seeking to end police brutality in their neighborhoods. They honed and refined their original mission, branching out to undertake a series of projects designed to meet the diverse needs of *barrio* residents. Under the direction of Arellanes and other women of the Brown Berets, the clinic offered working class residents of East Los Angeles -- both documented and undocumented -- access to greatly needed medical care provided by a reliable and dedicated staff made up of community organizers and medical practitioners.[351]

Just over one year after the creation of the Barrio Free Clinic, Whittier Boulevard once again played a central role as a public venue, this time as a place for Chicanas/os and their allies to mobilize against the Vietnam War under the auspices of the National Chicano Antiwar Moratorium. Demanding an end to the Vietnam War and protesting the disproportionate number of Chicanos being drafted and killed in it, over twenty thousand people marched down Whittier Boulevard on August 29, 1970. To this day, the antiwar moratorium holds a place of honor as one of the most momentous mass actions of the Chicano movement.

Politicizing the streets presented its own set consequences. The Chicano movement attracted the surveillance of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, military intelligence units, and local police agencies. Youths who participated in the blowouts and the teachers who stood by them in solidarity were harassed, beaten, and incarcerated.[352] The Brown Berets were infiltrated by informants and provocateurs from different law-enforcement agencies. Mario T.

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[351] Juan Herrera, "¡La Lucha Continua! Gloria Arellanes and Women in the Chicano Movement," March 26, 2015, Accessed here: https://www.kcet.org/departures-columns/la-lucha-continua-gloria-arellanes-and-women-in-the-chicano-movement

[352] Mario T. Garcia and Sal Castro, *Blowout!: Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

Garcia argues that the violence at the Chicano Moratorium was a "police-inspired riot" started by leaders of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and the Los Angeles Police Department who were "determined not to allow Chicanos to control the streets of East Los Angeles."[353] The riot turned what was first described by moratorium organizer and participant Gloria Arellanes as "very upbeat…very celebratory and exciting" event into a chaotic experience.[354]

Mythohistorical Intervention: "To Cruise Aztlán"

Activists working to provide medical services, to march for peace and to protest inequality, coalesced around a distinct body of signs, symbols and ideas rooted in their common history. Lee Bebout contends that while strategies like marches and protests are important to identity-based social movements like the historical Chicano movement, so are the narratives, signs and symbols that emerge from cultural producers in the movement, from what he calls, "mythohistorical interventions." The United Farm Workers eagle, for example, became a source through which community could be envisioned and citizenship enacted.[355] Other interventions included the invocation of a mythical Aztlán, an ancient homeland steeped in Indigenous lore and not reducible exclusively to the politics of either the U.S. or Mexico. The eagle was equally legible to speakers of English and speakers of Spanish. Aztlan could be both American and Mexican, Iberian and Indian, and Protestant and Catholic. The Aztec Eagle and images of the Virgin of Guadalupe reconciled in symbolic form the contradictions that impeded unity and solidarity among Chicanas/os who organized and took part in marches, actions, and

[353] Mario T. Garcia, *The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement*, (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015). Pp. 9, 10.
[354] Mario T. Garcia, *The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement*, (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015). Pp. 201.
[355] Lee Bebout, *Mythohistorical Interventions: The Chicano Movement and Its Legacies*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). Pp. 2-5.

service provision on Whittier Boulevard with a shared history of struggle for dignity across various differences and ruptures in experience.[356] Although mythohistorical interventions are not free of contradictions, and in fact depend on airing them, their creation by activists engaged in the Chicano movement offered heterogeneous groups of demonized Mexican Americans from across the U.S agency to collectively challenge their treatment as second class citizens. Moreover, these interventions gave sanction to young people to take over the streets and take back a vital part of the city for themselves.

As the imagined native homeland of the Aztecs before their migration south into what is now Mexico City, the idea of Aztlán offered an opening for Chicanas/os to challenge the politics of disposability that often perceived them as forever foreign to the U.S., and therefore removable, if not deportable. Because part of Aztlán occupied territory that later became part of the U.S. the ideal of Aztlán changed the representation of Chicana/o from late arrivals to earliest Indigenous inhabitants.[357] While Chicanas/os by definition live in the geopolitical territory of the United States, Aztlán was deployed by activists and artists to remind them that the United States is located on their ancestral homelands. The exact location of Aztlán is disputed, however, some Chicana/o activists have asserted that Aztlán is not reducible to territory on the map, that it is a cultural signifier "at home" anywhere that the *barrio* is. Yet deploying the concept of the territory of Aztlan enabled Chicanas/os to puncture the smug self-importance permeating Anglo exclusion by identifying Anglos as occupiers.[358] Images of being on one's ancestral homelands and yet simultaneously despised as a foreign intruder

[356] Lee Bebout, *Mythohistorical Interventions: The Chicano Movement and Its Legacies*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). Pp. 2.
[357] Lee Bebout, *Mythohistorical Interventions: The Chicano Movement and Its Legacies*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
[358] Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, (Boston: Longman, 2011).

instilled in Chicanas/os an anger that they sought to channel into mobilizations for community empowerment and reclamations of the *barrio* for their own use.

Aztlán provided Chicanas/os with a strong narrative in support of their social right to claim places on the streets for actions and marches. While Whittier Boulevard was not the only street politicized by the Chicano movement, it did stand as a central symbolic representation of Aztlán. Its particular historical development as a place that was constructed originally for commerce and local business interests, made all that much more dramatic and memorable its transformation into a special place where large crowds of people who were regularly demonized could gather and declare their right to organize for community empowerment and social justice. Utilized for a variety of purposes by ordinary people, the mythohistorical interventions of Aztlán infused the creative efforts of people treated as disposable by those in power to become critical subjects posing collective challenge to diverse and multiple injustices.

By the late 1960s, Chicanas/os gathered frequently to claim Whittier Boulevard, fusing car cruising with political expressions of Aztlán. Before Arellanes started her activism as minister of the Brown Berets, an administrator of the Barrio Free Clinic, and a participant in the Anti-War Moratorium, she and her high school peers found style to be an invaluable tool "for our own self-protection and to make us feel good about one another."[359] In the years following her high school graduation, Arellanes learned how to drive and got into the habit of cruising on Whittier Boulevard. In fact, it was after one night of cruising on the boulevard with her friends that she ended up at La Piranya, a café on Olympic Boulevard in East Los Angeles where she would meet the Brown Berets, and later join the organization.

[359] Mario Garcia, *The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement*, (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015). Pp. 123.

As the decade came to a close, Whittier Boulevard was the site of conflict between Chicana/o youths and store owners on the boulevard. In response to an August 1967 report "Business and Mexican-American Relations in East Los Angeles," local residents organized protests against the significant influence merchants had on social policy in the surrounding East Los Angeles community. An underlying argument of the report was that merchants were suspicious of and hostile to Chicana/o youths that congregated on the boulevard. The report revealed that many of the merchants on Whittier Boulevard were not residents of the *barrio*.[360] Oddly, they called the lowriders "outsiders," positioning themselves as insiders. Complaints by business owners were often enough to impel police officers to remove forcibly the car cruisers and the crowds of onlookers from the boulevard. In response to the study, an article in *La Raza Magazine* declared sarcastically, "Whittier Boulevard, because of its heavy commercial concentration, is heavily controlled. The exploiters' property must be protected at all costs!"[361] Carlos Montes, co-founder of the Brown Berets, challenged the validity of the claims made by merchants about Chicanas/os being outsiders in their own community and causing violence in the streets. He asserted, "It's a lie. It's an excuse. The real outsiders are the merchants…Most of the violence that I saw was police beating cruisers. It got so bad that in '68, we held a rally on Whittier Boulevard to protest the violence."[362]

The combination of the heightened criminalization of Chicanas/os congregating on the boulevard and the effect the study's results had on Chicana/o students led to a mass protest that included lowrider car clubs, students, and community organizers. On July 3, 1968, hundreds of people gathered on Whittier Boulevard to protest their criminalization in the eyes of business

[360] Charles M. Tatum, *Lowriders in Chicano culture: From Low to Slow to Show*, (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2011). Pp. 19.

[361] Paige Penland, *Lowrider: History, Pride, Culture*, (St. Paul: Motorbooks, 2003). Pp. 39.

[362] Paige Penland, *Lowrider: History, Pride, Culture*, (St. Paul: Motorbooks, 2003). Pp. 40.

interests and local officials. They demanded to be left alone, carrying signs that read, "the boulevard belongs to Chicanos!" and "Quit Harassing us!" Local police called for backup from the Special Enforcement Bureau (an agency made up of personnel that had recently subdued the Isla Vista Chicano Demonstration at the University of California, Santa Barbara) to remove the growing crowds of people.[363] The combination of tear gas and police barricades trapped many protestors on the boulevard until they were arrested. Of the hundreds detained that night, many were taken to a jail where six people had recently died while in custody, reportedly by hanging themselves in their jail cells. Many more were threatened and beaten while they were held by the police at various stations.

The effect of police violence caused ferment on the boulevard that lasted for the following three nights. When the upheaval was suppressed, the section of Whittier Boulevard between Atlantic Avenue and Eastern Avenue was closed off to cruising. The turmoil was blamed solely on the actions of the residents, not on the violence by police forces in support of the desires of merchants. Roberto "Beto" Hernandez, then the president of New Wave car club, recalls that in the face of mounting police violence and criminalization of Chicanas/os in East Los Angeles, car clubs began to explore ways that they could reclaim the boulevard for cruising. In a courageous move, Hernandez got together with people in about 80 other cars and parked at the Sheriff's Station, protesting with signs that read, "Don't Close Our Boulevard!" and "Don't Close Whittier!"[364] To their dismay, the police kept the boulevard closed to cruising, forcing the dissidents to seek out other places to congregate.

Police assaults on Chicanas/os and the closure of the boulevard instilled a sense of unity among members of different car clubs that had not existed prior to this action. Following four

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[363] Paige Penland, *Lowrider: History, Pride, Culture*, (St. Paul: Motorbooks, 2003). Pp. 38.
[364] Paige Penland, *Lowrider: History, Pride, Culture*, (St. Paul: Motorbooks, 2003).

days of protests and the barricading of the boulevard by the police, car club members with histories of conflict with one another began to develop a sense of collectivity through shared efforts to regain access to the streets. For those that congregated on the boulevard, these engagements brought an end to long standing and large scale feuds among rival Chicana/o car clubs that were known as "the club wars."[365] Additionally, the newly formed Federation of Lowriders began to demand that their constitutional right to freedom of assembly be recognized by local officials, merchants, and police forces. Coupled with the call to Aztlán by Chicana/o activists, the reclaiming of the boulevard by lowrider car clubs was situated within an expanding narrative of the social right to inhabit space in the city. After much pressure and protest from Chicanas/os demanding their right to Whittier Boulevard, county officials conceded, and formally reopened the boulevard to car clubs and cruising in late 1969. For car club members who cruised on Whittier whether it was legal to do so or not, this meant that their habitual cruising engagements had become decriminalized.

