UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Under Empire: Gentrification and Latinidad in Northeast Los Angeles

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

by

Luis Angel Trujillo

December 2020

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Crystal Baik, Co-Chairperson
Dr. Dylan Rodriguez, Co-Chairperson
Dr. João H. Costa Vargas

Copyright by
Luis Angel Trujillo
2020

The Dissertation of Luis Angel Trujillo is approved:

_____

_____

Committee Co-Chairperson

_____

Committee Co-Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Under Empire: Gentrification and Latinidad in Northeast Los Angeles

by

Luis Angel Trujillo

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Ethnic Studies
University of California, Riverside, December 2020
Dr. Crystal Baik, Co-Chairperson
Dr. Dylan Rodriguez, Co-Chairperson

My dissertation is a study of *(anti-)displacement organizing and genealogies* in North East Los Angeles (NELA). It is based on my time with an anti-displacement grassroots collective known as the Northeast Los Angeles Alliance (NELAA). Started in 2014, NELAA was our response to the post-recession resurgence of the housing market, its exacerbation/ exploitation of the affordable housing crisis in Los Angeles, and its preying on low-income and immigrant tenants. Like NELAA, my project takes on the displacement-driven speculative financial formulas of the real estate industry/ private property regime (derivatives of a *necro-speculative* social calculus) through an engagement/ examination of the *political economies of belonging* and the *libidinal economies of housing*. All in all, my research is a study of *Latinx/ Chicanx geographies* through the lens of *race and property, tenure and belonging*. I apply a relational analysis that understands Latinx/ Chicanx geographies through its exchanges/ entanglements with Indigenous and Black geographies. In it I argue that Latinx spaces/ neighborhoods are themselves constructed and defended through de-indigenizing and anti-black logics of

inhabitance, a *politics of belonging* that stems foundationally from the postcolonial *politics of being*. My methods include critical ethnography, oral history, and participatory direct-action research. I also conduct textual analyses of protest/ movement ephemera, local historiographies, murals, early 20th century booster literature, court transcripts, and legal documents. In terms of scale, my research is mainly focused on a specific neighborhood in NELA (Highland Park), but broadens out to include the area (NELA), city (Los Angeles), state (California), region (US Southwest), and nation (federal housing regulations).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful for everyone who has gotten me here to this point. At certain times it seemed uncertain if I would finish. If I did not have the love and support of all these people then I most certainly would not have. It starts with the most important people in my life, my parents. They did everything for me, a determined sacrifice that was always about my siblings and I gaining the best life you both could have hoped for. In turn, everything I do is for you both. For my mom, her dream as a young girl was to go to college. That dream has not yet been realized because of the demand for her to act as a second mother as the oldest of her siblings and then as a wife and mother to her own children. She turned her dream into an aspiration for her children. We all went to college and got our degrees, its her turn now. Mom I love you and I do this because you taught me to value education and to make the most of my opportunities. To my father, you taught me patience, determination, and the value of family. You've worked your entire life, from your childhood in the ranch and then when you were old enough migrating back and forth from Los Angeles to work as a bus boy. I know you were following the example of the men before you and I am thankful that you were aware enough not repeat their mistakes. You never raised a hand to my mother or us, you love us in your own special way and I am personally thankful for all of it. I do this to make you proud dad.

To my siblings, Ricky, Andrea and Gaby. I love you all very much and I happy to see your lives going in the directions you choose them to go. I am thankful for all your support and encouragement. To my grandparents Teresa Ortiz, Enriquetta Diaz, Luis Trujillo, and Marcelo Villaneda – I am not sure what you imagined for your grandchildren, but I know you all lived hard and difficult lives. Like my father, you may not understand fully what I do, but nonetheless I would not be here without you all. Thank you. To Uri, Celina, and your beautiful family, you all provided me a home when I was a broke and hungry graduate student. Those first few years of grad school would have been insufferable if it weren't for the pseudo-family you all provided me, thank you. To my exended family of *Tias, Tios, Primos*, and the entire *ranchito* back in Zacatecas, our community and our would exist independent of Zacatecas and Los Angeles, but we did well enough to influence and meld both into our own specific geography. To my large network of extended family, I am no one and nothing in the world outside our own without you all.

To my teachers and my mentors. Ms Mankey in 5th grade you taught me how to ask for help and along with Ms. Davis, you inspired my deep love for math and learning. To Mr. Andrews and all the other teachers like you, you all cared about your students as people with their own emotional and intellectual autonomy. You made it ok for students to be themselves and you met me where I was at. Thank you.

I would not be the scholar that I am today without the countless mentors and teachers I had in my undergraduate at UC Santa Barbara. Thank you, in no particular order, to Dr. George Lipsitz, Dr. Gaye Theresa Johnson, Dr. Claude McAuley, Dr.

Manolo Callahan, Otis Madison, Dr. Ingrid Banks, Dr. Jefferey Stewart, Dr. Claudine Michel, Dr. Earl Stewart, Dr. Clyde Woods, Dr. Chela Sandoval, Dr. Cedric Robinson, and Dr. Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval. Thank you to Carlos, Daniel, and Steven – three graduate mentors whom I still rely on to this day for their expertise as junior faculty in their respective departments. Thank you to Dr. Samuel Roberts and Dr. Elizabeth Hinton for their mentorship at Columbia University's Summer Leadership Academy during my time there as part of the cohort of 2011. Thank you to and Dr. Beth Schneider, Monique Limon, and Dr. Ellen Broidy (who is also graciously helping me edit my dissertation) at the UCSB McNair scholars' program. I applied as a freshman, when I first decided I would pursue my education towards a doctorate. I would not have made it here without your support. Thank you for all the work you have done and continue to do for underrepresented students.

Thank you to all my mentors and teachers at UC Riverside. Of course, my deepest gratitude goes to Dr. Crystal Baik and Dr. Dylan Rodriguez. As my co-chairs their mentorship was key towards by development as a maturing scholar. I also would have never found myself at UC Riverside without the lifelong work of Dylan, Dr. Setsu Shigematsu, Dr. Jodi Kim and Dr. Sarita See, among many others to make UCR a home to Critical Ethnic Studies. My thanks also goes to Dr. Joao Costa Vargas, Dr. Patricia Morton, Dr. Catherine Gudis, Dr. Michelle Raheja, Dr. Andy Smith, Dr. Jennifer Najera, Dr. Deb Vargas, Dr. Jayna Brown, Dr. Adrian Felix, Dr. Emily Hue, Dr. Keith Miyake, Dr. Anthony Macias, Dr. Robert Perez, Dr. Maile Arvin, Dr. Erica Edwards, and Dr. Amelia Cabezas. All these wonderful teachers, mentors and scholars have supported me in one way or another. Thank you as well to Dr. Ananya Roy, Dr. Raquel Rolnik, Marisa Lemorande, Hilary Mason, and Terra Graziani for organizing their work at the Institute on Inequality and Democracy and their Housing Justice Methodologies Summer Institute. I was able to find another scholarly home and community through the institute. I am thankful for all the work that you all do to continue to strengthen and expand it.

A tremendous thank you to the NELA Alliance. In 2014, thanks to the energies of Miguel Ramos and Melissa Uribe, we convened a group of concerned and like-minded individuals who sought to act in opposition to the economic and cultural erasures of our communities, the neighborhoods where we were born, raised and discovered ourselves in. Our first meeting was at Reies Flores' City Farm in the hills of Glassell Park. It was there that we began our discussions, that would lead to many more and an overall plan to action. This work speaks from those conversations. These ideas are not just my own. I have been influenced tremendously by Romo, Reies, Melissa, Javi, E-man, Denysse, Miguel, Star, Sandra, Liza, John, Robert, Ser, Imelda, Jay, Jesica, Yahaira, Sophanarot, Crystal, Jamie, among others. I am thankful for the community we built and the work that each of us continues to do outside or as NELAA.

I am also thankful to have friends like Alex, Albert, and Eddie. Your friendships are among the longest and most meaningful I have. It started in middle school with you Alex and blossomed into our own little clique of metal heads at Marshall. I wish the best

for you all always. Special thanks to Ian, Eric, Melizapata, Gio, Pedro, Danny, Mari, Liz, Brenda, Melissa, Ellie, Ashley, Gama, and Alexis. I found your friendships in college and I am thankful to still have you in my life. Thank you to Moreno, Tinoco, El Profe, Narco, Chilango, the pigeon Esteban for bringing me into your home and your family, El Balcon. Thank you to El Congreso and especially Pickels, Ana, and Lucha for being the example that I still continue to follow. Big shout out to the Göttingen Winter School crew. And of course, the UCR ethnic studies graduate collective: Brian Stephens, Jalondra Davis, J Sebastian, Pickels Camacho, Lucha Arevalo, Alex Villalpondo, Renyo Hwang, Iris Blake, Lawrence Lan, Sindy Martinez, Justin Phan, Loubna Qutami, Aaron Alvarado, Christina Geri, Jennifer Martinez, Sneha George, David Chavez, Marlen Rios, Romina Garcia, Beth Kopacz, Beyaja Notah, Julio Orellana, Frank Perez, Ramon Pineda, MT Vallarta, Charlies Sepulveda, and Kehaulani Vaughn. I am happy to have had all of y'all beside me during my time at UCR.

Finally, my deepest love and gratitude to Yasmine, the love of my life. I am so happy to have found you and to have kept you in my life for the past four years. You have helped me survive this difficult time. I am thankful for all your love and support. You are the smartest, funniest and most beautiful person I have ever known. You have influenced this work and me as a person the most of all. For my Angel Baby Yas.

Table of Contents

Abstract of the Dissertation……..……. iv

Acknowledgements……..……. vi

List of Figures……..……... xii

Introduction……..…..… 1

(Anti-)Displacement Genealogies – Political Economies of Belonging…….... 7

The Necrospeculative – Libidinal Economies of Housing…….……..... 11

Under Empire: A Socio-Spatial and Relational Analysis……...…..... 18

The Intimacies of Four Empires…….....…… 21

Gente de Razon – The People of Reason……..……...…….. 28

Los Angeles…….…...……..……28

Highland Park……...……...……..… 32

Communities of Negation……..……..……..… 41

Chapter Breakdown…….…..……. 48

Chapter 0: “Community is NOT for Sale”…….……..…… 55

Methods……..……..…… 55

Methodology……..…….. 57

Methodological Orientation – “Community is NOT for Sale” ……...…… 60

The Northeast Los Angeles Alliance……..…..….. 63

The Procession and the Testimony……...……. 69

Chapter 1: The Political Economies of Belonging……..…… 81

NELAA, Gentrification and the Neo-colonialism Critique……..….. 86

Preserving Community History…...……..……..…….. 92

"Born of the Boom" …...……..…… 95

The Preservation of the Human/ Property Form……..……... 100

"The Wall that Talks" – Place-based Politics of Indigenous Reclamation….. 110

Chapter 2: NELA's (anti-)Displacement Genealogies……...…… 117

The Franklin Mural Project……..…….. 121

Reies and Romo Talk Back to the Narrative of Erasure……..……. 122

Anti-Displacement Pedagogy……..….... 126

Conclusion……..…..... 140

Chapter 2.5: An (anti-)Displacement Politics of Place…….…… 144

NELAA's Grounded Normativity…….…….. 148

Personal Histories……...……156

Romo and Reis…… 156

Melissa…….... 157

Julia…….... 159

Geographies of Belonging……..…..…….. 161

A Politics of Place – Chicanx Nationalism……..…….. 164

The Time and Space for (anti-)Displacement…….…... 169

Chapter 3: NELA's Anti-Black Cartographies……. 177

Anti-Black Violence and non-Black Latinx Spatiality…… 182

Carceral Regimes and Landscapes…….…...…….. 188

Leonna's Upbringing in Highland Park……..……..… 192

Criminal or Justice Otherwise……..…..…. 198

Conclusion……..…..…….. 204

Chapter 4: Gentrification and the Necrospeculative……. 207

The Marmion Royal…….……..….. 211

The Costa-Hawkins Act (1994) and Prop 10 (2018) ……..… 216

The Case Against No-Fault Evictions…….…. 219

Chapter 4.5: "Housing is a Human Right"……..... 228

The Libidinal Economy of Housing…….…… 229

The Human/ Non-Human Divide……...…… 234

Non-Black Latinx Necrospeculative Investments……..…… 238

The Moral Universe of Obligation……..……..... 241

The Burden of Proof……..……...… 244

List of Figures

Introduction

Figure i-1: Portrait of Andrew Glassel Jr.

Figure i-2: Overlap of redlining maps covering Northeast Los Angeles

Figure i-3: An early cartographic representation of California's coastal lands by Sebastian Vizcaino, 1602

Figure i-4: Portrait of Alfred Chapman, legal partner and boyhood friend of Andrew Glassell

Figure i-5: A photograph of Andrew Glassell's home, the first home built on the Garvanza Tract – a community now subsumed by Highland Park.

Chapter 0

Figure 0-1: A NELA Alliance banner reading "Community is NOT for Sale"

Figure 0-2: A group photo of NELA Alliance following the event *Testimonios del Barrio*

Figure 0-3: A promotional flyer for *Testimonios del Barrio*

Figure 0-4: *El Capitalista* puppet at the beginning of *Testimonio del Barrios* procession

Figure 0-5: Banner reading Evicting Displacement at an organized march on York Blvd, Highland Park

Figure 0-6: An eviction notice on a York Blvd business

Figure 0-7: An eviction notice written as an undecipherable codex

Figure 0-8: A flyer promoting a workshop held in conjunction with Fig Jam and Los Angeles' Mayor Garcetti's Great Streets Initiative

Figure 0-9: An apartment building made vacant by an illegal eviction, foregrounded by a dumpster overflowing with the previous tenants' possessions

Figure 0-10: List of typical response by Pro-Gentrifiers Loteria Cards

Chapter 1

Figure 1-1: A satirical advert for *Café Colonizador* on the back cover of NELA's MASA Newsletter

Figure 1-2: Charles Lummis working on his desk in Highland Park

Figure 1-3: A view of the Southwest Museum from the bottom of Mount Washington

Figure 1-4: Exterior shot of El Alisal, the home of Charles Lummis in Highland Park

Figure 1-5: The Southwest Museum Mural covered in layers of graffiti

Figure 1-6: The right-most panel of the Southwest Museum Mural by Daniel Cervantes

Figure 1-7: Image of Daniel Cervantes standing in front of his Southwest Museum Mural

Figures 1-8: Photos of Mexico-Tenochtitlan: The Wall That Talks by Quetzalcoatl Mural Project

Chapter 2

Figure 2-1: Image of *People of the Earth: A Tongva Ceremonia*, The Franklin Mural Project – Histories of Northeast Los Angeles

Figures 2-2: Photos taken of the first stage of the Franklin Mural Project

Figures 2-3: First and second student group of the Franklin Mural Project

Figures 2-4: Photos of mission life sketches alongside the reenactments of the Franklin Mural Project students

Chapter 2.5

Figure 2.5-1: A hand drawn map of Northeast Los Angeles by Pendersleigh and Sons Cartography

Figure 2.5-2: A handmade coyote mask created by a NELAA member

Figure 2.5-3: A handmade owl mask created by a NELAA member

Figures 2.5-4: Melissa, Julia, Romo and Reis at Franklin Mural Project unveiling

Chapter 4.5

Figure 4.5-1: Photo of “Housing is a Human Right” light projected onto a recently vacated building in Highland Park

Figure 4.5-2: A flyer in opposition to the construction of permanent supportive housing in Cypress Park

Figure 4.5-3: Photo of a boarded-up Frank’s Camera, a commercial storefront on Highland Park’s Figueroa business corridor business corridor

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation began as a study of gentrification in North East Los Angeles…

It all started with my great-grandfather. I grew up in Los Angeles. My parents first arrived here in 1981, both 20 years old, newly married and with their first child on the way. They had followed the path many had established before them. Both my parents came from a small rural ranch town called El Salitre in Zacatecas, Mexico. The U.S, in its perpetual thirst for cheap labor, and Mexico (that is increasingly dependent on remittances),[1] drew this otherwise unknown ranch town into the migrant streams of Mexican laborers who sustain the national economies of both countries. My great-grandfather Abel came to Los Angeles in the late 1950s already a U.S. citizen. He was born in Morenci, Arizona in 1917, seven years after his father migrated there to work in the copper mines.

Following my great-grandfather Abel, my grandfather Marcelo decided to come to the US the way many at that time did: through the Bracero Program. He then deserted the program to go find his father in Los Angeles. In 1961, my mother was born in El Salitre and brought to Los Angeles as a baby. She grew up in Chinatown and spent most of her adolescence there. Marcelo decided to return to Mexico, for reasons still unclear. According to my mother, it was most likely due to the dearth of opportunities he encountered here, the same lack he feared would turn his children into young "cholitos

[1] Martha Menchaca, *The Politics of Dependency: US Reliance on Mexican Oil and Farm Labor* (University of Texas Press, 2016); George J. Sánchez and George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1995).

and cholitas."[2] My mother and her family returned to an agrarian lifestyle in Mexico. My father, at the age of 15, like others before him, crossed in car trunks and over fences to make money. My father returned home to El Salitre in 1979, married my mother, and together they came back to Los Angeles, this time to stay.

The type of community that El Salitre transposed to Los Angeles is one that Mike Davis talks about directly in *Magical Urbanism*.[3] Davis referenced El Salitre directly as an example when he stated that "the basic building blocks of Spanish-speaking urban neighborhoods are not only individuals and households, but entire transnationalized communities."[4] On the Southern periphery of the Elysian Park hill, where N. Figueroa St meets Sunset Blvd. and transitions to W. Cesar Estrada Chavez Ave and where Angeleno Heights abuts Chinatown, Historic Filipinotown, and Downtown, my parents, along with many others, established themselves in a tight-knit community of kin-based relations. They were enmeshed in the larger city and dependent on the political and socio-economic networks made available to them as immigrants, including public education, parks, and healthcare facilities.

My research started because the communities I saw my parents, and the many others like them help to build and sustain were disintegrating. I initially read it as gentrification, the socio-economic phenomenon first coined by Ruth Glass in 1965 to describe the demographic shift of inner-city London neighborhoods from impoverished to affluent.[5] I

[2] A term for delinquent and defiant youth that in itself carries ethnic, gendered, racial, and classist connotations.
[3] Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US City* (Verso, 2001).
[4] Ibid, 77.
[5] Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Elvin K. Wyly, *The Gentrification Reader*, vol. 1 (Routledge London, 2010).

started studying gentrification as an undergraduate at the University of California, Santa Barbara. My case study was Echo Park and the focus of my thesis was to understand the role of culture in facilitating gentrification. There are a multitude of ways in which culture and its marketing contribute actively to the markets of real property.[6] Los Angeles, as the largest media producer in the world, is notably capable of creating the desires that fuel land settlement and speculation.[7] My interest was in how Latinx culture was alienated, commodified, and fetishized to facilitate displacement in previously "undesired" (i.e. red-lined) neighborhoods. I learned that nobody had to prompt the Latinx community to do it, this was the basis of neoliberal citizenship.[8] More on that later.

By the time I started graduate school and returned to Los Angeles, everyone realized that Echo Park was not and would not be an isolated incident. My continued research into the topic revealed the spasmodic nature of "urban redevelopment," the starts and stops coming with every economic recession and boom. By 2014, this "redevelopment"

---

[6] Carl Grodach, Nicole Foster, and James Murdoch, "Gentrification, Displacement and the Arts: Untangling the Relationship between Arts Industries and Place Change," *Urban Studies* 55, no. 4 (2018): 807–825; Richard Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class* (Routledge, 2005); Richard Florida, *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class and What We Can Do about It* (Hachette UK, 2017); Daniel Makagon, "Bring on the Shock Troops: Artists and Gentrification in the Popular Press," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 7, no. 1 (2010): 26–52; Richard Lloyd, *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City* (Routledge, 2010); Sharon Zukin, "Gentrification: Culture and Capital in the Urban Core," *Annual Review of Sociology* 13, no. 1 (1987): 129–147; Sharon Zukin, "Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disneyland," *Berkeley: California University Press. Chapter Title* 229 (1991).

[7] Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (Verso, 1997); Tom Zimmerman, *Paradise Promoted: The Booster Campaign That Created Los Angeles, 1870-1930* (Angel City Press, 2008).

[8] Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (U of Minnesota Press, 2011)

scheme had infected almost every corner of Los Angeles.[9] This is when my accomplices and I decided to become better organized The Northeast Los Angeles Alliance (NELAA) was our collective response to the mass displacement we were experiencing in the region. For me, this was an education in grassroots organizing, the complexity of "community", and the varied scales of political structures within and outside California's housing justice movement. However, my time in NELAA and my continued research outside of the collective revealed to me something else, a root established so firmly in the ground it could never be extracted.

In 1999, a few months after my youngest brother was born, my family moved to the opposite side of the hill in Elysian Valley (also known as "Frogtown"). My parents bought their first and only home, back when the housing market was just its dizzying ascent into what Paul M. Ong refers to as the "boom period" in Los Angeles' recent real estate history.[10] It was the only house they could afford in a neighborhood they felt was right for what they were able to spend. Whereas before my family and I lived in a small 6-unit apartment building, isolated by empty lots all around us, we now were in a thriving neighborhood comprised mostly of single-family homes. I was now a resident of Elysian Valley aka "Frogtown".

Pinned in between the 5 freeway and the Los Angeles River, Frogtown was for a long time a quiet and idyllic suburban style neighborhood in the middle of the city. It has a history as a working-class enclave for the multi-ethnic workforce of the adjoining Taylor

[9] I write this in 2020 on the verge of another large economic recession that threatens to commodify housing even further.

[10] Paul Ong, Chhandra Pech, and Deirdre Pfeiffer, "The Foreclosure Crisis in Los Angeles," 2013.

Yard railway and the heavy industry along the waterway. Its "haphazard development," proximity to an unsettled river, and ethnic make-up were the reasons for its eventual redlining by the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) and why it stayed a working-class and immigrant community.[11] Similar to the other neighborhoods of Northeast Los Angeles (NELA), it would prove a popular destination for immigrant communities and maintain a housing stock of at least 50% rental units. Noted by its own histories of displacement, residents forced out of Chavez Ravine found new homes just down the hill in Frogtown. During the period of urban modernization, it was also one of the neighborhoods chosen by the Regional Planning Commission to be bisected by the 5 freeway, literally and figuratively connecting it to other neighborhoods experiencing displacement via eminent domain.[12] Frogtown is where I learned about what it means to "be" from and in Los Angeles. These lessons were imparted to me from my growing social networks, informal relations, and the elders who profess experiential wisdom.

Being raised in Los Angeles in a working-class Mexican immigrant family, my position and proximity to communities in struggle against displacement comes from a shared experience in labor, migration, and place. This is in combination with the other determinants to my positionality - my white phenotype, physical make-up and cis-gendered maleness. In the Northern-Central regions of Mexico where my family immigrated from white-skin is not an abnormality, it is part of the biological and cultural

[11] Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed August 5, 2020, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/

[12] Eric Avila, *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

diversity that defines Mexico's "genealogy" as well as a colonially rooted project of *blanqueamiento* – a white-supremacist, euro-centrist and eugenicist project.[13] In the context of the United States and Los Angeles, my whiteness defines my access to privilege and property, as well as how closely I can associate myself with the community I have grown up identifying with. Laura Pulido states, "racial identity can in some places and sometimes be a choice - a political choice. And just as some ethnic Mexicans insisted on whiteness as an antidiscrimination strategy, some also insisted on being a person of color."[14]

My critiques on whiteness and the proximity that Latinx communities hold to it are in part guided by my own family's experience in Los Angeles. I hope to make that clear, especially as I engage in these critiques throughout the chapters. I am critical of anti-displacement work that attempts to argue for the contribution of Mexicans and Latinx to US civil society. I recognize civil society via Frantz Fanon and Frank Wilderson's critiques, as a violent project that necessitates a dialectically negated figure of the non-"Human," either as a colonized object of Fanon's critique or the ontologically non-existent Black subject per Wilderson. One of the argument's central to my project is that the displacement generated by contemporary gentrification in Los Angeles re-entrenches

[13] Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America:," *International Sociology*, June 29, 2016, https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005. Blanqueamiento refers to the privileging of white phenotype when choosing a partner as well as a deeply entrenched Eurocentric political and economic order present in Latin America.

[14] Laura Pulido, "'Checkered Choices, Political Assertions: The Unarticulated Racial Identity of the Asociación Nacional México-Americana' in Critical Ethnic Studies: A Reader. Edited by Nada Elia, David Hernandez, Jodi Kim, Shana Redmond, Dylan Rodriguez, and Sarita See. Duke University Press, Pg. 463-476.," 2016, $63-476.

the significance of anti-Blackness and de-Indigeneity. It also reifies them in a manner that solidifies their ordering logics under the hierarchies of our current historical conjuncture.

The value of desire runs rampant in the real estate industry and Los Angeles at large. The desire for territorial control, a self-determining capacity, and Whiteness is inscribed in the language of property. Cheryl Harris and George Lipsitz both write about it as a possessiveness of whiteness, specifically of whiteness as a property to be leveraged for social and material wealth. This underlies postwar examples of the remapping of Los Angeles as a predominantly single-family residential zoned city. Housing and race are intertwined and implicated in the formation of Los Angeles' ever evolving social landscape. In this dissertation, the convergence of *race and property* is analyzed through *tenure and belonging*.

(Anti-)Displacement Genealogies – Political Economies of Belonging

I refract my focus on gentrification through the prism of (anti)-displacement. (Anti-) displacement is the analytic I apply to urban space and history. (Anti-)displacement genealogies capture how Latinx space in NELA is itself a reflection and product of entangled imperatives to push for and resist displacement. Michel Foucault defines "genealogy," in combination with "archaeology" or "the method specific to the analysis of local discursivities," as "the tactic which once it has described these local discursivities, brings into play the desubjugated knowledges that have been released from

them."[15] The anti-displacement genealogies are a dynamic, inter-, and multi-generational entanglement of refusals of racial capitalist expulsions. It is the collective of voices that protest "no se vende," "I will not be moved," and their "right to the city." It is the interwoven timelines of place-based Indigenous, Black, Asian, and Latinx struggles against colonial dispossession, eminent domain, and no-fault evictions.[16] It is the refusal to alienate and be alienated from the land. It is an episteme of embodied and ecological knowledges where land comprises more than just the material. Land is a set of relations built on "reciprocity and mutual responsibility."[17]

My dissertation is an incomplete picture, a scratch on the surface of something so profound it is difficult for me to put it into words. However, my attention to (anti-)displacement genealogies is to reveal, on the opposite end, the multiple forms of displacement and our complicit role in perpetuating them. This dissertation is a critical reflection on non-Black Latinx negotiations of de-indigeneity as the basis of "dis/possession" and anti-Blackness as the premise for "racial banishment".[18] This is achieved through a centering of "necro-speculation" (a concept borrowed from Kris

---

[15] Michel Foucault and François Ewald, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* (Macmillan, 2003), 10.

[16] Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*, vol. 19 (Univ of California Press, 2006).

[17] Glen Coulthard, "Place against Empire: Understanding Indigenous Anti- Colonialism," n.d., 5; Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (November 21, 2014), https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/22170; Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity," *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 249–55, https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2016.0038.

[18] Ananya Roy, "Racial Banishment," *Keywords in Radical Geography: Antipode at 50*, 2019, 227–230; Jodi A. Byrd et al., "Predatory ValueEconomies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities," *Social Text* 36, no. 2 (135) (June 1, 2018): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-4362325.

Manjapra, which I will define in just a moment). As a derivative of the necrospeculative, my use of the term *displacement-driven speculative- finance* describes the market incentive for landlords (both corporate and private) to evict and displace tenants from their apartment units. In the context of Los Angeles' housing market this takes the shape of what Neil Smith refers to as the "rent gap" theory for gentrification, where "market rate" rises at the speed of real estate speculation. In NELA, the speculative interest in multi-family residential properties exploits a severe lack of affordable housing, exacerbated by the disproportionate impact of the foreclosure crisis in low-income Black and Brown neighborhoods, to profit off the imposed precarity of these neighborhoods. Those who refuse to leave, as acts of resistance and survival, are further criminalized and subjected to state terror.

My study is specific to Latinx and Chicanx culture as it is overdetermined by the paradigmatic representation of NELA's Mexican and Mexican-American community (mostly non-Black Latinx). There are a number of Afro-Cubans as well as "Blaxicans" (Half Mexican-American and African-American or half Black and half Mexican as those two identities are conceived in LA as essentially distinct). The limitations of this project preclude me from examining how Afro-Latinxs negotiate the aforementioned terrain, nor do I touch on how Central Americans and Indigenous populations of Southern Mexico influence the Latinx landscape of NELA. This project is most concerned with how an over-determined Northern Mexican Latinidad is negotiated in a onto-epistemic project that reinforces the contours of its shape in the protest against and the facilitation of gentrification. The seeming antagonism within the Latinx community between pro- and

anti-gentrification advocates moves me towards a deeper analysis of NELA as a place, a conceived space and imagined community as defined by disparate authoritative voices (i.e. local historians, boosters, artists, gangs, speculators, and anti-displacement activists).

As an example, my allusions to the 1990s in Chapters 1 and 3 gesture towards the political climate and context of state and federal legislation that worked to criminalize immigrant and non-immigrant Latinx peoples in an act to remove their bodies from the "conceived space" of the state. Their position in the "perceived space" of NELA made the Latinx community both authors and subjects of an alternative citizenship that subverts or directly counters the scripts of their own objectification.[19] This is reflected in the "Lived Space" of NELA as Henri Lefebvre's three categories of space combine to create the (anti-) displacement landscape. The tension between conceived space (of state or empire), perceived space (of alternative Latinx citizenships) and lived space (of NELA) moves me to understand how all three engage and negotiate indigenous and black geographies.

My project implicitly and explicitly engages with the multiple debates around Latinx positionalities, the evolving nature of their racialization in the US, and their roles in fighting or perpetuating the settler colonial and "anti-Black city." In other words, this is a study of Empire, and the post-colonial Latinx subjectivities and Mexican American relational racializations Empire foment in the United States. I achieve this through an

[19] Nicholas De Genova, "' American' Abjection:" Chicanos," Gangs, and Mexican/Migrant Transnationality in Chicago," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 33, no. 2 (2008): 141–174; Romeo Guzman, "The Transnational Life and Letters of the Venegas Family, 1920s to 1950s," *The History of the Family* 21, no. 3 (2016): 457–482; Sylvia Zamora, "Transnational Racialization: How Immigration Transforms Conceptions of Race in Mexico and the US" (PhD Thesis, UCLA, 2014).

examination of belonging, in all its manifestations. Belonging takes on many forms. It is naturally place-based, within varying scales of "place" that range from neighborhood, to city, county, region, state, country, and continent. Belonging is based on the narratives we create, invest in, and instrumentalize against arguments for our displacement. It is also, as stated previously, an ontological proposition. I argue that in Highland Park, a political economy of belonging is and has been situated through the libidinal economies of Indigenous "dis/possession" and Black exclusion.

The Necrospeculative - Libidinal Economies of Housing

Kris Manjapra summarizes Achille Mbembe's "necropower" as the infrastructural production of surplus value through "death making and the ability to keep conquered, incarcerated, or occupied peoples in the 'state of injury'." Focusing on the "financial dimensions of necropolitics," he defines necrospeculation as "the search to claim or capture profit through ritualized engagement with the social figure of the dead and the killed." Speculation is the engine of racial capitalism, the imagined profits determined by the right set of conditions, a social and financial calculus of value and desire that reduces Black and Indigenous bodies to variables that facilitate or impede speculative profits. It is a driving logic and defining worldview. At its most explicit, the terrain it works to create is exemplified by the Home Owners' Loan Corporation's redlining maps. Racialized risk and speculation are once again written in the language of bodies in space (i.e. the "Subversive Racial Elements" as they were referred to in their assessments of dangerously heterogenous neighborhoods by the HOLC).