Before Whittier Boulevard was reopened, many car clubs decided to find other places to cruise. Cruising became popular on Van Nuys Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley, on Tweedy Boulevard in Southgate, and at Montebello Park in Montebello, and Legg Lake Park in South EL Monte. It was not until the late 1970s when people began to gather again on the Boulevard in large crowds. According to Roberto Rodriguez, then a journalist for the newly established *Lowrider Magazine*, by the late 1970s Whittier Boulevard won renown as "the lowriding capital of the world."[366] Chicana/o lowrider clubs that congregated on the boulevard took great pride in this recognition. With cruising on Whittier Boulevard going strong, people from all parts of the Los Angeles region began to show up to join the festivities. Whittier

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[365] Paige Penland, *Lowrider: History, Pride, Culture*, (St. Paul: Motorbooks, 2003). Pp. 39
[366] Roberto Rodriguez, *Assault with a Deadly Weapon.*

Boulevard proved such a large draw on weekends, that many people went there desiring to be "there in the middle of traffic."[367]

Rodriguez wrote in *Lowrider* that the people and car clubs that came out to the Boulevard by the late 1970s no longer solely represented the lowriders from the *barrios* of Los Angeles, but now included people "from all parts of Southern California."[368] Thousands of people flocked to the boulevard each weekend. The numbers grew even larger with the release of the movie, *Boulevard Nights*. Rodriguez claims that while the movie was purported to be about cruising on the boulevard, it essentially sensationalized the tragic activities of impoverished Chicana/o youths. This provoked a larger police presence on the boulevard than usual. On March 21, 1979, the movie premiered in the face of protests by student activists and community organizations at different movie theatres across the city declaring that this film criminalized Chicana/o youths. People cruised up and down a one-mile stretch on the boulevard until the early hours of the morning. The crowds showed no signs of letting up. Between March 23 and 25, Sheriff's department officers began a process of forcefully removing Chicanas/os from the boulevard.[369]

According to Rodriguez, the police began to beat a man who appeared to be preaching in the middle of Whittier Boulevard near McDonnell Avenue. As people screamed at the police urging them to stop the beating, the officers attacked the crowd. Rodriguez was struck between the eyes with a baton by Los Angeles County Sheriff's officer while taking photos of the brutality as it took place. Laying handcuffed and face down on the concrete in a puddle of his own blood, Rodriguez witnessed the police do to many others what had just happened to him.

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[367] Roberto Rodriguez, *Assault with a Deadly Weapon.*
[368] Roberto Rodriguez, *Assault with a Deadly Weapon.*
[369] Roberto Rodriguez, *Assault with a Deadly Weapon.*

After a terrifying escort in the back of a police car to receive medical attention, Rodriguez woke up in the jail ward of the Los Angeles County Hospital. Taking in the shock that arose from the sight of his own disfigured face, Rodriguez discovered that he had been charged with inciting a riot and assault with a deadly weapon on a peace officer. Throughout that long weekend, he remembers seeing dozens upon dozens of men brought into the hospital with serious injuries who faced criminal charges resulting essentially from being beaten by the police on Whittier Boulevard. In addition to discovering that the Sheriff's Department officers who beat him claimed that Rodriguez had attacked them with his camera, Rodriguez had also learned that they had arrested over five hundred people who were either cruising in their vehicles or walking along the street.[370]

The militarized closure of the boulevard to car cruising did not shock Rodriguez, nor was he surprised by the violent beatings and arrests. Rodriguez decided not to suffer in silence, as he later testified to a U.S. Civil Rights Commission hearing in San Jose, California in 1979. The tribunal took place in response to complaints by the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) and other groups to the Department of Justice about the kinds of police brutality targeting Chicanos that occurred on the boulevard in 1968, 1970, and 1979.[371] In a letter dated on February 9, 1978, President and General Counsel of the MALDEF, Vilma S. Martinez, urged the Attorney General of the U.S., Griffin B. Bell, to support federal action against the "epidemic of violence and hatred directed against Mexican Americans" and the "shadows of fear" caused by law-enforcement officials across the southwest U.S.[372] In its

[370] Roberto Rodriguez, *Assault with a Deadly Weapon.*
[371] Alfredo Mirandé, *Gringo Justice. (*Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987).
[372] Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), "MALDEF Documents Official Abuse of Authority Against Mexican-Americans in Letter to Attorney General Griffen Bell." (San Francisco: MALDEF, 1978).

own investigation into state violence directed at Mexican American communities, MALDEF found that between 1975 and 1977 law enforcement officers had "killed sixteen Chicanos, and shot and severely beaten many more." Framing the brutal treatment directed against Mexican Americans as a "wave of violence," Martinez went on to remind Attorney General Bell that the poor "quality of response by local prosecutors, judges, and jurors in many cases reflects the rampant prejudice against Mexican Americans in many parts of the southwest U.S."[373]

Before becoming a journalist for *Lowrider*, Rodriguez had covered the 1977 trial of a retired sheriff's deputy, Billy Joe McIlvain who had lured a teenager, David Dominguez of San Gabriel, into his home and held him against his will before executing him.[374] Stories like that encouraged Rodriguez to work on a story that connected the beatings of *pachuco* youths by police forces in the 1940s to the beatings of youths in the 1970s. Because of the sight of all the brutalized men that came into the hospital the night he was beaten and the vivid memories of screaming men and women on the boulevard, Rodriguez predicted that Chicanas/os' "right to cruise Aztlán" would be truncated by terror, by police assault, and that the lowriders would not come back to the boulevard any time soon.[375]

<u>Banished From The Boulevard</u>

During this time, sheriff's officers placed barricades on the boulevard on weekend evenings. Although these blockades were supposed to cover only the area from Eastern Avenue to Atlantic Boulevard, they were placed further east near the Commerce Shopping Center because that site had become a lively venue for young Chicanas/os and Latinxs to gather. In an effort

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[373] Roberto Rodriguez, "'Not Counting the Mexicans': The Many Tentacles of State Violence Against Black-Brown-Indigenous Communities," *Truthout*, February 4, 2015, http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/28921-not-counting-mexicans-or-indians-the-many-tentacles-of-state-violence-against-black-brown-indigenous-communities

[374] Roberto Rodriguez, "'Not Counting the Mexicans': The Many Tentacles of State Violence Against Black-Brown-Indigenous Communities."

[375] Roberto Rodriguez, *Assault with a Deadly Weapon.* Pp.

to mark a new day on the boulevard following the clashes, the Whittier Boulevard Business Association began a beautification project that underlined the area's historical roots in a Hispanic (Spanish not Mexican) past.[376] The erection of "El Arco," a Spanish-Colonial sculpture that has a 65-foot span and weighs 14-tons of steel and reaches across Whittier Boulevard just east of Arizona Street in January of 1986 symbolized the boulevard's new public face. The centerpiece of a multi-million-dollar redevelopment project, El Arco would by the year's end be surrounded by a "Hispanic Walk of Fame" that mimicked the Hollywood Walk of Fame only in this case celebrating the names of famous local people. Linking the history of Whittier Boulevard to El Camino Real, a thoroughfare created by Spanish missionaries, the central focus of the boulevard during the 1980s would again center business aspirations for eliminating demonized working class residents and their culture from visibility on the boulevard.[377]

With the exception of a few lowrider cars that would drive by to check out the scene, the criminalization of cruising on the boulevard had forced people to go elsewhere. During the 1990s, people attempted to organize cruises again on the boulevard, but they did not succeed. Immediately following the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion, local officials stationed military personal and police along the boulevard. In 1997, they passed an ordinance that criminalized any motorist who passed the same location on the boulevard within six hours as a cruiser. This law functioned to disperse gathering crowds for years to come. Cadillac Steve remembers that the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 9/11 had a similar effect on the boulevard for quite a while. In his experience, it would not be until the years after 2010 that the younger members

[376] Carol McGraw, "Rebirth of Whittier Boulevard: 65-Foot Arch Marks a Dream Come True," Los Angeles Times, January 9, 1986, http://articles.latimes.com/1986-01-09/local/me-14220_1_sidewalk
[377] Carol McGraw, "Rebirth of Whittier Boulevard: 65-Foot Arch Marks a Dream Come True," Los Angeles Times, January 9, 1986.

of various car clubs began to express openly their desire to organize a gathering on the boulevard like they did "back in the day."[378]

"Those Hops Had an Impact…"

Around the time of their banishment from the boulevard in the late 1970s and early 1980s, many lowrider crews started to focus their attention on competitions of style and performance held at "super shows."[379] Unlike the uncertainty that policing created constantly on Whittier Boulevard, at super shows people were able to gather with one another at an event that was certain to last as long as the flyer indicated without being broken up by the law. In addition to the more traditional best in show competitions, displays of hydraulic lifts attracted attention at these contests. Moving from the boulevard to the show room drew added attention away from the look of the car and the glide of the ride to performances of how high the cars could hop. Some of the winners of these contests at first could make their cars hop upwards of twenty-four inches.[380] As the years passed, and the owners of lowrider "hoppers" became more experienced with hydraulic technology, the vertical hopping inches continued to grow. In recent years, there has been a revival of elaborate enamel paint jobs and customizations, which has only raised interest in car hops.[381]

Car hops have been a part of car cruising since hydraulics were placed in cars. In the last few years, however, hopper practitioners began to take the car hop out of the super shows and into retail store parking lots.[382] What started in parking lots as a competitive attempt to hop higher than a tall-boy beer can, eventually turned into an attraction that can bring hundreds of

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[378] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 5, 2015, Los Angeles, California.
[379] Ruben Mendoza, "Cruising Art and Culture in Aztlán: Lowriding in the Mexican American Southwest."
[380] Ruben Mendoza, "Cruising Art and Culture in Aztlán."
[381] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 5, 2015, Los Angeles, California.
[382] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 5, 2015, Los Angeles, California.

people together in a matter of minutes., Cadillac Steve believes people flock to attend them "because it's an event where so many people have a good time, people compete, and you get a good crowd out there, people who I'd say really believe in car clubs as making things happen."[383]

On Sunday, July 5, 2015, I accompanied Cadillac Steve and his sons to a "hop" in the city of Long Beach.[384] As he warmed up his vehicle, Cadillac Steve carefully removed some dust from his burgundy 1973 Cadillac Coupe de Ville, and placed an instant wax over the vehicle. His sons cleaned the tires with a special tire care spray and cloth. Shortly afterwards, we jumped on the southbound 710 Freeway, just past Cesar E. Chavez Avenue and Humphreys Avenue. Arriving at a Walmart Super Center, we were among the first cars in a desolate parking lot. By the time Cadillac Steve had parked the car for us to exit, caravans of lowrider vehicles had started to appear. Within ten minutes, the parking lot was becoming filled with beautiful low rider vehicles of all colors, makes, and with what Cadillac Steve would call "classes" ranging from "street cars" like his to "hoppers," and "show cars," each with particular customizations made possible by large but hidden investments in time and money.

People parked their cars in a way that defied the logic of the Walmart parking lot. They positioned their vehicles across several individual parking spaces. Several car clubs had set up their own exhibition spaces that snaked across nearly the entire lot. This remapping of the parking lot allowed for car clubs to establish spaces where they could keep an eye on the festivities and their vehicles at the same time, while creating a route for people to walk through in an organized fashion to get a close-up look at each car. At one side of the hop, cars towed

[383] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 5, 2015, Los Angeles, California.
[384] https://www.kcet.org/departures-columns/crenshaw-boulevard-cruising-through-the-decades

smokers and grills. The people who got out of these vehicles quickly began selling barbecued meats, tacos, hamburgers, and other foods and drinks.

Funk, R&B, and hip hop music filled the air. Walking through the car show with Cadillac Steve and his sons, I was introduced to Asian and Asian American, Black, Chicano, and white car club members from throughout the Greater Los Angeles area. In attendance were hundreds of men, women, and children, many of whom do not own their own low rider vehicles or belong to low rider car clubs, but still attend events like this. Once hops begin, it is the crowds of people that transform the dreary parking lots into lively social spaces.

A space at the center of the show hosted the contests. In one of the contests that the crowd enjoyed most, a twelve-year-old boy, "Bully" from the Inland Empire's Allegation car club, out-hopped and "bullied" a highly touted and extremely expensive lowrider vehicle owned, operated, and brought over from Japan by a Japanese woman visiting Los Angeles. As the third contest commenced, however, a Los Angeles County Sheriff's helicopter overhead began to circle the parking lot. On the street level, police cars arrived and quickly established a perimeter. Several dozen police officers began to give orders for people to disperse or risk being cited, arrested, and having their vehicles towed away. The crowd of people displayed great disappointment with the ending of the show, but the organizers of this hop had other plans. After a brief conversation with friends from other car clubs and a quick glance at his Instagram and Facebook accounts, Cadillac Steve said that people were heading to the neighboring city of Lakewood for a hop that would take place once people from this hop arrived there.

The inter-racial and inter-ethnic crowds enjoying time and space together at car hops serve for Cadillac Steve as a concrete example of how people from across different axes of identity

can get together and enjoy common interests. They desired spaces of their own where they can be in charge of where, when, and what time people gather. Speaking to the influence that hops have had on organizing Boulevard Nights, Cadillac illustrates that, "yeah, those hops had an impact on what I was trying to do. Everybody around me was into the idea of cruising the boulevard, but they were only saying yes with no action, no action at all, so seeing people organize things like hops, yeah, it got me pumped."[385] Recognizing the success of car hop organizers in getting large groups of people together in different parts of the city inspired Cadillac Steve to continue his efforts to organize a cruise down Whittier Boulevard.

"So Did the Stories about the Old Days on Whittier"

Cadillac Steve began to think of organizing Boulevard Nights events in 2014, as a way to revive an old community practice. He explains, "I wanted to cruise the boulevard like they did in the old days. A lot of people tell me about how all the (four) lanes would be taken up by cars, bumper to bumper. You know, I'd think about it, and I'd say to my *compadre*, we're going to do that. We can do that."[386] Sometimes Cadillac Steve thought it was going to be impossible to gather enough people to stop the cars from racing and maneuvering donuts in the middle of the street, actions that interrupted the events whenever they tried to cruise. Racers and stunt drivers pose the risk of crashing into the lowriders, and also attract the police earlier than usual. Steve also found it difficult to stage events because his long days at work driving throughout the Los Angeles region to repair coffee machines at different eateries debilitated him physically. Yet he built an intricate social network of car clubs determined to show up and not be pushed off the boulevard by the police or anyone else. Ruminating on the difficulty of making it to a car club meeting after a thirteen hour shift at work, Cadillac observes, "I have

[385] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 5, 2015, Los Angeles, California.
[386] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 5, 2015, Los Angeles, California.

to do it, we all have to, we agreed to it, and if we don't, it [the car club] will come apart…Believe me sometimes it's real hard, real hard, but I have to keep my word, and your word here [in the car club] means a lot."[387] In spite of being cited by the police for having a lowrider with hydraulics, despite seeing his friends' cars towed away for minor traffic violations, despite experiencing police harassment and ridicule from a range of people telling him that lowriding is a waste of money and time, Cadillac Steve maintained his determination to organize an event that recreated what he imagined cruising in the "old days" to have been like.

As a member of City Wide car club since 2009, Cadillac Steve has attended at least a hundred car shows throughout the southwest. He has embarked on many more car cruises throughout Los Angeles. Before he was a member of City Wide, Cadillac Steve had been a member of Wild Fantasies car club, and before that he was what he called a "solo cruiser," riding throughout the city alongside others, but not belonging to any club. In these different roles within the larger car club scene, Cadillac Steve has firsthand experiences with cruising along many different boulevards throughout the city. None of his experiences, however, could match the stories he would hear from "O.G.'s" about the boulevard. Men and women with at least three decades of car club membership experience would tell him that nothing would ever top the cruises from "back in the day." Kiko from Klique car club, one of the oldest car clubs in Los Angeles, regularly related stories to Cadillac Steve about Whittier Boulevard in the 1970s when large crowds came out to enjoy themselves and see the low-riders traveling freely down the street.

[387] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 5, 2015, Los Angeles, California.

When Cadillac approached O.G.'s to come along cruising with him, however, they did not show interest. He recalls, "I'd say, hey, let's cruise the boulevard, and they'd say, ok when? I'd say, 'this date on a Saturday night,' and they'd say, 'nah, the cops are going to break it up, let's do it on Sunday afternoon.' O.G.'s will talk about the good times, but when it comes time to do something, they only remember the bad times, like the fights with the sheriffs and the club wars, and then they say cruising on a Saturday night won't happen."[388] In Cadillac Steve's experience, it has been extremely rare to see a cruise on a boulevard with all lanes taken up by a steady bumper to bumper flow of lowrider vehicles. "The issue isn't about cars, that there's not enough," he assures me, "it's creating an event where people feel safe to come out."[389] Cadillac Steve notes that during the mid-1990s, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department had officially closed the boulevard to cruising. Although there were then no barricades placed along the street to deter cars from accessing the boulevard between Atlantic Boulevard and Eastern Avenue at sundown as in previous years, Sheriff's officers and California Highway Patrol personnel still cited people who drove through the boulevard in either direction two times within thirty minutes. Faced with the likelihood of an expensive traffic citation, the O.G.'s stayed away from this part of the boulevard, and instead took to congregating at places further east on Whittier Boulevard such as Montebello Park. Looking at photos online and in the occasional old volume of a *Lowrider Magazine,* or simply catching a story that a O.G. was sharing about their experiences on the boulevard from the 1970s, Cadillac Steve was always pleasantly surprised to hear stories about lowriders "standing up to the police" and "having their clubs real organized."[390] In his view, his car club membership revolves around his

[388] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 5, 2015, Los Angeles, California.
[389] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 5, 2015, Los Angeles, California.
[390] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 5, 2015, Los Angeles, California.

burgundy 1973 Cadillac Coupe de Ville and his relationship with his fellow City Wide members to be sure, but it's also about "standing up for what's right…to set an example for the kids, to stand up for what they believe in...You have to ask yourself, am I standing up for what I believe in? I don't think the O.G.'s thought that I was thinking about all that when they were telling their stories, but I was."[391]

While stories about the old days motivated Cadillac Steve to organize an event that matched, or surpassed the magnitude of cars and people having a good time in the 1960s and 1970s, the popular narrative of the boulevard being the place to be was also registered in some of the music that surrounded him. In what is perhaps the most respected song about Whittier Boulevard among East Los Angeles residents, "Whittier Boulevard" by Thee Midniters captured the way that Chicanas/os culturally repurposed physical place for their own social interests. The instrumental song's raucous celebration of a street characterized by physical barricades, state sanctioned violence, and incessant arrests, speaks to a transgressive politics in Chicana/o cultural expression during this time. For East Los Angeles teenagers during the 1960s, the hardships and frustrations of trying to cruise on Whittier Boulevard also built bonds of place-based solidarity and mutual respect. Steve Salas, of the musical groups the Salas Brothers and Tierra remembers the boulevard during the 1960s as a place where he and his friends found a place for "cruising…listening to music our way…it was like a two-mile long party."[392] At a "happening place and a real active time, a very creative time," Salas chose to

[391] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 5, 2015, Los Angeles, California.
[392] David Reyes and Tom Waldman, *Land of a Thousand Dances: Chicano Rock 'n' Roll from Southern California*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998). Pp. 92.

endure the looming threat of police violence on the boulevard to have a good time with his friends.[393]

Cadillac Steve prefers hip hop and rhythm and blues to the music of Thee Midniters. Yet he does marvel at the "Whittier Boulevard" song's underlying message in relation to his own efforts. "That song gets it, doesn't it?" he enthuses, adding "I don't think they say a word in that song, but they [Thee Midniters] know the feeling of being out there with all the people. That's what I hear."[394] Inspired by stories about people being organized and standing up for what they believed, as savoring "that good feeling you get when you're cruising and people are looking at your ride…you're turning heads because your ride is clean," Cadillac Steve became deeply invested in cruising. He identified "the feeling of being out there with all the people" that he learned happened in the past along Whittier Boulevard as something he wished to experience in the present. So, he got together with his *compadre* and began to organize what people said was not going to be possible: a Saturday night cruise on Whittier Boulevard.

Taking Back Boulevard Nights

"Boulevard Nights" events on Whittier Boulevard manifest a contemporary effort on the part of working class Chicanas/os and Latinxs from throughout the Los Angeles region to claim space. On a particular Saturday evening, once businesses in the area have closed around 9 p.m., hundreds of lowrider vehicles from throughout Greater Los Angeles make their way onto Whittier Boulevard between Atlantic and Eastern Avenues. In their collective cruise, participants transform a one-mile drive that usually takes only a few minutes into one that takes hours. They proceed to cruise up and down the boulevard until the early morning hours. Taking

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[393] David Reyes and Tom Waldman, *Land of a Thousand Dances: Chicano Rock 'n' Roll from Southern California*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998). Pp. 92.

[394] Interview with Cadillac Steve, Interview with Cadillac Steve, August 23, 2015, Los Angeles, California.

it "low and slow," they purposely alter the social-spatial and temporal logic of city streets to meet their own needs.[395]

As the procession of cars gets underway, crowds of men, women, and children gather to take part in the festivities as spectators. They set up chairs on sidewalks. Many small groups of people stand in the fluorescent glow from different businesses that spills over the sidewalk and the parking spaces of the boulevard. Lowrider car owners leave their trunks wide open, their windows rolled down, and their car doors open for people to peek in and see how they have customized the vehicles to fit their own personal taste. A sign on a sky blue 1964 Chevy Impala reads, "look, but don't touch!" One large group uses the bright lighting of a Nike advertisement to illuminate the fluorescent colors of their blue and pink motorcycles and a cherry red lowrider vehicle parked on the street. People rearrange empty lots, especially the small parking lots nearest to Eastern Avenue, transforming them into their own open-air car club headquarters where members can relax and where the children in their group can distribute flyers with information about their next cruises and other upcoming events to people that walk by.

Families lounge on picnic blankets on the hoods and trunks of their parked cars. They eat food, and socialize with one another. Groups of women listen to music from car radio systems as drivers make last minute adjustments under the hoods of cars and wait for the perfect moment to jump in and join the parade of low rider vehicles. Not too far up the street, a crowd of people on the sidewalks attempt to capture the photographs and video footage of cars moving underneath the now famous arch that reads "Whittier Boulevard, East Los Angeles."

[395] Denise Sandoval, *Bajito y Suavecito/Low and Slow: Cruising Through Lowrider Culture*, Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate School.