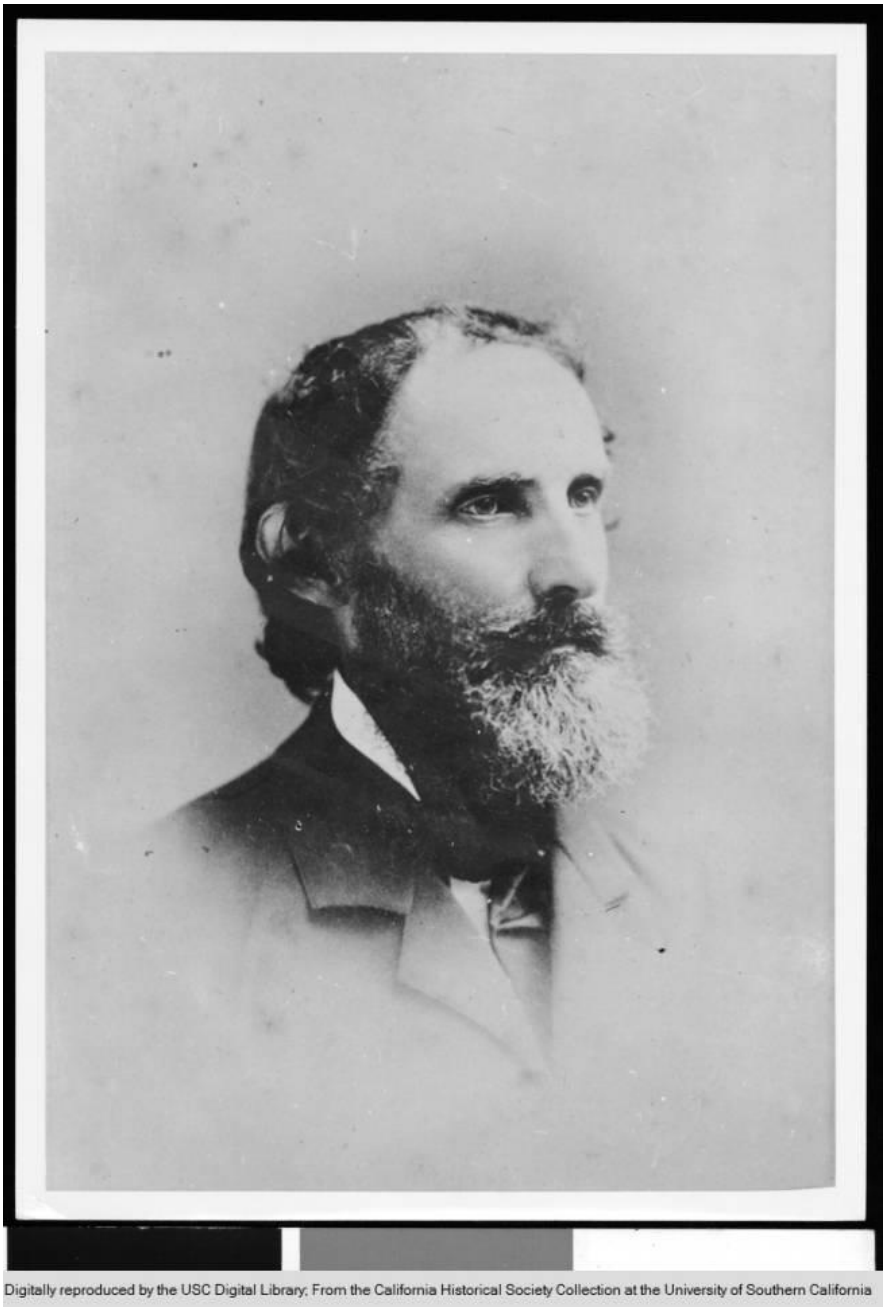


Figure i-1: Andrew Glassell Jr., Founding Father of Highland Park. Digitally reproduced by the USC Digital Library. From the California Historical Society Collection at the University of Southern California.

"Property prices in California were low: 'I believe that a speculator could very safely invest money in the purchase of property, with the assurance that in a few years he would realize a handsome advance'.... He urges his father to sell his 'negroes', come to California, and invest his money safely and profitably there." **(From Roucan to Riches: The Rise of the Glassell Family by David McKenzie Robertson, Pg 316)**

The "bio-politics of home ownership," as argued by Melissa Garcia Lamarca and Maria Kaika, inculcate and manage populations through a paradigm of debt.[20] In the United States, as Byrd et al. describe, this bio-politics is contained within "an ontological proposition" of dis/possession which provides the "logics that order power, violence, accumulation and belonging for all those who find themselves on lands stripped from Indigenous peoples."[21] The "racial banishment" accelerated by the increasing financialization of housing creates, borrowing a term from Manjapra, an financial infrastructure of necrospeculative investment that progresses and profits from the states capacity (in collusion with the market) to reproduce the precarity of life that results in a premature and otherwise preventable death (the working definition of racism coined by Ruth Wilson Gilmore).[22] The "disturbed relationalities" this engenders creates fissures among and within racialized groups, along the lines of what Ananya Roy refers to as a nexus of race, property, and citizenship.[23]

[20] Melissa García-Lamarca and Maria Kaika, "'Mortgaged Lives': The Biopolitics of Debt and Housing Financialisation," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41, no. 3 (2016): 313–327.
[21] Byrd et al., "Predatory ValueEconomies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities."
[22] Roy, "Racial Banishment"; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, vol. 21 (Univ of California Press, 2007); Kris Manjapra, "Necrospeculation," *Social Text* 37, no. 2 (June 1, 2019): 29–65, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-7370979; Raquel Rolnik, "Late Neoliberalism: The Financialization of Homeownership and Housing Rights," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, no. 3 (2013): 1058–1066; Rolnik.
[23] Byrd et al., "Predatory ValueEconomies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities"; Ananya Roy, "Dis/Possessive Collectivism: Property and Personhood at City's End," *Geoforum* 80 (2017): A1–A11.

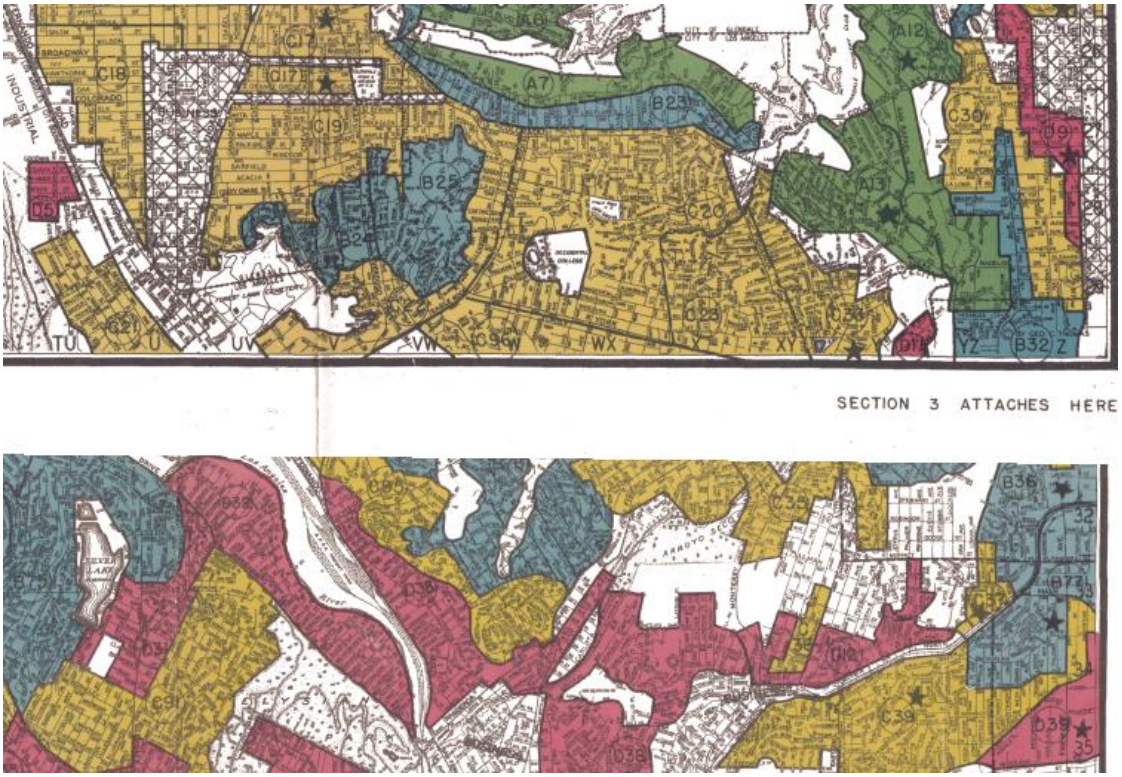


Figure i-2: Portions of HOLC's "redlining" maps – this area covers the Northeast region of Los Angeles. Source: Mapping Inequality, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/

K-Sue Park details a history of the mortgage in the new American colonies as it blurred the lines between personal and real property. She states that when land could be used to settle debts and the mechanisms for foreclosure became enshrined in the American legal scape, that "for the first time, they turned land into an object that could be alienated like chattel, and into an equivalent of money." [24] She describes a new status of fungibility for land that had not existed in England. This is an American invention and for Park has very much to do with the history of US settler colonization. Land would be a substitute for money "not through positive sale, but through debt and loss; foreclosure

[24] K.-Sue Park, "Money, Mortgages, and the Conquest of America," *Law & Social Inquiry* 41, no. 4 (2016): 1006–35, https://doi.org/10.1111/lsi.12222, pg 1014.

was a tool of indigenous dispossession" (1009). As Tiffany Lethabo King argues, "Blackness, as expansion and spatial possibility, becomes a constituting feature of the spatial imagination of the conquistador/settler rather than just another human laborer exploited as a mere technology to produce space" (1023). Life, and that which sustains it, reduced to chattel, a personal property and fungible commodity, creating a new value for its consumer and producer in the "erotic and ritualistic" (Manjapra, 33). This new underlying status of fungibility is one that many Black Studies scholars have referenced when discussing the role of black bodies in the development of the nation.[25] As Manjapra states, "Finance, with its supposed insistence on the universal fungibility of all value on Earth through the general equivalent of the money form, actually provides the means by which the productiveness of killing off racialized communities is converted into monetized, reinvestable value" (34).[26]

As NELAA, we saw this play out through increased policing, which Ana Muniz details in her writing on the historic development of gang injunctions, as a tactic to reinforce racial boundaries when gentrification brings an influx of affluent and white residents to predominantly poor and non-white neighborhoods.[27] Governmental interventions came in the form of "community redevelopment" projects and private-

[25] Saidiya V. Hartman and Assistant Professor Department of African American Studies Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997); Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65–81; Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms* (Duke University Press, 2010).
[26] Kris Manjapra, "Necrospeculation," *Social Text* 37, no. 2 (June 1, 2019): 29–65, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-7370979.
[27] Ana Muniz, "Maintaining Racial Boundaries: Criminalization, Neighborhood Context, and the Origins of Gang Injunctions," *Social Problems* 61, no. 2 (2014): 216–236.

public partnerships that nonprofits are especially engineered to foster. This parallels the mass eviction of low income tenants and the businesses that serve them[28] and leads to the increased presence of encampments and the record numbers of houseless people throughout the city.[29] It is this ultimate designation of the non-"Human" (or non-western bourgeoise "Man") as it intersects with the non-propertied (holding or leasing) that positions certain bodies as the most deserving of state terror and concentrated policing.[30] The precarity of life produced from displacement-driven speculative finance raised the cost of living in neighborhoods that had otherwise been marked as too risky of an investment, the formerly red-lined neighborhoods of Los Angeles. The "subversive racial elements" that depreciated the value of a holding, geographically, are the fungible product that drives the increased financialization of carceral institutions as well as housing.

---

[28] Raquel Rolnik, *Urban Warfare* (Verso Books, 2019); INCITE, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2007), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucr/detail.action?docID=4811867; Ana Muniz, "Maintaining Racial Boundaries: Criminalization, Neighborhood Context, and the Origins of Gang Injunctions," *Social Problems* 61, no. 2 (2014): 216–236.

[29] Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, "1371 - 2017 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count - Data Summary - City Of Los Angeles," accessed March 28, 2018, https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=1371-2017-homeless-count-results-city-of-los-angeles.pdf; Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, "Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority," n.d., 15.

[30] Danielle Dupuy, Terry Allen Ma, and Kelly Lytle Hernández, "A Million Dollar Hoods Report," n.d., 1; Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, eds., *Freedom Now! Struggles for the Human Right to Housing in L.A. and Beyond* (Los Angeles: Freedom Now Books, 2012); Jordan T. Camp, *Incarcerating the Crisis: Freedom Struggles and the Rise of the Neoliberal State*, vol. 43 (Univ of California Press, 2016); Jordan T. Camp, "Blues Geographies and the Security Turn: Interpreting the Housing Crisis in Los Angeles," *American Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2012): 653–678. Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

Focusing on Los Angeles, this describes the neoliberal turn in housing policy that has privatized public housing, regressed tenant protections, and sided with the landlord's free market right to evict undesired tenants. The figure in the center of these reforms is the Black body reduced to the signified flesh. The queer and Black body, "welfare queen," and "super predator,", are at the center of the rhetoric that pushed decades of policy promoting policing and undermines housing protections. Highland Park, now a predominantly Latinx and Asian immigrant working class community in Northeast Los Angeles, in the eyes of HOLC avoided redlining because of its ability to keep Black populations distant. However, it received a C rating because of its "haphazard development" and proximity to Black populations nearby. White flight and persistent immigration changed the face of the neighborhood, but NELA's and Highland Park's anti-black infrastructure remained. The impact of housing financialization impacts Latinx populations in high numbers in Highland Park, but the figure of "banishment" remains disproportionately Black.

Likewise, my analysis of dis/possession in Highland Park centers the complicated relationship of indigeneity to Latinx people and their overall engagement with the alienation and commodification of land in NELA. As a culture war, gentrification has been cast as a struggle against the displacement of Latinx culture from the spaces that it helps to create. Highland Park is part of the greater Latinx geographies that make up the city of Los Angeles. The mass eviction of low-income tenants (disproportionately Black) has been accompanied by the shuttering of community spaces, displacement of businesses catering to the low-incomed, and white washing of murals—literally and

figuratively creating a blank canvas on which the new gentrifying culture is painted. In the case studies presented, both the *investment in* and *denial of* the property form by Latinx populations have worked to reproduce a practice of Indigenous "dis/possession." The desire to possess Indigeneity, and property as an extension, is central to the sovereign politics of US, Mexican, and Chicanx nationalisms to legitimize their claims to land (as in the case of US treaties, as well as constituting myths of indigenous ancestry and homelands). For Chicanx peoples, this desire stems from an impetus to create a metaphor for projected racial status in the US, substantiating their assertions, as in the former, for territorial claims to the US Southwest.

Under Empire: A Socio-Spatial and Relational Analysis

In "Of Other Spaces," Michel Foucault writes "we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another."[31] Highland Park and NELA are their own geographies distinct from the rest of the city. This distinction lies both in topographic/ecological features, but also with respect to the social matrix described above. They sit in contrast to other majority non-white neighborhoods in Los Angeles, but together are separate from the white and affluent pockets of the county. NELA differs from other areas, like East LA and South Central, which face their own unique patterns of gentrification, displacement, and/or "banishment." Increasingly, over the decades, these neighborhoods were or had become mostly Latinx. In South Central, the proximity of the Latinx population to Blackness

[31] Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22–27.

places it in contradistinction to the prototypical Latinidades of the "Greater Eastside," NELA included. NELA is marked by its proximity to Whiteness. Again, they both maintain an active separation from Blackness that makes the category of the Afro-Latinx, under current racial schemas, an illegible contradiction. These regional developments within the city are historical and contemporary frames for gentrification, which has shifted Los Angeles' racial landscape.

Highland Park claims its identity as a city of many "firsts." Self-identified as "the city's first suburb," Highland Park manifested during the first real estate boom in Los Angeles' long history of booms and busts. Highland Park was selected for the city's first parkway, the 110, which ushered in a new era of modernization, displacement, mass suburbanization, and white flight. It is the site of Los Angeles' first museum, the Southwest Museum, started by the man who coined the term "Southwest," Charles Lummis. Cast as a staunch multi-culturalist and Native American rights advocate, his purpose and mission were to preserve Southwest Native American culture from extinction from an expanding and modernizing US society. Lummis helped romanticize Los Angeles (as part of the greater Southwest); early real estate boosters contracted him to deploy his vision and continue to create demand for Los Angeles' greatest resource – land. Connoted with themes of opportunity, sunshine, and adventure, booster ephemera comprises another arena of the "necrospeculative."

In Los Angeles, the booster campaign manufactured speculation from the active disappearance and destruction of the Indigenous body. From early California statehood to the current moment, this was a campaign of Indigenous genocide that promotes the

ontological proposition of the settler conquering the final frontier of the contiguous US, and the perpetual frontier that is Los Angeles' real estate market. At times, the fungibility of land and bodies were interchangeable. During the antebellum period, this followed the development of "plantation landscapes," wherein profits from the plantation economies could be invested in the burgeoning land markets West and South of the original colonies. This is a settler colonial geography that, according to Tiffany King, requires the spatialization of the black body as the grounds on top of which the white "master/settler" can actualize as a self-determining subject and to materialize as a landmark on the cartographic representations of "Man."

The necrospeculative — for Indigenous bodies — means markets are made from "dis/possession." The Indigenous body is meant to be disappeared, to only exist as the fungible product of booster ephemera that sells the romantic vision of "the West" and Los Angeles. The possession of Indigeneity, in the case of Charles Lummis, helped appease his restless anxiety over the deteriorating nature Eastern and Southern European migration imposed on an American identity and history. Assuaging feelings of alienation and isolation, Lummis tried to reconnect himself to an authentic notion of Americanness that was entirely dependent on the static and ahistorical representation of Native American culture as pre-modern. As Jason E. Pierce argues, Lummis was most enamored with the Native populations he believed mostly closely resembled the ethos of his Anglo and Protestant background—worth saving from the full brutality of genocidal "Indian wars." Absent from his world view were the traces and hidden geographies of Native survivance, forced underground but never displaced. The practice of possession that

Lummis fostered resonates in the Chicanx use of Indigenisms in the fight against their own displacement.

The Intimacies of Four Empires

My project engages recent conversations in the field of Ethnic Studies, namely questioning relational frameworks and new grammars of solidarity that do not flatten nor mystify distinct experiences and forms of racialization for Native, Black, Asian, and Latinx populations; this is a critical ethnic studies project. My contribution to this emergent scholarship centers on questions of land and property, tenure and belonging for Latinx populations in Los Angeles. As part of the Latinx Studies field that positions demographic questions and the evolving status of Latinx peoples in the United States, this project disentangles Latinx peoples' own projects of settler colonial and anti-black inhabitancies outside of the US.[32] The epochal shifts of Los Angeles' racial landscape parallel the transitions between four iterations of "Empire,"—the autocratic rule of the Spanish Empire, the liberal ideologies of governance under Mexican authority, the US imperialist imposition of distinct racial separations, and the "empire of finance" in which we are now located. As Maylei Blackwell describes it, Los Angeles is a palimpsest

[32] Taunya Lovell Banks, "Mestizaje and the Mexican Mestizo Self: No Hay Sangre Negra, so There Is No Blackness," *S. Cal. Interdisc. LJ* 15 (2005): 199; María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford University Press, 2008); Shannon Speed, "Structures of Settler Capitalism in Abya Yala," *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2017): 783–790; María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *Indian given: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States* (Duke University Press, 2016); Rosario Aguilar, "The Tones of Democratic Challenges: Skin Color and Race in Mexico," *Política y Gobierno*, January 1, 2013, 25–57; Bobby Vaughn, "Mexico Negro: From the Shadows of Nationalist Mestizaje to New Possibilities in Afro-Mexican Identity," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 6, no. 1 (2013): 227–240; Andrés Villarreal, "Stratification by Skin Color in Contemporary Mexico," *American Sociological Review* 75, no. 5 (October 1, 2010): 652–78, https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122410378232.

comprised of layers of "Empire" that leave traces upon distinct geographies. This project is invested in uncovering how Latinx populations negotiate US racial landscapes through settler colonial and anti-black grammars specific to US and Latin-American formations.

Garcia-Lamarca and Kaika view mortgages as "a technology of power over life that forges an intimate relationship between global financial markets, everyday life and human labour."[33] The value of one's person becomes intimately tied to the success of one's mortgage payments. The financialization of housing in relation to its subject-making capacities goes well beyond its contemporary iteration, as Garcia-Lamarca and Kaika's account of early to mid-20th century Spain exemplifies. In the United States, the Federal Housing Administration's creation of the modern-day mortgage system was itself responsible for the expansion of white wealth and grew the materiality of white privilege, while red-lining effectively deprived communities of color from similar patterns of wealth accumulation.[34] Following the Fair Housing Act of 1968, formerly white neighborhoods became Black and Brown almost overnight. De-facto redlining, blockbusting, and continued racial/ economic segregation sustained the deprivation of Black and Brown communities in the decades that followed.[35] However, as Rolnik

[33] Melissa García-Lamarca and Maria Kaika, "'Mortgaged Lives': The Biopolitics of Debt and Housing Financialisation," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41, no. 3 (2016): 313–327.
[34] Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, *Black Wealth / White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (Routledge, 2013); Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Harvard University Press, 1993), https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=uGslMsIBNBsC&oi=fnd&pg=PR8&dq=american+apartheid&ots=I64yd-C7Z8&sig=QOfycQwiH3SuIoN-kGIKdZJRWy0.
[35] Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, vol. 13 (Univ of California Press, 2004); Jack Schneider, "Escape From Los Angeles: White Flight from Los Angeles and Its Schools, 1960-1980," *Journal of Urban History* 34, no. 6 (September 1, 2008): 995–1012, https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144208317600; Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (University of California Press, 2005).

argues, finance capital as it grew exponentially over the decades, ventured into the new and often risk-laden markets of low and middle-income borrowers. Coinciding with the usurpation of civil rights rhetoric towards what Jodi Melamed calls a "neoliberal multiculturalism," Latinx peoples were selectively brought into a project of whiteness that is situated in part around home ownership. Helping to build a conservative political base in the US, home ownership makes Latinx people complicit/ invested in the projects of racialized precarity that disproportionately deny African-Americans as well as many others from access to property, the security of social services, governmental protections against unjust evictions, or even the freedom of mobility (as evidenced by the murder of Trayvon Martin among many others). I see these patterns repeated in the efforts of homeowners organizing against homeless encampments and the construction of transitional/affordable housing in their neighborhoods as well as in the casual anti-Blackness that Latinx people engage in to distinguish themselves from African Americans.

Whiteness as property and property as a financial asset and investment is mutually dependent on the transformation of Black and Indigenous bodies (in varying geographic scales) into fungible commodities. My project speaks of the political economies of belonging and the libidinal economies of housing in NELA.[36] Here I insist that the non-

[36] Frank Wilderson, quoting Jared Sexton, defines the libidinal economy as the "economy, or distribution and arrangement, of desire and identification (their condensation and displacement), and the complex relationship between sexuality and the unconscious." The organization of desire and its inter-exchange with its political-economic elements fuel the housing market and sustain it as an industry actively commodifies desires, making "the home" (or property as a concept) a fetish object. The home for Black and Brown people who have been denied access to property view the home as an object of displaced desires for security, stability, and wealth (social and material). However, in the United States, the concept of property itself exists in the form of an enclosure that

Black Latinx community's ability to self-determine is achieved through relations of violence that reify them as subjects to be mapped rather than the terrain on which subjects are mapped. This violence structures the most quotidian forms of social life. In that sense, my project takes on the question of post-modern geographers in their assessments of Latinx socio-spatial formations as a fundamentally relational process. I highlight how community, at its foundation, is a violent act set with parameters that extend a self-determining recognition to some and not others.

Jodi Byrd et al. in *Predatory Value: Economies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities*, reevaluate the biopolitical project of homeownership Garcia-Lamarca and Kaika describe as one based on violent regimes of property. They state, "various iterations of liberal capitalism have historically conceived of personhood in terms of the property relation, dispossession in this sense is an ontological proposition." Similar to the argument I forward on the Latinx inhabitation of native Tongva land, Byrd et al. argue "the US imperial nation-state adjudicates itself through an economy of inclusion intended to signify 'debts paid,' Indigenous dispossession continues unabated to provide the logics that order power, violence, accumulation, and belonging for all those who find

---

necessitates exclusion of the "Black body" from the "White home". In other words (and has been evident in the history of residential segregation and extralegal murders of Trayvon Martin, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, among countless others), the property form becomes material through the death and exclusion, the ontological denial/ negation of Black bodies. See Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black*; Jeannine Bell, "Can't We Be Your Neighbor: Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman, and the Resistance to Blacks as Neigbors Symposium: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 at 50: Past, Present and Future: Panel III: Reshaping Public and Private Space: Public Accommodations, Neighborhoods, and Housing," *Boston University Law Review* 95 (2015): 851–72; Madeline Holcombe and Alec Snyder CNN, "Warrant in Fatal Encounter between Breonna Taylor and Police Was Linked to Gentrification Plan, Family's Lawyers Claim," CNN, accessed September 15, 2020, https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/07/us/breonna-taylor-lawsuit-gentrification/index.html.

themselves on lands stripped from Indigenous peoples."[37] As Laura Pulido argues, in a place like Los Angeles, alternative imaginings of nation-state formations as a radical push for self-determination and sovereignty for Mexican Americans within the US operates on a logic of territoriality that perpetuates the erasure of native populations. Pulido identifies the territorial logic of Aztlan in the mythic origin and contemporary nationalism of Chicanismo as part and parcel of a settler colonial project that began in Los Angeles under the Empire of New Spain.[38]

According to Patrick Wolfe, selective and contextual racializations are imposed due to demands for either land or labor.[39] Shannon Speed demonstrates that the racializations of Indigenous populations in Mexico have had to meet the demands for both, leading to fluid forms of racialization that write in and out Indigenous peoples as part of the socio-political body.[40] Like Sylvia Zamora and others, the focus on transnationalisms in my project searches for the intimacies of each states ordering racial logics.[41] Following the work of scholars in my field, I apply a critical lens to the Indigenisms adopted by Chicanx artists and activists to investigate the internal dimensions/limitations of decolonial demands for sovereignty and self-determination in a search for justice and

---

[37] Jodi A. Byrd et al., "Predatory ValueEconomies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities," *Social Text* 36, no. 2 (135) (June 1, 2018): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-4362325.
[38] Speed, "Structures of Settler Capitalism in Abya Yala"; Laura Pulido, "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity III: Settler Colonialism and Nonnative People of Color," *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no. 2 (April 2018): 309–18, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516686011.
[39] Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism* (A&C Black, 1999).
[40] Speed, "Structures of Settler Capitalism in Abya Yala"; Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, "Who's the Indian in Aztlán? Re-Writing Mestizaje, Indianism, and Chicanismo from the Lacandón," *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*, 2001, 402–23.
[41] Sylvia Zamora, "Racial Remittances: The Effect of Migration on Racial Ideologies in Mexico and the United States," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 2, no. 4 (2016): 466–481; De Genova, "' American' Abjection"; Davis, *Magical Urbanism*.

equity in urban contexts. Scholars such as Maria Eugenia Cotera and Maria Josefina Saldana Portillo have pointed to the use of Indigenisms as metaphor for Chicanx peoples to articulate their relationship with the US empire as second-class citizens. What they refer to as a "mestizo mourning," also applies to the lament expressed by Chicanx artists and activists over the loss of Indigenous knowledges, practices, and identity in Mexico.[42] Lourdes Alberto, likewise, illuminates the contradiction of Chicanx Indigenous reclamation as it follows and perpetuates the Mexican nationalist erasure of Indigenous peoples in Mexico.[43] Just as Shannon Speed and Laura Pulido argue in their work on Latin American and US settler colonial paradigms, respectively, Alberto argues "Chicanos' and Chicanas' uses of Indigeneity is viewed as an extension of a colonial practice." As Maylei Blackwell demonstrates in her work on *Critical Latinx Indigenous geographies*, a place such as Los Angeles has been subject to succeeding and overlapping landscapes of empire and resistance.[44] Continuous movement and migration across the Americas make Los Angeles what Renya Ramirez refers to as a "native hub", but also a place where different empires have insisted on varying socio-political and material structures, resulting in multiple forms of racialization for Indigenous and mestizes alike. As Pulido, Alberto, Cotera, and Saldana-Portillo have argued, for Chicanx people this has resulted in a complicated relationship with empire that places them in both a position of

[42] M. Cotera and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, "Indigenous but Not Indian? Chicana/Os and the Politics of Indigeneity," *The World of Indigenous North America*, 2015, 549–567.
[43] Lourdes Alberto, "Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas: The 'Indian' in the Chicano Revolutionary Imaginary," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2016): 107–127; Lourdes Alberto, "Making Racial Subjects: Indigeneity and the Politics of Chicano/a Cultural Production" (PhD Thesis, 2008).
[44] María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, "Critical Latinx Indigeneities: A Paradigm Drift," *Latino Studies*, 2017, 1–18; Maylei Blackwell, "Geographies of Indigeneity: Indigenous Migrant Women's Organizing and Translocal Politics of Place," *Latino Studies*, 2017, 1–26.

power/privilege relative to Indigenous populations in Mexico and the United States and a status of deep infrastructural neglect and social depression. The latter was the basis of a movement seeking civil/human rights and a cultural renaissance of reclamation and repair (i.e. the Chicano Movement).

Inspired by Tiffany Lethabo King's interventions in the fields of Black and Native Studies, I place Chicanx and Latinx Studies on a "terra non-firma," "the Shoals" of Black and Native Studies critical conjunctures.[45] I do so to dismantle that which makes Chicanx and Latinx bodies, landscapes, and geographies legible in a US hegemonic vision. As well, I intend to disentangle traditions and reveal underlying buttresses of a Latinx identity in Los Angeles and the US. To place Chicanx and Latinx Studies on the Shoals troubles the stability of empirical studies imposed on Latinx experiences in the US, the categorical breakdowns and positivist understandings of Chicanx and Latinx struggles. My work reveals the deeply relational nature of our identity formations and subjective understandings of ourselves as written in a tradition of de-Indigeneity and anti-blackness, the engines of settler colonial expansion and racial capitalist extractions.

My dissertation started as a study of gentrification in NELA. It is my hope that it has moved beyond those limitations to make claims about something more profound at play—what the socio-economic phenomena of gentrification exacerbates and is made possible by. This study connects the fields of Critical Geography with Critical Ethnic Studies, following in the scholar activist tradition of Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Laura Pulido,

[45] Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Duke University Press, 2019).

Clyde Woods, Joao Costa Vargas, among many others. It does so by pushing forward a relational analysis of race and space that Scott Kurashige, Natalia Molina, and Laura Barraclough have helped popularize in the field. Centering the work of Chicanx/Latinx, Postcolonial, Black and Native Studies scholars, I bring these fields together in a conversation that presents distinct challenges to Chicanx/ Latinx Studies and the field of housing justice in struggles against racialized displacement/banishment. This is done with the intention of understanding new possibilities and opportunities for mutual solidarity. What are conditions of possibility for solidarity? This question perhaps hides another more obvious one: what generates the tensions [I am] describing? What are the fundamental differences between the Indigenous and the Black positionality? Can they be overcome, and if so, under what terms?[46] These are the questions this project has become unsettled by and that must be continually confronted in the field of Critical Ethnic Studies.

Gente de Razon – The People of Reason

Los Angeles

Los Angeles was founded in 1781 by eleven families of mixed African, American, and European ancestry. They were accompanied by priests, soldiers and governmental officials who had enlisted the eleven families from Sonora, Sinaloa, and Baja California to finally lay claim to the northern frontier and coastal lands the Spanish empire feared they could lose to other occupying forces. Ten years prior, the physical

[46] These questions were posed to me by my committee member Joao Costa Vargas. My dissertation implicitly and explicitly engages in these conversations.

occupation of this burgeoning Spanish territory started with the missions established to reign in the local Indigenous population, a Spanish policy of "reduccion y congregacion" - reduction and concentration. The mission system in California was the political and economic backbone of Spanish settlement, claiming an early monopoly on Indigenous land and labor. However, the settlement of California starts well before this date. Over a century earlier and after the initial expeditions of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo in the mid-16th century, Sebastián Vizcaíno was charged with creating a map of the California coastline that Cabrillo had encountered in his expedition. The cartographic representation, accompanied with place names still in use today, initiated a stalled process of colonization that would finally be galvanized by news of Russian voyages across the Siberian peninsula. California was now in the settler imaginary, inculcated in a grammar of territorial expansion that was crystallized in Vizcaino's early maps.