On these evenings, El Arco is taken over by people who though they are made to feel demonized during the day, at night can imagine that they own the boulevard.

Boulevard Nights enables lowriders to transform a space constructed to serve travel and consumption with its four spacious lanes into an arena for organic artistic display and collective convening. This reveals how hegemony can be turned on its head. The state engineers and local officials who redesigned the street at the beginning of the twentieth century have unwittingly created the perfect place for working class residents pushed aside by the logic of development to create a place-based Aztlán that affirms their ancient right to inhabit the eastside. At the corner of Arizona Avenue and Whittier Boulevard, Cadillac Steve and about two dozen people wearing t-shirts that feature a City Wide Car Club logo across the chest and back stand proudly by their parked lowrider vehicles. They walk with a strut in their step, as they know their car club is in part responsible for this event that has people smiling, complimenting one another, and planning the next time they are going to take back the boulevard for themselves. Cadillac Steve proclaims "Whittier is the heart of East L.A.…It's downtown East L.A., and I think we have a right to be here, and we [the car club members involved in organizing the event] wanted to bring back cruising to the boulevard like the way people got together back in the day, like the older [car] clubs use to do it...to have a good time and be together, to come together in our common interests."[396] As he stands looking at the boulevard that is now packed, he locates his sons up the street handing out flyers for an event that will take place in a couple of weeks near Belvedere Park. Acquaintances congratulate him on a successful event. Throughout the night, he sees grandparents, parents, and children of all ages enjoying themselves. Before getting into his Cadillac, two older women approach him,

[396] Interview with Cadillac Steve, August 23, 2015, Los Angeles, California.

and share memories about the vibrant atmosphere and the procession of cars going in both directions on the street in “the old days” when they would “come to Whittier [Boulevard] and have a really nice time…back in the 70s.”[397] Cadillac Steve declares “when you see all the people out here [on Whittier Boulevard] having a good time, kids, adults, no cops in sight, that should answer any question you can ask me about why cruising the boulevard is important to me…” after a pause, he concluded, “it feels good!”[398]

The Boulevard As Contested Space

Cadillac Steve invested a lot of time and energy to make Boulevard Nights the joyous event it has become. He does not act alone. Sending Facebook messages to members of numerous Southern California car clubs, lowrider enthusiasts have answered a monthly call by taking it upon themselves to spread the message. On the evening of the event, they make the trek to the boulevard, and contribute to the festive space that is enjoyed by the local community. Onlookers bring lawn chairs from their homes. They set them up along sidewalks to take in the sights and sounds of the procession of lowrider vehicles. Street vendors set up food stands to sell sliced fruit, hand squeezed fruit juices, bacon wrapped hotdogs, and tacos. Men and women stand at street corners with cleaning supplies prepared to wash windows for change at the request of motorists. Photographers claim their favorite street corner and assemble special lighting to capture photos of the lively social scene.

Following a year of organizing Boulevard Nights, Cadillac Steve and members of various car clubs believed that they had successfully taken back the boulevard for themselves. Arriving after 9pm, when most businesses close for the night, they rarely encountered merchants who

[397] Note’s in author’s possession.
[398] Interview with Cadillac Steve, August 23, 2015, Los Angeles, California.

had long been at odds with Chicana/o youths and car cruising on the boulevard. Encounters with police officers were also sparse. Police personnel that were present on the boulevard mainly reminded people not to park in red zones, and issued warnings to people who were spotted with open containers of alcohol. Cadillac Steve remembers one instance when someone from the East Los Angeles Sheriff's Station Facebook account "liked" photographs of the festivities on the boulevard that he had posted to the social media site. Recounting how he felt about this, he confides, "I thought that was pretty cool of them."[399]

Shortly after the Facebook incident, however, Cadillac Steve disclosed to me that things had started to change.[400] One evening in December of 2016, officers from the East Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department station and California Highway Patrol officers flagged down Cadillac Steve as he approached a car club event that was being held near the Commerce Center. Walking up to the passenger side of his vehicle, the officers began to lodge complaints at him about the crowds that gathered on the boulevard. Because of his presence at Boulevard Nights, police officers regularly referred to him as an "organizer" of the event. The police charged that he was responsible for the traffic and litter. A few weeks later at So-Cal Burgers, a hamburger stand on Mednik Avenue that is a popular gathering site for lowrider car clubs in East Los Angeles, sheriff's officers approached and "encouraged" Cadillac Steve and his car club members to apply for a parade permit each time they want to organize Boulevard Nights.

Following these encounters, the plan was to stay below the police radar for a few months. Cadillac Steve and members of various car clubs did not want problems with or fines from the police. Organizers of Boulevard Nights were troubled by the idea that they were being asked to pay money to access a cherished space in their own neighborhood. Moreover, a parade

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[399] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 3, 2017, Los Angeles, California.
[400] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 3, 2017, Los Angeles, California.

permit contradicts the reasons police gave to car club members about cruising in the evening. Drawing out the contradiction, Cadillac Steve contends, "they cry about us blocking traffic at 9pm when most of the stores are closed, so they want us to get a parade permit. With that permit, you can only cruise by once, and cruising must be done in the daytime when all the stores are open and the boulevard is the busiest."[401]

In April of 2017, members of Family Wayz car club and the East Los Angeles car club organized an event to commemorate the two-year anniversary of Boulevard Nights. It was a success, even without obtaining an expensive parade permit. Cadillac Steve relates of the anniversary celebration, "that one was the biggest and the best."[402]

The same car clubs organized a Boulevard Nights cruise to take place on the last Saturday of May to observe the beginning of summer. Police personnel put an end to the event before it began. Cadillac Steve recalls, "they had the CHP [California Highway Patrol] and the sheriffs out there with road blocks threatening to tow people's rides away if they didn't leave."[403] Road blocks directed traffic away from "the heart of the cruise" on Whittier Boulevard, between Atlantic Boulevard and Eastern Avenue.[404] No cars were towed away, but the police successfully disrupted the boulevard summertime celebration. Boulevard Nights organizers were told by police, "cruising here [Whittier Boulevard] is over."[405]

In the beginning of the next month, car club members took part in an improvised boulevard cruise to take back the boulevard. The small crowd of cruisers were immediately met by sheriff's officers who set up a street blockade to direct vehicles away from the boulevard. Later

[401] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 3, 2017, Los Angeles, California.
[402] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 3, 2017, Los Angeles, California.
[403] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 3, 2017, Los Angeles, California.
[404] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 3, 2017, Los Angeles, California.
[405] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 3, 2017, Los Angeles, California.

in the month, car club members found new signs on the boulevard, emphasizing old ordinances about cruising. Near the Whittier Boulevard arches, the larger of the two signs reads, "No Cruising: Two Times Past Same Point Within Six Hours Is Cruising." The second sign reads, "No Parking From 10pm to 6am, Commercial Vehicles Excluded."[406] "Something had to be done," Cadillac Steve confesses, "some of the [car] club members went to demonstrate at [Hilda L.] Solis's office."[407] As a member of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Solis is a Supervisor for the First District, which includes East Los Angeles. In recent months, Solis has characterized lowrider cruising events and car club members as a drain on county resources, including police authority. Carrying signs that read, "Cruising Is Not A Crime," "We Are Not Criminals," and "The Lowrider Movement," car club members arrived at her office headquarters to declare their right to the boulevard. Car club members have also attended "community nights" events to proclaim their membership to the greater East Los Angeles community. Solis has yet to respond to their invitation to sit down with them to discuss why they have been displaced from the boulevard. Since the closure of Boulevard Nights in June, there has been no cruising of any kind there.

There is a long history to take into consideration when thinking about why cruising is criminalized on Whittier Boulevard. In East Los Angeles, police road blockades, the threat of citation and vehicle impounding, and city ordinances forbidding cruising and parking on the street have become obstacles to Chicana/o and Latinx feeling like valued members of the very neighborhoods where they were born and raised. Many motorists are accused of cruising, even if they are not, and then are warned to stay away from the boulevard. In some instances where the police identify someone for cruising their vehicle is impounded.

[406] Notes in author's possession.
[407] Interview with Cadillac Steve, July 3, 2017, Los Angeles, California.

Everything related to using a public street in East Los Angeles to create a lively and joyous atmosphere for working class communities has become criminalized. While it does not look good for Chicana/o and Latinx car club members who desire to congregate in forms of their own choosing, they have not given up on the belief that they have a right to the boulevard. The experience of being treated like criminals by political officials for cruising is generating much anger among a large population of car club members who believe cruising is not a crime.

Chapter Six: Conclusion: Race and Place in Los Angeles

Creative repurposing of undervalued spaces in Los Angeles characterizes the art on the walls at Estrada Courts, the youth hangouts carved away in the alleys of City Terrace, the backyard punk rock gigs and missions across town, the crossing of geographic and discursive borders by the musicians in Sin Remedio and the poet Rebecca Gonzalez, and the low rider car events staged on Whittier Boulevard and in retail store parking lots. Each of these instances evidences the ways in which people who have been dispossessed and displaced take possession of abandoned and forgotten spaces as strategies for refusing the unlivable destinies to which they have been relegated. These microsocial activities have macrosocial causes and consequences. They are material manifestations of dramatic changes in urban form and social organization. Read carefully and correctly they record a hidden history of Los Angeles.

Alessandra Moctezuma and Mike Davis describe the history of East LA through the framework of three borders. They assert that the "first border" was established following "the 1847 war of aggression by an expansionist slave republic (U.S.)" against Mexico.[408] As a geographic boundary founded and enforced by U.S. military, the first border served to spatially delineate the newly acquired territories of the U.S. from Mexico. In spite of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, Anglo settlers in the newly acquired territories initiated racialized social systems of control that criminalized the culture and language of the region's Mexican inhabitants, relegating them to second class citizenship for more than a century.[409] Politically, the first border functioned to facilitate the realization of the economic goals that initially

[408] Alessandra Moctezuma and Mike Davis, "Policing the Third Border," *Color Lines*, November 22, 1999 http://www.colorlines.com/articles/policing-third-border Accessed September 1, 2017.

[409] David Lloyd and Laura Pulido, "In the Long Shadow of the Settler: On Israeli and U.S. Colonialisms." *American Quarterly* 62.4 (2010): 795-809.

motivated U.S. aggression against Mexico.[410] Spatial, politico-economic, and cultural changes were further accelerated and legitimated by settler colonial narratives of manifest destiny that sought to cultivate the land and civilize the "savage" people of Mexico while expanding economic opportunity, democracy, and freedom for Anglo settlers.[411]

Federal policy at the turn of the century began to give shape to social and physical structures that would accentuate U.S. power in the region. The Immigration Act of 1907 set in motion an authorization process that required all immigrants entering the U.S. to pass through officially recognized entry points.[412] Following the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the founding of Ellis Island as an immigration center in 1892, the 1907 act was used to set up buildings and position personnel along the border to further control who would be recognized by the state as legal immigrants to the U.S.[413] The National Origins Act of 1924 initiated an era of racially restrictive national quotas, and established the U.S. Border Patrol as a national police force. While people had for centuries moved across the border lands according to their own needs, these acts gave legal force to the first border as a place where national officers would control the migration of Mexican labor into the U.S.[414]

Kelly Lytle Hernandez demonstrates that between 1924 and the 1940s, Border Patrol officers translated the broad directives and abstract imperatives of U.S. immigration law into practical and concrete practices.[415] In this context, Mexicans and Mexican ethnics at the first border were often subject to deeply racialized and regionalized ideologies that understood them

[410] David Lloyd and Laura Pulido, "In the Long Shadow of the Settler: On Israeli and U.S. Colonialisms."
[411] David Lloyd and Laura Pulido, "In the Long Shadow of the Settler: On Israeli and U.S. Colonialisms."
[412] Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014). Pp. 106.
[413] Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
[414] Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*.
[415] Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*.

as likely transgressors of U.S. immigration policy.