In 1769, through an expedition on sea and land, Gaspar de Portola and Fernando Rivera de Moncada, along with Junipero Serra and soldado de cuero Jose Maria Verdugo established the missions, pueblos, and military outposts on the new Spanish frontier of Alta California. The monopoly that the missions enjoyed early on were steadily challenged and sabotaged by both the local Indigenous population and the soldiers and pobladores who sought to wrest political and economic control of the land away from the missionaries. A beleaguered and protracted struggle towards liberalism moved the colonial class of Criollos and Mestizos in Mexico to claim independence from the autocratic rule of the Spanish monarchy. Under Spanish rule, land could only be held in title by the crown. Land was administered by retired soldiers like Jose Maria Verdugo,

but only so far as his use of the land did not supersede that of the collective good nor Indigenous tenure for fear of social and political instability. Nevertheless, the land was alienated from Indigenous peoples' sovereign control over the political and economic landscape. The communal uses of that land that was subsequently generated from this alienation often, in language and in practice, wrote Indigenous peoples as outside of that community.

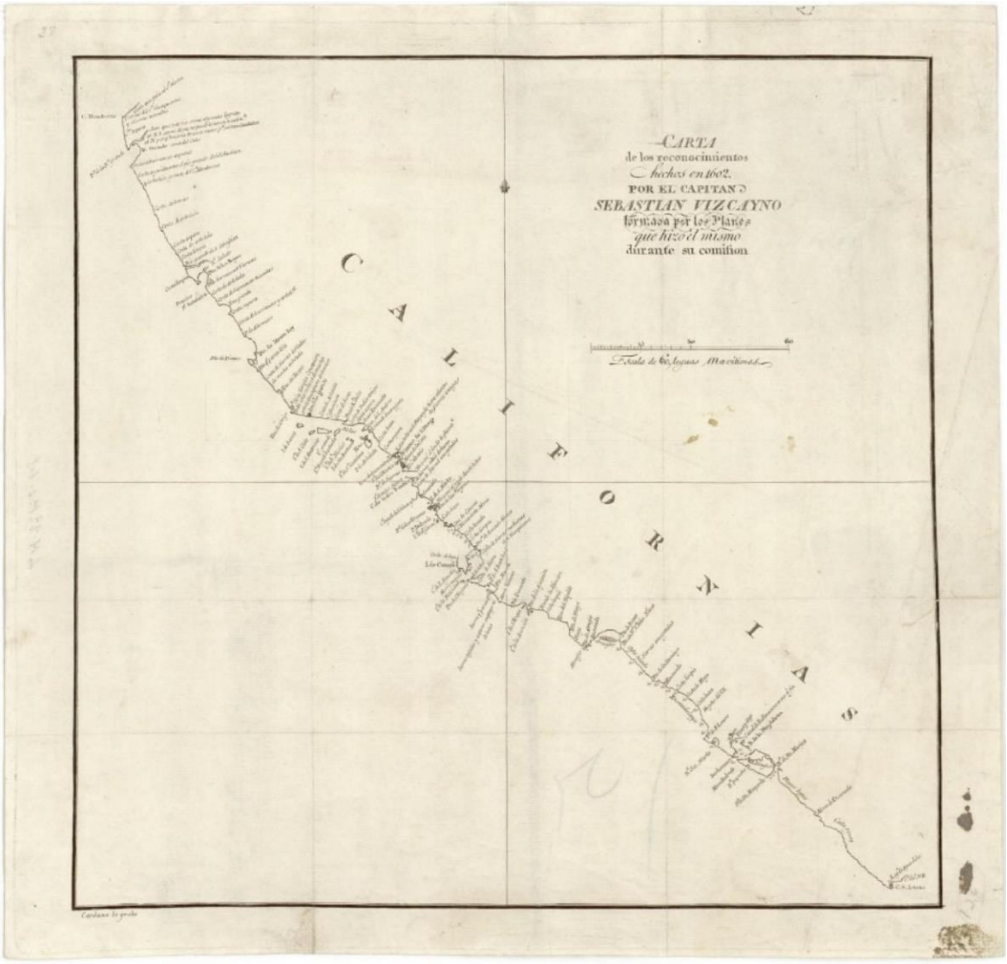


Figure i-3: A 1602 map of the California coast by Sebastian Viscaino.[47]

[47] "1602 - Carta de los reconocimientos hechos en 1602 por el Capitan Sebastian Vizcayno -formada por los Planos que hizo el mismo durante su comisión - Cardano lo grabó" (2017). Pre-1824 Maps. 22. https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/hornbeck_spa_1_a/22

Under the new Mexican government and its more liberal ideologies, these racialized exclusions of Indigenous peoples persisted in the face of the government's efforts to diminish their significance. Attempts to include them into the fold as citizens was denied by the Indigenous peoples of California, now subject to the missionaries patronizing surveillance and likewise exploited by the Californios, the territories' own colonial elite that sought to increase their economic and political influence in the region. The claims to land and title would accelerate in the lead up to the end of Mexican rule, culminating with the reign of an expanding US Empire. Following the end of the Mexican American War, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo guaranteed to the former Mexican citizens of Mexico's former northern territories that if choosing to stay and be governed by a new rule, they would be granted the protections of their rights, including rights to property. Now inculcated in a US system of racialized citizenship, the promise of their continued whiteness was fulfilled in varying degrees, leaving some secure in their claims, while others suffered the violence of poverty, secondary status, and social exclusion. The desire to claim lands not yet owned by actors of the preceding empire was the premise of eighteen treaties with over a hundred different Native California Tribes and a genocidal war that sought to bury those treaties, driving many Native peoples to a life underground.

The necessity of Indigenous disappearance drove a settler colonial enterprise of the speculative real estate industry that endeavored to wipe the slate clean for a signifying narrative that painted Los Angeles as an idyllic paradise, full of sunshine and riches. As Patrick Wolfe argues, the Native subject/object must always be available for elimination.

Patents created by the Congressional Land Commission, along with the denied treaties, set the stage for a series of economic boom and bust in the development of Los Angeles built environment and social landscape. Now embedded within the infrastructural networks that connected the "West" to the rest of the United States, continuous migration of white settlers bolstered this purveying image of Los Angeles as the "great white spot."[48] It was these networks, in conjunction with the imperial incursions beyond the contingent US, that made Los Angeles a place of non-white inhabitance, a "second city" outside the imagination that drove real estate speculation.[49] Los Angeles' desire to be an open-shop town necessitated the inclusion of white migrants as owners of property, their whiteness and a single-family home, creating the city of "contented labor" where each man had his home and lawn to manicure on the weekend.[50] It also necessitated the inclusion of precarious, cheap, and racialized labor to maintain the literal and social wages at the bare minimum.

Highland Park

Highland Park was founded in 1885 when Morgan and Judson, in addition to the Rogers Brothers and others – the "cadre of real estate developers who believed that growth was not inevitable but desired by the community" - subdivided the former ranch

[48] Scott Kurashige, "BETWEEN 'WHITE SPOT' AND 'WORLD CITY': RACIAL INTEGRATION AND THE ROOTS OF MULTICULTURALISM," *A Companion to Los Angeles*, 2014, 56; Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*.
[49] Raúl Villa, *Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture* (University of Texas Press, 2000).
[50] Tom Zimmerman, *Paradise Promoted: The Booster Campaign That Created Los Angeles, 1870-1930* (Angel City Press, 2008).

land of Jose Maria Verdugo into individual parcels.[51] These subdivided lots were the fungible commodities Los Angeles' boosters packaged to potential settlers from the East Coast and Midwest. The city and community were marketed as an idyllic paradise, full of opportunity. This essence still reverberates in tourist and real estate branding today. Highland Park was, as Charles Fisher puts it, "born of the boom." The convergence of two competing rail lines offering lower and lower fares for people to travel to the West. Los Angeles (and southern California more broadly) was a tropical reprieve from other developed and developing territories in the United States; it was also rich in agricultural production. As Glen S. Dumke notes, these qualities alone were not enough to attract the attention of potential settlers. The first real estate boom of 1887 set a high precedent for which developers sought to repeat over successive cycles of peaks and valleys in the Los Angeles housing and land market.[52] Highland Park was born from speculation. It was birthed alongside the image of Los Angeles as a paradise of opportunity. It also cemented a new spatial and racial order that saw the old rancho system finally die out to the new purpose of the land—real estate speculation.

The historiography of Highland Park, first printed in 1923 and again 80 years later by Fisher, is part of the tradition of boosterism carried through the successive generations of real estate developers, and other settler colonists, invested in Los Angeles' commodifiable image. Written and published by the publicity department of Highland Park Branch of the Security Trust & Savings Bank of Los Angeles, the timeline of

---

[51] Charles J. Fisher, *Highland Park* (Arcadia Publishing, 2008).
[52] Glenn S. Dumke, "The Real Estate Boom of 1887 in Southern California," *Pacific Historical Review* 11, no. 4 (1942): 425–38, https://doi.org/10.2307/3633255.

Highland Park begins by recognizing the community's founders as "a selected people." These early pioneers were the characters of Charles Lummis, Andrew Glassell, and Alfred Chapman, as well as equally important citizens of war-torn Denton County, Texas (100 families led by the "pioneer mother" Tempe Sarah Ann Rogers). The sons of that pioneering mother would be the same Rodgers Brothers who would go on to found Garvanza (a community now subsumed by Highland Park).

Before the tracts, allotments, and subdivisions, the land was first separated into private ranch land granted to Jose Maria Verdugo, a soldado de cuera, who came in the 18th century. He was part of the settling expeditions mandated by the Viceroyalty, under the order of King Carlos, and carried forward by Gaspar de Portola, who was accompanied by Franciscan friar Junipero Serra, and augmented by the inland expedition of Captain Fernando Rivera y Moncada. Verdugo was a young man at that point – solider for the protection of the priest and pobladores that would make the missions and first pueblos along California's coast. Arriving first to San Diego and then later assigned to stand as guard for Mission San Gabriel, Verdugo served god and crown until his retirement in 1798. He would retire to his ranch, Rancho San Rafael, first granted to him by Governor Fages in 1784 and confirmed by Governor Borica in 1798. At the time it was only the 3rd land grant administered in Alta California, a 36,403-acre land grant north of the emerging pueblo of Los Angeles. Upon his death, the ranch was split between Catalonia, his blind daughter, and Julio, his only son. Prosperity came to the Verdugo family when increased demand for beef accompanied the population boom in Northern

California, but it was short lived due to increased competition and drought.[53] Spanish and Mexican titles were respected by the United States, but Rancho San Rafael was eventually lost via a defaulted loan that went through eight years of litigation and interest (a 3,445-dollar loan converted to 58,000 dollars in debt). That amount was paid by Alfred Chapman, a lawyer, who along with his partner Andrew Glassell. dealt primarily in real estate under the auspices of their own law firm. They played a central role in the great partition that split the rancho San Rafael between 28 different parties.[54]

This transition from Mexican possession to early California statehood was formalized in 1851 under the United States Land Commission. Secured via the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the former citizens of Mexico's California territories were afforded the protections of citizenship under their new sovereign, the United States. This was the case for the property rights of title holders, those who received land grants from New Spain under the authority of the Spanish Crown and subsequently by Mexican California Governors who under Mexican Independence increasingly grew their local autonomy to administer land grants at will.[55] For 2 years, from 1851 to 1853, individuals and collectives submitted their applications to have their land grants patented under the new federal jurisdiction of the US government. The process was long and the transition

---

[53] George Shochat, "The Casa Adobe de San Rafael (The Sanchez Adobe) In Glendale, California," *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1950): 269–92, https://doi.org/10.2307/41168273.

[54] Shochat.

[55] George Harwood Phillips, "Indians and the Breakdown of the Spanish Mission System in California," *Ethnohistory*, 1974, 291–302; Carlos Salomon, "Secularization in California: Pío Pico at Mission San Luis Rey," *Southern California Quarterly* 89, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 349–71, https://doi.org/10.2307/41172390.

complicated. Spanish and Mexican surveys varied from the rigid character of America's grid system when deciding what boundaries separated one person's land from another.

Under Spanish rule, those boundaries were often between mission lands and the lands held by the crown for the "common good." Jose Maria Verdugo's San Rafael Rancho was granted to him by Governor Fages under the stipulation that his use of the land not supersede that of the public. However, following independence from Spain and the political push toward liberalism in the Mexican Government, in theory, liberalism was to create equality in opportunity and for all to gain access to title, and by relation land. In practice, the powerful political elite in California used it as an occasion to expand their territorial acquisition and economic authority.[56] Likewise, as George Harwood Phillips illustrates, neophytes formally held as wards under the control of the missions rejected Mexico's attempt to include them in the fold as citizens of the state.[57]

Secularization, for many decades, was a goal of both liberal Spanish and Mexican authority figures, but was rejected heavily by the Franciscan Missionaries under the argument that the neophytes under their control still did not have the ability to comport themselves as rational subjects .[58] Fearing the corruption of poblador society that the missionaries had discriminated against based on their incomplete indoctrination in the moralities of a Christian faith, they did not want the neophytes under their control to associate with them.[59] To the missionaries, the designation of "Gente de Razon" or

[56] Salomon, "Secularization in California."
[57] Phillips, "Indians and the Breakdown of the Spanish Mission System in California."
[58] Phillips; Salomon, "Secularization in California."
[59] Manuel Patricio Servín, "California's Hispanic Heritage: A View into the Spanish Myth," *Journal of San Diego History* 19 (1973): 1–9.

people of reason, to did not reflect a morality in the rationality of citizenship they had been bestowed under New Spanish authority. Incentivized with the promise of land and opportunities for socio-economic mobility, the African and Indigenous descended populations of Sinaloa were recruited by the "Mestizo solider Captain" Francisco Rivera y Moncada and led in an expedition that would result in the founding of the pueblo de Los Angeles and the loss of life for Rivera himself in the Yuma rebellion of 1781.[60] The Mission San Gabriel had already been established a decade prior (1771).

As a frontier institution, the mission would join with the presidio in initial process of Spanish settlement. The Presidio (or fort) in collaboration with the mission would execute the policy of "reduccion y recongregacion" – reduction and concentration of the surrounding Indigenous populations to be held at the mission as wards of the missionaries. Again, Phillips, challenging the historiographic denial of Indigenous agency, claims that in addition to the coercion of Spanish of soldiers, incentives of food, stability and political power for the smaller tribes in the area established a relationship to power that included consent and compromise on both ends. The neophytes provided the necessary labor that would push colonization further into the frontier, beyond established the settlements.[61]

---

[60] "Desert Documentary by Kieran McCarty - Chapter 9: The Yuma Massacre," accessed March 24, 2020, http://www.library.arizona.edu/exhibits/desertdoc/massacre.htm; Servín, "California's Hispanic Heritage."

[61] Herbert E. Bolton, "The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish-American Colonies," *The American Historical Review* 23, no. 1 (1917): 42–61; George Harwood Phillips, *Chiefs and Challengers: Indian Resistance and Cooperation in Southern California* (University of California Press Berkeley, CA, 1975); Phillips, "Indians and the Breakdown of the Spanish Mission System in California"; Martha Menchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans* (University of Texas Press, 2001); Robert Archibald, *The Economic Aspects of the California*

Under the early Spanish system of land, title in the frontier land was granted to individual holders on temporary lease and only as a reward and with a requirement for their continued service to the project of settlement. The ranching lands were vital in supporting the infrastructure (roads, irrigation ditches, livestock, and crops) that helped to sustain the pueblos in the early days of their founding.[62] The stipulations imposed upon the first land grantees was that their individual rights to the land were not to supersede that of the common good. The "public" and the state trumped the individual in the access to and use of land. Ranchos were also to not interfere with the agenda of the mission, representing the power and co-dependency of the church and the state. The last stipulation for the ranchers was that they should and could not interfere with the use practices of gentile Indians, whom they depended on as local laborers and feared for their potential to foment rebellion. With the precarity of settlements, disputes, resulting from the insult to Indigenous peoples and sovereignty, catalyzed into large scale rebellion that had the potential to wipe out towns.[63]

The gentile populations subsisted on the lands where they were able and capable of existing unmolested. These peripheral communities were both outside the bounds of the town and civil society. The public and common good under Spanish rule was in the access to neophyte (i.e. newly converted) and gentile labor as well as the lands they appropriated from them. The common good under Mexican rule was in the pueblo

---

Missions, vol. 12 (Academy of American Franciscan History, 1978); Robert Archibald, "Indian Labor at the California Missions: Slavery or Salvation?," *Journal of San Diego History* 24, no. 2 (1978): 172–182.

[62] Shochat, "The Casa Adobe de San Rafael (The Sanchez Adobe) In Glendale, California."

[63] "Desert Documentary by Kieran McCarty - Chapter 9: The Yuma Massacre"; S. W. Hackel, "Sources of Rebellion: Indian Testimony and the Mission San Gabriel Uprising of 1785," *Ethnohistory* 50, no. 4 (October 1, 2003): 643–69, https://doi.org/10.1215/00141801-50-4-643.

infrastructure (i.e. commonwealth) that gentile populations were similarly denied access to.[64] Missions enjoyed a monopoly on neophyte labor and desirable coastal lands in California. The missions strived politically to extend their control over both. Their possession of Indigenous land and labor was a temporary transition for the continued development of the pueblos. Winning the consent of the neophytes was their critical role, one that they claimed was improbable with the corrupting nature of poblador society. On the opposite end, the political-economic elite of California pointed the finger at the mission's ill-treatment of the neophytes as the reason for their continued resistance. Secularization, with the advancement of liberalism, granted more power to the individual to enact their freedom to property at the same time that it was, in theory, meant to spread equality by removing race as a barrier to claim land. The large landholdings of the missions were disbanded, and although those lands were to be subdivided among the neophytes of the missions, in practice the lands were administered among the gente de razon, the citizens and power holders of the pueblos.[65]

In the transition to US title law, the looser boundaries of Spanish and Mexican property claims were to become more pronounced. As the influx of American immigrants came unto settled and unsettled land, the illegible land claims of Indigenous peoples living on the margins of Mexican society could not be translated into American title. The American frontier was expanding westward and with it came a policy of extermination

[64] David Samuel Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.: Race, Space and Municipal Power in Los Angeles, 1781-1894* (New Haven, UNITED STATES: Yale University Press, 2013), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucr/detail.action?docID=3421271.
[65] Salomon, "Secularization in California."

through warfare and state incentivized violence. The flood of new settlers coming into California from the East and Midwest initiated a genocidal war in the 1850s. The policy nationwide was changing, the great Indian wars proving to be too costly to carry forward. A new policy was to take place, one that domesticated rather than exterminated.[66] Benjamin Madley in *An American Genocide* documents that public debate as it was happening in California. The popular opinion was a racialized hate for the Indigenous that was carried out on all levels of the frontier government. Genocide was not only popular; it was state sanctioned and facilitated. However, it was the intervention of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1850 that challenged and attempted to supersede the official discourse coming from California's government. Treaties were the new recommended path forward.[67]

A US congressional injunction of secrecy buried the 18 "lost treaties" of California. Those treaties were made in negotiation with "no fewer than 119 California tribes" by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. According to Benjamin Madley, this was the precursor to a state-sanctioned and incentivized genocide carried out by the newly formed State of California and its citizens. The promised reservation lands, anti-treaty state forces rhetorized, would impinge on the already settled lands of opportunistic migrants who came to California in search of prosperity. As Madley states "many of the constituents wanted unfettered access to California Indian lands, all of which they

[66] Reginald Horsman, "Scientific Racism and the American Indian in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *American Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1975): 152–68, https://doi.org/10.2307/2712339.
[67] Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* (Yale University Press, 2016).

considered valuable or possibly valuable, and most legislators advocated for their constituents' demands for entitlement" (Madley, 167). The speculation over "possibly valuable" California Indian land was the basis for a subversion of the federal government's attempt to sequester the land with less bloodshed and military expenses. The debate over the 18 treaties created a platform where the campaign for entitlement over all lands included in the new state would be open to speculation. This campaign was waged on the premise that Native Americans were vile non-human beings whose extinction would only be prolonged if the treaties were ever to be executed.[68] It was, as the newly formed California state-government suggested, inevitable. It would be an argument that justified the mass murder, rape, and theft of native people and lands across the state.

Communities of Negation

In a post-Mexican American War California, the genocidal stance of American settlers affected all Indigenous populations who had evaded and/ or escaped the Mission system, pre- and post-secularization. My extended focus on Los Angeles concerns the practice of settlement that predates the larger-scale campaign of mass-genocide carried out by Anglo Settlers during the mid-19th century. The formalization of land tenure became more rigid with the influx of Anglo settlers. The laissez-faire attitude of Spanish and Mexican California authorities stemmed from the fear of upsetting the fragile balance of settlement in the area. The pobladores, soldiers, rancheros, and elected officials were

[68] Madley.

both dependent on Indigenous labor and fearful of insurrection. Indigenous populations choosing to live on the outskirts of Spanish and Mexican settlement were left alone, and those living just outside the bounds of the pueblo de Los Angeles on the established ranch lands of retired mission guard Jose Maria Verdugo were to not be interfered with either. In either instance, the notion or bounds of community were firmly established. As Medley states, "anti-indian views prevailed over more sympathetic voices, each time pushing Indians farther beyond the bounds of citizenship and community." Medley's historiography of the California Indian catastrophe reveals how native groups in California were pushed "farther beyond the bounds", but for the most part they had already resided outside and in the margins.[69] As David Samuel Torres-Rouff notes "Californios and vecinos normally thought of indios as existing outside the boundaries of their community… [and] turned widely held notions of Indian difference into institutionalized practices that furthered and substantiated inequality."[70]

The settlement of Rancho San Rafael, as detailed in Charlie Fisher and Highland Park Branch Security of Los Angeles Bank historiographies, exchanged hands from Verdugo to Glassell and Chapman to Judson and Morgan as well as the Rogers brothers in a practice of real estate speculation that made each exchange of the land profitable to its holders (minus the Verdugo family). The pioneering Rogers family had left Tennessee by way of Texas to eventually find themselves in the "promise land by shining pacific" (Los Angeles) in 1868, after the Civil War had devastated their opportunities in Northeast

[69] Madley; Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*
[70] Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.*

Texas.[71] Andrew Glassell, Jr. came to California on a similar mission. Son of Scottish Migrants who had enmeshed themselves in the Southern plantocracy in Virginia, his father had tried his hand in establishing himself further west in Livingston, Alabama. As a young man Andrew Glassell, Jr. left the south for California with a recommendation letter from a Supreme Court Justice. This allowed him to land a job as district attorney of San Francisco and would work under the congressional land commission to settle the contentions over proper boundaries and to verify the old Spanish and Mexican land for US patent.[72] According to David McKenzie Robertson, who did extensive archival research on the Glassell family, Andrew Jr. wrote often to his father, at times advising him to "sell his 'negros,' come to California, and invest his money safely and profitably there" (316). Andrew Sr. never followed on the advice of his son and during the Civil War he had donated all he had to the Confederate cause, leaving him with nothing. (Robertson). With the money from his wife's estate in North Carolina, Andrew Jr. was able to establish himself in Los Angeles after his sympathy for the south during the civil war removed him from his position as DA of San Francisco.

Tiffany Lethabo King describes how the spatialization of the enslaved Black woman's body acts as the grounds on which the master/settler/conquistador actualizes their self-determining capacity over life.[73] The fertility demanded from the soil and Black

---

[71] Charles J. Fisher and Highland Park Heritage Trust, *Garvanza* (Arcadia Publishing, 2010); Security Trust & Savings Bank (Los Angeles Branch Calif) Highland Park, *The Five Friendly Valleys: The Story of Greater Highland Park* (The Branch, 1923).

[72] David McKenzie Robertson, *FROM ROUCAN TO RICHES: THE RISE OF THE GLASSELL FAMILY* (Troubador Publishing Ltd, 2020).

[73] Tiffany Jeannette King, "In the Clearing: Black Female Bodies, Space and Settler Colonial Landscapes" (PhD Thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 2013).

women, a piece of the overall speculation plantation economies dealt in, was to (re)produce the profits that they had initially invested to create. In its most profitable of social wages, the plantation landscape catalyzed the production of a settler class that materialized the frontier as a threshold for an onto-epistemic white supremacy.[74] The celebration of Andrew Glassell in the local histories of Los Angeles and his ability to put his name and that of his relatives on the map (the neighborhood Glassell Park and the streets within were named after him and his relatives) exemplifies King arguments on the self-determining power of the master/ settler dependency on the fungibility of Black flesh. The pioneering Glassell, while in California saw an opportunity much in the same way that others did when they first arrived. An open market, with the help of the California legislature, that sought reduced competition from non-American foreigners (foreign miner's tax) or in legal claim to title by Indigenous parties.[75] The land, similar to the enslaved flesh, were the fungible commodities expensed to enact settlement.

The pioneering families from Denton County, Texas, led by the celebrated figure of the pioneering mother, Tempe Sarah Ann Rogers, need not to have engaged any Native people in actual warfare. The "threat" of an attack was always looming. The pioneering family is defined by a dialectic that ultimately necessitates the death/ disappearance of native populations. The Comanche were an especially present force in Northern Texas life, where the Rogers family, having made their way to from Tennessee

[74] David R. Roediger and Kendrick C. Babcock Professor of History David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (Verso, 1999).
[75] Leonard M. Pitt, "The Foreign Miners' Tax of 1850: A Study of Nativism and Antinativism in Gold Rush California" (PhD Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1955); Madley, *An American Genocide*.

16 years earlier.[76] They decided to leave a "post-civil war South," "frustrated at the lack opportunity".[77] Mother Rogers organized the pioneer train of 100 families, "set out on the Santa Fe Trail on April 3, 1868, with 100 teams of oxen and 300 steers".[78] They arrived in Los Angeles 6 months later, "October 23, 1868, after an arduous journey wrought with a stampede and concern with Native American attacks".[79] The brothers Rogers, Ralph and Edwards, sons of "The Pioneering Mother" were part of "the cadre of real estate developers" that would incorporate and subdivide Garvanza, a neighborhood abutting and later absorbed by Highland Park. They had acquired the land from the legal offices and official business partnership of Andrew Glassell Jr. and Alfred Beck Chapman.[80]

Andrew Glassell Jr., as United States Attorney in San Francisco, worked as an arbitrator on behalf of the city to settle land disputes that arose from the contestation of Mexican land grants, their improper boundaries and overlapping claims. After the civil war, he started his own practice in Los Angeles, which unlike San Francisco, had not yet found its first economic boom outside of the cattle ranchers that profited from the demographic influx of gold prospectors in the north. Glassell, along with his boyhood friend Alfred Chapman, would litigate on the "great partition" that saw Jose Maria Verdugo's rancho San Rafael, the ancestral land of the Tongva people, subdivided among its "proper owners." A defaulted loan (predatory in nature) had removed any claim to title by Verdugo family. The "contact economy" of two settler colonies that wrested sovereign

---

[76] Gregory Michno, *The Settlers' War: The Struggle for the Texas Frontier in the 1860s* (U of Nebraska Press, 2011).
[77] Fisher and Trust, *Garvanza*.
[78] Fisher, *Highland Park*.
[79] Fisher.
[80] Branch, *The Five Friendly Valleys*; Fisher and Trust, *Garvanza*; Fisher, *Highland Park*.

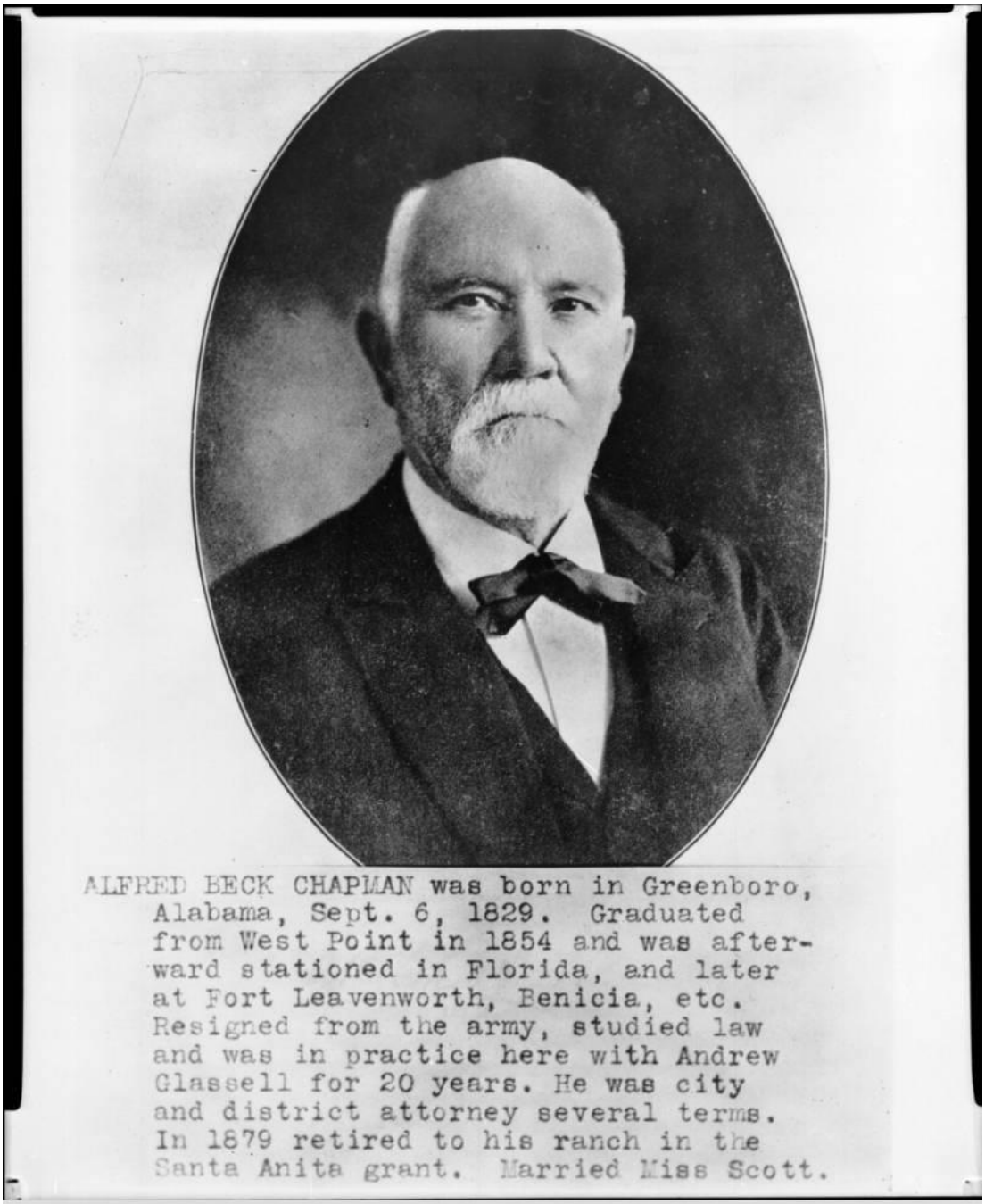


Figure i-4: A portrait of Alfred Beck Chapman, legal partner and boyhood friend of Andrew Glassell Jr. Digitally reproduced by the USC Digital Library. From the California Historical Society Collection at the University of

Southern California.



Figure i-5: Andrew Glassell's home and the first house built on the Garvanza Tract, a community now subsumed by Highland Park. Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.

and territorial control away from Californio elites to the new Anglo society.[81] In 1883, when President Chester A. Arthur finally signed the patent for the land title that confirmed Rancho San Rafael territorial boundaries 30 years after the Verdugos had filed their application with the United States government in an act of recognition of the rights to property (Rancho San Rafael and to an extent their own whiteness), the original speculators sold their land, now profitable because of the conferment of the United States government.

[81] Park, "Money, Mortgages, and the Conquest of America"; Shochat, "The Casa Adobe de San Rafael (The Sanchez Adobe) In Glendale, California."