Following the construction of interstate highways that reach across California into Mexico during the 1960s, Moctezuma and Davis argue that the creation of permanent checkpoints and detention centers by Immigration and Naturalization Service along these routes serve as a "second border."[416] They contend that the most notorious of second borders is on Interstate 5 at San Onofre, which is 75 miles north of the border. At this point, Chicanas/os and Latinxs, or anyone appearing to be so, could expect to be stopped and interrogated about their legal citizenship status. By this time, Border Patrol officers had been trained in document analysis for the purpose of capturing "fraudulent citizens."[417] By fraudulent, immigration officials were referring to people who carried false documentation.

Like the first border, the establishment of the second border was not a natural, or an inevitable phenomenon. Since 1940, when the Immigration and Naturalization Service was transferred from the Department of Labor to the Department of Justice, the creation of the second border was the outcome of socio-cultural and political economic forces propelled by the efforts of Border Patrol administrators to stay relevant as a police agency in an era that was progressively turning to national systems of policing.[418]

According to Don Mitchel, in the decades before the 1940s, immigration law-enforcement officers represented undocumented people as impoverished, docile, and deportable working class Mexican men. Under this logic, the work of immigration law-enforcement officers included facing up to rapacious growers who worked people on plantations under slave-like conditions. Mitchell contends that at this time the latter group was considered a threat to

[416] Alessandra Moctezuma and Mike Davis, "Policing the Third Border," *Color Lines*, November 22, 1999 http://www.colorlines.com/articles/policing-third-border Accessed September 1, 2017.
[417] Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol.* Pp. 208.
[418] Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol.* Pp. 104.

American democracy.[419] During the WWII era, these same workers, in the rhetoric and policy of the Border Patrol, became "border violators," "fraudulent citizens," "illegal families," and "alien criminals."[420] These emergent types of undocumented immigrants were reported to be unlike the docile types of the previous decades, as they were described as people who gave chase when attempting to be apprehended.[421] In addition to being represented as criminals, in California, political officials argued that unsanctioned Mexican immigrants were a drain on public resources and proved to be a menace to public safety.[422] The result of the two arguments was a shift in police rhetoric and practice away from freeing workers from miserable conditions in a capitalist agricultural industry to punitive social control of people who threatened American democracy.[423]

In 1940, members Congress began to shake up local law-enforcement authority by consolidating it under federal police bureaucracies geared toward nationalized systems, discourses, and projects of fighting crime.[424] By the time the second border began to be founded, the work of immigration law-enforcement officers would include fighting crime, informed by military authorities like retired U.S. Army General Joseph Swing who was appointed Commissioner of the Immigration and Nationalization Service in 1954. Under Swing's direction, the Border Patrol demonstrated its power to apprehend undocumented workers and punish labor operations that transgressed federal law with paramilitary style road blocks, foot patrols, and the transformation of public spaces into temporary detention

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[419] Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops: Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle Over Industrial Farming in Bracero-era California*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

[420] Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol.* Pp. 205, 206.

[421] Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol.* Pp. 205, 206.

[422] Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol.* Pp. 81.

[423] Don Mitchell, *They Saved the Crops: Labor, Landscape, and the Struggle Over Industrial Farming in Bracero-era California*. Pp. 25.

[424] Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol.*

centers.[425] Known as Operation Wetback, the organized military-style immigration raids in Los Angeles informed the greater public that the country required military action in places well beyond the first border to subdue the threat to democracy posed by undocumented immigrants in the country.

Following the 1954 operation, the Border Patrol needed a new image to authorize their presence and function at the border and within the nation. In 1955, Commissioner Swing authorized that all Border Patrol officers be cross designated as customs inspectors for purpose of finding unsanctioned immigrants, as they were now suspected of smuggling drugs into the U.S. from Mexico. Moving further in the direction of criminal policing, in 1956 the Border Patrol founded the Criminal Immoral Narcotics (CIN) program, which sought add the arrest of "criminal aliens" across the U.S. to their work of detaining and deporting undocumented immigrants.[426]

In the same year that the Border Patrol founded the CIN program, Congress passed the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act. The term "defense" in the 1956 Act's title was for two reasons. First, portions of the cost to build the system were covered by defense funds.[427] Secondly, the highway system provided direct links between U.S. Air Force bases throughout the country. In this context, it is not surprising that a militarized Border Patrol would utilize an interstate highway system developed with the intent to defend the U.S. against attacks for the use of policing undocumented immigrants that were progressively being labeled as criminal threats to the nation.

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[425] Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*. Pp. 184, 185. The transformation of public parks into temporary detention centers was not an unfamiliar sight in the region given the internment of Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans during WWII.

[426] Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*. Pp. 206.

[427] Richard F. Weingroff, "Federal-aid highway act of 1956: Creating the Interstate system." *Public Roads* 60, no. 1 (1996).

By the time the second border appeared, immigration law-enforcement officers had secured military training and technology to police the second border for detaining and deporting criminals. The melding of immigration control with crime control during the 1960s created a highly punitive understanding of the work of immigration law enforcement practices at the first and second border. The passage of the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act would only assist this militarized body reach across the nation, extending its operations of social control to communities far away from the first border.

Before this act was passed, East Los Angeles neighborhoods were already experiencing broad change. Once a multiracial community, a shifting structure of racial restrictions in residential politics following WWII facilitated the movement of white European ethnic, Black, and Asian American communities out of East Los Angeles to other parts of the city.[428] Becoming a majority working class Mexican immigrant and Mexican American demographic, East Los Angeles developed into vast Mexican American *barrio* that stretched east into the San Gabriel Valley, including portions of neighboring cities such as South Gate, Montebello, El Monte, San Gabriel, Whittier, and Pico Rivera.[429]

By 1960, the "Greater Eastside" would become known as the "new capital of Mexican America," where over a million Mexicans and Mexican Americans inhabited this southern California region that was once northern Mexico.[430] The concentration of Mexican and Mexican American working class people in the very lands sought for interstate highway development made the plan seem insidious, if not heartless, to many residents notified that

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[428] George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[429] Eric Avila. "LA's Invisible Freeway Revolt." Pp. 833; See also, Victor M. Valle and Rodolfo D. Torres, *Latino Metropolis*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

[430] Raul H. Villa, *Barrio Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); Eric Avila. "LA's Invisible Freeway Revolt."; Victor M. Valle and Rodolfo D. Torres, *Latino Metropolis*.

they must move.[431] Confirming these feelings, the neighborhoods where freeways would destroy community networks were some of the very same neighborhoods that were redlined in the 1930s. Avila contends that the linkages between redlining and interstate development makes clear that developers sought to "contain or eradicate working-class, racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods."[432]

The Estrada Courts and the Estrada Courts Extension were opened in 1942 and 1954. Public housing during the 1940s was thought of as a "stepping stone" for low-income people to move toward home ownership in the private housing market.[433] When Norma Montoya arrived at the Estrada Courts in 1972, impoverished residents faced a set of conditions that were far from what public housing was initially designed to provide. The construction and maintenance of public housing went from being viewed by much of the public as a social good and a governmental responsibility to an unwanted social burden that was begrudgingly tolerated. By the early 1960s, public housing and public housing residents would become demonized as problem places and problem people. Housing in general became seen primarily as a private commodity to be purchased rather than a public good to be provided and managed by the government. Of course, government was deeply involved in subsidizing home ownership and asset accumulation by white people through the expressly discriminatory home loan policies of the federal government, the home mortgage and property tax deductions, and subsidies for land and infrastructure in segregated suburban developments. At the same time, these actions corresponded with the government's urban renewal policies and siting decisions about public housing projects to relegate racial minorities to renting means tested housing in poorly

[431] Raul H. Villa, *Barrio Logos.*
[432] Eric Avila. "LA's Invisible Freeway Revolt." Pp. 833
[433] Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Pp. 117.

constructed and poorly maintained buildings.

Peter Kivisto has identified three phases public housing policy in the U.S.[434] The first phase begins in 1933 with the Roosevelt Administration's National Industrial Recovery Act. A capitalist economy as a whole at its foundation is unplanned even though individual corporations design and execute business strategies.[435] The Great Depression is an example of capitalism's most enduring unplanned destructive capacity. The Depression caused the economy to underutilize productive capacities that resulted in high unemployment and shrinking markets.[436] Douglas Dowd argues that the scale of this depression can be grasped by the fact that industrial manufacturing in the U.S. fell by fifty percent.[437] In the U.S., between 1929 and 1933, the gross national product fell from $104 billion to $56 billion, and unemployment rose to 12.8 percent of the labor force.[438] Tending to the crisis of capitalism, national economies around the world were tasked to figure out how to recover the loss of wealth from the decline of leading industries such as automobile manufacturing and housing construction. They sought to avoid future crises that are endemic to capitalism.

Across the nation, the troubles experienced by industry and organized social unrest pushed government officials to respond. With only a fraction of the U.S. population able to purchase a new home before the Depression and with as many as a thousand foreclosures a day placing thousands more people on the streets, grassroots mobilizations represented public housing as an immediate solution to the crisis and a future safeguard against an unreliable private

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[434] Peter Kivisto, "A Historical Review of Changes in Public Housing Policies and Their Impacts on Minorities." In Eds. Jamshid A. Momeni, *Race, Ethnicity, and Minority Housing in the United States*. (New York; West Port; London: Greenwood Press, 1986).

[435] Douglas F. Dowd. *The Twisted Dream: Capitalist Development in the US since 1776*. (*Cambridge: Winthrop,* 1974). Pp. 97.

[436] Douglas F. Dowd. *The Twisted Dream*. Pp. 95.

[437] Douglas F. Dowd. *The Twisted Dream*. Pp. 22.

[438] Douglas F. Dowd. *The Twisted Dream*. Pp. 103.

market.[439] The Roosevelt administration's passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 (NIRA) responded to social unrest. Under NIRA, the federal government created the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration (PWA), which was authorized to produce and manage housing for low-income people.[440]

National and local housing advocates constituted an important social force pushing government officials to move forward to develop noncommercial housing across the U.S.[441] The federal government further responded to growing national mobilization for public housing by enacting the 1934 Housing Act which created the Federal Housing Authority (FHA). In charge of preventing home foreclosures and set up to assist low and moderate-income people become homeowners, the FHA provided people with access to long term low interest rate loans with minimal or no down payments required. The 1937 Housing Act expanded the federal government's role in housing by establishing the U.S. Housing Authority (USHA), equipped with five hundred million dollars as aid to cities for the planning, construction, and management of low-income housing.[442]

Following the passage of the California Housing Authorities Law in March of 1938, the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) and the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles were established. With continued organization by local and national housing coalitions, officials in Los Angeles approved plans to build public housing in the city. Looking for places to site public housing, city officials faced concerted push back by white

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[439] Peter Kivisto, "A Historical Review of Changes in Public Housing Policies and Their Impacts on Minorities."