The land that Los Angeles was founded on had been alienated from the local Tongva by the Spanish enclosure of the pueblo and the mission. Native people were not driven away from the enclosure but included as suspicious and laboring bodies. The new Anglo settlers also relied on Native labor early on and were similarly held at a critical distance. The land would be further alienated, the agricultural and ranching economies would make way for a new way to profit from the land, real estate sale and speculation. The subdivisions produced the tracts that would be further privatized by the new Anglo settlers coming in droves to claim a piece of paradise for themselves. The early pioneers were acutely aware that the land they approached as settlers was not empty. Both the frontier trail and the enclosure were established and fortified against the existential threat of the unknown and the adversarial. Likewise, families and individuals arriving in California by way of the various frontier trails westward had to often negotiate the social and legal ramifications of being a settler in new territories. Land was often in dispute, not only between the Indigenous groups who had their traditional hunting grounds, seasonal farming lands and sacred religious sites impinged on, but between settlers as well. The violence of settlement made the "Indian" and it established the material dimensions of the settler and the settlement. The bounds of an enclosure only going so far as they could be distinguished from the threat of nature itself.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter 0 begins with an explanation of my overall methodological approach to the research project. Employing the positioning NELAA takes with their own work, I

insist that this project "speaks from and not for the community." This is in line with my methodological orientation that like NELAA, refuses to assume an authoritative stance as a representative for NELAA. The "community is NOT for sale" dogma of anti-displacement organizer informs an antagonism to the positivistic traditions and understandings of "inner city" neighborhoods that reduce the internal nuance, dynamism and complexity of these communities. This chapter illustrates where in this protracted struggle against gentrification NELAA has had to fight with the pressures of neoliberal capitalist imperatives to categorically define and isolate NELA's Latinx communities, denying legibility, and counteractively naming the violence that perpetuates displacement.

In Chapter 1, I read three distinct and relational timelines of narrative belonging. I analyze how the necrospeculative origins of NELA and Highland Park are invoked and evoked in the local historiographies, both through the written word and visual art. Put together, a book/ pamphlet of booster ephemera from Highland Park Branch and Security of the Los Angeles Bank (1923) with Charles Fisher's more recent historiography of Highland Park (2008), they track a genealogy of a "selected people" that actualizes their materiality through the necrospeculative engagement with black and Indigenous bodies. This is exemplified in the celebration of Tempe Sarah Ann Rogers, the "pioneering mother," Andrew Glassell Jr. a son of the South and product of the Southern Plantocracy, as well as Charles Lummis, Native American preservationist, and rights advocate.

This narrative timeline of belonging, predicated on necrospeculative investment and erasure, is instrumentalized in the desire to preserve territorial claims to land. This is

evident in the second narrative timeline that, like Charles Lummis', possesses Native identity and ancestry to claim belonging to NELA and Highland Park. Two murals at the center of the gentrification debate over cultural preservation and ethnic erasure in Highland Park reveal the manner in which anti-displacement measures can also work to displace claims of cultural and political sovereignty by the local Gabrieleno-Tongva. The chapter concludes with an assessment of a new politics of place that creates a sense of belonging predicated on displacement itself, or the resistance theretofore.

In chapter 2, I focus on the story of Melissa Uribe, Julia Bogany, Arturo Romo and Reies Flores to isolate a moment in the anti-displacement genealogy that positions these four individuals as conduits of a tradition that refuses dispossession and displacement in Northeast Los Angeles (NELA). Melissa, Romo and Reies are members of the Northeast Los Angeles Alliance (NELAA), an anti-displacement collective started in 2014 as a response to the rapid gentrification of Highland Park and abutting NELA neighborhoods (e.g. Lincoln Heights, Frogtown, Cypress Park, Glassell Park, El Sereno, etc.). In 2007, cousins Arturo Romo and Reies Flores were substitute teachers at Franklin High School when they started a mural project with students on campus. Julia Bogany, a Tongva elder and the cultural affairs officer for the Gabrieleno Tongva Tribe, was one of the consultants they invited to teach their students local Tongva history and customs, and Melissa Uribe was one of their students.

Chapter 2.5 continues their story with an assessment of what Reies and Romo are emblematic of, a tradition developed through Chicanx nationalist thought as it encountered American Indian movements for sovereignty, recognition, and tribal self-

preservation. They connected themselves and their students to the local place-based anti-displacement genealogy of Julia herself was a living repository, a fragmented, but yet continuous embodied ecological knowledge of Los Angeles as a place. It is what Cindi Moar Alvitre refers to as a "silenced knowing of the city" based "on an intimate connection with to the land, water, and creations."[82] Borrowing from Leanne Simpson and Glen Coulthard's conceptualization of Grounded Normativity, I foreground the spatial dimensions of an onto-epistemic tradition rooted in the Los Angeles landscape and as such, I highlight Reies, Romo and Melissa's engagement with the practice of Indigenous reclamation central to Chicanx nationalist thought as an entry point towards assessing anti-displacement activists' negotiations with settler colonial logics of inhabitance. [83]

In Chapter 3 with my focus on the libidinal economy of carceral institutions and their underlying anti-Black architectures. Centered on the recent court proceedings of the United States of America v. Merced Cambero, Cambero's voluntary guilty plea put an end to a series of events that started two decades prior. Beginning in the early 1990s, the Avenues street gang carried out a series of violent acts against Highland Park's Black residents. Acts of violent harassment with the intention of ousting Black bodies from the gang territory of a Latinx inner-city suburb, ultimately lead to the deaths of Anthony Prudhomme, Kenneth Wilson, and Cristopher Browser. The victims of this violence were many, including the mothers of the three murder victims, two of whom appeared to

[82] Cindi Alvitre, "Coyote Tours," *LAtitudes: An Angeleno's Atlas*, 2015, 44.
[83] Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Grounded Normativity/Place-Based Solidarity," *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 249–255.

testify in Cambero's case more than a decade after the initial court proceedings, which saw four of Merced's accomplices charged and convicted. The murders and "illegal use of a firearm" were accompanied with the superseding charges of conspiracy and of violating the civil rights of Anthony, Kenneth, and Christopher, using federal hate crime statutes (the first time they had been used to convict a Latinx gang or any other group that wasn't a prototypical white nationalist organization) and overall impeding Highland Park's Black residents' freedom to choose where they can live without fear of discrimination or violent reprisal.

These events are placed in the context of Latinx populations inculcation in the fundamental anti-black logic of carceral geographies that saw an expansion under the repressive pro-policing policies of the 1980s and 1990s. The desire to reclaim a self-determining capacity over life in the conditions of their captivity replicates the anti-Black desires inherent to the prison's daily operational logics. The denial of and distancing from Blackness persists as a source of power for the otherwise disenfranchised. The Human right to housing insists on a category of Human when it is subsumed under a civil right to housing that only grants access the right of access to a commercial good still not accessible to folks because of gratuitous and quotidian forms of anti-Black violence. Displacement is seen as a market choice and not an urgent social issue or practice of racial discrimination.

In chapter 4, I examine the contemporary practice of finance capital in generating the precarity of life that preludes a social, civil, prematurely physical death, this chapter will focus on the Marmion Royal apartment complex and its struggle against the no-fault

evictions that the tenants were subjected to under the demands of the building's new owners. Represented by Gelt Venture and Skya Inc., this partnership was the face of an expanded practice of real estate financialization that turns people's homes into commodity assets and lucrative business opportunities. In the context of Highland Park and the Marmion Royal, the depreciating variables in this financial formula follows a social calculus of racialized valuations of Black and Brown bodies, accommodating desires for walkable and hip neighborhoods through the displacement of tenants who challenge the fragility of the white possessive.

This analysis extends into chapter 4.5. Operating within a "moral universe of obligation" with contentions towards "housing as a human right" and a "right to the city," I analyze the charging of the new owners, Gelt and Skya, and the city through its elected government officials whose only moral obligation is to the financiers behind their business operations and campaigns for reelection, respectively. I pose this question: which definition of the "human" is being operationalized in our fights for our homes and city? A universalist (neo)liberal standard overdetermined by bourgeois western man or a radical claim to humanity that in its calls for inclusion unravel the fabric of civil society's operational logics? The emphasis of a self-possession over one's labor and the non-Black Latinx community's ability to continue as a deserving and capable leaser of whiteness' "real property" intersects with the anti-Black scripts of the United States citizenship of hetero-nationalist and patriarchal family units.

This chapter is a challenge to reassess the paradigmatic violence that coheres and contains non-Black Latinx communities in NELA. How has the non-Black Latinx

community become complicit, not only in its own displacement, but the perpetual displacement of Black subjectivities to the point where Black Latinx peoples have been erased from the terrain of Latinidad in general? How has the Latinx communities' indignations over the mechanisms of displacement that disproportionately affect Black people in Los Angeles worked to usurp Black suffering without actually addressing it?

Chapter 0

“Community is NOT for Sale”



Figure 0-1: "Community is Not for Sale". Credit: NELA Alliance

Methods

This project employs a mixed method investigation of (anti-)displacement thought and practice/ theory and praxis in Northeast Los Angeles. It is a critical reflection upon the housing rights movement in Los Angeles, grassroots anti-displacement organizing in NELA, and the individuals who carry the (anti-)displacement genealogy forward. I employed four distinct methods interchangeably. The first was textual analysis of cultural

and political ephemera, both created with the goal of rejecting or promoting displacement. The second and third were participatory action research and critical ethnography. These two methods were simultaneous and part of my "observational participation" as a member of the anti-displacement collective known as NELA Alliance (NELAA). From 2014 to 2018, the group collectively organized, strategized and theorized what it meant to do anti-displacement work in this historical moment. The participatory action component reflects our joint efforts to power map, investigate property/ sales information, and otherwise instrumentalize that data for the purpose of resisting our communities' mass eviction.

While engaged in this collective work what became clear to me was the larger dynamic of institutional actors, political, and libidinal economic structures that define a city and its movement. During my time in "the field," I had innumerable conversations/ interactions with grassroots mobilizers, nonprofit organizers, government officials, politicians, artists, lawyers, revolutionaries, teachers, scholars, public intellectuals, and tenants, all subsumed under the umbrella of housing justice. These conversations/interactions ranged from formal to informal, superficial to in-depth, and a few minutes to many years. Finally, where further dialogue was necessary, I invited my interlocutor to engage me in a long form interview, on average 2-3 hours each. Reflecting an oral historical praxis, the purpose of my interviews was to understand people's connection to place (Highland Park, NELA and/or Los Angeles) as a critical basis for understanding the thought and practice of contemporary anti-displacement work. I interviewed 12 people in total, learning a great deal about their personal lives, their

individual calls to action, and Los Angeles history in the process. Not all the interviews I conducted made it to the dissertation; future projects and further work is required to probe the enormity of the topics presented. However, where the interviews were not present explicitly, they were an implicit influence in my understanding of the historical trajectory and nature of (anti-)displacement work in Los Angeles. Leonardo Vilchis, Elizabeth Blaney, and Dont Rhine, members and founders of Ultra Red Los Angeles, Los Angeles Tenants Union, and Union de Vecinos, exposed to me a rich tradition of community building and organizing that during the 1990s was actively fighting against the federal government's decisions to destroy public housing as a model and in the process thousands of peoples' homes. The impact of that moment still reverberates in the contemporary fight against unjust and illegal evictions, and all three of those organizers are still heavily involved in campaigns to make Los Angeles a city for all.

Methodology

This project is participatory action oriented and is representative of a collective process of meaning-making that occurred in conversations within NELAA as well as in the actions we engaged in as a collective. My methodology follows in the tradition of other activist scholars such as Joao Costa Vargas, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Laura Pulido, and countless others that insist on participation over observation in social justice struggles. It is important to add that the understanding of the roots and causes of inequality are captured and expressed in the struggle against its sources as well as its reactionary evolution against its challengers. This tradition of community-engaged

scholarship sits in contrast to the legacy of anthropological, sociological and positivist traditions that reduce inequities to quantifiable disparities in institutional access and wealth.[84] Noting that although it may tell part of the story, what is left out is the thread of a larger tradition that devalues and displaces non-white peoples and their onto-epistemic challenges to anti-Blackness and de-Indigeneity. To the extent that this research project follows suit, the result has been the collective creation of knowledge used toward the ends of resisting displacement.

As such, I do not distinguish myself as separate from the group, as NELAA itself does not remove itself from the surrounding community. As is our self-described position, we intend only to speak from the community and not for the community. This statement has come to also represent my methodological approach. Many of the ideas that I present here in my research stem from endless conversation/ theorizing from within the group itself. The stories I tell and the research I present is a combination of my insights and those of the larger group. Multi- and inter-generational anti-displacement and place-based grassroots organizing are informed by and continue a larger tradition (or genealogy) that are as constitutive to the urban landscape as is the forces of exploitation and expropriation. I, as well as my contemporaries, are the products of this tradition.

---

[84] Charles R. Hale, *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship* (Univ of California Press, 2008); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning," *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship* 31 (2008); Laura Pulido, "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, no. 1 (March 2000): 12–40, https://doi.org/10.1111/0004-5608.00182; João Helion Costa Vargas, *Catching Hell in the City of Angels: Life and Meanings of Blackness in South Central Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); João H. Costa Vargas, *Never Meant to Survive: Genocide and Utopias in Black Diaspora Communities* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010).

Ultimately, my research centers the histories of a place as understood by the practitioners of those in inculcated in the anti-displacement genealogy.

Likewise, the oral history interviews I conducted were the product of personal relationships I developed while organizing within my collective. The interview itself was a process of mutual trust building that at its foundation was built on a collective politics of anti-displacement, anti-racist, and housing justice. Reflecting the nature of the grassroots political organizing I privileged and was engaged in during my study, the interviews were direct opportunities to share stories, exchange experiences, and collectively theorize from our positions and perspectives. It was deeply political and deeply personal work. It was important for me as a researcher, scholar, and oral historian not to present myself as an objective observer, recording personal histories solely for the sake of historical preservation (a worthy endeavor nonetheless). My interviews and the personal relationship they fostered/leveraged was for the sake of discovering what a politics of mutual solidarity looked like in practice and in theory. It was part of my larger endeavor to paint a broader picture of anti-displacement work and how housing justice organizing benefits (or can benefit) from this broader paradigm. Of the interviews that did make it into the final stages of the writing, I am thankful for the insights my interlocutors added to my project.

The other primary materials I collected for this study represent an assemblage of (anti-) displacement cultural and political production. This includes local historiographies in the form of books, zines, and murals. It also comprises audio, literary, and video art in the forms of protest songs, poetry, and documentary. I also analyze political ephemera

such as flyers, leaflets, banners, and op-eds as well as *the procession* and *the testimony*. For the final chapter my sources also include court documents, transcripts, and newspaper articles, reading them against the grain of state-led and juridical understandings of justice. Adding the insights I have gained from my time with NELAA and in "the field," this dissertation follows the guiding principle of NELAA's work: I can only claim to *speak from the community and not for it.*

Methodological Orientation – "Community is NOT for Sale"

"Community is not for sale," is a common call among anti-gentrification and anti-displacement organizers. It is a refusal to sell your home, exchange your "keys for cash," or otherwise leave your community for the promise of monetary gain. The imposed exchange value on the use value of someone's home is an often imprecise and improbable financial formula. In NELA we as NELAA saw this often. Mixed with fear and uncertainty, people frequently left their rent-controlled units for less than the legal amount of relocation assistance people are entitled to when pushed by their landlords to leave. In addition, the amount of money you are entitled under current provisions does not last long enough to find new housing close-by, thus displacing people to the peripheries of the city, the exurbs as many put it. However, the adage "community is not for sale" took on other meanings in our work as NELAA.

As a collective we challenged the prevailing narratives that disregarded or downplayed the violence of gentrification. We ran counter to the rebranding of gentrification as "community betterment" and that leveraged the bad with the "good of urban reinvestment." However, in our response we were wary of duplicating the position

of those we stood against. It was our unwillingness to engage in the paradigms of representation that in its essence attempts to make legible and legitimate that which is rendered the opposite by state-sanctioned discourses. We refused the constant requests to act as the mouthpieces for community in newspaper articles, radio broadcast and tv news stories. We saw this nebulous concept of community being seized upon by various actors in the non-profit and for-profit sectors. These ranged from kitsch stores packaging and selling markers and symbols of Chicanx and Latinx culture to the gentrifying businesses that kept the signs and names of businesses once removed to other business that sourced items from Central America and sell them to mostly white and affluent clientele. The concept of community is also used by non-profits and governmental agencies as leverage in negotiations with the market, claiming qualitative and quantitative empiricism.

In the process of conducting my research, the denial was also the guiding framework of my "data collection." This project was never meant to be positivistic, although statistics construct a useful narrative and I do use them when appropriate throughout the text. However, this project, when it can, avoids the sociological/ anthropological impulse to reduce communities to a set of social categories and/ or paint community in broad brushstrokes, used as a pseudonym for a regionally bounded group of people. In short, this project was troubled by and intentional in avoiding the branding and packaging of an intellectual property that maintains an exchange value for universities, governmental, and non-governmental organizations, in a claim for financial stability and with promises of fulfilling "diversity standards" or "metrics of equity".

My criticisms of the non-profit industrial complex are no different from those that have studied it in full nor do I have anything substantial to add to that specific field of study. In the process of my work I too was wary of assuming a position of expert on "community" relations or a bearer of some "truth" that reveals a new market in the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC). This project focuses on the organizing against, rather than the discourse of, suffering incited by the gentrification and displacement in NELA. I do so to avoid a victimizing narrative and to center/ bolster long standing imperatives for cultural, political, and economic sovereignty and self-determination.



Figure 0-2: Current and Former Members of the Northeast Los Angeles Alliance at the Testimonios del Barrio Procession, December 2014. Photo Credit: NELA Alliance

The North East Los Angeles Alliance

> *"The Northeast Alliance is a group of local Northeast Los Angeles Residents committed to witnessing and documenting the changing socio-economic landscape of NELA. The group is committed to understanding the full effect of gentrification on immigrant, working class and poor communities and addressing these effects through education, organizing, visual and performing arts and ongoing scholarship. Recognizing that many of the narratives defining gentrification are not coined by the immigrant, working class and poor communities it profoundly affects, Northeast Alliance is non-complacent in challenging those prevailing narratives by presenting and recording voices of those who are not heard."*
>
> - *North East Los Angeles Alliance*

The anti-displacement collective known as the North East Los Angeles Alliance (NELAA) was a direct response to aesthetic shifts of central business corridors and the changing reputation of our neighborhoods from sites of "blight" to highly attractive and highly profitable real estate markets. However, as the culture war was being waged over who could claim the neighborhood under the racial gendered/classed politics of territorial possession, we were concerned that what these debates were eclipsing was the patterns of mass displacement and eviction. We felt that the attention on the changing store fronts and the increasingly white and affluent demographics they served in accompaniment to the discursive positionings of benign and benevolent capital reinvestment by the small business community, local politicians and real estate developers, masked and/or rationalized the economically incentivized and state-facilitated violence of mass displacement.

As a collective, we centered the violence gentrification perpetuated on low-income, immigrant communities of color. We refocused the narrative away from neoliberal

discourses of progress to center the perspectives of those closest to the threat of displacement. Friends, family, and even some of the members of our collective had already been forced to leave the community for lack of affordable housing options or outright eviction from our homes. This issue was close to all of us and we each felt the violence as trauma inflicted on our collective selves. In its beginning stages, NELAA acted as a support group for all of us. The meetings were an opportunity for us to vent our frustrations, our anger, and to mourn our losses – it was a safe space, away from the violence that was impacting our community. It was also a recuperative space, in more ways than one. Physically, as well as emotionally, our meetings, our protests, our events were all strategic and intentional in reclaiming the public spaces we felt we were losing. As Setha Low and Neil Smith argue in their introduction to their edited collection, *The Politics of Public Space* "public spaces are simultaneously an expression of social power and a force themselves that help shape social relations."[85] We were a mirror reflecting the violence imposed upon us by the main street businesses and the obfuscating discourses they fomented. We began to collect the stories, highlight the instances of tenants (sometimes an entire apartment building's worth) being cast into the streets. Our goal was to implicate the patterns we could see, the more visible, public facing patterns of gentrification on the main streets with what was happening behind them. We marched, we protested, we processed, we gave testimony.

The collective was started in 2014 and it is made up of a small number of contributing members who come from the various neighborhoods that make up Northeast Los

[85] Setha Low and Neil Smith, *The Politics of Public Space* (Routledge, 2013).

Angeles. Our group identity is local and place-based, as is our work. Both were a strategic and political choice. Membership in the group is predicated on a set of criteria. We limited membership to those who can say to have come from either working class, immigrant and non-white backgrounds (although it should be specified that the "whiteness" referenced is the categorical "non-Hispanic White," per demography). In the larger context of our anti-displacement work, this was in response to the largely race-based patterns of gentrification in NELA. In other words, we accused the market logic at play in facilitating a culture war against what the immigrant, working class, and poor communities of color have built in NELA.

I was part of the original group of members that participated in the initial conversations that would develop into the ideology and strategy of NELAA. I was invited by a friend with whom I had intense conversations over the developments happening in our neighborhoods. Noticing that this was a similar conversation being held across our network of friends and colleagues we decided to get together in a pragmatic fashion, uniting under a common local identity. NELAA is a horizontal collective, meaning that roles and duties are circulated among the members in the group. Our responsibilities were shared, everyone's opinion carried the same value, and we were careful to not let our individual intrinsic power and privilege translate into an unbalanced horizontality. We did not want the dynamics of our group to fall into gendered labor stereotypes that put the burden of the work on women and celebrate men for "taking initiative." This is not to say that those dynamics were fully absent, but that we were self-reflective and deliberate in avoiding it. Our actions, our ideologies, and our politics were developed collectively/

dialectically and refused a hierarchical system of organization. The duties week by week could be facilitating a meeting, hosting a workshop, door knocking, survey intake, note taking, timekeeping, creating poster art, fabricating banners, talking to the media, etc. I served in any role that I felt was within my abilities and sometimes outside if it was necessary.

NELAA came at a time when we felt that the gentrification of NELA in Highland Park had entrenched itself so deeply that we were starting to see its negative effects. We understood gentrification as a long-term development in the making, as the intensifying increments of local policing and market initiatives to rescue Highland Park from its decades of darkness, post white flight. The right mix of social and market factors accelerated the gentrification happening in NELA. A mass of people was losing their housing and many more were in peril. We felt the imperative to act then because of how urgent the matter had become.

We formed over the summer of 2014. When we started, not many people were aware of what gentrification was and/or were not aware of some of the larger patterns taking place around them. Others may have understood gentrification in concept but had no idea what to make of it after. However, the demographic shifts, increasing home values, and new businesses were hard to ignore. Most politicians went on record that gentrification was a myth, that it was not happening in our communities, and that what was happening was ultimately a good thing. Their subjective perspective establishing an official position where they could only remark on the increased vitality of local commerce and governmental revenues generated from a vibrant real estate economy. Politicians had

gained leverage over the fact that these neighborhoods once again became central to a conversation of an evolving city. Small business owners and homeowners loved the effect of increased business and property values even if they lamented the inconvenience of losing parts of their social network.

We wanted to wrest control of the narrative of gentrification from those who stood to benefit from it. Even within their laments over the losses of the less fortunate, those who had the most to gain still centered the narrative from their perspective. We wanted the young adults who had been abandoned by the public school system, young parents with kids who were struggling to make ends meet, immigrant populations, the newly arrived, the undocumented, and the older generation of folks who were now struggling to preserve their foothold in a neighborhood they had helped to conceive to be part of the conversation. More so, we wanted to centralize their narratives and their perspectives. We wanted to highlight the narratives of folks who had been displaced not once, but twice, three times, etc. from other homes in the neighborhood and/or from their own countries. We wanted to center the narratives of people without houses, but that refused to lose their home in Highland Park, creating encampments along the local Arroyo. We wanted to expose the violence of gentrification rather than on focusing in on its civic importance. We refused to recognize it as a necessary evil or a lamentable side effect to community development. We saw it as racialized displacement.

NELAA has had many iterations over the years. It was always meant to take a multipronged approach because gentrification itself is multi-faceted. We worked through art, media and representation, housing and direct action, along with local policy

initiatives. As we developed early on, our capacities were first and foremost attempts to reshape the narrative of gentrification. We wanted to make sure people understood that when they were investing in the economic instruments of gentrification, they were investing in a type of violence that sequestered and removed people from their homes, either onto the streets or into far-away places, far removed from their formal and informal networks. The violence of gentrification is also associated with the stress and anxiety of not knowing where you are going to live and the trauma experienced under "root-shock" - when you have to move form a place you known as home suddenly and forcibly. We started by giving people an opportunity to be heard, to be considered, and most importantly to heal, to give them a place to express their anguish and to come back into a community many of us felt was disintegrating around us.

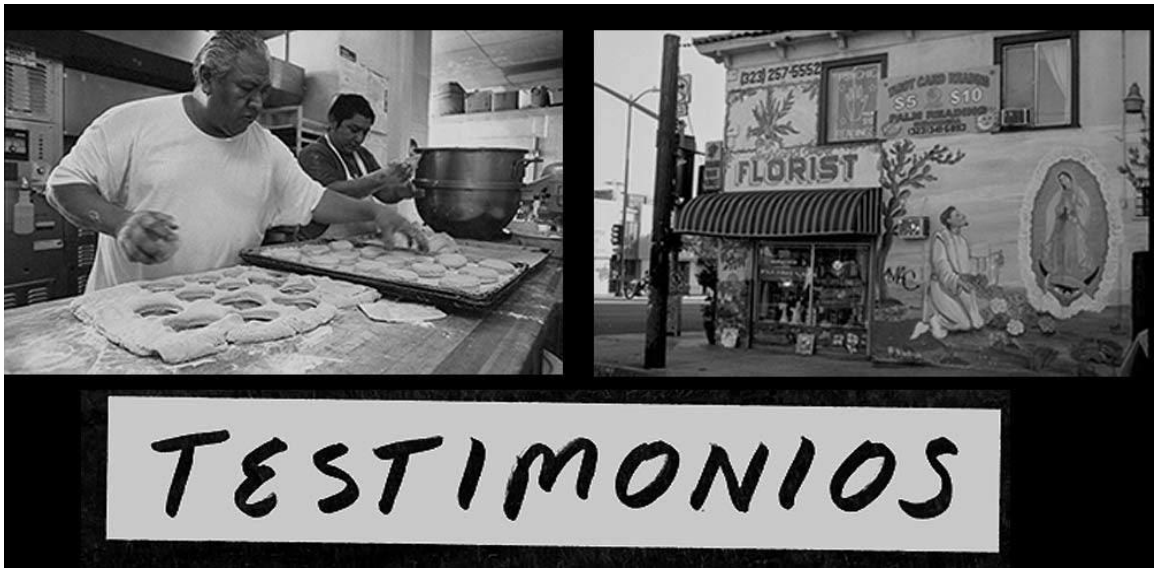


Figure 0-3: Flyer for Testimonios Del Barrio action in Highland Park. Credit - NELA Alliance.

The Procession and the Testimony

Displacement takes many forms, including and extending beyond the physical eviction of tenants, deterioration of social networks, and the erosion of a small business community that is oriented toward the needs of working-class and immigrant populations. The effect also happens on a cultural level, including the shuttering of community spaces, the usurping of the public street culture, and the replacement of a neighborhood's cultural markers and symbols. It happens also on a psychological and spiritual level. In other words, if you are among the people who get to stay, although your body might be present, your sense of belonging has been displaced, resulting in feelings of anger, frustration, dismay, depression, and isolation. As one community member in a NELAA meeting put it, when you displace the elders you lose a living memory of the community's history, when you displace the younger generations you lose a sense of the community's future.

Early on, NELAA realized that our greatest contribution to the anti-displacement struggle was carried out in the form of emotional labor. For our members, our meetings were a place for us to release the pressure valves of anger and anxiety, a place for each of us to be heard. Our collective sense of grief was also the source of our strength. We had each other and the isolation and dismay we all felt as individuals was transformed in the process of collecting our potentially destructive emotions into constructive anger and love for our neighborhoods. When possible, we always held our meetings in a public place, usually in a contested terrain where we could engage in the symbolic arena of displacement, where race and representation intersect with bodies and belonging. We came together in public space, engaged in dialogue, shared food, and celebrated. As

NELAA put it, “The debate around the subject has often been heated, but the voices of those most affected have been left out of this debate. For this reason, it’s especially important to hear these voices before they’re lost.”

The *Procession* and the *Testimony* were both an extension of this “politics of place”. Carrying the intention of our meetings into a wider scale, our protests were more than just about “airing our grievances.” As a public display of emotion, we instrumentalized grief and anger into a strategy for reclaiming spaces, both in material and immaterial terms. Our processions moved from places of significance, where people could share their *testimony.* Overcoming the fear and anxiety of displacement’s isolation, our events were meant to reinforce the fabric of the community, by creating new connections that otherwise had not existed. We created a platform for people to speak, to have their say and not just be a statistic or an example of “community betterment’s” unfortunate side effects.

One of our first actions was titled “Evicting Displacement.” We marched along both York Blvd and N. Figueroa Ave placing our hand-crafted “eviction notices” on businesses we felt were culturally insensitive or failing to accommodate or acclimate to the community their presence ultimately aided in removing. Our antagonisms toward the small business community stemmed from the local chamber of commerce’s commitment to seeing gentrification move forward. Written in the discourse of a neoliberal multiculturalism, the presence of new and gentrifying small businesses in the community fed into a rhetoric of neighborhood diversity and a notion of “community vitality” that is economically determined. Our eviction notices challenged these logics and accused

businesses of being complicit in promoting displacement. Some of the notices were written in English and Spanish. The eviction notice illustrated below is written in a code, a codex that is untranslatable to the business owner or their patrons, but the question begs, if it was written in a language they could decipher, would the message itself be understood?

Similarly, our "Jamming Fig Jam" action was an intervention into the neoliberalist logic of the NPIC and local city authorities. Fig Jam was a one-day event marked by public performance, historical tours and community workshops. It was funded by Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti's Great Street Grant initiative, which was also funding other similar projects across the city, intended "to serve, support, and strengthen the vibrant corridors that are the backbone of Los Angeles." It was organized by the local chamber of commerce in collaboration with non-profits to attract more traffic onto streets and into the stores. The interest of non-profits and small businesses is thus placed in opposition to that of the grassroots organizations who are more concerned with the preservation of affordable housing and wary of an economically-determinist visions of community betterment. The language of Fig Jam also appropriates the terms specific to the tactics of grassroots. The use of phrases such as "reclaiming public streets" – is an eerie reminder of the chamber of commerce's central role in advocating for a gang injunction in Highland Park as well as the NIMBY-ist campaign to continually criminalize and further displace the houseless camping along the arroyo seco on the other side of the 110 freeway. In that sense, the actors behind Fig Jam define and limit which forms of reclamation are legal and legitimate. As the organizing committee behind Fig Jam put it

in an interview, “one of the things that came out in the civic engagement meeting were that people were concerned over the amount of change that’s happening in neighborhood. We’re interested in seeing how we can make gentrification not such a negative word and make it an inclusive process.”



Figure 0-4: El Capitalista/ the capitalist at Testimonios del Barrio/ Testimonials of the Neighborhood Procession, December 2014. Source: NELA Alliance, Photo taken by Miguel Ramos.



Figure 0-5: "Evicting Displacement" Protest on York Blvd in Highland Park, 2014. Source: NELA Alliance, Photo Taken by Miguel Ramos.



Figure 0-6: "Eviction Notice" - Evicting Displacement Protest, November 2014. Source: NELA Alliance, Photo Taken by Miguel Ramos.



Figure 0-7: "Eviction Notice". Photo Credit: NELA Alliance.

As other scholars have demonstrated, gentrification cannot happen without the role of the police in creating an illusion of peace and security on main business districts while they have historically and contemporaneously enacted their violence against people in the neighborhood while hidden from sight. Gang injunctions, as Ana Muniz demonstrates in *Maintaining Racial Boundaries,* has the intent of doing just that.[86] The production and constant reiteration of racial boundaries in LA have now had to adapt to the neoliberal urbanist political economic agenda of gentrification. Meaning that in to perpetuate the legacies of anti-Black policing mechanisms and its effectiveness of non-Black people of color then you have to constantly validate its logic. The act of investment, and its invitation by the non-profit, arts, culture, and business cooperation, by citizens plays on their desires to be included in the realm of civic representation. Ana Muniz's illustrates in, *Police, Power and the Production of Racial Boundaries,* many had been aware of and were witnessing firsthand Echo Park's trajectory from "ethnic enclave," home to many various immigrant and working-class communities of color, to "LA's hottest neighborhood," both in nightlife and real estate. As Ana Muniz demonstrates, decades of resource redistribution from social services into suppressive policing technologies (i.e. gang injunctions) set the stage and helped secure the gentrification of Echo Park.