[440] Peter Kivisto, "A Historical Review of Changes in Public Housing Policies and Their Impacts on Minorities."

[441] Peter Kivisto, "A Historical Review of Changes in Public Housing Policies and Their Impacts on Minorities."

[442] Peter Kivisto, "A Historical Review of Changes in Public Housing Policies and Their Impacts on Minorities."

residents from different parts of the city when projects proposed siting multi-racial residents in their neighborhoods. Following these encounters, a 1938 Public Works Administration study found East Los Angeles and South Los Angeles to have the highest concertation of what was termed slum dwellings. These findings suggested that East Los Angeles had the highest need for public housing. Two years later, the Federal Housing Census found that Los Angeles had 58,410 uninhabitable dwellings.[443] What resulted in part from these studies and from public housing opponents was a requirement to build public housing on sites where "slum" housing previously stood. While housing advocates did not favor slum clearance as a requirement for the construction of new public housing, they rationalized looking past the complaints of aggrieved communities and the destruction of their communities by emphasizing the modern, safe, and low-income rental housing that would purportedly replace it.[444]

During the 1940s, public housing was understood as a key component of social democracy. Yet over the first two decades of public housing policy in the U.S., public officials and private special interests narrowed its proposed scale and scope. Kivisto argues that the legislation in the first phase did successfully house millions of low-income families devastated by the Great Depression. Yet the federal government made concessions to builders, bankers and real estate agents at the outset that had a strong influence on creating the racialized inadequate housing that would take shape in public housing developments in the following decades. In the face of concerted opposition from real estate, banking, and construction industries, the federal government assured the private sector that the government was not going to compete with them in the rental housing market. It committed itself to providing a housing of last resort for people unable to meet market costs. The 1937 Housing Act included a twenty percent gap between

[443] HACLA. Pp. 8.
[444] Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City*.

the upper income limits for people seeking consideration for public housing units and the lowest limits at which the private sector offered units, creating cleavages between the housing needs of the most impoverished and the housing concerns of everyone else.[445] When the 1937 Housing Act was amended in 1940 to exempt war workers in the growing defense industries from the low income eligibility for public housing, attention for public housing in Los Angeles was turned to workers in a quickly developing military industrial complex.[446] This resulted in a disconnect between the housing concerns of the most impoverished people and the housing concerns of the rest of the public. In 1942, except for the Ramona Gardens in East Los Angeles, public housing developments run by the Los Angeles City and County Housing Authorities were turned over to the emergent Federal Public Housing Authority, tasked with creating defense housing to ensure the efficiency of workers to build war machines. It was in this social milieu that the Estrada Courts housing projects were built in 1942.

In addition to the twenty percent gap written into the housing act and the turn in emphasis from low-income families to war workers, racially discriminatory practices by federal government agencies would determine what public housing would become and who would rely on it as a permanent source of housing over the next phases. While the federal government succeeded at its task of creating public housing units, the FHA used openly racist practices to lock out communities of color from opportunities at homeownership that were offered to white people. In one instance, the HOLC appraisal manual instructed agents to deny people in Boyle Heights federally backed loans because it was a multi-racial community. Racist practices used by the FHA understood people of color to unfavorably impact the value of homes. In turn, the

[445] Peter Kivisto, "A Historical Review of Changes in Public Housing Policies and Their Impacts on Minorities."

[446] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

FHA advocated for the creation of restrictive zoning ordinances to prevent people of color from moving into white neighborhoods, as they claimed they depreciate the exchange values of the homes in the neighborhoods where they move to.[447]

While some states did pass legislation during the 1940s to stop racial discrimination, housing officials continued to follow policy that promoted segregation.[448] The goal of the 1949 Housing Act was to provide a "decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family," yet banking institutions and housing developers would systematically offer white communities opportunities for home ownership in newly developed suburban tracts while racialized communities were steered to rentals in older urban neighborhoods. Returning white troops received loans from the G.I. Bill, backed by Veterans Administration (VA) that were unevenly provided to war veterans of color. Over the 1950s, the FHA further supported white residents of suburban developments by spending federal and state tax monies to build highways and water infrastructure to support neighborhoods that were off limits to people of color.[449] Homeownership in the suburbs offered white communities unearned and federally sponsored privileges to accumulate assets that would accrue in value over time at the expense of communities of color.[450] Discriminated against by the FHA and the VA, troops of color along with disabled veterans, and the families of deceased war veterans were denied the fruits of what they believed service in war would deliver them when they returned home.[451] Although the law mandated replacing housing destroyed by slum clearance projects, eighty percent of the dwelling units destroyed by urban renewal were never replaced. This process of destruction

[447] George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American.*
[448] Marie Jahoda, and Patricia Salter West, "Race Relations in Public Housing." *Journal of Social Issues* 7, 1 (2), 1951: 132-139. Pp. 133.
[449] Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro. *Black Wealth, White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality*. (New York, NY: Routledge 2006).
[450] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment of Whiteness*.
[451] Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City*.

would heighten federally supported programs known as slum clearance that had taken place since 1934.

By the 1950s, mounting local political conservativism, red scare politics, and an emerging national political lobby of home builders would influence greatly the public housing agendas of political officials in Los Angeles. The 1954 Housing Act amended the 1949 Housing Act to make urban renewal a part of the law.[452] In the same year, the Supreme Court ruled that local governments could use eminent domain to seize and demolish structures for public use with just compensation. Housing law stipulated that people removed from their homes due to urban renewal would be given priority to access new rental public housing, yet this was not practiced and the destruction of urban renewal far outpaced the construction of new public housing units. Cuff writes that at the time of the 1954 Housing Act the political role of the real estate industry in local issues of land use and the building industry took form as a "nationally organized institution and lobbying bloc."[453]

In Los Angeles, the power of the corporate elite and the private housing sector in determining the strength of public housing in the U.S. could already be identified in 1953 with the defeat of the Elysian Park Heights project. This project was designed to house upwards of 9,000 people, including residents whose homes would be demolished in the Chavez Ravine, and thousands of other people who had already been displaced for other public housing projects around the city.[454] In the case of the Chavez Ravine, urban renewal and eminent domain became tools for members of dominant social groups to use the backing of the federal government to enhance the power of private enterprise. In theory, urban renewal with the

[452] Mindy Thompson Fullilove. *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It*. (New York: Ballantine, 2009).
[453] Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City*. Pp. 56.
[454] Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City*. Pp. 165.

power of eminent domain behind it would lead to new public housing and new public infrastructure accessible to ordinary people.[455] In practice, they enabled private developers to use public tax monies to fund commercial ventures for the profit and needs of corporate interests.[456] The creation of Dodger Stadium on a site previously planned to build public housing was a loss for public housing advocates far beyond the city of Los Angeles.[457]

Across the nation, federally assisted slum clearance and urban renewal projects would destroy countless neighborhoods to build private commercial venues. In her study of urban renewal, mental health practitioner and psychologist Mindy Thompson Fullilove illustrates that between the passage of the 1949 Housing Act and 1967, urban renewal projects across the U.S. demolished 400,000 residential units, while only 10,760 low-income public housing units replaced them.[458] Fullilove holds that the destruction of neighborhoods ripped apart "emotional ecosystems," or the meaningful social networks of care and attachment to place that constitute a healthy emotional, psychological, social sense of self and community.[459] In the second phase of public housing policy, political and economic elites overlooked the housing needs of the most aggrieved communities.

By the 1970s, a third phase of public housing was emerging. On the one hand, this was marked by processes of privatization. On the other hand, the needs of tenants were being overlooked, and their rights violated. Under the guidelines of the 1949 Housing Act, local housing authorities were to fund maintenance and daily operations out of money paid for rents each month. This guaranteed inadequate maintenance. During this time, the Estrada Courts

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[455] Mindy Thompson Fullilove. *Root Shock.*
[456] Donald Parson. *Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
[457] Donald Parson. *Making a Better World.*
[458] Mindy Thompson Fullilove. *Root Shock.*
[459] Mindy Thompson Fullilove. *Root Shock.*

and the Estrada Courts Extension became overwhelmingly filled by impoverished people of color with declining incomes. Faced with rising costs and declining tenant incomes, housing projects began to fall apart. By relying on a percentage of the rent paid by tenants instead of a fully capitalized fund to maintain housing infrastructure, the more impoverished residents became, the less they paid in rent, and the less money there was available for maintenance costs.[460]

If at the beginning of public housing in the U.S. low-income people were viewed as people facing problems. By the third phase, impoverished people of color in public housing developments across the U.S. were viewed as the problem. The public housing needs of impoverished people of color received indecisive attention from elected officials in the first and second phase. In the third phase, public housing residents were abandoned.

While social welfare programs and a full employment and high wage economy associated with industrial era social democracy did not redistribute the wealth meaningfully to all people, programs organized by and on behalf of impoverished communities did make inroads at creating a general quality of living that was above poverty levels.[461] A 1966 study by the Division of Fair Employment Practices reported that programs associated with Kennedy Administration urban policy and the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty contributed to decreasing unemployment for both men and women residents of East Los Angeles between 1960 and 1965.[462] During this time activists as part of Black, Chicana/o, Asian American, and Native American movements revamped broad-based grass roots activity that had not been

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[460] Eugene J. Meehan, *The Quality of Federal Policymaking: Programmed Failure in Public Housing*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1979).

[461] Gerald R. Gill, *The Meanness Mania: The Changed Mood*, (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980.). Pp.18

[462] *Negroes and Mexican Americans in South and East Los Angeles: Changes Between 1960 and 1965 in Population, Employment, Income, Family Status,* (San Francisco: State of California Department of Industrial Relations, 1966). Pp. 29.

evidenced since the actions of working class organizations during the 1930s. After a brief infusion of federal money into the urban economy following their victories, by the early 1970s a series of crises led to the repudiation of committed investment into opportunity structures for racially aggrieved groups by the federal government.[463]

The political economy of the Keynesian welfare state worked well to bring the U.S. out of the Depression. At the dawn of the third phase of public housing in the U.S., however, it would begin to show signs that it was too expensive to maintain in the eyes of the corporate and financial elite.[464] Postwar state policies aimed to ensure stable economic growth through spending schemes, particularly geared toward to the military-industrial complex and the refinement of technological advancements in mass communications. Between 1946 and 1975 federal purchases of goods and services totaled almost two trillion dollars.[465] Of this money, seventy-five percent was for defense expenditures. State and local purchases were recorded at about ten billion dollars in 1946 and reached two-hundred eight billion dollars in 1975.[466] The policies that supported this steady growth were initiated at the highest echelons of business, government, and labor. Yet, as indicated by the fact that 1974 and 1975 marked the first time that the Gross National Product for the U.S. fell two consecutive years in the postwar era, business as usual was no longer working as it had in the past. Additional signs of this included rising unemployment and inflation rates. Although inflation is usually represented as a natural rise of prices for goods and the decline of the purchasing power of the dollar, whether inflation is curtailed or not, and at whose expense, are political questions.[467] The decision makers from

[463] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).
[464] Douglas F. Dowd. *The Twisted Dream*. Pp. 115.
[465] Douglas F. Dowd. *The Twisted Dream*. Pp. 114.
[466] Douglas F. Dowd. *The Twisted Dream*. Pp. 114.
[467] Douglas F. Dowd. *The Twisted Dream*. Pp. 122.

business, government, and labor represent the political and economic elite. As Dowd illustrates, they would choose to enact policy to lower inflation and employment in ways that would cause themselves the least losses and produce for themselves the most profit.[468]

Dominant social groups determined that social spending became too expensive to maintain the system that had been brought into being following the Great Depression. As a response to concessions won by broad-based social movement organizing, and despite early progress by government and community based initiatives in reducing poverty, dominant social groups began to devise political and economic measures of facilitating the upward redistribution of wealth to maintain, if not regain, class dominance.[469] In the face of these changes, access to meaningful social space loomed large for aggrieved groups in the postindustrial city to express their grievances and to demand social change.