The narrative of void and erasure is a common one with gentrification (as we will discuss later). Yet, the logics that inform "gente-fication" (or the Latinx middle class/ petit bourgeoise led commodification of the "hood" or "barrio") as a solution to the social

[86] Muniz, "Maintaining Racial Boundaries."

injustice that gentrification creates tend to follow a neoliberal rhetoric.[87] The endeavor to improve one's community without somehow contributing to the displacement it can engender is a complicated formula without a straightforward solution.[88] In fact, it would be appropriate to ask ourselves at this point if the influx of community beautifying programs is itself a prerequisite for gentrification, a concurrent phenomenon or simply a reaction? Opportunism or a means to preserve history and culture? Either way a market mentality is applicable to both. The strategies and tactics of grassroots struggles often get coopted, usurped, or absorbed into the hegemony of the non-profit industrial complex. We can see this clearly carried out in the politics of Latinx businesspeople and non-profits. The necessity to preserve racialization to perpetuate the conditions necessary for capitalism to persist requires that it adapt its approach, especially to its resistance. In anti-displacement organizing this looks like the celebration of gente-fication. It also looks like street improvement and beautifying programs. Large-scale urban developers are dependent on this labor to make secure investments out of once abandoned neighborhoods.

The language of Fig Jam appropriates the language of the grassroots (specifically the way that we had employed it up to that point). People are reclaiming public streets thru parklets and open street events (when it is and when it isn't appropriate to). Compared to

---

[87] "'Gentrify? No! Gentefy? Sí!': Urban Redevelopment and Ethnic Gentrification in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles | Www.Aspeers.Com," accessed July 28, 2017, http://www.aspeers.com/2015/ahrens?fulltext; Scott Saul, "'Gente-Fication'on Demand: The Cultural Redevelopment of South Los Angeles," *Post-Ghetto: Reimagining South Los Angeles*, n.d., 147–172.

[88] "'Gentrify? No! Gentefy? Sí!': Urban Redevelopment and Ethnic Gentrification in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles | Www.Aspeers.Com," accessed July 28, 2017, http://www.aspeers.com/2015/ahrens?fulltext.

our protest – even though it was a disturbance - the reaction by people and the police might have caused a little bit of resistance and tension, but otherwise we were permitted if not encouraged to continue our actions. The Fig Jam organizers and Mayor Garcetti's Great Streets initiative speak of creating community, commerce and healthy transit options under the auspices that infrastructure and economic vitality are central to community building (or as the only community building that truly matters).

As the political terrain evolved so did our actions. NELAA sits in a larger political landscape centered around anti-displacement measures. Our evolution was a response to the changing narrative. People started to acknowledge gentrification as a legitimate problem with negative consequences for the city's most vulnerable residents. We adapted our strategies to this new narrative landscape. We augmented our tactics, bolstering our public performances and protest art with eviction defense and direct advocacy for tenants' rights. In collaboration with other anti-displacements organizations, including but not limited to Eviction Defense Network and the Los Angeles Tenants' Union, we helped organize and promote tenants' rights workshops; researched recent sales and reached out to residents of multifamily residents; connected tenantsunder threat of an eviction to legal defense networks; and within our own capacities we organized buildings into tenants' unions and conducted rent strikes against unsafe housing conditions and unfair eviction proceedings.



Figure 0-8: Flyer for Fig Jam Small Business Workshop.



Figure 0-9: Dumpster filled over its capacity with the belongings of tenants' mass-evicted from a building in Highland Park. Photo Credit: John Urquiza, Sin Turistas.

Our limitations were many. We were a small collective, dedicated to the organizational method of consensus building and decision making. That meant things took a long time to be conceived because of the constant attention and participation of each member. Also, because of our size and capacity it, was hard for us to take on all aspects of the anti-displacement struggle. Knowing that we were not invested in representational democracy and initiating change through policy we refused to work with or promote key pieces of legislation or candidates who supposedly spouted our interest and the interest of the communities we came from. We refrained from taking on this labor even if we believed it could achieve short term and tangible successes. We were also limited by our identity politics. Most of us were Latinx of different regional backgrounds

and gender identities, but mostly we represented Mexican descended peoples who had been here for a majority of our formative years, had a mastery (more or less) of the English language, and were more often than not college educated. We also did not have members who could say that they came from non-Latinx, but still person of color backgrounds. The neighborhoods that we lived in were mostly Latinx, but they were also home to an immigrant working class population of folks from Asia and the Pacific Islands as well as non-Mexican Latinx and Indigenous identifying peoples from Latin America. Given the additional element of the diversity in class and politics, it was difficult for us to represent an entire communities' interest, so we did not.

Typical Responses, the Loteria Card of Pro-Gentrifiers (Created by Reis Flores, Amended by Arturo Romo):

The "Wastelander" – people who overemphasize lack of services/ resources and gangs in the neighborhood

The "Change is Inevitabler" – you can't stop capitalism, life isn't fair. A defeatist tone

The "Free Marketer" – somebody who believes in the ultimate good of the free market, sees gentrification in purely market logic

The "Propertyer" – puts emphasis on financial gain of gentrification to home owners, especially Latinx ones when White people are questioned of what impact their community has

The "Race Carder" – people who suggest that halting gentrification means that you just don't want white people in your neighborhood

The "For Your Own Gooder" – is somebody who polices which tactics and strategies you should adopt when fighting gentrification

Figure 0-10: These are the various types of pro-gentrification responses to anti-gentrification protests.

Chapter 1

The Political Economies of Belonging

In this chapter I study three separate narrative devices that create distinct timelines of place-based descendancy in Highland Park. This chapter is my means of teasing out the (anti-) displacement genealogies that come to bear in the contemporary rhetoric over gentrification in Northeast Los Angeles (NELA). It covers the historiography of colonization and the *communities created through negation* – a necrospeculative practice based on the imposed absence of an undesired populations that encapsulates more than the financial mechanisms of displacement. The first timeline covered is one authored by NELA Alliance (NELAA). The rhetoric of the NELAA, captured in the protest ephemera and various other texts, sought to identify a universal and racializing logic that created a unified timeline of displacement from the native Tongva to the current day evicted low-income tenants of NELA. To protest the *displacement-driven speculative-finance* of capital investors, NELAA created a narrative of belonging that was situated in displacement itself. The second analyzed timeline covers the history of a "selected people"[89] as written by Anglo settlers, real estate boosters, and historical preservationist who establish and maintain the material and symbolical contours of the Northeast Los Angeles neighborhood, Highland Park. Finally, the third timeline studied in this chapter reveals a pan-indigenous and Chicanx-specific use of indigenisms to signify a homeland

[89] Branch, *The Five Friendly Valleys*.

or possession of territory that acts counter to or in spite of US settler colonial and imperial claims to the US Southwest.

My intention in putting these three timelines side by side is both as a comparative analysis of overlapping and concurrent movements for preservation, reclamation, and reconstitution, as well as a relational analysis of how community is built in rejection and reaction to racializing discourses/ logics that were used to settle Highland Park and displace its undesired populations. It highlights flashpoints in the various historiographies of Highland Park that reveal the collective fragments informing contemporary evocations of an (anti-)displacement genealogy in the region. Ultimately, my analyses of these three timelines follows how each creates a narrative belonging to Highland Park. The focus falls on the indigenous embodiments/ emplacements that each timeline engages in for the purpose of creating that narrative belonging.

The necrospeculative is "the means by which the productiveness of killing off racialized communities is converted into monetized, reinvestable value."[90] This concept speaks specifically to the history of racial capitalism that K-Sue Park identifies in the Anglo-American exceptionalism of financial innovations that for the first time fail to distinguish real property from personal property. Necrospeculation, of the kind early English colonist engaged in, created a market for mortgages that in its basic intention was a practice of native dispossession through foreclosure. It imposed a character of fungibility on land and other sacred objects (i.e. wampum) that theretofore indigenous people had never formally agreed to. The instantiation of this American invention first

[90] Manjapra, "Necrospeculation."

necessitated the death and dispersal of indigenous populations to perpetuate the myth of terra nullius, a settler colonial practice of divorcing indigenous people from the land. This alienated form of indigeneity is commodified and adopted by any non-Native group seeking to assuage the anxieties of the very same mechanisms of alienation help to create.

In a piece titled "Columbusing California," Miguel Ramos writes a succinct history of colonization in Los Angeles. Starting with the first expeditions and settlements, this history begins in 1542 and persists for 475 years, Ramos moves through key moments that capture both the domination of and resistance to Spanish and Anglo-American colonial rule. The invoking of this history and the explicit rhetoric that casts gentrification as "neo-colonialism" and Gentrifiers as the colonizers, reflects the *mestizo mournings* that use indigenous suffering as a rhetorical device for a Chicanx and Latinx experience in the US. Can a condition of (anti-)displacement actually work as the basis of a decolonial politics that can be used against the commodification of land and housing?

Communities created through negation are also fully encapsulated by the booster pamphlet authored by the publicity department of the Highland Park Branch Security of Los Angeles Bank in 1923. Titled "The Five Friendly Valleys," in reference to the foothills that nestle Highland Park in a green and verdant topography, this booster material is the continuation of an explicit settler colonial campaign meant to attract white migrants from the US East Coast and to propel the real estate speculation that was/is Los Angeles' main economic and demographic growth machine. It does so by creating a history of Highland Park's founding that emphasizes the centrality of real estate development and speculation. Not so far removed from Highland park's actual founding

(1886), the significance of the pamphlet, for the sake of this chapter, lies in its refashioning by local historian and an early board member of the Highland Park Heritage Trust, Charles Fisher. He authored two books on the history of Highland Park and Garvanza (a neighborhood later to be included as part of Highland Park), published in 2008 and 2010, respectively. His narrative repurposing of the Five Friendly Valleys was a gesture of preservation, the impetus of a movement to enshrine the architectural and social history of Highland Park's American settlers. As a neighborhood of many firsts (first museum, parkway, and suburb of Los Angeles), Fisher's Highland Park History celebrates a pioneer logic of its early founders and most notable boosters. Following Fisher's own timeline of Highland Park, the figures of Andrew Glassell Jr., the Rogers family, and Charles Lummis each play a significant role in plotting out the coordinates of a spatial and ontological dimensionality that relies on the fungibility of land and flesh.

The last narrative device that I focus on is another element central to the debates over gentrification, public art, and history. Focused on two specific murals, with a gesture towards a third that will be covered in greater detail in the next chapter, my analysis follows the history-making and community engagement practices of Chicanx muralists. With the violence, loss of life, and decline in community cohesion Highland Park's Latinx community faced in the 1980s and 90s, both the Quetzalcoatl arts collective and, subsequently, Daniel Cervantes were inspired to create narrative and public reminders of the universal and indigenous heritage of Highland Park's Latinx, Black, Native, and

Asian populations.[91] Their public engagement through the arts is rooted in a long tradition of Mexican and Chicanx muralists in Los Angeles and abroad. It had found a different life in the arts funding world that would later act as the gatekeepers to an arts movement situated in a particular time and place, Highland Park at the turn of the 21st century. Their murals would also become centerpieces in a battle over public space and in a public debate over cultural erasure and gentrification in Highland Park.[92]

My objective is not to give an exact or detailed history of Highland Park, but more a survey of a historiography that examines the racializing logics at play in the settler colonial possession and construction of Los Angeles and more specifically Highland Park as a place. The observations of early 20th century boosterisms were inherited from a tradition started by 19th century real estate developers, speculators, and boosters. Charles Lummis was a notable author contracted to help foster and create the romantic vision of Los Angeles and the Southwest, commodified with the ultimate ends of attracting settlers and driving speculation. This historiography is once again adopted in the 1980s by Charles Lummis and the Highland Park Heritage Trust with growing

---

[91] QMP's mural contain references to various universalized and symbolic expressions of African, Asian, Chicanx and Native Indigeneity. A reminder to the reader that we were all indigenous once before.

[92] Setha M. Low, *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture* (University of Texas Press, 2010); Setha Low and Neil Smith, *The Politics of Public Space* (Routledge, 2013); Andrew Gumbel, "'Whitewashed': How Gentrification Continues to Erase LA's Bold Murals," *The Guardian*, January 26, 2020, sec. US news, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jan/26/whitewashed-how-gentrification-continues-to-erase-las-bold-murals; Jessica Donath, "Zack de La Rocha and The Doors' John Densmore Funded This Highland Park Mural — Now It Needs Help," LA Weekly, February 21, 2017, https://www.laweekly.com/zack-de-la-rocha-and-the-doors-john-densmore-funded-this-highland-park-mural-now-it-needs-help/; Mike, "Proof That The North Figueroa Association Ordered The Destruction Of Two Highland Park Murals In 2017," *Michael Kohlhaas Dot Org* (blog), June 28, 2018, http://michaelkohlhaas.org/wp/2018/06/27/proof-that-the-north-figueroa-association-ordered-the-destruction-of-two-highland-park-murals-in-2017/.

concerns over the increasing Latinx presence in the neighborhood (coded as anxieties over youth delinquency, immigration, and infrastructural neglect). The expression of these concerns appears as early as the 1930s when hysteria over slums coupled eugenicist thinking of non-white racial degeneracy in the country, leading to these ideologies' financial codification within lending practices and the overall need to police racialized non-white bodies degenerative impact on property values (i.e. redlining). In 1980s Highland Park, not only were homeowners' equity in threat, but the *heritage* on which that neighborhood was built on was also in danger of being erased and forgotten. The 1980s is a culmination of a protracted white flight that sees many leave for greener pastures. It was the decade that saw the founding of the Highland Park Heritage Trust. Charles Fisher was one of its first presidents and the literal author of the history of Highland Park.[93]

NELAA, Gentrification and the Neo-colonialism Critique

NELAA spent innumerable hours developing our collective conceptions of displacement, gentrification, whiteness, class, and colonization. These were the topics of our very first conversations and was collectively decided as necessary before we moved forward on strategy. In those days, the urgency of the issue pushed us to meet often. Each meeting lasted hours as we broke bread, danced, laughed, cried, fumed, vented, and created theory from emotion and experience. From the beginning we never struggled to find an identity. It didn't take long for us to decide that membership should be limited to

[93] Fisher, *Highland Park.*

people who had a connection to NELA and came from an immigrant and/or working-class background. That was the character of the communities we had grown up in as residents of the various neighborhoods that make up NELA (i.e. Lincoln Heights, Highland Park, Cypress Park, Glassell Park, Frogtown, El Sereno, etc.). To us, the critical thing was to preserve and center a knowledge and experience (onto-epistemic) that we had seen be discredited and undervalued, especially in the emerging dialogues and official statements on gentrification in NELA.[94] The organizational infrastructure we created was akin to an emotional support group. Many of us felt that this is where the power and significance of our collective lay and it was to be central in our strategy moving forward.

As NELAA member Arturo Romo put it in the first publication of our newsletter (MASA), "the anger you feel is not irrational. Neither is the confusion or sadness. Those are feelings we have, justifiably, when we are pushed to the background and off the page. Out of our own communities."[95] Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard likewise writes about the political significance of resentment as a register for a politics that works to prevent contemporary injustices based on historical devaluations, somewhat opposed to a politics of reconciliation that deal with harms already done.[96] The politics of resentment and grief informed our first actions as NELAA. We felt empowered to act and

[94] "Mayor Addresses Gentrification Concerns Along L.A. River," KCET, June 2, 2014, https://www.kcet.org/shows/earth-focus/mayor-garcetti-addresses-gentrification-concerns-along-la-river.
[95] NELA Alliance, "MASA: Sustento Para El Pueblo// Sustenance For The Pueblo" (Northeast Los Angeles Alliance, Winter 2018).
[96] Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Indigenous Americas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

organize against displacement because of the validation we afforded each other in the collective. We wanted the community, at threat of being displaced, also to feel validated in their natural responses to racial capitalist displacement, to turn anger and remorse into empowered action rather than into feelings of isolation and hopelessness. "We refuse to disappear from our own communities, we refuse to respond to our displacements and evictions by hiding. Though our resistance may take many forms, we will not cooperate in being displaced from the communities that we have built."[97]

One of our very first actions as NELAA was through an invited speaker and performance series at Union Station. We started with a procession that begun at the eastern entrance of the Placita Olvera. Moving through one of Los Angeles' earliest municipal streets, some of us wearing animal masks created with our own hands (e.g. the coyote, the owl, and the hawk), we played one continuous procession song as we moved our crowd through the aural, spatial and temporal landscape landing on the symbolic weight of a displaced Chinese community (the original Chinatown) on top of a displaced Tongva village (Yaangna), where loitering is forbidden and resting is a luxury only a person with a train ticket can afford. Layers of displacement that remove ownership or place are invoked with every utterance of a "move it along" or "what's your business here?". Once we arrived, greeted by a mass of people waiting for the performance to start, our procession, still in full swing entered the room and transitioned to our prepared musical and spoken word performance. It was a tone that we intended to set for the long conversation that would follow. A room full of people expressed their varied opinions

[97] NELA Alliance, "MASA."

about gentrification, what it meant to them. For NELAA, the dialogue that we had helped to facilitate in the method that we did, was our answer to the discursive exclusion and displacement of voice that gentrification requires.

The practice of gentrification in Highland Park had played out in a similar fashion to others in the country. The late Neil Smith was one of the first scholars to identify the practice in North America, after Ruth Glass had coined the term from her study of residential practices in London.[98] Every place has its particularities. In the United States, as Neil Smith would illustrate in *The New Urban Frontier*, there was a pioneering logic to the discovery of the next "up and coming" neighborhood in New York City. Before Neil Smith would identify gentrification as a "global urban strategy," there was implicit in it an essence an "Americanness" that drove capitalist incursions into the creation of new markets.[99] Jason E. Pierce, writing on Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis", states that the frontier is where America is made and remade.[100] The frontier, in this regard, represented the bare essence of American democratic values, the egalitarianism of opportunity and prosperity. This image is divorced from the reality of monopolies in underregulated frontier markets. The comparisons to settler colonial practice of erasure

[98] Neil Smith, "Gentrification and Uneven Development," *Economic Geography* 58, no. 2 (1982): 139–155; Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (Psychology Press, 1996).
[99] Neil Smith, "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy," *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 427–450.
[100] Jason E. Pierce, "INDIANS NOT IMMIGRANTS:: Charles Fletcher Lummis, Frank Bird Linderman, and the Complexities of Race and Ethnicity in America," in *Making the White Man's West*, Whiteness and the Creation of the American West (University Press of Colorado, 2016), 95–120, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt19jcg63.10.

and replacement is rife in the scholarly and popular critiques of gentrification.[101] Gentrification is casted as the new colonialism.

For members of the NELA Alliance, the comparison is distilled to what Romo calls the "apartheid imagination."[102] Manifested as "cold, guarded smiles, indifferent and hostile glances", the apartheid imagination is the underbelly of Turner's "frontier thesis." As Romo states:

> "that dream of colonization is present today, you can think of it as an 'apartheid imagination.' It's a lens that anyone can be taught or forced to look through and it continues to inform how our city grows and changes. The apartheid imagination informs policies that have segregated Blacks and Latinos into areas of our city that are filed with toxic waste while mostly white neighborhoods are far from those toxic industries and often reap the products those industries create… The apartheid imagination wants Mexican food without Mexicans, wants us in the back of the restaurant. It wants to consume and profit from what we create while at the same time pushing us out of the foreground, into the background and off the page. It attempts to render us as foreigners in our own land… Do you want to see the apartheid imagination at work? York Bl., and now Figueroa St., have been remodeled under the lends of the Apartheid imagination, the same imagination that produced the idea of the need to 'tame' the 'frontier', 'wildreness' and 'savage' of the American west."

The point of comparison exists in the concept of "America" and especially in the "American West," the frontier is actually an enclosure constructed on acts of negation. For Romo, NELAA and the like, it is a universalizing condition of colonization that extends beyond the bounds of the United States. As Romo insists, "we've been displaced since the beginning of colonization."[103]

---

[101] "Gentrification Is NOT the New Colonialism," Last Real Indians, July 29, 2017, http://lastrealindians.com/gentrification-is-not-the-new-colonialism/.
[102] NELA Alliance, "MASA."
[103] NELA Alliance.



Figure 1-1: A Satirical Advert from NELA Alliance's Independently Produced Newsletter, MASA - Issue #1.

Preserving Community History

The sense of belonging created by anti-displacement activists in the throes of a mass-eviction (material, spiritual and psychological) is one that is situated in displacement itself. The recognition afforded to the Tongva-Gabrielino is in the frame of a logic of colonization, what Romo refers to as the "apartheid imagination," that once more works its way forward to displace the new natives (evicted tenants).[104] Acting as a metaphor for physical occupation, the displaced history and culture of NELA's working class and immigrant demographic is sequestered, erased, or commodified to further the necrospeculative practice of displacement-driven finance.

Distilling the act of recognition and placing it within the context of modern-day gentrification, is designed to place racialized immigrant communities on a continuum that rewrites history with new subjects. This practice of indigenous embodiment is not isolated from the pattern of indigenisms used to graph communities in a place.[105] It was a practice of the Chicanx nationalist movement that employed a praxis of indigenous reclamation to territorialize land and create a sense of belonging in places where they were rejected and cast to the margins.[106] The myth of Aztlan acted as a powerful metaphor that, just like the murals in Highland Park, aimed to unify the community in a collective identity of universal origins.

[104] NELA Alliance.
[105] Alberto, "Making Racial Subjects"; Alberto, "Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas."
[106] Pulido, "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity III"; Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo, "Indigenous but Not Indian?"

Likewise, the Highland Park Heritage Trust (HPHT), reacting to the continued deterioration of a community close to 100 years in the making (1886 – 1981), moved to preserve the architecturally significant homes and businesses that were being destroyed by the speculative practices of mutli-family residential developers as well as immigrant, and low-income populations that those same developers sought to extract rents from. The timeline emphasized by HPHT is illustrated in text and photo by the two books, mentioned above, of local history authored by one of the HPHT's earliest board members, Charles Fisher. The celebrated pioneer founding of the Highland Park neighborhood is centered around several figures, none of whom cast a larger shadow than Charles Lummis.

Lummis was the founder of Los Angeles' first museum, the Southwest Museum.[107] The museum literally casts a shadow over the valley above which it was built. Lummis house (El Alisal), built by his own hands, sits along the arroyo seco and was credited as the catalyzing hub for the bohemian arroyo seco art scene at the turn of the 20th century. Most notable of all was his affinity for and work to preserve and advocate on behalf of native people and culture. As the architect of Southwest booster culture, Lummis tended to assume native culture as his own. The reasons for his journey to Los Angeles was part of his desire to "play Indian."[108] Fisher, in a similar gesture of recognition, begins his narrative timeline of Highland Park history with the 30,000-year

[107]It was purchased by the Gene Autry Museum of the West in 2003, parts of his collection of Native American artifacts are still held at the southwest – although most of it has been transferred to the Autry's collection storage.

[108] Pierce, "INDIANS NOT IMMIGRANTS"; *S8 E1: Charles Lummis - Reimagning the American West*, accessed March 27, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nGr65kf348&feature=emb_rel_end.

presence of the Tongva and Chumash, that seems to vanish with the onset of colonization. Indigenous history and heritage are not mentioned beyond this two-sentence preface. Lummis' appropriation of Native culture, in its spirit and advocacy for Native peoples, was fashioned into a larger movement for preservation that crystallized an indigeneity meant to serve as the premodern roots of an emergent United States, and more specifically a new Southwest Lummis was actively constructing in his work as a journalist and writer. Lummis' vision relied on a biologically determinist view of race used to argue for indigenous people's erasure from the Americas.[109] Once removed, real estate title and speculation could develop unfettered by native disputes for territory.[110]

Seemingly contradictory to the reverence Lummis held for certain indigenous populations (i.e. the industrious Pueblo Indians), this existential quelling of a Lummis' restless anxiety reads as a "settler nostalgia" for a group that Lummis feared would become extinct with the emergence of a new and progressive Anglo civilization.[111] Additionally, rather than contradicting the genocidal practices that established California's statehood and the legal, illegal and extralegal title transfers of the mid to late 19th century, the settler colonial ontology that Lummis reifies is a part of the whole which creates place through negation. Andrew Glassell Jr. (son of the Southern plantocracy and the namesake of Glassell Park – a neighborhood contained within NELA) and the Rogers

---

[109] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409.

[110] Joanne Barker, "Territory as AnalyticThe Dispossession of Lenapehoking and the Subprime Crisis," *Social Text* 36, no. 2 (135) (June 1, 2018): 19–39, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-4362337; Madley, *An American Genocide*.

[111] Pierce, "INDIANS NOT IMMIGRANTS"; Adria Imada, "'Aloha 'Oe': Settler-Colonial Nostalgia and the Genealogy of a Love Song," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37, no. 2 (January 1, 2013): 35–52, https://doi.org/10.17953/aicr.37.2.c4x497167lx48183.

Family (early Los Angeles Pioneers and former settlers of the Comanche territory of Northeast Texas) are the necrospeculative founders of Highland Park that, in Fisher's historical narrative, emerge as prominent historical subjects materialized on the terrain of a self-actualizing frontier dependent on the ontological denial of Native and Black peoples in the Americas. Glassell Jr. and the Rogers Brothers were land and real estate speculators essential to the transition of Highland Park from an unruly landscape of undecipherable title and illegitimate inhabitation to neatly allotted parcels primed for the market. The community that would build on this foundational infrastructure of settler emplacement, was an enclosure that struggled to maintain its impermeability.

"Born of the Boom"[112]

Charles Fisher, unlike the Highland Park Branch Security of Los Angeles Bank, did acknowledge the Tongva presence in the area, 30,000 years before Gaspar de Portola led his expedition into Alta-California in 1769. The timeline moves on quickly from that and repeats the important history of Highland Park's reputation as a neighborhood of many firsts: the first suburb of Los Angeles, the first museum of Los Angeles, and the first parkway. Geographically, it gained its significance as a main thoroughfare connecting Central Los Angeles to Pasadena. As part of the famed Route 66, it also connected the Midwest to Los Angeles. Highland Park was literally and figuratively part of the vast national infrastructural and social network that helped to further Los Angeles' settlement as an American city in the first waves of migration post 1850.

[112] Fisher, *Highland Park.*

Charles Lummis arrived in Los Angeles in 1884, just a few years before Highland Park's founding. He came to Los Angeles as a Harvard drop out, disenchanted with the trajectory of American civilization in the Anglo America of his forefather's creation. Working as a journalist, he managed to convince Harrison Gray Otis to give him a job at the Los Angeles Times. He sold him on the idea of cross-country tramp, cataloging stories of his adventure for publication in the Times. For Lummis it was an opportunity for him to partake in the frontierism that had beckoned many before him and reconnect with the America he had become increasingly alienated from. Jason Pierce captures all of this in his analysis of the American naturalist and Indian rights advocates that Lummis himself was a part of. Manly men reconnecting themselves to nature to shed the deteriorating effects of the luxuries of modernization on the spirit. The rugged individualism proffered was also set in contrast to the effects of industrialization and ceaseless migration from Southern and Eastern Europe Lummis especially detested.[113]

Lummis' celebration of Indigenous heritage took on many forms. His writing, archiving, archaeological research, and advocacy on behalf of native peoples were all done with the intent of promoting and preserving Native lifeways in peril of being erased by the ceaseless progress of Anglo society. From his early expedition on foot across the United States, and after the stroke he suffered from the excessive hours at his job (when he left Los Angeles to live with a Pueblo tribe in Iselda, New Mexico), his desire to play Indian stemmed from his own ambitions to reconnect the American exceptionalism to a history situated in the land. Lummis was an early pioneer of a "Settler Colonial

[113] Pierce, "INDIANS NOT IMMIGRANTS."

Nostalgia" that Adria Imada describes as a romanticizing of indigenous culture that does not account for the continued dispossessions of settler society. The possession and inhabitation of the Native body in this case fulfilled Lummis' desire to assuage the anxiety of alienation. Lummis' preservationist work held Native culture and peoples in a premodern form, ahistorical and static.[114] As Jason E. Pierce ,writing of Lummis and others, synthesized the motives for his fascination with the expanding frontier, "The West could be a refuge for whiteness, they hoped, a last chance to create an ideal society."[115] Lummis' legacy as a Sunshine booster, bohemian trend setter, and preservationist reverberates in the continued significance of all these movements in real estate and touristic branding; the sedimented Arts and Crafts character of Highland Park's historic preservation overlay zone; as well as in the New Age fascination, fetishization, and cultural appropriation of Southwestern Indigenous culture. Sitting on top of a hill, fortified from the eviscerating force of modern culture, Lummis' conceptualization of indigeneity, as a purer and deeper spiritual connection to the environment, was crystallized in the development and construction of the Southwest Museum, the location of Daniel Cervantes' mural of Pan-American Indigeneity.

[114] Imada, "Aloha 'Oe."
[115] Pierce, "INDIANS NOT IMMIGRANTS", pg 2.



Figure 1-2: Charles Lummis working from his desk in his home, El Alisal. Digitally reproduced by the USC Digital Library. From the California Historical Society Collection at the University of Southern California.



Figure 1-3: A view of the Southwest Museum from the bottom of Mount Washington. Digitally reproduced by the USC Digital Library. From the California Historical Society Collection at the University of Southern California.

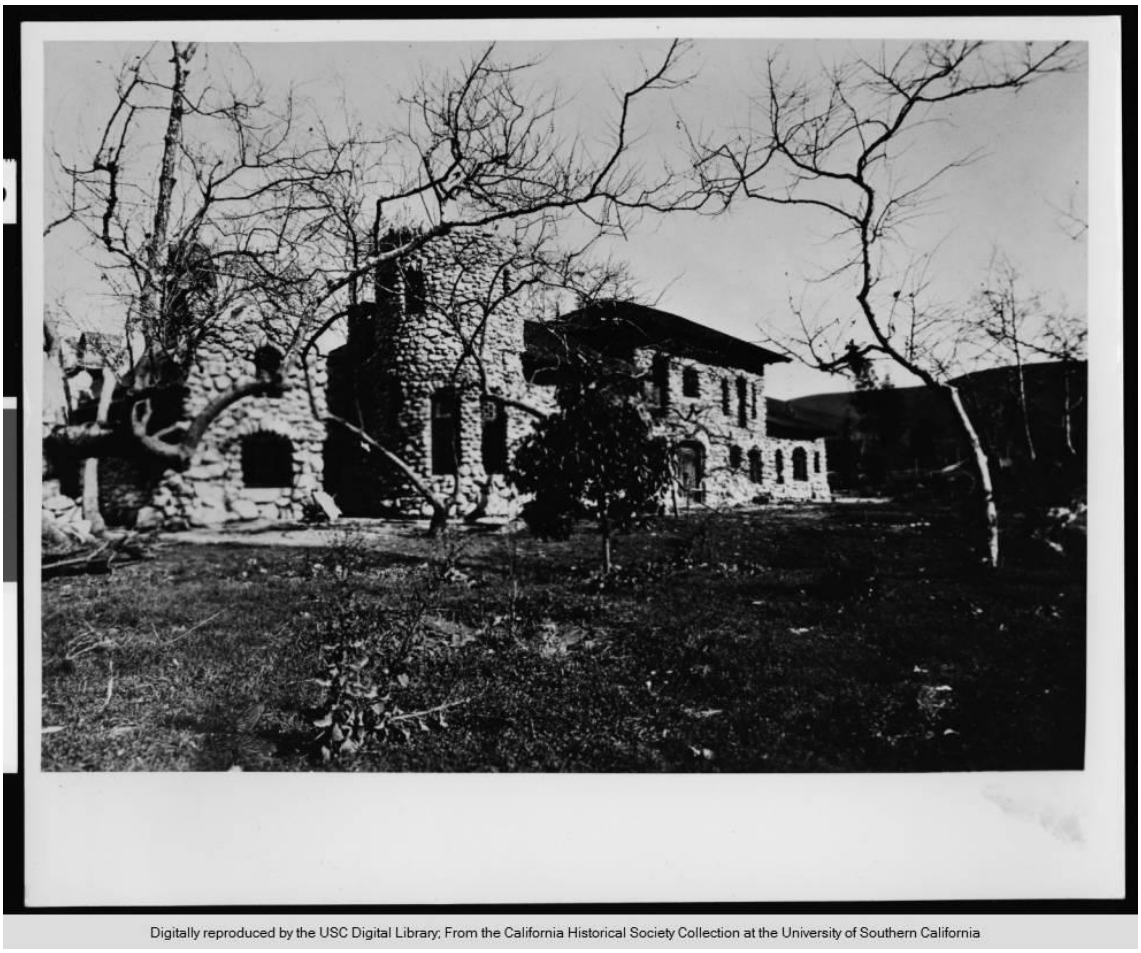


Figure 1-4: El Alisal, Charles Lummis home along the Arroyo Seco in Highland Park. Digitally reproduced by the USC Digital Library. From the California Historical Society Collection at the University of Southern California.

The Preservation of the Human/ Property Form

The 1970s was the breaking point for those who still held steadfast to the notion of Highland Park as a historically rich and high cultured neighborhood of Los Angeles. It had the qualities of being one of LA's most significant places. 1985 was the precipice of a settler anxiety that believed that highland park's historical significance would be erased forever. The mid-1980s was the final nail in the coffin of a pattern of white flight and immigrant occupation of a neighborhood that was losing its department stores, its grand

theatres, and quaint image of a culturally-rich yet still sleepy suburb nestled in the "Five Friendly Valleys" of the foothills at the tail end of the Santa Monica Mountain Range.

The anxiety had been building for some time and is most evident in the early eras of anti-Mexican sentiment that gripped the nation following the Great Depression.[116] Massive amounts of Mexican migration, result of a variety of push and pull factors, inundated Los Angeles with a growing Mexican population, just a four decades after US settlement had made Los Angeles for the first time in its history a white majority city. The anxiety was clear in the countless newspaper articles and government documents that spoke of a Mexican immigration problem and which resulted in, among other things, repatriations and the regulation of seasonal farm work (i.e. the Bracero Program).[117] The hysteria and fear would also most plainly come to view, in its most undeniable manner, during the Zoot Suit riots. As Catherine Ramirez has demonstrated in detail, that event emerged from the clash of white and Mexican youth over the control of public space in Downtown Los Angeles. Mexican youth, dressed in a way that denied the scripts of invisibility and docility, insisted on their belonging in a city that was actively trying to marginalize them into segregated barrios. Young white sailors from across the country stationed in Los Angeles, unaccustomed to the unapologetic attitudes of cosmopolitan youth of color, started a race war against those they felt should have deferential in their presence. Cast as a riot, the blame was put squarely upon the Mexican youth, young girls and boys who refused to be reduced to second class citizens.

[116] Banks, "Mestizaje and the Mexican Mestizo Self."
[117] Banks.

Concerns over youth delinquency, as it came to be known, was the foreground to the underlying issue, the maintenance of racial boundaries its Los Angeles Northeast region. Although the redlining maps from the Home-Owners Loan Corporation in 1939 demonstrate that although there were no "racially subversive foreign populations" in Highland Park at the time of its assessment by the HOLC, it still received a C-rating for the same reason that informed its first real estate boom in in 1880s. "Figueroa Avenue was an arterial highway" making the area undesirable. The HOLC's written report also states that many of the houses were very old as was the community, leading it to be "spotty" and "planned haphazardly."[118] The HOLC described and graded an area inhabited by white collar workers and businessmen, a population of good character with no legible infiltration of racially subversive elements. The problems of the neighborhood only really lay in its aging housing stock, heavy traffic, and from the cartographic perspective of the HOLC, an inclination to become dangerously heterogenous. Surrounding the C-class blocks of highland park were D-rated neighborhoods, already infiltrated by "subversive elements."

The impact of the redlining coupled with the racially restrictive covenants of proximate neighborhoods (Eagle Rock was a racially restrictive neighborhood to the north of Highland Park) over decades transformed Highland Park from moderately risky C-rated neighborhood to a predominantly Mexican and immigrant barrio. The speculation based on the existing character of the neighborhood was that investment in the C-rated blocks, and more so with the D, would prove to be a moderately risky venture. The

[118] "Mapping Inequality," accessed April 27, 2020, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/.

construction of the 110 parkway along with the channelization of the arroyo seco helped address some of the infrastructural and environmental concerns that kept Highland Parks neighborhood rating down. However, its proximity to blue collar and increasingly heterogenous neighborhoods as well as the zoning regulations that made the neighborhood susceptible to the construction of multi-family housing would eventually be its downfall. Over the decades the traffic down Figueroa Avenue that promoted consumer visibility to the stores would be gone as traffic shifted to the new highway. The local rail systems were also replaced by freeways and the automobile industrial complex.

Many factors lead to the white flight of Northeast Los Angeles, making the neighborhood the predominantly working class, immigrant, and non-owner-occupied area that it is today. Working class, and lower middle-class neighborhoods went from predominantly white to predominantly non-white over a few decades. The conservative backlash to integration, what homeowners and property rights advocates posited was an impingement on their own civil rights, worked to reaffirm the practice of segregation through legal (Prop 14), extralegal (mob violence), or illegal (residential discrimination) ways. Ana Muniz points to the origins of the racially-based civil ordinances of gang injunctions in Los Angeles. As a reaction to the presence of black youth on public streets, the first gang injunction in the city worked within the politics of public space and culture.[119] The measure would carry forward to other neighborhoods in the city, blanketing a large geographic area where profiling is a requirement for the civil

[119] Muniz, "Maintaining Racial Boundaries"; Low and Smith, *The Politics of Public Space*; Low, *On the Plaza*.

ordinances' transition into criminal proceedings. Prop 13, spearheaded by Howard Jarvis' taxpayer revolt in California, is cited as the reason for this new single-family zoning movement, a "homeowner revolution."Prop 13 undercut the tax base and undermined Northeast neighborhoods' capacities to host denser, lower-income communities. A city once zoned for 10 million people dropped to 4 million in that period. Andrew Whittemore classifies this "slow growth movement" as a continued legacy of the racializing and financial logics that birthed redlining and the reaction against it.[120]

The Highland Park Heritage Trust (1981) was part of a larger planning movement stemming from local dissatisfaction with a loosely regulated housing market that allowed developers to build multi-family housing cheaply and haphazardly.[121] This lead to the condo conversions and destruction of old and architecturally significant homes that in Highland Park eventually lead to the Highland Park Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ), the largest in the city of Los Angeles, containing the highest number of historically significant sites, and that unlike other HPOZs contains both residential and commercial properties. Historic preservation in Highland Park carries many of the same ideologies that Charles Lummis helped foster with the Southwest Museum. However, it was his DIY, arts and crafts, and bohemian character that was sustained in the register of

[120] Andrew Whittemore, "How the Federal Government Zoned America: The Federal Housing Administration and Zoning," *Journal of Urban History* 39 (June 14, 2012): 620–42, https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144212470245; Andrew H. Whittemore, "Zoning Los Angeles: A Brief History of Four Regimes," *Planning Perspectives* 27, no. 3 (July 2012): 393–415, https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2012.681140.

[121] "Northeast Los Angeles Community Plan | Los Angeles City Planning," accessed April 23, 2020, https://planning.lacity.org/plans-policies/community-plan-area/north-los-angeles.

historical sites located within Highland Park. It is a preservation of the human/ property form that had 'found itself" against the natural backdrop of the arroyo seco.

Waves of migration from Mexico, South and Central America, East and Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands over the past century and decades of fair housing advocacy challenged neighborhoods, especially Highland Park, to maintain its property values at any cost, a direct and explicit correlation to the distinguishability of the human and property form. It led to the culmination of policing and zoning tools that have successfully fragmented Los Angeles (at the city and neighborhood level) to a series of subdivided lots and single-family homes.[122] Although planning and policy is outside the purview of my current analysis, I use it as context for the preservationist movement that developed over fears of rebellious youth and similarly unrestrained developers.[123] This lead to ballot initiatives likes prop 13, 14, and 187.[124] What emerged simultaneously to the narratives promoting white flight and racialized disinvestment was an infrastructure of community belonging that necessitated its own historical narrative.[125]

In 1996 and 2004, two of the many murals that populate the area, found their way onto the walls of Highland Park. Located on Ave 61 and Figueroa, at the north end of Highland Park's Figueroa commercial corridor, is Mexico-Tenochtitlan: A sequence of

---

[122] Whittemore, "How the Federal Government Zoned America"; Whittemore, "Zoning Los Angeles."
[123] Whittemore, "Zoning Los Angeles"; Gregory D. Morrow, "The Homeowner Revolution: Democracy, Land Use and the Los Angeles Slow-Growth Movement, 1965-1992" (UCLA, 2013), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6k64g20f; Muniz, "Maintaining Racial Boundaries"; Ana Muniz, "Disorderly Community Partners and Broken Windows Policing," *Ethnography* 13, no. 3 (2012): 330–351.
[124] Max Felker-Kantor, "Fighting the Segregation Amendment: Black and Mexican American Responses to Proposition 14 in Los Angeles," *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition*, 2013, 143–175; Daniel Martinez HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (University of California Press, 2010).
[125] Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*.

time and culture (or The Wall That Talks). Created by Quetzalcoatl Mural Project (QMP), the mural sits 100 by 20 feet and represents a timeline, accompanied with images of a procession that moves left to right, from birth to a speculative (and seemingly dystopian) future. QMP created the mural because they were "committed to bring a sense of community and cultural identity to a lost and silenced history."[126] Close to ten years later, a young man named Daniel Cervantes, inspired by the QMP and Mexico-Tenochtitlan, would start to create his own murals in Highland Park. Cervantes had painted a few murals before he started his Southwest Museum Mural. In fact, before Cervantes was a muralist, he was a young and aspiring graffiti artist, already versed in the culture of public street art. He and Anthony Ledesma (a member of QMP) came up together and had a collective revelation around where they wanted their art to go. In that sense, QMP was successful, as their mission statement reads,

> We believe in giving young people a chance to nurture their creativity and contribute positively to their community. Mentoring youth during these difficult times provided us a deep look into the individual hardships and experiences they endured early in life. The youth made a tremendous impact on this mural by contributing their artistic talents and creativity to the project; especially in addressing their concerns and aspirations.[127]

As a young and undeveloped muralist, Cervantes also tried his hand in creating a grand mural. Located on the load bearing wall of the hill that holds the Southwest Museum, Cervantes' Mural is a nine panel, 120-foot depiction of American pan-indigeneity. In my conversation with Cervantes he expressed that he wanted to move away from the religious pieces he saw growing up in Highland Park. He, in his own words, was

[126] "Mexico-Tenochtitlan Mural | Avenue 50 Studio," accessed April 28, 2020, http://avenue50studio.org/mexico-tenochtitlan-mural.
[127] "Mexico-Tenochtitlan Mural | Avenue 50 Studio."

becoming "culturally aware" and he used the mural as an opportunity to learn and present "our [the community's] heritage." The mural contained images of a northwestern totem maker, Natives from the Plains, Alaska, California (including the local Tongva and their neighbors to the north, the Chumash), Powwow and Aztec dancers. The heritage Cervantes was representing was one he claims as his own but was also that of the artifacts contained in the Southwest Museum. Cervantes was proactive in identifying the wall and then applying for a grant, which he received, in order to paint the mural, but the Southwest Museum was instrumental in coordinating with Cervantes on the reflection of an indigeneity that the Museum was, once again, invested in preserving.

A decade after the Autry Museum of the American West merged with the Southwest Museum of the American Indian in 2003, its plan of action to help conserve the collections of the southwest museum was finally culminating, Cervantes explains that the new management had neglected the vital upkeep on the mural. As with most murals in Los Angeles, it was exposed to the elements and other ambitious youth (like Cervantes and Ledesma many years before) who wanted to make their name known as well. The presence of one graffiti tag begot more and eventually the original mural was completely covered with graffiti and was subsequently whitewashed, erased but not forgotten. Just a few years later a committee of people with a vested interest in the mural embarked on a restoration project. The committee circumvented Cervantes and hired Pola Lopez to restore the mural.[128] Mexico-Tenochtitlan would also become involved in a controversy

[128] "Zender told the Boulevard Sentinel that graffiti and other elements that change or destroy a mural are part of its natural lifespan, but he thinks there should be consultation before murals are removed. A process to deal with aging murals on public property is for the city's Cultural Affairs

that also threaten its complete erasure from the neighborhood. The building, whose northern facing wall holds the mural, was purchased in 2019 by Fig Crossing LLC, a subsidiary of Amazon Properties and owned and operated by the Mehdi family of Beverly Hills, California. Their plans to renovate the commercial property proposed to knock out a portion of the wall to build in a large window. Thanks to Los Angeles municipal code 22.119 (the "LA mural ordinance") passed in 2013, when an owner wants to make alterations to or remove a Los Angeles City registered mural from their property, they have to first notify the mural's painter, which the Mehdi family did not and city officials did. Quetzalcoatl Mural Project (QMP) and the community were up in arms. To them, the threat to the mural represent an already established project of gentrification and cultural displacement that had seen other murals whitewashed, tenants evicted, and the public facing image of Highland Park progressively excised of its Latinidad. Both Cervantes and QMP's murals would indeed become embroiled in the contestations over public art and history. The artists and the Latinx community likewise felt like their history was being expunged from the neighborhood.[129] This is the same public debate NELA Alliance was active in since 2014.

---

department to reach out to the artist to assess the mural or – if the artist is not available – to reach out to a local muralist like Zender. That gives an artist a chance to restore the mural or let it remain exposed to graffiti and the elements until, due to extensive damage, it would be whitewashed." - Wendy Newell, "Zender on Murals," April 29, 2018, https://www.boulevardsentinel.com/zender-on-murals/.

[129] Philip Iglauer, "This Neglected Mt. Washington Mural Hides A History Of Chicano And Indigenous Identity," LAist, accessed March 26, 2020, https://laist.com/2019/02/20/southwest_museum_mural_getting_restored.php; Mike, "Proof That The North Figueroa Association Ordered The Destruction Of Two Highland Park Murals In 2017"; Donath, "Zack de La Rocha and The Doors' John Densmore Funded This Highland Park Mural — Now It Needs Help"; Gumbel, "'Whitewashed.'"



Figure 1-5: The Southwest Museum Mural with Layers of Graffiti Covering it. Photo credit: Pola Lopez. Photo Source: The LAist.



Figure 1-6: One Panel of the Southwest Museum Mural. Photo credit: Daniel Cervantes.



Figure 1-7: Daniel Cervantes standing in front of his Southwest Muesum Mural. Photo credit: Daniel Cervantes.

"The Wall that Talks" – Place-based Politics of Indigenous Reclamation

Maria Josefina Saldana-Portillo's and Maria Eugenia Cotera's concept of "Mestizo Mourning" refers referring to mourning the loss of indigenous customs and traditions that had been denied and buried. Societal pressures to reject custom and tradition in favor of rationality and progress pushed many Mexican nationalist to adopt their new status as mestizos.[130] This loss is at the center of a reclamation project that gained vast popularity during the Chicanx nationalist movement's inception of a broad universalizing identity engineered to unite politically and regionally specific movements

[130] Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo, "Indigenous but Not Indian?"

for land and civil rights. Chicanx nationalist did so by reaffirming the Mexican Nationalist narrative of common indigenous ancestry.[131] The nationalist ethos of Mexican Mestizo identity, as Lourdes Alberto demonstrates, has worked to erase the presence of indigenous populations in Mexico.[132] Indigenous people were seen as an antecedent to the modern Mexican population, and an historical object of violent relations that make the modern Mexican subject. Creating its own specific issues with regards to recognition, rights, and sovereignty within Mexico, the signifying myth of Mestizaje has also been a territorializing mechanism for Mexican American political movements, Chicanx Nationalism included, erasing and displacing US Native populations.[133]

Tenochtitlan (or the Wall that Talks) represents an active trope among Chicanx cultural nationalists that the artist collective behind the mural, Quetzalcoatl Mural Project, wanted to showcase the common heritage of the Latinx population as well as the universalizing indigeneity of African and Asian descended peoples. The emphasis of the mural however stressed Mayan and Aztec common heritage as well as the procession of this common heritage into its evolutions and synthesis with Western religion and politics. A literal moving procession guided by Quetzalcoatl, through the iconography of Mexico's patron saint and divine mother, landing ultimately with the historical and contemporary figures of Cesar Chavez, Las Adelitas, Subcomandante Marcos, and Emiliano Zapata. Updates to the mural added emphasis of the need for education, adding

[131] Alberto, "Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas."
[132] Alberto.
[133] Saldaña-Portillo, "Who's the Indian in Aztlán?"; Pulido, "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity III."

books and laptops as part of the revolutionary spirit that determines Chicanx perseverance. The mural however also contains a warning.

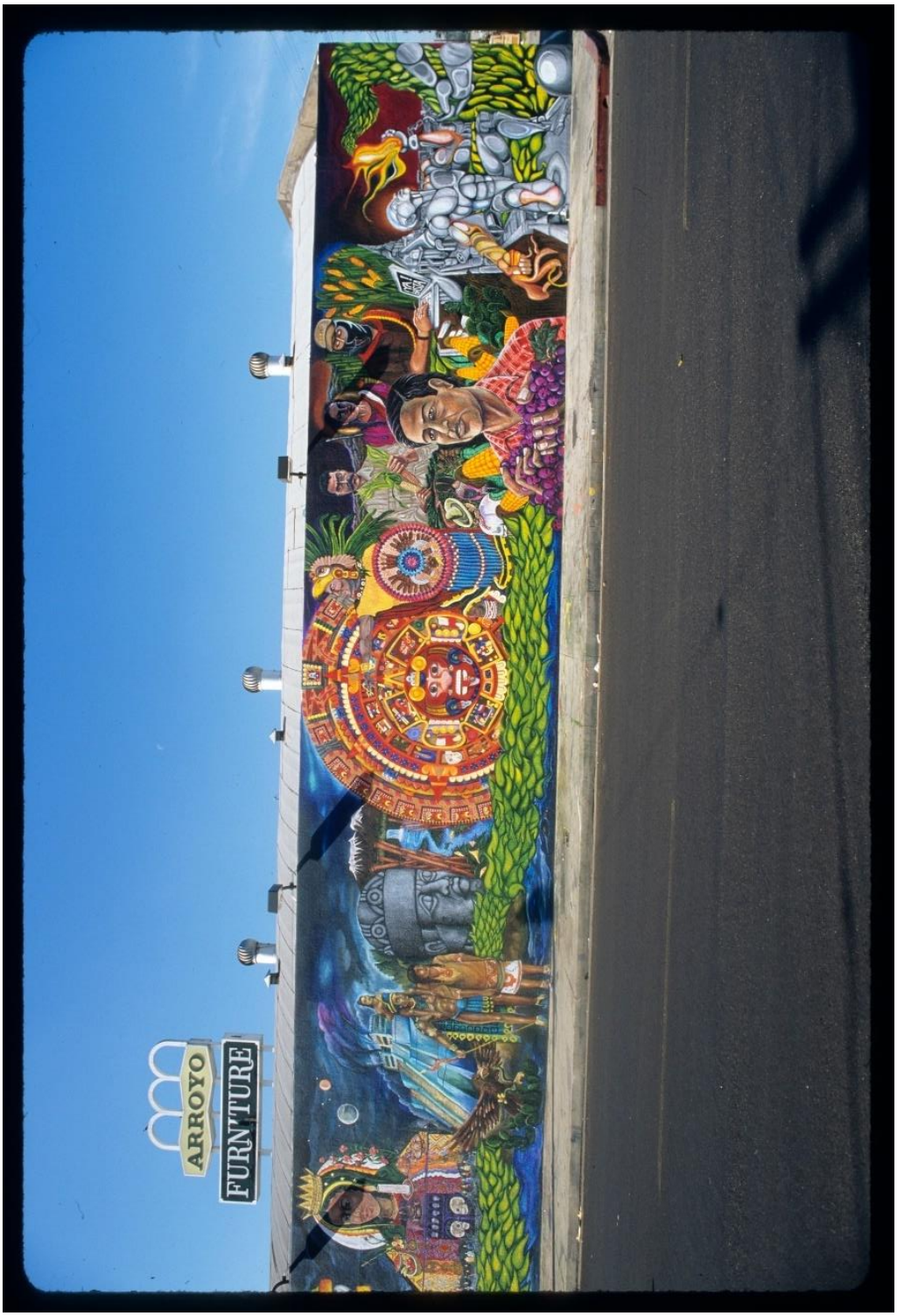
The timeline created by QMP was intentionally created to help Highland Park's youth understand a history that begins with an attachment to the land, and the Americas broadly. Moving from left to right, from birth and ultimately to death, the mural ends with the illustration of a dystopian landscape where a man made of metal is surrounding by a similar chromed industrial landscape, one arm shackled with chains. A fire burns in their shackled hand, seemingly provided by Quetzalcoatl (the Aztec serpent god), while the other hand is being pulled by roots, back into the land and into the history it contains. Tenochtitlan displays a similar anxiety to that which Charles Lummis expressed almost a hundred years prior. The alienation of a youth that once again requires indigeneity to reconnect and assuage itself of the harm (western) modernity inflicts on the spirit, ego, and telos of Man's transcendence through his mastery of time and space (History and Geography). This is "our land and "our heritage."

In my conversation with Daniel Cervantes, I learned that the same inspiration motivated him to create a memorial to Pan-American Indigeneity that converges in Los Angeles and specifically in the archives of the Southwest Museum. Lummis likewise was drawn to archaeological sites throughout the Americas to aid in the creation of a catalogue of Indigenous peoples and artifacts that could be then preserved by institutions like the Southwest museum. Cervantes own revelations and cultural consciousness drove him to remind the young artists on the street just like him of their common heritage. A path towards self-discovery drove Lummis on a voyage that would take him across the

US and all over the Americas. When Cervantes' mural fell into disrepair, a wall reclaimed by the streets, the museum as designated co-curator and financial supporter of the mural decided that the only solution was to bury the artifact in a thick coat of white paint. A symbolic erasure of the "new natives" displaced at the hands of greedy landlords and motivated investors. In 2018 a collection of neighborhood organizations wanted to bring back the mural, to reconnect to the heritage it possessed. They wanted to hire Cervantes, but the pay they offered, he suggested was not sufficient for him to travel from his new home in Covina. A delayed process finally saw Pola Lopez as the artist to bring back the mural. She claims that a careful mix of water and chemicals helped peel back the layers of whitewash and graffiti paint, the original piece not gone, but lying dormant underneath. A metaphor truly to the indigenous heritage it represents. Although, despite the presence of a "ghostly Indian" and most of the bodies seemingly stuck in time, there are at least two of the nine panels that showcase a totem maker with modern tools and a powwow dancer. Cervantes expressed that, as such an early piece of his, he wanted the opportunity to redo his mural if he had been hired. He claimed that that didn't sit well with the committee that wanted to see the mural brought back to its original form. Cervantes said he would have made the images seem more modern, more of this time and representative of his heightened technique as an artist. He was denied the opportunity and he speculated that the low wages they offered were meant to detract him from the mural restoration project. The vanguards of history and community needed its Indigenous and Chicanx history to be as it is, for them to exist as they are.

Each three of the narrative devices I covered represent the (anti-) displacement genealogies that inform a contemporary debate around gentrification and cultural erasure. These genealogies clash and come to bear in a fight against racialized displacement in NELA. Also, within each of them, either in the foreground or background, is a grappling with a settler colonial ontology that creates "community" through a negation of an indigenous present and future. This is true of the narrative created by the Highland Park Branch Security of Los Angeles Bank and repurposed by Charles Fisher. In this narrative, Highland Park's Founding Fathers and "Pioneer" Mother are able to actualize as Humans with the Cartesian dimensions of their new property lines as well as significant historical subjects creating civilization in a place lacking both (humans and civility). As the enclosure of the settler-community turned into the community of enclosed single-family homes, this narrative would be instrumentalized to preserve and revitalize a neighborhood degenerated by ill-conformed youth and opportunistic developers. Oppositional to, but still inculcated by the settler ontology, is the narrative devices that use indigeneity (and indigeneisms) as the grounds on which "community" can plant tits roots and spring forward. In the three examples, it is a device that helps soothe the anxieties of an alienation that comes with the human-property form.

ARROYO



Figures 1-8: Mexico-Tenochtitlan - The Wall That Talks by Quetzalcoatl Mural Project. Credit to USC Digital Library. Robin Dunitz Slides of Los Angeles Murals Collection

CHAPTER 2

NELA's (anti-)Displacement Genealogies



THE FRANKLIN MURAL PROJECT
HISTORIES OF NORTHEAST LOS ANGELES
PEOPLE OF THE EARTH: A TONGVA CEREMONIA
2009

In this chapter I focus on the stories of Melissa Uribe, Julia Bogany, Arturo Romo and Reies Flores to isolate a moment in the anti-displacement genealogy that positions these four individuals as conduits of a tradition that refuses dispossession and displacement in Northeast Los Angeles (NELA). Melissa, Romo and Reies are members of the Northeast Los Angeles Alliance (NELAA), an anti-displacement collective started in 2014 as a response to the rapid gentrification of Highland Park and adjacent NELA

neighborhoods (e.g. Lincoln Heights, Frogtown, Cypress Park, Glassell Park, El Sereno, etc.). In 2007, cousins Arturo Romo and Reies Flores were substitute teachers at Franklin Highschool when they started a mural project with students on campus. Julia Bogany, a Tongva elder and the cultural affairs officer for the Gabrieleno/ Tongva Tribe, was one of the consultants they invited to teach their students local Tongva history and customs, and Melissa Uribe was one of their students. Reies and Romo are emblematic of a tradition developed through Chicanx nationalist thought as it encountered American Indian movements for sovereignty, recognition, and tribal self-preservation. They imbedded themselves and their students in the local place-based anti-displacement genealogy that Julia herself was a living repository of, an embodied ecological knowledge of Los Angeles as a place – a "silenced knowing of the city" according to Cindi Alvitre, based "on an intimate connection with to the land, water, and creations."[134]

I interviewed Melissa, Julia, Romo and Reies to gain a firsthand account of the Franklin Mural Project as a site of these genealogies' emergence and entanglements. In the first two and a half chapters of this dissertation, I argue that Latinx subjectivity and geographies are constructed and defended through de-indigenizing logics that are central to settler colonial projects of land and identity. This is discernible in the Latinx population's role and investments in the developmental teleology of the human/ property form that has taken shape over the course of settler colonization in Southern California. In the context of gentrification in Northeast Los Angeles, it is demonstrated by the subset of Latinx homeowners promoting gentrification as a policing and market instrument as

[134] Alvitre, "Coyote Tours," 44.

well as in those who challenge displacement in a territorial positionality of indigenous embodiment. These differing responses to gentrification and the displacement it engenders reflect a spectrum of Latinx postcolonial subjectivities that are as divergent as the opposing characters of Charles Lummis and Andrew Glassell Jr., but that nonetheless inhabit the same onto-epistemic traditions driving Southwest US settler colonialism forward.

Of central concern in this chapter is the use of pre-colonial narrative to help cohere a place-based attachment and territorial claim to land. As Pulido notes, it is a logic of territoriality that perpetuates a Chicanx settler-colonial relation to land, one that has worked to continue a myth of Tongva disappearance in Los Angeles. Romo and Reies' centering of the Tongva in their narrative timeline of NELA can be read within the politics of recognition. The Franklin Mural Project acknowledges the Tongva as the original stewards of the land and even employed a contemporary Tongva member (Julia) and others, to teach them about local native history and landscape. However, my concern is to what extent anti-displacement activists' and artists' evocations of an "original displacement" act as a measure of "settler nostalgia" that celebrates Tongva culture and/or laments its disappearance, without acknowledging the continued projects of settler colonial erasure. For the Latinx populations in Northeast Los Angeles, is it an act of "mestizo mourning" that uses the Tongva as a narrative device (or metaphor) for their own history of dispossession and displacement in the region? [135]

[135] Adria Imada, "'Aloha 'Oe': Settler-Colonial Nostalgia and the Genealogy of a Love Song," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37, no. 2 (January 1, 2013): 35–52, Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo, "Indigenous but Not Indian?"



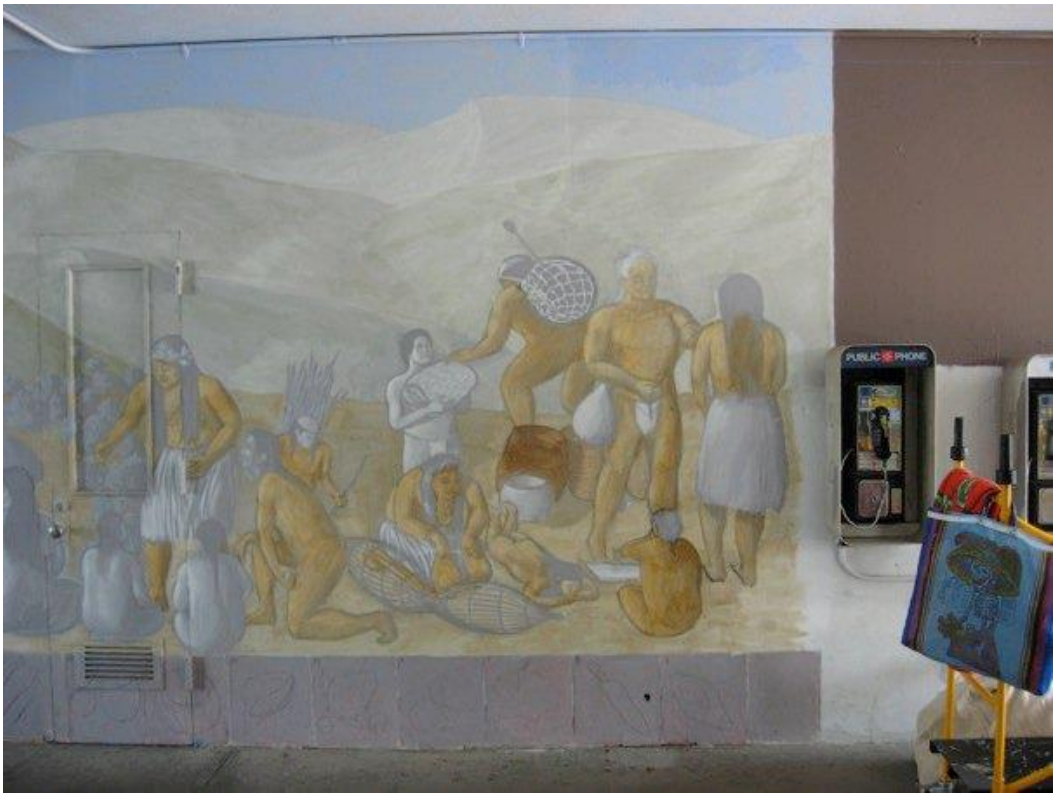


Figure 2-2: Images of the Completed First Stage of the Franklin Mural Project - Tongva Social, Political, and Economic Landscape in Full Display. Photos taken by Reies Flores.

The Franklin Mural Project

The Franklin Mural Project adorns opposite walls in Franklin High School's main entrance, a breezeway that climbed the four floors of the school's main building. With two panels per floor, eight in total, the mural project was an ambitious endeavor to visualize the history of a place – Northeast Los Angeles (NELA). In practice, Romo and Reies wanted the mural to tell one story in four acts "that went from Tongva people through Spanish Colonization, Mexican Independence, American Colonization, Post-war boomtown and then ending in the present day with some of the social movements of the [19]60s", according to Romo.

Unfortunately, the mural project stalled during the second phase of the project and was never completed. Ironically (considering this projects concern with affordable housing crisis in Los Angeles), Romo and Reis were unable to continue their project because of the collapse of the housing bubble (i.e. the Great Recession) and the financial impact on the school's budget. However, Melissa and her peers were part of the many students who got to benefit from this collective art/history making. The conceptualization and execution of this mural diverged from others in the region that tended to overemphasize either a de-spatialized Aztec mythology central to a Mexican Nationalist identity or a pre-modern, pre-US Los Angeles that, according to Romo and Reies, focused too often on the mission period in California as the origins of civilization in this region. The mural project was centered on a sense/politics of place. To that end, Romo and Reies invited their students to imagine themselves as a product of a larger timeline contained within NELA. It was a response and reaction to the settler colonial narratives that erased a Tongva history and presence from the region. The mural also worked to counter narratives that dismissed and devalued the contributions of working class Latinx immigrants to NELA's identity and history. It imparted a lesson that would be evoked once more against the market forces (i.e. speculative finance) that drive gentrification in NELA.

Reies and Romo Talk Back to the Narrative of Erasure

Reies and Romo starting writing about their community work and experience first as substitute teachers in Franklin High School. They noticed a pattern of representation

that overemphasized crime and disfunction in Highland Park – narratives of void and toxicity that are superimposed on marginal communities. They recognized that a superfluous concentration on crime is part of the rhetoric for people who argue for gentrification. Bolstered as a solution to the "gang problem," this argument insists that gentrification is a pro-development/pro-community asset (as those two things have come to be represented as synonymous).