An important achievement for Chicanas/os during the industrial era of social democracy was the creation of broad based social relationships that enabled them to claim social rights that were not guaranteed by dominant social groups. Social democratic visions during the postwar era were thought up in social spaces created by working class Chicanas in the 1930s. These spaces functioned as concrete places to figure out how best to enact their own needs and intellect in organizing. The 1930s mobilizations described by Lizabeth Cohen as the "culture of unity" and by Michael Denning as the "cultural front" won political victories like the Wagner Act, the Social Security Act, and the Federal Housing Act that created a government subsidized social safety net supporting a high employment and high wage economy.[470]

[468] Douglas F. Dowd. *The Twisted Dream*. Pp. 122.
[469] David Harvey, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 610 (March 2007): 22–44.
[470] Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Michael Denning. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. (London; New York: Verso, 1998).

Government spending during and after World War II financed by progressive taxation policies offset the effects of economic recessions and promoted new forms of participatory democracy at the point of production, at the ballot box, and in diverse areas of community life.

Across the nation, however, the social wage of social democracy was not equitably available to people across race, class, and gender.[471] For instance, the Social Security Act of 1935 excluded agricultural and domestic workers from its protective provisions. Those excluded were predominantly workers of color, and women of color in the latter instance.[472] Before and after WWII, many racially aggrieved communities experienced exploitation in the work place.[473] In public space, Chicana/o and Latinx youths were criminalized for their cultural practices and styles, and labeled as unpatriotic delinquents posing serious problems to the nation.[474]

The popular call to participate in political life and the promise of inclusion, equality, and freedom as a central component of the social democratic state, however, did present aggrieved groups with grounds to hold dominant institutions accountable to meet these benchmarks. In her research on working class Chicanas in Los Angeles in the early 20th century, Vicki Ruiz shows how assertions of agency in private and public spheres enabled women to craft critical subjectivities and forge social relationships built around their own "dreams, goals, tenacity, and intellect."[475] For example, conversations on the bus riding to and from work enabled

[471] Vijay Prashad, "Second-Hand Dreams," Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer 2005), pp. 191-198.

[472] Patricia Hill Collins, "It's All In the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation," *Hypatia* vol. 13,no. 3 (Summer 1998).

[473] Zaragosa Vargas, ed. *Major Problems in Mexican American History: Documents and Essays*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999).

[474] Luis Alvarez, *Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

[475] Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of The Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Pp. 82.

women of different backgrounds to inhabit a shared woman-centered world for several hours each day. Unlike the work they performed as "rote operatives numbed by repetition," at the conveyer belts in the canneries where they worked, the collective creation of social space by these women entailed self-assertion and self-activity built around resisting the demands of bosses, husbands and other authority figures in their lives.[476] The working women in Ruiz's study embedded their surroundings with an ethos of mutual respect and a shared commitment as workers to workers' rights that crossed ethnic and racial axes of identification. Ruiz notes that creating spaces with "both material and psychological benefits," held promise for working class communities more generally. They served as sites for reclaiming social rights that had been stripped from them by dominant social groups inside and outside the factory gates.[477]

Ruiz demonstrates that crafting new social spaces functioned as an important tactic for creating new relationships among workers of color. It provided them with a self-created authority to resolve the racialized and gendered contradictions of social democracy in public and the workplace. These spatial practices from the 1930s through the 1960s informed the acts of creative placemaking delineated in this study including mural art, gatherings in alleys, backyard punk rock gigs, missions across urban space, border hopping music and art, and car customizing.

The postindustrial city, however, posed a different set of problems and risks for people who attempt to create meaningful social space to resolve racialized and gendered contradictions.[478] If the industrial era of social democracy sanctioned, even if unevenly and

[476] Vicky Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987). Pp. 121.
[477] Vicky Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Live.* Pp. xviii, 121.
[478] Victor Hugo Viesca, "The Battle of Los Angeles: The Cultural Politics of Chicana/o Music in the Greater Eastside," American Quarterly 56, no. 3 (2004): 719-739.

unequally, the social wage and the right to organize for social rights, neoliberal political economic policies have generated material and social conditions that allocate authority over what is deemed moral to property owners and consumers, not to workers, renters, or neighborhoods.[479] Speaking to the experiences of Black women residents of public housing developments during the New Deal era, Rhonda Williams contends that they and their families found in social programs a "mixed bag" of "opportunity and discrimination, possibilities and restrictions, freedoms and surveillance."[480] Black women in Williams study, like the Chicanas at the Estrada Courts in the postindustrial city, made sense of the mixed bag they faced by utilizing public housing as a place to make art and create community.

Throughout the 20th century, federal housing policy in the U.S. gave social and material support to the assertion that white people are the rightful and valued owners of homes that appreciate in value over time. George Lipsitz contends that these policies and practices did not occur by chance. Rather, they represent "shared ideals and moral geographies" reflective of a hierarchical way of knowing and being in the world that he refers to as the "white spatial imaginary."[481] This imaginary prizes neighborhoods and homes for their exclusivity and the augmentation of exchange values. Lipsitz contends that whiteness is not solely a skin color, but a life condition and an analytic tool to register and challenge the structured advantages that accumulate to white people due to past and present discrimination.[482] Not all people who identify as white knowingly embrace the white spatial imaginary, and not all people who identify as white profit equally from whiteness, however, Lipsitz does provide evidence that

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[479] Susan A. Phillips. *Operation Fly Trap: L.A. Gangs, Drugs, and the Law*. (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

[480] Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality*. (Oxford University Press, 2004). Pp. 4.

[481] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place. (*Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).

[482] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place.*

illustrates how all white people are advantaged over people of color from the association of whiteness with privilege and the neighborhood race effects of spaces defined by their racial categorization.[483]

The neighborhoods where people of color have been steered to live in by segregation are associated with low exchange values.[484] The white spatial imaginary actively represents the inhabitants of these neighborhoods as people who lack morals. Crowded living conditions, decrepit physical structures, environmental degradation, and industrial hazards are not read as the outcomes of the systematic, hierarchical, and exploitative policies and practices informed by the white spatial imaginary. Instead, they are understood as irrefutable signs of the poor individual choices made by impoverished people and the low, or nonexistent morals of racially aggrieved communities.[485] Making matters worse for racially aggrieved communities, these characteristics are used in the neoliberal era by political officials and dominant social groups as seemingly race-neutral justifications to further police them, and to privatize public resources in their neighborhoods.[486]

To counter the deleterious effects of the white spatial imaginary, racially aggrieved communities and communities perceived of as non-normative by dominant social groups have created their own spatial imaginaries. Lipsitz contends that Black people have created a "Black spatial imaginary" based on "sociability and augmented use value."[487] Black here is also not reducible to skin color and neither do all Black people deliberately embrace the Black spatial

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[483] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place.*

[484] George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American.*

[485] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place;* See also, Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract*, (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1997).

[486] David Harvey, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction"; Clyde Woods, "Les Misérables of New Orleans: Trap Economics and the Asset Stripping Blues, Part 1," *American Quarterly, Volume 61, Number 3*, (September 2009): 769-796.

[487] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place.* Pp. 19.

imaginary. Yet, all Black people benefit from it. Like Black people in the U.S., Chicanas/os have created a Chicana/o spatial imaginary. Speaking to the tactics of *barrio* residents to resolve the problems that exist in their neighborhoods, Raul H. Villa contends that Chicanas/os have developed a spatial imaginary that authors and authorizes the transgressions of the social and physical structures that enclose them in impoverished neighborhoods and diminish their life chances. The Chicana/o spatial imaginary, or what Villa calls, barriology, rests on cultural practices that assist ordinary people of the *barrio* to take stock of how power functions so they might collectively change it.[488] Because *barrio* residents across the U.S. are blocked from opportunities to enhance the exchange values of their neighborhoods, they have envisioned and enacted ways of being and way of knowing that augment the use value of their neighborhoods. The Chicana/o spatial imaginary, like the black spatial imaginary, is not reducible to skin color, and neither do all Chicanas/os deliberately embrace it. Yet all Chicanas/os benefit from its ability to create social space in the face of racialized gendered oppression and exploitation.

For over a century, working class Chicanas/os have turned their homes into social spaces where they fashion broad social relationships that provide alternatives to the patriarchal and private order of the traditional home. The white spatial imaginary understands the home as a fixed legal entity undergirded by private property and nuclear family relations that produce augmented exchange values. The Chicana/o spatial imaginary understands the home as a malleable and fluid space that honors conviviality and the social process of community-making. Owing to the heightened immigration of Latinx communities in the late 20th century,

[488] Raul H. Villa, *Barrio Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); See also Rudolfo Acuna, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, (Boston: Longman, 2011).

the Chicana/o spatial imaginary has been infused by a range of working class Latinx politics and practices that embolden how people enhance the use value of the home and neighborhood, especially in speaking out against a range of injustices to articulate their individual rights with social rights.[489] The backyard punk gig is emblematic of this blending of public and private space.

Cities are places where people live, work, and play, where they create social relationships, and claim spaces to serve as productive social sites. Cities promise a dynamic public life, interactive public associations, social and cultural relationships, and multiple and diverse kinds of civic participation.[490] Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift contend that density of people, heterogeneity of life practices in close proximity, and the diverse systems of global communication and movement located in cities, fill city spaces with enormous potential.[491] Doreen Massey holds that a whole range of relationships among people produce a spatiality that invites a sense of social membership that goes beyond the family, the home, and even the local community.[492] In short, cities are both the product of and producers of a complex social process of mixture.[493]

There are no guarantees that city life will provide lively and dynamic spaces for everyone all the time. Under tenets of neoliberal urbanity, public officials often create competitive sorted-out cities that result in winners and losers. Valuing predictability over spontaneity,

[489] James Rojas, "Latino Urbanism in Los Angeles: A Model for Urban Improvisation and Reinvention." In Jeffrey Hou eds. *Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

[490] Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban,* (Cambridge: Polity; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

[491] Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban.*

[492] Doreen Massey, "On Space and the City" in Doreen B. Massey, John Allen, and Steve Pile, eds. *City Worlds*. (New York: Routledge, 1999) Pp. 160.