Romo and Reies saw forming what they themselves labeled as a "wasteland narrative" – "this idea that you would see in print, online and local newspapers that there was nothing here, that thus place was a wasteland, was crime-ridden. What was happening was that people were coming in here and saving this place. Bringing this place back to its former glory before the 'dark ages.'" Romo and Reies rebuked this notion that gentrifiers were the saviors of NELA. "There was this sense that the 80s and 90s were a 'dark age,'" Romo says. "Devoid of any redeemable culture or value… that's what I was pushing back against" states Reies. Romo claims that is was a timeless narrative – "it's a frontier mentality… land in a place and dehumanize anybody, any person who's living there and exploit resources." Reies and Romo had encountered that narrative multiple times over many years before they started writing their op-eds in response.

Romo mentions an article he read in 1997 that reinforced this narrative. "I read an article about Lincoln heights in the LA times magazine, I think my father sent it to me because it was right around Sichel Street right around my grandparents' house and they were calling themselves urban pioneers. That was their term for themselves." Neil Smith likewise describes gentrification as the signifying of "a new urban frontier" where

"hostile landscapes are regenerated, cleansed, reinfused with middle class sensibility."[136] Reies stated that this frontier mentality was captured in statements like "there's no one here" or "we're the first one here." Romo said that this was also applied to racialized, classed and hetero-patriarchal notions of the family, devaluing the family units that have been and are cultivated here, "'were the first ones on this block,' like actually saying stuff like that or the classic, 'oh I'm so glad that there's families now'".

The question of discursive representation and the "coloniality of being"[137] that facilitates dispossession was/is a potent conceptualization for NELAA to analyze the mechanisms of displacement in our neighborhoods. Yet, when I present a challenge of the conceptualization more directly, Romo points to his own family's history, aside from their connection to the Los Angeles landscape.

> "Being Chicano or being Mexicano, our own family history is one of displacement. Our own identity and our own family history is the result of conquest on a very broad scale, colonialism… being a Chicano its really hard not to think about displacement because we're displaced on multiple levels. Even our identity, part of the chicano project is a reclamation of an identity that might not be ever to be reclaimed fully. Its a heroic effort to reclaim something that has been taken away from you with violence and maybe irretrievable. On that level, as a chicano if you're thinking about it I think you always feel it anyway. Its just part of your family story. Its embedded in the way you talk about yourself and your history. Also being from Los Angeles and having attempted to think about the history of LA and my place in it, the Tongva displacement off of their own lands. Its like Sandra [another NELAA member] was telling me the other day, the colonial gaze makes us foreigners on our own land."

Romo reflects what this must mean for the members of Tongva people still fighting for recognition and reclamation. Romo continues,

> "displacement is more than just leaving a physical place like there's all these different levels of spiritual displacement too and language displacement. They're all forms of like robbing something of a base from which to build. We lose Spanish or we lose our native language and we've lost the ability to build in that language. If we lose our mythologies or robbed of our mythologies and we lose the ability to like build those thousands of

[136] Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (Psychology Press, 1996).
[137] Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom."

> years histories. And so it's a it's a devastating it's a devastating position to be in. Being a chicano and having experienced that, from the stories of my family and in my blood that's where I first approach it. When I hear about displacement and gentrification, that's where I first approach it."

There's more than just physical displacement. It is a loss of the ability to build. Loss of language, loss of mythologies, loss of our basis of collectivity. We lose our histories – we lose our stories – we lose our places – our foundations. There is an effect of when knowledge is removed from place – becomes abstract and thus susceptible to delegitimization. This is important to those who refuse to be removed from their sites of knowledge and history

For Reies it was thinking about a condition of displacement that moves with the body, of having been "displaced historically." Yet, this does not cloud his recognition of the Tongva's sovereign claims to this land, stating "we're all visitors to this land. In terms of narrative or mindset just having people approach what they do with that idea that were all visitors to an extent. There's very few people that can claim this and they're probably the most marginalized, the ones that can claim this as their land." He contends that while his parents were protesting and organizing against the cuts to social services and disinvestment from the conservative eras of Reagan and Bush, today he sees the face of displacement as carried out by a liberal educated middle class, whom he says he can most likely agree with on political terms, but that refuse responsibility of the displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods. They claim that now even the margins are gone – places and cultures born out of necessity have now been claimed in this colonial relationship. What is more for those that do get to stay, they are meant to recede into the

background. They become the backdrop to the life of the pioneers, first to explore and claim these neighborhoods for reclamation.

Romo considers the history of redlining in these neighborhoods. Neighborhoods like Lincoln Heights and Boyle Heights were marked as red – meaning not fit for financial investment and not worthy of inhabitation by anyone besides people of color and poor whites. Increased industrialization made these communities too toxic and escape was only granted to those with the means and the access to do so (white flight). Reies notes that this was all zoned as such, city planners allocated these undesirable locations to undesired populations. The fight for safe and clean places to live, demands for infrastructural equity, were met with suppression and displacement. Those demands were deflected to the private sector and now the redlines revolve around the city, far flung places where those with no other option are removed to.

Anti-Displacement Pedagogy

Reies and Romo were direct beneficiaries of the intellectual and cultural traditions that the Chicanx movement was able to preserve and foster. Melissa, along with many of her peers, would also come to be influenced by this genealogy. Reies and Romo were substitute teachers in Franklin Highschool in Highland Park when Melissa were going to school there. Along with other teachers, Reies and Romo taught Melissa and other students to question history and create knowledge through art. Melissa was part of a group of students who got the opportunity to work with Reies and Romo in constructing a four part mural that would cover a series of walls that moved vertically up Franklin's

main building. As you scaled each floor moving up, the walls would represent a different era in Los Angeles' history. Romo and Reies taught their students how to curate their own historical narratives.

As one of Romo and Reies' student, Melissa spoke on the process (before paint met surface) as holding the true significance of the mural, something that may not be apparent to the thousands of spectators that have seen the mural since it was painted. Melissa and the other students would meet as a group after school (the project was an extracurricular and volunteered based). She recounted to me the hours of research Romo and Reies required of their students. Melissa worked on the first stage of the mural project, the precolonial depiction of Los Angeles. She stated that it was meant to honor the local Tongva people as the original caretakers of the land. However, as it was stressed to her by Romo and Reies, they wanted to represent Los Angeles as a Tongva landscape that didn't stand to objectify the Tongva people. She recollects the dilemma: "how can we depict something in its most accurate, sincere form? If we want to be accurate and honor, we need to do the groundwork," so they did. Romo and Reies organized different talks, conversations, and excursions for them in the hopes that they could project themselves back to a history before colonization. They spoke with Christopher Nyerges – a local expert on the indigenous flora and fauna of Los Angeles. He taught them how to read their landscape by identifying native versus non-native plants. They also met with Julia Bogany – a member of the Gabrieleno Tongva band of mission Indians, to learn about Tongva life, language, customs, food, and architecture. Romo and Reies invited these local knowledge bearers to connect with their students, to nurture them and make

them aware of the native landscape that surrounded them. As Melissa commented, these lessons were "shaping who I am now and needing to return to that landscape."

Romo claims that sense of "place" is itself an important form of agency and that they are honored by the fact that it has had so much self-recognized impact on Melissa and others. Romo and Reies claimed that the process rather than the end was always the intention – "painting a mural is more than just painting a mural. We knew it was going to be embedded in these bigger issues of situating ourselves in LA." Romo doesn't recall ever making gentrification or displacement a central topic of conversation in his classes. Reies on the other hand did recall that in those early years at Franklin a narrative was circling about a "safer and cleaner" Highland Park. Reies asked his students to critically reflect on where the changes were coming from and who where they intended to serve? The development of the mural and the conversations that ensued coincided with what Melissa and I identified as the start of gentrification in Highland Park, the opening of Café de Leche on York Blvd and Avenue 50, just down the street from Franklin High School.

The pattern that was initiated in those moments would ramp up on both sides. Romo and Reies cultivated a seed that would blossom into the NELA alliance many years later. In fact, it was Reies' farm and Romo's house that would serve as two central locations for the initiation and continued organizing of NELA alliance as an anti-displacement collective. The plant that they had cultivated with Melissa and others at that time stemmed in part from the ideology Romo and Reies had developed over education and the failures of the educational system they had entered as educators.



Figure 2-3: The First and Second Mural Groups. Photo credit: Franklin Mural Project.

Reies: "How I've come to believe through subbing and through teaching and through being a student my whole life, I've come to believe that in the David Brooke's type of way that education has become not an opportunity but a roadblock for a lot of people. I feel like the way that we do it and what requirements are asked of students; I think they're geared towards and customized for people who have already gone through that path and attained that knowledge and needlessly. I think there are a lot of things that are not taught that could be taught, there are different paths of the students could go down but I think that largely we end up with a huge segment of the population believing that they are failures academically and since we tie so much of our economic success and professional success to academics, I think that we end up locking a number of kids out. I had conversations with the kids about that a lot… and try to just let kids know that there might be this institution, there might be this system that's in place that is not there for them and may be there to thwart them in certain ways."

Romo: "when you're talking to teenagers you can't… there's an entry point that you have to start at. You can't just start in the middle of the story. You have to start with their own lives or their education, because they're in the middle school. That's where you start. And then we also just through the experience of painting the mural and going on hikes we also really talked a lot about sense of place."

Reies stated and Romo confirmed that the relationships they developed with their students attached them to their lives. He said that before they even teach the kids anything, they make sure that they know that they are interested in them as people, that they are important. They both confirm that it's not an easy task and can understand why most teachers won't do it with all the demands of administration to complete the predetermined lesson plans. They state that getting to see the students mature and develop as people is reward enough to justify the amount of labor they put in to their teaching. Even after they graduate, if they or their families are not displaced from the neighborhood, it's gratifying to see them as adults. In the cases like Melissa, they became *comadres* and *compadres*[138] afterwards. They say it's a different approach to teaching that involves a sense of place, community and belonging, that sits opposite to the practice

[138]Close acquaintances or friends

of teachers coming in from the suburbs to teach "underprivileged" kids in the city. As they said, these kids become important parts in their life and vice versa.

Reies and Romo both continue to work as teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Reies teaches farming and agriculture with a fully operational on-campus farm with barn animals and crops to teach students the practice of self-sufficiency in an urban context. His intention is to promote access to healthy food and to teach students autonomy and alternatives to corporate food models. As an artist himself, Romo continues to teach students the methods of self-expression through the various mediums of art in painting, mural design, graphic design, silk screening, documentary, and video production, etc.

Reies claims that the process of creating the mural combined both their efforts to teach students methods of self-expression while using art as a praxis in critical thinking and consciousness raising. They taught their students to represent themselves using history, fostering, as they claimed, a sense of place that involved initiating the spatial imaginary that connected the students to the people who came before them. They instilled, as Romo stated earlier, a sense of agency in the students that brought a sense of belonging and importance in the longer timeline of North East Los Angeles as a place. Reies claims that it was also a way for the students to connect to their own ancestors by rekindling a relationship to land. In Reies' mind, teaching students agriculture and the local landscape of native plants helped students to deconstruct the built infrastructure of the city to imagine themselves in the positions of their ancestors – a connection to history through a connection to the land. However, Reies was careful to note the lack of a direct

descendancy from the original Tongva inhabitants of Los Angeles for themselves most of their students:

> what we saw what made the mural so powerful I think was that connection to the place and to the people who were here before and though maybe we can't draw a direct line from the Tongva genetically and maybe most of the kids probably couldn't. I don't know I feel like as this being our adopted home right now I feel like most of the people that went through the process can feel that connection. Though we weren't genetically related, I mean I guess in the large scale we were, but though we weren't genetically familial with the Tongva that they were in a sense our fore-runners, you know our ancestors too and I don't know, I think that's like a form of talking about displacement too and kind of pushing back against displacement. There's is before the gentrifiers and before redlining.

In my conversation with Reies, Romo and separately with Melissa, I saw the mural and the surrounding lessons as responsible to a sense of place that doesn't erase the local Tongva from the narrative. As active contributors to and builders of the genealogy of anti-displacement, the timeline they create reifies the importance of historical structures (i.e. redlining), but that goes well beyond to tell a story of colonization that uses Tongva bodies as vessels to connect to their own history. Melissa and I remarked that the mythology of history and place in traditional Chicanx sensibilities with the insistence of Aztlan as a territorial possession, is no less evident as a tool used in the construction of a new history and a new place that recenters the Tongva presence; even with the responsibility of "true representation" for the original inhabitants, the mediums and the perceptions of artist and reader will never be able to cast the full nuance of Tongva life "as it actually happened." This leaves us to ruminate on what this mythology is seeking to create, and what its limitations are when we do start to build. Nonetheless, to empower people in place you need a mythology, a myth of origins and a myth of place.

Adria L. Imada calls settler nostalgia an act of claiming indigenous history as the possession of the settler nation as a means of territorial ownership.[139] It fundamentally operates on a logic of genocide that insists that native peoples, in the face of American modernization, were too primitive and thus unable to adapt. Tragically extinct, settler nostalgia consigns native ontologies and bodies to the past. Reies and Romo express at least a counter to that position, "them [the students] planting and restoring habitat, now that we're working on this new project, of them bringing these plants back and learning the Tongva names. It is this idea that it [Tongva existence] is present."

Romo claims that myth in Western civilization presupposes a distancing, but that in this tradition, in what they were constructing, was an embodiment of the myth.

> They're always a distancing at least the way we conceive of myth in Western culture there is a distancing that's going to happen when you enter into that myth space. Just because of the way we think of it in Western culture. But I think it's still powerful because as long as it has as they can embody it, as long as we're not just reading about it. We're doing the planting, we're doing the building and the creating. And also, I know that it's that there are all these pitfalls and there's things that you need to be vigilant about in terms of honoring Tongva people and native people as different then Mexicanos and our tribes, because I don't want to conflate and I identify as mestizo I don't identify as Indigenous, even though I have indigenous blood. But I do think what might have helped. People who took part in the mural as far as we know were probably all from Mexico and Central America and the Philippines, is that those cultures got missionized too. My ancestry on the part of my mom's side goes back to a mission. It's not that we are Tongva, but we were also missionized. We were also made to build the missions. And Tongva people are mestizo to a large extent. I think building that connection, we wouldn't say we are all Tongva. I think it was powerful for students to hear their own family history and echoed, that it happened with other people too. That there was a connection.

Romo expresses what Saldana-Portillo and Eugenia Cotera refers to as *Mestizo Mourning* – "a mourning that is not merely an appropriative gesture of Native tribal identity, but rather a psychic restoration of an indigenous past denied them by exigencies of U.S. colonial history and law" (Indigenous, but not Indian, 562-3). Cotera and Saldana

[139] Imada, "Aloha 'Oe."

continue,

> Given the generative centrality of indigeneity in the Mexican national imaginary, and its imperfect translation into the U.S. model of white citizenship in the post-1848 borderlands, it is not surprising that Mexican Americans turned to explorations of their submerged historical relationship to indigeneity in an effort to address their colonized condition as subjects of overlapping imperial projects – their mestizo mourning. Nor is it surprising that they continue to attach recuperative decolonial meanings to a search for indigeneity that manifests itself in a variety of cultural, political, and intellectual projects, from mythopoetical invocations of Aztlan as a "lost land" to neo-Mexica community formations and decolonizing pedagogies…" (563).

Reies echoes exactly what Lourdes Alberto, Saldana Portillo and Maria Cotera demonstrate as an embodiment of an Indigenous subjectivity to represent their own struggles as descendants of the gente de razon (proselytized indigenous subjects), absorbed and assimilated into the body politic. It was an integration into the cause of empire, Spanish, Mexican and United States. Reies – "You draw the line to the displaced, you're not going to draw the line to the displacers." Reies quotes Nicholas Hummingbird, native Chumash activist and botanist who views the genocide of native plants as tied to the displacement of Native people, making the connection between now and then "people with wealth, people with money, with power coming in and pushing those without, out." Reies comments that that lesson was not made explicitly to their students in their mural work. Yet Reies felt like there was a real need for this type of history to be represented in the muraled landscape of Los Angeles

The four-part mural meant to be designed and exacted collaboratively with the students never made past "phase 1 and a half" as they put it. At the time of the interview the second part of the mural "was a line drawing on the wall." The second phase of the mural jumps from the pre-Colombian Tongva landscape to that of the mission period in Los Angeles, "in a way that it has never been covered before" according to Reies and

Romo. Melissa informed me in our interview that in research for the mural, Reies and Romo had their students visit the mission San Gabriel and lay on the floor with blankets to embody the condition of people facing multiple epidemics and demands on their body. Reies and Romo state that when they first started conceptualizing the mural the dates they had been working with as representation of the Tongva timeline placed their origins back to 8,000 B.C. At the time of the interview, the latest numbers reflect a deeper history stretching back 20,000 years in the area. Yet, as they put it, most of the murals celebrating a pre-US history in the region focus primarily on what William Deverell and Carey McWilliams have deemed a "Spanish Fantasy Past."[140] Reies and Romo wanted their murals to work against the ideological and settler colonial project of native erasure claiming that the mission period, at 200 years, is 1% of the 20,000 years the native Tongva have been present on this land. This is the 1% percent history that dominates most of our local historical education and artistic landscape. They also wanted the murals to counter the celebration of this history in our local culture. Reies and Romo stressed that native history in education focused 1 to 2 weeks of 4th grade while you spent a whole semester building a mission.[141]

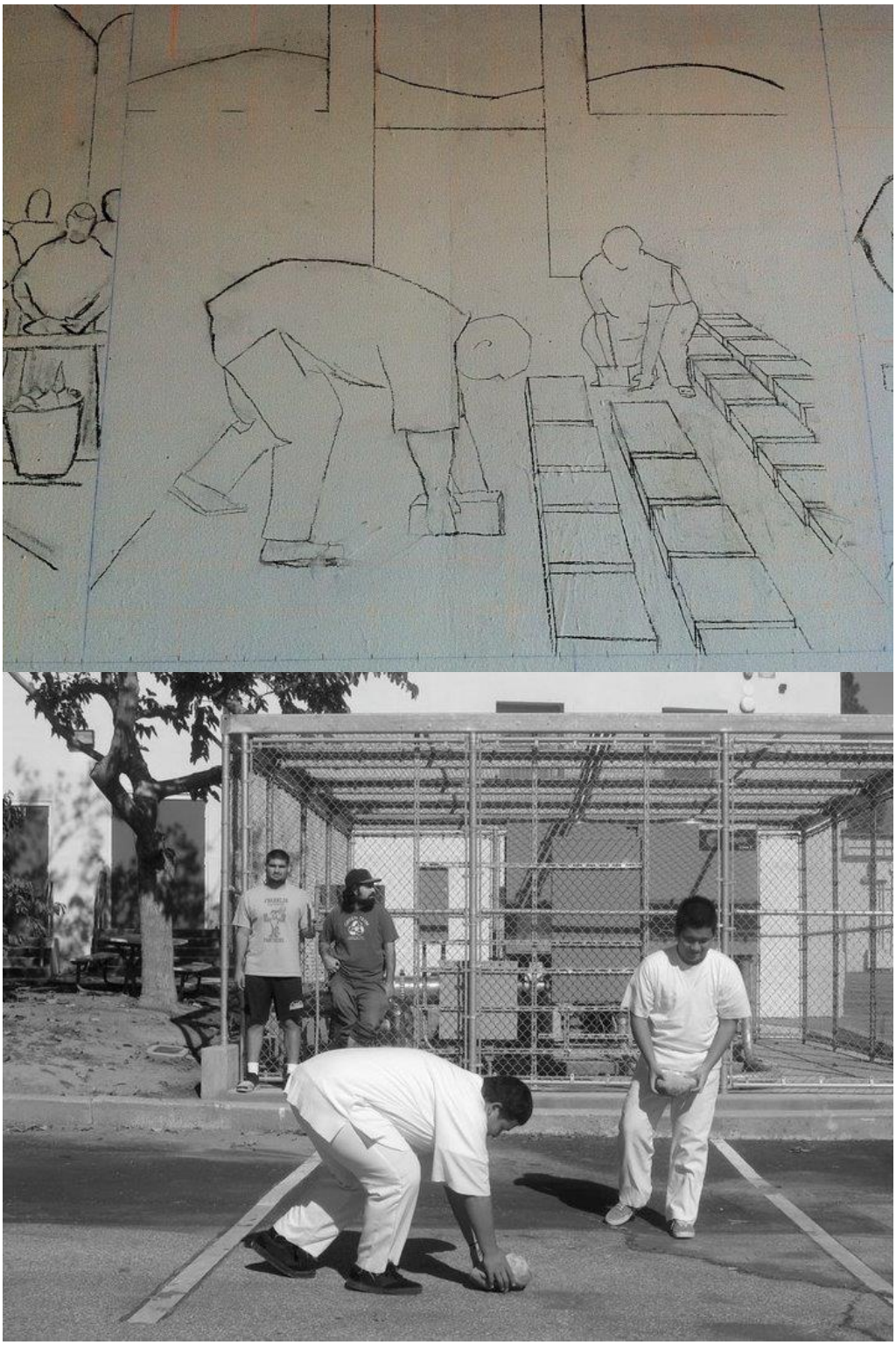
[140] William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past* (Univ of California Press, 2005); Carey McWilliams, "The Fantasy Heritage," *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, 1968, 1880–1940.

[141] Zevi Gutfreund, "Standing Up to Sugar Cubes: The Contest over Ethnic Identity in California's Fourth-Grade Mission Curriculum," *South Calif Quart* 92, no. 2 (2010): 161–197.









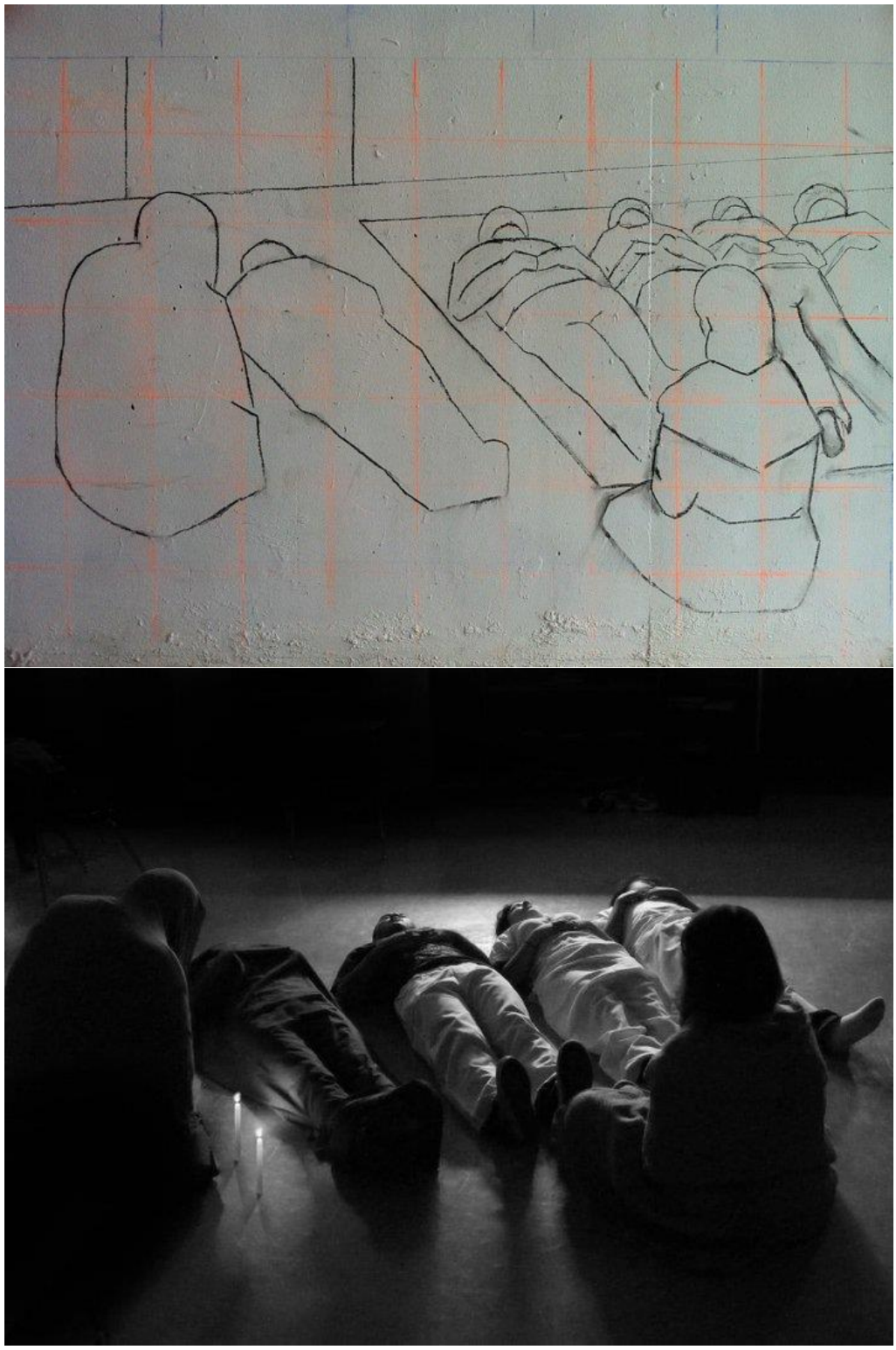


Figure 2-4: Conceptual Sketches on the Walls of Franklin High School alongside Reenactments of Mission Life by Franklin Mural Project Student Group #2. Photo Credit: Franklin Mural Project.

Conclusion

Reies and Romo introduced what a relationship to land looks like through a politics of grounded normativity rooted in the tradition of anti-displacement that understands the continued struggles of Tongva sovereignty co-align with challenges to narratives of racialized disappearance and contemporary struggles against gentrification. The land is a palimpsest with the same story written and erased repeatedly. The mural itself tells this story. Melissa and I agreed that figuring a pre-colonial history, much like the Chicanx generation before us, is always a dealing in the practice of myth and metaphor. We can never truly represent what precolonial life was like for the native Tongva inhabitants; such is the limits of the medium (i.e. murals and visual art). However, what the mural does represent is a new practice of ideological work. It encapsulates a newly informed approach to indigeneity and a relationship to place that is central to anti-displacement politics. The mural's representation of Tongva inhabitation still used the Tongva as symbols and objects of connection for Latinx students in the school. Yet those students engaged in the research and practice of the mural's creation, versus that of a passive observer, became a part of what was represented. "Before sketching anything, there was a 2-year process of connecting to all the possible points of life. Place yourself in those contexts." The students would model for the sketches, symbolically replicating pre- and post- colonial life.

Melissa and I wondered what the mural could have become if they had been allowed to continue. I asked Melissa what it meant to honor the Tongva? Was it just remembering, or did it involve a present and future rather than just a past? Melissa said it

helped her to be aware. It led her towards a path of self-discovery and reclamation. It informed her politics of anti-displacement and included her as a practitioner in the genealogy of that tradition in Los Angeles. She realizes now that its more than just naming and that people must work together. "I can name it all I want, but what am I doing to build with native people? Or uplift native issues?" Melissa also reflects on her "Mestizo mournings" – "we can't trace back or we haven't traced back our lineage or we've been so far removed, genetically, biologically or culturally. We are always searching too." Melissa plays in a band called "El Rio" named after the Los Angeles River and its focality in breeding and sustaining life, a central figure in the Los Angeles landscape. Melissa and her partners use the band as a platform and an outlet to share and promote their vision of a Los Angeles reclaimed by its indigenous roots. This is part of a larger project in the Americas that works to recover, continue, and/ or create traditions rooted in the ideological philosophies of "respect and reciprocity."[142] As Melissa says, "we are always sharing, share our music and share our song."

Today, Melissa works to fight displacement on the grassroots level with NELA alliance, she works to recover and insist on a projects of decoloniality in Los Angeles, and she works more formally in her day job at East LA community corporation (or ELACC) to build up the Latinx community of Los Angeles' eastside. One of the ways she has done that is to be a liaison for issues rooted in anti-gentrification and anti-displacement struggles. Melissa advocates, like so many others in this struggle, for

[142] Glen Sean Coulthard, "Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition," 2014, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/2325548X.2016.1145982#page=57.

community control of land and collective ownership. However, she recognizes that these solutions without input from the local indigenous tribes can and does perpetuate their original displacement even as the community Melissa works with fights to prevent theirs. This was a guiding principle she was always familiar with, but never really informed her institutional organizing work until she went to an environmentalist conference. There she attended as part of the "It takes roots" coalition that understands environmental issues cannot be solved if we do not address them as local matters disproportionately affecting poor people of color. As an activist politics informed by localities, it was there that Melissa realized the importance of solidarity actions with respects to land protection and reclamation, things she has been intrinsically fighting for the better part of a decade. She is working to build those solidarity movements and working with others in her organization (ELACC) and outside to imagine what that would look like. She insists that people in her organization acknowledge the problem but are still unsure what the solutions are. Outside of institutional settings, Melissa's art and music practice has been able to share and create with local Native artist from across the southwest. In a recent locally organized show, money and awareness were raised on the issues impacting indigenous communities across the Americas – the disappearance of indigenous women and terrorizing of sacred sites. It was a fundraiser for the longest walk. As a practice of solidarity and a recognition of a similar violence having impacted their own familial genealogies, El Rio played. They met other artist shared and created connections that make art and culture an even more limitless platform for imaging the world Melissa and others have been fighting to achieve.

Romo and Reies, from the start, saw the mural's significance in the process rather than the material end of paint on a wall. The end was an excuse for the path. They wanted to introduce their students to the local history, to connect them as part of that history. The life of the mural is ongoing and incomplete. Romo, Reies, and I have spoken on what it will take to complete the mural and what opportunities it can open up for another generation of young artist and historians. As of the time of this writing, the mural project continues to promote and further a community dialogue that positions Tongva claims for truth and reconciliation. Again, the mural's strength lies in its ability to exist as an example of a process, rather than an end.

Chapter 2.5

An (anti-)Displacement Politics of Place

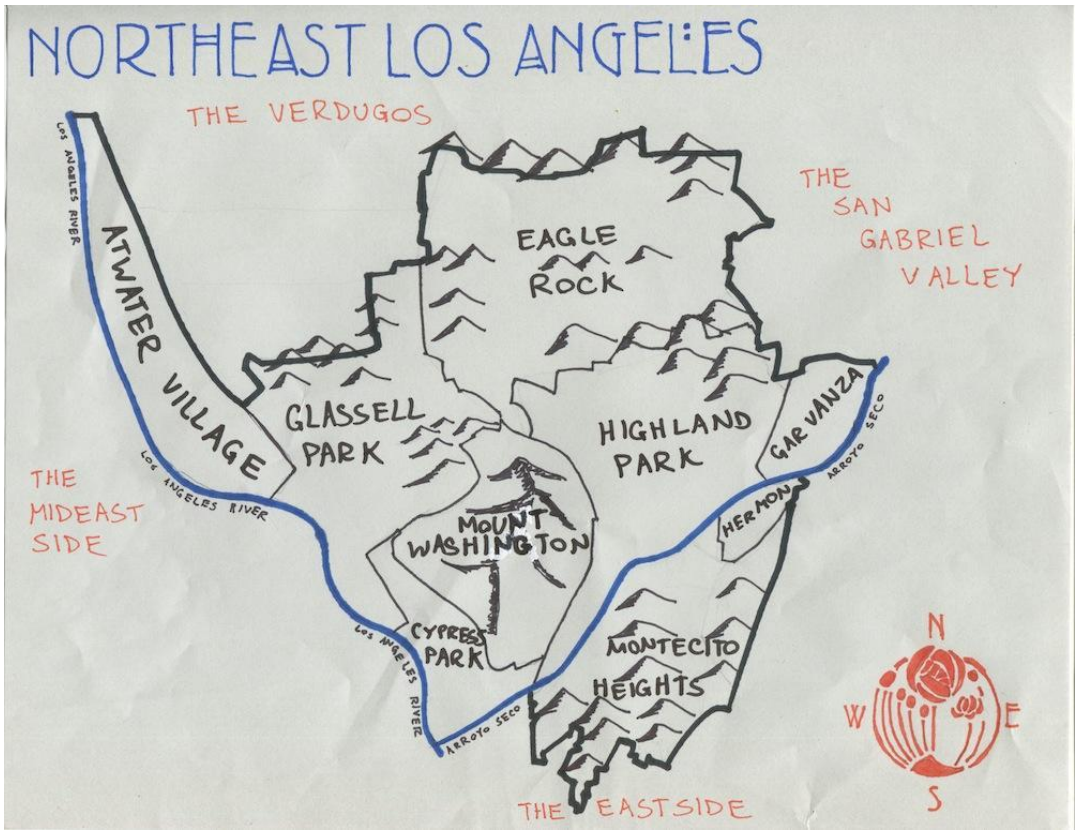


Figure 2.5-1: A hand drawn map of Northeast Los Angeles (NELA). Permission to reprint from Pendersleigh & Sons Cartography (Eric Brightwell).