[493] Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Cities.* Pp. 3.

private interests over public space, and exchange value over use value, officials and dominant social groups regularly direct subsidies toward development founded on capital accumulation and consumerism.

For racially aggrieved communities across the nation, cities are places where past policies and practices of racial segregation function in the present to lock people into *barrios* and ghettos. These communities face a range of challenges associated with the lack of employment opportunities, a vastly shrinking social safety net, and hyper-policing, all of which frustrate their ability to achieve upward social mobility. Compounding the economic struggles of impoverished communities in the city are the user-fees and time limits associated with the privatization of previously public spaces, which unfavorably impact their ability to achieve spatial mobility in the city including the suburban periphery.

The inability of the Keynesian welfare state to maintain profitability for corporate interests and achieve the demands of labor and civil rights movements in the U.S. led to major transformations in the role of state in the 1980s. For four decades, the state functioned as a negotiator between capital and social movements. In this role, working class communities could secure a social wage in the form of public infrastructure amenities such as roads, schools, parks, and a range of social services. Although the distribution of the social wage was not equal across race and gender, the broad recognition that the government had a role as negotiator among the different social groups created openings for working class communities to struggle to legitimate their claims to social goods. Following the crisis in capitalism during the 1970s, in the next decade the state began to be controlled by finance capital.[494] Additionally, the role

[494] Pauline Lipman, "Contesting the City: Neoliberal Urbanism and the Cultural Politics of Education Reform in Chicago" *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, Vol. 32, No. 2, (May 2011): 217-234.

of the federal government was rolled back, and the relationship of social welfare to racially aggrieved communities in the U.S. drastically changed for the worse. City governments developed policies and practices to stimulate growth by granting corporate leaders excessive decision making power in the national and global economy. Pauline Lipman argues that it was within the social milieu that local government officials turned to market ideologies that understood the most robust economic development to come about through property and real-estate tax subsidies and debt financing. Government officials made policy decisions based on satisfying the profit motives of real-estate developers and dominant social groups. This logic of urban government contends, "Anything that hurts investment is 'bad' for bond ratings and thus 'bad' urban policy."[495] The state was to be utilized by powerful groups to enable business oriented governance. This created the urban crisis that shaped the restlessness of Sin Remedio and Rebecca Gonzalez and the radical nostalgia of Cadillac Steve.

Urban power facilitates the mobility and circulation of capital. In this mix, spatiality becomes heavily privatized. When people push back against these neoliberal policies to engage and maintain access to their treasured spaces of the city on their own terms like the reclaiming of Whittier Boulevard by car cruisers, they are often represented as a threat to business and public interests. In these instances, politicians at different levels of government turn to the carceral state to remove, if not contain, defiant groups, and other groups they recognize as undesirable such as houseless people, low-income and no-income people, and youths.[496]

In Los Angeles, racially aggrieved communities face the contradictions and consequences of this form of urbanity. Dominant social groups contend that the city is a place of mobility of

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[495] Pauline Lipman, "Contesting the City." Pp. 219.

[496] Don Mitchell, *The Right to The City;* Henry Giroux, "Youth in Authoritarian Times: Challenging Neoliberalism's Politics of Disposability," *Truthout*, October 21, 2015. http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/33312-youth-in-authoritarian-times-challenging-neoliberalism-s-politics-of-disposability

goods and capital. However, this city's form and functions come into being at the expense of most city residents who are immobilized. Racially aggrieved communities often experience the city as a site of quotidian conflicts with the desires of dominant social groups that attempt to remove them from space if they do not act according to their policies and principles.[497] Amid these conditions, Chicana/o and Latinx communities must be clever at determining who they will collaborate with and what tools they will utilize to maintain the opportunity to create their own forms of mobility and circulation in the city. To practice their social right to inhabit the city, Chicanas/os and Latinxs utilize culture as a means to register and refuse the dominant social relationships of the city in the neoliberal era. More than a reaction to neoliberal policy, their cultural expressions create distinctive ways of enacting the kinds of social spaces that they believe lead to a city capable of envisioning and enacting dynamic democratic deliberation that is open to people who are regularly disrespected and demonized.

Landscape and urban planning journalist Grady Clay contends that the scale of the street offers an optic into the everyday practices, signs, and symbols that people utilize to make meaningful use of the city. This scale offers insight into the social cultural processes of how people create and access special places in the city, or what he calls "epitome districts."[498] Grounding our work in the lived experiences of people who create, live, and engage others in these districts, Clay believes, we will be positioned to better understand how people create the very institutions that keep the city open to the broadest publics. This is extremely useful in an era where dominant social groups and city officials seek to limit the use of public space to public-private interests and only those with discretionary incomes.

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[497] Asef Bayat, "Politics in the City-Inside-Out," *City & Society*, *Volume 24, Issue 2*, August 2012, Pp. 110–128.

[498] Grady Clay, *Close-Up: How to Read the American City*, (New York: Praeger, 1973). Pp. 64.

During the 1990s, the third border would emerge in Southern California to target residents of the very *barrios* who had weathered the storm caused by federal redlining practices and interstate highway development.[499] As physical expressions of systems of social control, third borders emerged in neighborhoods across the country, usually where white and wealthier cities adjoined working class *barrios*. Moctezuma and Davis contend that white residents erected third borders partly in reaction to a sizeable growth in the Latinx population in Los Angeles and Orange Counties. Additionally, two decades of economic downturns created anger and frustration on the part of white communities. Third borders materialized in numerous places to enclose working class communities of color to *barrios* and ghettoes.[500]

At the third border, ordinary people and city governments enact policy, build architecture, and engage in practices that make public spaces private. The goal of this transformation is twofold. First, it seeks to hoard resources for white communities that were in large part brought into being by policies and practices of segregation in suburban housing developments, the relocation of jobs from the city core to the suburbs, and highway development. Secondly, they seek to deter working class Chicanas/os and Latinxs, and working class people of color more generally, from using public goods in areas with a predominant wealthy and white demographic.[501] It is permissible for working class Chicana/os and Latinxs to fulfill domestic labor needs in wealthy and white communities; however, third borders arise to ban them from accessing public space when they are not working. In instances where Chicanx and Latinx cross into these spaces to access public parks, they must pay use and parking fees and abide by time use policies, or police agencies will be called to cite and remove them.

[499] Alessandra Moctezuma and Mike Davis, "Policing the Third Border."
[500] Alessandra Moctezuma and Mike Davis, "Policing the Third Border."

[501] Alessandra Moctezuma and Mike Davis, "Policing the Third Border."

Driving forward this logic is a neoliberal politics of disposability. Henry Giroux contends that this neoliberal disposability is achieved by a persistent "production of an unchecked notion of individualism that both dissolves social bonds and removes any viable notion of agency from the landscape of social responsibility and ethical considerations."[502] Neoliberal policy holds private, consumer oriented, and policed social relations as the foundation for creating and maintaining safe public spaces.[503] The neoliberal tenets that inform the third border are heavily influenced by political economic philosophies that embrace and elevate Social Darwinism and consumer citizenship over social citizenship and social membership.[504] The grammars of neoliberal disposability represent impoverished communities as social parasites consuming resources that belong to the body politic.[505] Under this political and economic philosophy, racially aggrieved communities who suffer from issues of houselessness, hunger, and healthcare are not understood as people facing civil rights violations. Instead, they are identified as "flawed consumers."[506]

Within this atmosphere, third borders materialize in the lives of Chicana/o and Latinx youths as a social force that anticipates their criminal activity, understands their use of public resources as a socio-economic assault on tax paying citizens, and views their travels outside of the *barrio* as an offense to society. Where the Border Patrol reigns supreme at the first and second borders, ordinary people, as well as county and city police like Officer Razo are the leading characters who police the third border. Considered disposable by political officials, young people are figuring out how to transgress the social control of third borders, meeting

[502] Henry Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014). Pp. 38.
[503] Henry Giroux, "Neoliberalism and the Machinery of Disposability."
[504] Henry Giroux, "Neoliberalism and the Machinery of Disposability."
[505] Henry Giroux, "The Violence of Neoliberalism and the State of the American Left."
[506] Henry Giroux, "Neoliberalism and the Machinery of Disposability."

with other youths across city, state, and nation-state borders to figure out how to produce a new social spaces, social relationships, and social identities that are based in the broadest forms of mutual respect. Youths are not simply seeking to claim social space for its own sake, they are making committed strides to produce new ways of knowing and new ways of being capable of fashioning subjectivities and spatialities that resuscitate joy and critical vocabularies of justice.

While business interests have always played a special role in the racial and social-spatial contours the eastside, treating working class residents as disposable people in the way of profits, the transition from industrial era social democracy to neoliberal abandonment in the 1970s ushered in changes that exacerbated these conditions. President Richard Nixon's veto of the 1971 Child Development Act provided an emblematic moment in the development of neoliberal abandonment of the social wage. The president argued that child care centers "undermine 'family-centered' traditions," reflecting the hyper-individualized approach to the needs of working class communities that the federal government adopted.[507] Following his 1972 reelection, Nixon's budget proposals demanded heavy cuts in social welfare spending for hospital construction, public housing, and education, among other vital social institutions. During the same year, the median income of Chicana/o families was 71% that of white families, and over a quarter of all Chicanas/os were classified as poor. Frustrating already impoverished conditions and changes to the needs of working class families, the deindustrialization of Los Angeles heavy manufacturing would terminate thousands of high paid and union protected jobs and put people out of work.

[507] Henry Giroux, "The Violence of Neoliberalism and the State of the American Left."

On the other side of stripping resources from social services, the Nixon administration helped legitimate the spending of federal monies on social control. At the beginning of the 1970s, "riot control" became the Department of Justice's main objective under Nixon, as the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, established by the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, saw its financial support increase from $63 million in 1969 to $268 million in 1970, and to almost $700 million by 1972. For many racially aggrieved groups in California at this time, prisons began to loom over everyday life, as non-white people represented 40% of the growing prison populations. For Chicana/o lowriders on the eastside that were already perceived as "gangs on wheels," these changes had a detrimental impact on their ability to congregate on the boulevard or at any other place where their presence was deemed questionable.[508] If the previous era of lowrider car club members were criminalized by local officials and merchants on the boulevard as "outsiders," law enforcement activities to remove unwanted working class people are bolstered by the general effect of racialized law and order rhetoric and financial support to punitive social control efforts coming from the white house down to local government.

In Los Angeles, city officials have developed a range of municipal codes to make spaces of the city more alluring for redevelopment. To do this, they seek to do away with everyday civil liberties of ordinary people. This includes criminalizing actions such as sitting on sidewalks, standing around to socialize with people, and moving too slow or too fast, depending on what time of day it is. In Oakland, city officials have criminalized houseless peoples' efforts to feed one another and eat together. In other instances, houseless people have put resources together to secure a porta-potty so they may relieve themselves with dignity only

[508] Henry Giroux, "Neoliberalism and the Machinery of Disposability."

to have the city tow it away. For racially aggrieved groups, these decisions by political officials eradicate important emotional and social networks belonging to impoverished communities. Furthermore, strong-arm policing of impoverished populations increases fear and creates spatial immobility. For dominant social groups, these spaces create short term profits while creating long term problems for aggrieved communities.