In the previous 2 chapters, I began my critical analysis of the practices of indigenous embodiment by both artists and activists, highlighting a tradition of possession (of native land and identity) beginning in the 18th century and that evolved through various historical conjunctures. In the mid to late- 19th century, figures like the pioneering Rogers Family and Andrew Glassell were central characters in the legal transition of title and

demographic settlement that announced the arrival of US imperialism and settler colonialism to Highland Park, post-bellum.[143] They were part of the "cadre of real estate developers who believed that growth was not inevitable but desired by the community."[144] Glassell and his partner Alfred Chapman sold the land that they had acquired as legal fees for overseeing the partition of Julio Verdugo's foreclosed *Rancho San Rafael,* and would eventually become the fragmented tracts of a burgeoning Highland Park community. That same year (1885) Charles Lummis arrived from a 1,000 mile plus pilgrimage from Ohio.

Lummis' fierce advocacy for Native peoples and culture completed an onto-epistemic settler colonial dialectic that was likewise premised on the elimination of Native peoples. He personally embodied a position that opposed the rest of US settler society's militaristic approach and treatment of Native populations. As such, Lummis was successful in spearheading his possession of Native identity/voice through his leadership in the Sequoia League and founding of the Southwest Museum. His work helped to assuage an anxiety created by the alienation instilled into the landscape through practices like real estate speculation. The act of preservation worked to create an undisturbed timeline (or a teleology of the human/property form) that begot Los Angeles and Highland Park in 1771 and 1886, respectively. This form, taking the shape of an enclosure, would be challenged by the persistent threat of native and immigrant socio-

[143] Here Imperialism and Settler Colonialism are used simultaneously to reflect the US settler colonial sequestration of unceded Native Lands West of the Mississippi and their imperial relation in respects to the challenge to Mexican sovereignty and territorial control in the Mexican- American War and its aftermath in local political and economic transitions of power.
[144] Charles J. Fisher, *Highland Park* (Arcadia Publishing, 2008).

political actors, the reaction to which would be the basis of a preservationist movement against the degenerative presence of multi-family housing and "subversive racial elements."[145]

This chapter is a provocation and discussion of creating alternatives to the practice of indigenous embodiment and use of indigenisms as metaphor for a Chicanx experience in the US.[146] I follow the work of Native and Chicanx Studies scholars that have criticized Latin American and Chicanx Movement iconography and discourse for perpetuating a genocidal myth of Indigenous absence. The focus on the Franklin Mural Project in this chapter posits a critique, but also asserts that a decoloniality of being requires a decoloniality of inhabitance as well as a politics of place that centers indigenous claims for cultural and political sovereignty.

The Franklin Mural Project was embarked on by Arturo Romo and Reies Flores and augmented by the lessons provided by Julia Bogany and others, the Franklin Mural Project was conceived of to enlighten and inform Melissa Uribe and her fellow students about the local history and ecological knowledge of NELA. It was a response to what immigrant and working-class communities were facing in NELA at that time, a long tradition of infrastructural disinvestment and institutional neglect. It provided a bridge between the various timelines and anti-displacement genealogies present in the area, the

---

[145] Ryan Reft, "Segregation in the City of Angels: A 1939 Map of Housing Inequality in L.A.," KCET, November 14, 2017, https://www.kcet.org/shows/lost-la/segregation-in-the-city-of-angels-a-1939-map-of-housing-inequality-in-la; Andrew Whittemore, "How the Federal Government Zoned America: The Federal Housing Administration and Zoning," *Journal of Urban History* 39 (June 14, 2012): 620–42, https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144212470245; "Mapping Inequality," accessed April 27, 2020, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/.

[146] Alberto, "Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas"; Alberto, "Making Racial Subjects"; Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo, "Indigenous but Not Indian?"

varying stories of contact and arrival that have led to large epochal shifts on the landscape.[147] All this would come to bear under the reign of a new empire, the "empire of finance."[148] The Northeast Los Angeles Alliance (NELAA) is an anti-displacement collective founded in 2014 as a response to the post-recession influx of displacement-driven speculative finance in Northeast Los Angeles (NELA). Among the founding members was Romo, Reies, and Melissa. Their prior relationship through the Franklin Mural Project and the lessons that were borne from the project would reemerge in the approach of NELAA to the gentrification and displacement of our communities (low income, immigrants, and working class). I contend that Northeast Los Angeles Alliance embodies Simpson and Coulthard's non-Native grounded normativity in their approach to anti-displacement work. "*Inherently informed by an intimate relationship to place,*" NELAA is shaped by the lifetimes and legacies of migration to NELA, situated within the context of the Tongva Tribes' lessons on original stewardship and persistent anti-displacement claims.

Borrowing from Leanne Simpson and Glen Coulthard's conceptualization of Grounded Normativity, I foreground the spatial dimensions of an onto-epistemic tradition (a collection of anti-displacement genealogies) rooted in the Los Angeles landscape. As follows, I highlight Reies, Romo and Melissa's engagement with the practice of indigenous reclamation central to Chicanx nationalist thought as an entry point towards assessing anti-displacement activists' negotiations with settler colonial logics of

[147] Blackwell, "Geographies of Indigeneity."
[148] Rolnik, *Urban Warfare*.

inhabitance. [149] Anti-statist struggles for urban sovereignty and self-determination among Native American and Chicanx communities in the mid-20th century act as a medium for an anti-displacement genealogies carried forward by anti-displacement activist and housing justice advocates fighting against what Raquel Rolnik describes as an "Empire of Finance" - a regime of sterile and faceless transactions that drive formulas of displacement-dependent speculative-finance.[150] I ask, how can grassroot campaigns for "housing justice" be responsible to/collaborate with projects for recuperation and restitution for Native peoples?

A Politics of Place - Grounded Normativity[151]

NELAA draws a connection between all the inhabitants of NELA that have faced pressures of racialized dispossession and displacement across time.[152] Made up of members with varying timelines of descendancy in Los Angeles, most of NELAA is only a few generations removed from migration stories that begin in Mexico, Central/ South America, and Southeast Asia. NELAA embodies an anti-imperial stance pushed forward

[149] Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Grounded Normativity/Place-Based Solidarity," *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 249–255.
[150] Raquel Rolnik, *Urban Warfare* (Verso Books, 2019).
[151] Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity," *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 249–55, https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2016.0038.
[152] The onset of US settler colonialism and imperialism in the region post-Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo represents both the human and non-human racializations and subsequent dispossessions they were intended to foster. Whereas outright genocide dictated US settler societies relationship to Native peoples, the requirement to treat former Mexican citizens as now citizens of the US necessitated different methods of racialization and dispossession not afforded to all Native peoples. As the demographic majority started to skew heavily White and Anglo, increased migration from non-Anglo and especially non-White populations challenged the hegemony Anglo settlers were able to wrest away from the former Mexican and Spanish elite.

by revolutionary Chicanx nationalist artists and intellectuals that highlights the difference between voluntary and forced mobility.[153] On the other hand, their anti-colonial positioning is also an expression of their complicated ambiguity in the region. As both *settlers* and *arrivants*[154], Chicanx nationalists have perpetuated in their relationship to space and time, tropes of native erasure that speak to the legacies of US, Spanish and Mexican settler colonialism in the areas where they overlapped.[155]

I examine how NELAA and the overall grassroots movement of anti-displacement organizers fight for housing equity (or self-determination as to where one can live without barriers based on race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, etc.) engages with demands for reparations for and reclamation of land unjustly taken. I contend that NELAA embodies a non-native variation of what Simpson and Coulthard refer to as a *grounded normativity.* As they describe it, grounded normativity

> "houses and reproduces the practices and procedures, based on deep reciprocity, that are inherently informed by an intimate relationship to place. Grounded normativity teaches us how to live our lives in relation to other people and nonhuman life forms in a profoundly nonauthoritarian, non-dominating, nonexploitive manner. Grounded normativity teaches us how to be in respectful diplomatic relationships with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations with whom we might share territorial responsibilities or common political or economic interests. Our relationship to the land

[153] Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*, vol. 19 (Univ of California Press, 2006).

[154] Shannon Speed, "Structures of Settler Capitalism in Abya Yala," *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2017): 783–790; Maylei Blackwell, "Geographies of Indigeneity: Indigenous Migrant Women's Organizing and Translocal Politics of Place," *Latino Studies*, 2017, 1–26; Laura Pulido, "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity III: Settler Colonialism and Nonnative People of Color," *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no. 2 (April 2018): 309–18, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516686011.

[155] Pulido, "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity III"; María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *Indian given: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States* (Duke University Press, 2016); M. Cotera and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, "Indigenous but Not Indian? Chicana/Os and the Politics of Indigeneity," *The World of Indigenous North America*, 2015, 549–68; Lourdes Alberto, "Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas: The 'Indian' in the Chicano Revolutionary Imaginary," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2016): 107–127; Speed, "Structures of Settler Capitalism in Abya Yala"; Blackwell, "Geographies of Indigeneity."

> itself generates the processes, practices, and knowledges that inform our political systems, and through which we practice solidarity."

Rooted in the place-based politics of Chicanx nationalism, NELAA builds and transforms on this relationship to place that is premised first and foremost on a recognition of the Gabrieleno Tongva as the first inhabitants of this region and the first to experience a racial capitalist displacement stemming from the necro-speculative practices of Los Angeles' real estate market. NELAA's intention to "connect to the working class to people of color, to intergenerations, to those with deep Northeast roots, to those who still remain here and to honor those who have been displaced" is a measure towards establishing "*relation to other people and nonhuman life forms in a profoundly nonauthoritarian, nondominating, nonexploitative manner"*[156].

Grounded normativity informs, inspires, actively constructs, preserves, and reproduces the American Indian anti-displacement tradition. Simpson and Coulthard describe it as a response to "the state-sanctioned murdering, assimilating, and disappearing of Indigenous bodies (asymmetrically distributed across gender)… is a direct attack on Indigenous political orders because these bodies generate knowledge, political systems, and ways of being that contest the hegemony of settler governmentality and thus make dispossession all the more difficult to achieve."[157] The Gabrieleno Tongva have refused dispossession for longer than any other group in Northeast Los Angeles. They stand as a monument to survivance and refusal to the forces of settler colonial

[156] NELA Alliance, "MASA: Sustento Para El Pueblo// Sustenance For The Pueblo" (Northeast Los Angeles Alliance, Winter 2018); Coulthard and Simpson, "Grounded Normativity/Place-Based Solidarity."
[157] Coulthard and Simpson, "Grounded Normativity/Place-Based Solidarity."

genocide and racial capitalist displacement.[158] Julia Bogany is an embodiment of that tradition. Now a well-respected Tongva elder, she has worked most of her life, along with others, to promote and popularize a campaign against Tongva invisibility. As a young woman she defied the patriarchal order of society, as well as her own family, to follow a matrilineal descent to her great-grandmother Rose's Tongva heritage. Julia sees herself as a product of a long line of strong women who have defied erasure and disappearance, a tradition she now carries for her own granddaughter.

Melissa, a 12th grader at the time, was only one generation removed from her family's migration story. As a young man, her father would come and go between Mexico and the US, to work and send money back to his family in Mexico. Her parents met in her mother's *colonia* in Tlaquepaque. They migrated to the US together and stayed for the sake of their children, but with long-term aspirations for return. Reies and Romo are multiple generations removed from their family's migration story, with ancestors in the southwest that predate even the US' arrival. While Melissa is emblematic of a more recent and transnational immigrant narrative, Romo and Reies are the inheritors of a relationship to place that their parents had helped to politicize during the Chicanx Movement of the 1970s. It is a Chicanx and trans- nationalism that are both emblematic of a racializing structure of otherness that requires, in the case of Mexican immigrants, a

[158] *You Are on Tongva Land: Mercedes Dorame, Angela R. Riley & Wendy Teeter*, accessed March 31, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hfvYhbtBrk; Heather Valdez Singleton, "Surviving Urbanization: The Gabrieleno, 1850-1928," *Wicazo Sa Review* 19, no. 2 (2004): 49–59; Claudia K. Jurmain and William McCawley, *O, My Ancestor: Recognition and Renewal for the Gabrielino-Tongva People of the Los Angeles Area* (Berkeley, Calif. : Long Beach, Calif: Heyday, 2009).

unique standard of citizenship.[159] It is a subaltern citizenship and one that is invested in the fostering of place as a political and social necessity and in recognition of the (gendered, classed and racialized) limitations on their participation in the larger socio-political realm. This results in the creation of institutions not generally valued or legible to the state. As Romo and Reies emphasized in their interviews, what they were combating in their role as educators was a disinvestment and devaluing of NELA neighborhoods that projected narratives of void or dysfunction. In addition, they faced a criminalizing rhetoric of deviance that at that moment served to justify the over-policing of their students and was later weaponized as a moral argument from pro-gentrification forces in the city.[160]

[159] Nicholas De Genova, "' American' Abjection:" Chicanos," Gangs, and Mexican/Migrant Transnationality in Chicago," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 33, no. 2 (2008): 141–174; Romeo Guzman, "The Transnational Life and Letters of the Venegas Family, 1920s to 1950s," *The History of the Family* 21, no. 3 (2016): 457–482.

[160] "Mayor Addresses Gentrification Concerns Along L.A. River," KCET, June 2, 2014, https://www.kcet.org/shows/earth-focus/mayor-garcetti-addresses-gentrification-concerns-along-la-river. The moral defense has now shifted sides to anti-gentrification forces due to the ceaseless rise in homelessness many have now agreed is the result of city-wide displacements and evictions of poor and socially marginal folks. Brenda Stevenson writes in *The Contested Murder of Latasha Harlins,* likewise points to the death of 17-year old Brenda Hughes in Highland Park who was murdered by a shopkeeper who accused her friends of stealing, firing into their car as they sped away. Brenda Stevenson, *The Contested Murder of Latasha Harlins: Justice, Gender, and the Origins of the LA Riots* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

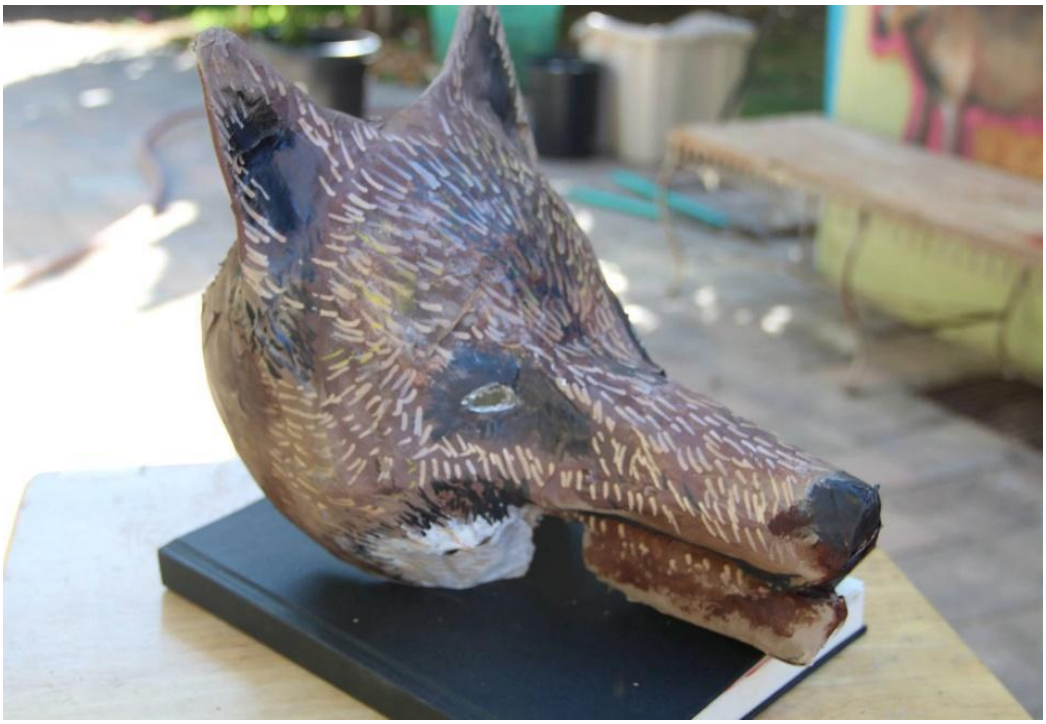


Figure 2.5-2: Coyote Mask made by NELAA member Miguel Ramos to be worn during NELAA processions as a representation of non-human displacements/ inhabitance in NELA. Photo Credit: Miguel Ramos



Figure 2.5-3: Owl Mask made by a NELAA member to be worn during NELAA precessions as a representation of non-human displacements/ inhabitance in NELA. Photo Credit: Miguel Ramos.



Figure 2.5-4: Top - Melissa (background) pictured with Julia (foreground), Bottom - Romo and Reis at the Franklin Mural Project Unveiling Ceremony.

Personal Histories

Romo and Reies

Arturo Romo and Reies Flores are cousins who were both born in Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital, 3 years apart. Arturo was born in 1980, 3 years after Reies. At the time, his parents lived in Highland Park but moved to Alhambra as soon as he entered first grade. Reies' parents had lived in Echo Park when he was born but would soon move to his uncle's home in Highland Park. (his uncle's career would keep him away from home for extended periods of time). By 1981, Reies' parents would eventually save up to put a down payment on a home in Glassell Park, the neighborhood abutting Cypress Park to the west and on the southern fringe of Northeast LA. Alhambra, Romo's home for most of his life, was the closet suburb to Northeast LA. Sitting on the eastern outskirts of NELA, Romo and Reies both commented on Alhambra, as the logical extension to an evolving Northeast geography. Romo cites his parent's motivation for moving to Alhambra as similar to many second and third generation experiences at the time. Economic upward mobility coupled, but not always, with a desire to provide a safer environment for your children, pushed Romo's parents to rent a home in Alhambra, part of an escape from neighborhoods that have been characteristically associated with notions of threat, danger and criminality.

Romo and Reies are cousins on Reies's mother's and Romo's father's side. Their shared great grandparents were the first to move to the United States from Sonora during the era of the second Revolution in Mexico in the early 20th century. They moved to Tucson, Arizona where they would stay until their common grandparents moved to Los

Angeles, making Romo's father and Reies' mother the first generation to be born in Los Angeles. However, Romo's family on his mother side had been longer established. His grandmother and possibly great grandmother (they were both uncertain at the time) both having been born in Los Angeles. Once arrived, most of his family would settle in the Lincoln Heights area, buying homes and renting in the places with established familial networks, what they described as "word of mouth about where to land, where to settle." Like Melissa's parents, Reies and Romo's family, generations before Melissa's family, integrated themselves into the Northeast Los Angeles landscape, and relied on the same type of familial and communal networks to help establish and pursue individual dreams of family and security. As Reies' parents matured and started their own families, Reies remarked that it was always important to his parents to "stay in a place that was like a barrio still… it was always valuable that my sister and I [Reies] realize the struggles that most people had,… to live in an area that wasn't isolated or buffered from that." However, Reies' parents' choice to finally settle and put down roots in Glassell Park came because they recognized it as a hidden gem nestled in the foothills of the Santa Monica Mountain Range. It was a barrio, but it was also very green. "I [Reies] was made to feel like this was the best place to live."

Melissa

Melissa was born in Los Angeles. After the hospital, her parents brought her to the one and only home she would ever know. It was the place where she would sleep, eat, and play under the supervision of overprotective mother. She is the youngest of three

children, the beneficiary of her parents third attempt at raising a child. After her first two children faced difficulties in high school, her mother nurtured a desire to have her children not only graduate high school but pursue higher education. Melissa's parents were born and raised in Jalisco, Mexico. Her mother was from a *colonia* just outside the second largest urban center in Mexico, Guadalajara. Her father was from a further out *rancho* (a rural farm town) two hours from of Guadalajara. They met in Melissa's mother's *colonia.* Melissa's father, following his two older brothers, moved to her mother's *colonia* in order to be closer to Mexico's urban economic centers. It was an exodus and a turn away from the rural lifestyle that ultimately landed both her parents in Los Angeles. Before then, Melissa's father had tried eight times to cross the border on his own. He was deported each time to a place he was less than familiar with (Tijuana, Manzanillo, etc.). He was following the path many had traveled before him, including his own brothers, making stops along the way, to rest, make money and move on. Her mother's *colonia* would be the stop where Melissa's story began. It was the place where her parents would start their family.

Melissa's uncle (her father's older brother) was the first person to establish roots in Northeast Los Angeles. He worked as a contractor for construction jobs. He would help establish his entire family as plasters. They bought their first house in Cypress Park – a community just north of the Los Angeles river and the southernmost fringe of the Northeast LA area. Her father was ready to come work with her uncle and establish his life in Los Angeles, but his mother (Melissa's grandmother) was insistent that if he was going to Los Angeles, he had to take his new wife. Melissa's paternal grandmother had

been abandoned by her husband, left to raise all the kids by herself. Melissa comments that this affected her father and the dynamic of their family deeply. Her father abided by his mother's instruction.

Melissa's parents crossed the border together in 1973. They moved in with Melissa's uncle in Cypress Park. They lived there for some time until they were able to afford their own home. They invested in a home in Highland Park, the same home Melissa was delivered to after her birth. They purchased the home in 1981. By the time Melissa was born (1989), her family had established itself as part of the community. Melissa's parents, because they owned their home, would often lend their front yard for family parties when large gatherings of her relatives would come together, eat food, and catch up on family business. Melissa's mother, being as overprotective as she was, also never allowed Melissa to leave and visit friends at their houses. Instead, Melissa's home was often the place where she and her friends would come together to run around and be kids. It was through her upbringing that Melissa would come to privilege a form of inhabitation that centered communality. Her parents had relied on family and neighbors as a support system that helped establish them in the neighborhood and root Melissa in a larger Highland Park and NELA identity.

Julia

Julia Bogany was born 1948 in Santa Monica. Santa Monica is the location of Kuruvungna Springs, a protected sacred site for the Gabrieleno Tongva tribe. It sits on the campus of University High School, the same high school Julia mentions her parents,

aunts and uncles went to school. Julia's father was born in Los Angeles, his parents came from Mexico City. Julia's mother was Tongva and Acjachemen (the neighboring tribe to the South and otherwise known as the Juanenos of San Juan Capistrano Mission). She describes her father as equal parts Spanish and Azteca, "but we didn't practice. They really didn't talk about being Indian." Julia moved around a lot when she was a child. Her parent's divorce landed her in Tijuana (where her stepmother was from), while her father worked in the states. They eventually moved to Pacoima, in the San Fernando Valley, where her father forced her to go to Catholic school because she didn't want her to go to Pacoima Junior High, which she describes as a mostly black school at the time, racially divided from San Fernando Junior High she describes as mostly Mexican.

When Julia began her path to self-discovery, she encountered a patriarchal order that began with her father. She describes her father's violent disapproval at her opening her first small business. "When I opened my first school which was a day care center, my father tore up my business card. Women were not supposed to be businesswomen, they were supposed to stay at home." When it came time to rediscover her connection to the land, she had to overcome the gendered colonization of patriarchal lineage. She followed a matrilineal descent that drew her first to her great-grandmother Rose and then down the line to the Tongva woman ancestors that helped preserve a culture Julia now passes on to her own granddaughter. Julia claims, as she always has, that Tongva women didn't disappear, "they just became invisible" and when anyone seeks to discredit her native ancestry, they refer to her as "just another Mexican."

Julia came of age in a period of cultural resurgence that saw the rise of the American Indian and Chicanx Nationalist movements. Her path led her to San Gabriel in 1975. She became the cultural affairs officer for the tribe, and this catalyzed a lifelong mission to amend the fragments of a collective Tongva culture. “You find a piece here and a piece there and you put it together.” After an experience of meeting native people from across the United at Oklahoma University, she lamented to her cousin the lack of stories in their family, those that hold the place-based and ancestral knowledge. She spent the next few decades collecting those stories – finding them in whatever sources she could find, other Tongva relatives, documented histories, etc., to the point where she now has amassed 300 stories. When she began to search, she said “the stories just started coming.” Julia has been cultural affairs officer for 40 years now. No one runs against her, so every 3 years she becomes the cultural affairs officer again. She says she wants someone to run against her, but she is also content with continuing the work she has dedicated her life to. She claims it as her legacy and what she intends to leave behind for her granddaughter and subsequent generations.

Geographies of Belonging

Melissa commented that at a young age she “had no conception of location.” Her whole world was limited to the reaches of her community; “all I knew was Highland Park.” Besides her local routines, it was occasional trips to the Santee Alleys between Los Angeles and 4th street in Downtown Los Angeles and a yearly trip to Mexico to revisit the *colonia* and the *rancho* of her parent’s origins. Beyond those places to shop,

eat or visit family, there was never really any reason to leave Highland Park. It was the product of a working class, racialized and gendered mobility that would only allow her to visit the other pockets of Latino life in the city, the places where Latinidad was "zoned" and "sanctioned" (Los Angeles' second city[161]) to exist and always under the supervision of her vigilant parents. As a result, she developed an intimate knowledge of Highland Park. Highland Park, for her, was the place where community happened. It was the place where she would come to know herself. It was the backdrop to the significant moments of her life, her series of "firsts."

Melissa's spatial awareness of her neighborhood expanded when she was in middle school. She recounted to me that her mother, as a homemaker, would walk her children to and from school every day. They all went to the local public schools near their home. Melissa said then that one day she decided she was too old for this. Her mother naturally did not agree, but eventually allowed Melissa and her older sister to walk back and forth between their home and the middle school about a mile away. The tradition would hold true for her and her sister through high school, still in proximity to their house, but twice the distance of her middle school. It was in these formative years in her life that as a pedestrian walking through her streets that she started to become more intimate with her community.[162] She stopped at the local stores to buy chips, her favorite fries and veggie burger at the local diner and overall, to aimlessly explore the different corners of the neighborhood with her young friends. It was an education in *place* that

[161] Villa, *Barrio-Logos.*
[162] Michel de Certeau, "The Practice of Everyday Life," *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing After the Linguistic Turn*, 2005, 217.

young children experience growing up, particularly if they are gifted with the type of housing stability Melissa had. Melissa gained an experiential knowledge and attachment to place that would be that platform for her place-based politics. A deep attachment to place was the basis of her "grounded normativity" and helped her realize and connect to a genealogy that was always present but never formally introduced to her. In these formative years of her youth, as she explains, she was lucky to gain that introduction from Romo and Reies when they were semi-permanent substitute teachers at Franklin High School. They were for her conduits/ teachers of the anti-displacement genealogy.

Julia's geography was broadly Southern Californian, including Baja, where she describes having learned a "Kumeyaay Spanish" or a Spanish that is common to the Kumeyaay Indians of San Diego and Baja California. Her path was like others (her ancestors and her contemporaries) who moved from Kumeyaay, Acjachemen, Tongva and Tatavium territories and that were subsumed and circulated between the San Fernando, San Gabriel, San Diego, and San Juan Capistrano Missions. When Julia became president of the Gabrieleno Tongva Springs Foundation she said, "it's like I made that full circle." Santa Monica is where she was born, and her parents were raised. Tongva social life and sacred geographies coalesced for her as they have for many other Tongva people in Los Angeles. As Leanne Simpson describes, land is more than the material. It is also a set of relations, social networks that define how we move through and inhabit space. The resurgence of those networks is just as important in the

reclamation of sacred and secular native geographies in Southern California.[163] As such Julia was able to create her own "cartography of coyote space", in order to "[make visible] what others cannot or choose not, to see."[164]

A Politics of Place – Chicanx Nationalisms

This privileging of place, NELA acting as a locus, was instilled in Romo and Reies at a young age. Both their parents were young adults during the political movements of the 1970s – in the wake of the Chicanx movement. Part of their political ideology was a celebration of place – as represented in Chicanx political and cultural ephemera and was done in the face of a denigration that often devalued and justified destroying Mexican – American neighborhoods.[165] Romo claims that "there was a sense that the places that they were from were important and had this value. I got that a lot too, I got that sense that it was very important that we're here. This is where we belong essentially." Reies and Romo explained that their parents "were working on campaigns, going to marches." They were active and "politics" was a verb to them. However, the connection between their parents' political nature and their pride in place was not directly correlated or mutually dependent. As Reies remarked, "I get the sense that they were aware that these were communities where we were allowed to live and that we were going to then take ownership of." Romo added "that sense of being in a place and making

[163] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (November 21, 2014), https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/22170.
[164] Alvitre, "Coyote Tours."
[165] Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, vol. 13 (Univ of California Press, 2004).

it your place. Defiantly holding onto it and making political agency through that, through the barrio."

Romo continued to reflect on the centrality of place in political agency that he believed his parents' generation was successful in capitalizing on. He insisted that a schism existed between now and then in the way communities were identified and formed. "There's a real barrio in the Chicano movement that I'm familiar with through my parents. There's a real sense of barrio that was one of the building blocks of agency, is community… the barrio was a physical place. The community was a physical space rather than what we talk about now in-quotes 'the community'." For Romo, the idea of a community is now much more abstract. He said that during the early years of the Chicano movement community often acted as a synonym for neighborhood. He said that everyone knew each other, and you relied on your neighbors as a support network. He laments that this is not true today and in relation that community has become a more abstract term.

Engagement in the political process of anti-displacement organizing made NELAA realize that neighborhood and community are indeed not synonymous. The marked difference in generations does relate to the nominal disintegration of redlining as a formal institutional practice, while its lasting impacts continue to make Los Angeles one of the most segregated cities in the United States.[166] The persistent introduction of refugee and migrant populations from Southeast Asia, Central America, etc. over the decades had also destabilized NELA's shared sense of racial and ethnic origins. Reies

[166] "The Persistent Effects of Residential Segregation," *Rentonomics* (blog), May 23, 2018, https://www.apartmentlist.com/rentonomics/persistent-effects-residential-segregation/.

and Romo state that an influx of Asian migrants and refugees into Lincoln Heights, for example, failed to create a similar pattern of communal recognition as was possible with Italians and Mexicans who shared a common heritage of Catholicism and other Western European values and traditions. The conditions have changed, so the dynamics of a contemporary struggle against displacement necessitate another basis of solidarity. A deemphasis on racial or ethnic origins have both broadened and weakened the possibility of collective struggle in Los Angeles Northeastern communities. A shared sense of displacement ironically acts as a foundation for collective grounding.

As NELA alliance, the motivating factor to organize in political protest was brought on by first or secondhand accounts/experiences with displacement and the threat of eviction. Early on, in fighting to cut the stream of mass evictions, we approached the organizing on a building by building basis. We helped organize people who were fighting to keep their homes. They had experienced tremendous harassment at the hands of their landlords or people landlords would hire to "motivate" people to move out. Some of the residents that we worked with had been evicted from other neighborhoods/buildings before (homes foreclosed on while others jumped from apartment building to apartment building in the neighborhood). As our conversation continued, I challenged Reies and Romo to conceive of a past of anti-displacement that is not romanticized or idealized. Meaning that if we consider how conditions of precarity can work to exclude people from participating in the creation of their own narratives or the narrative of a community in struggle, how can we reimagine the past to factor in historical conditions of precarity. This was motivated by my own interpretation of anti-displacement work today. Those

most affected by displacement rarely can comment on it or challenge it before they are meant to leave the "community" entirely – leaving me to question if they were ever accepted to begin with? This led me to question the historical and cultural divisions within the Latinx community based on race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, gender, ability, etc. Our romantic retellings of the past then could serve to reinforce those exclusions in the ways we remember our presents.

Reies and Romo both agreed that this might have been the case when we wax nostalgic on all that came to be "us." Romo states that either for politics or marketing, when someone wants to bring up an "immigrant story," the story follows a very similar prototype of the "boot-straps" myth - "the immigrant experience everyone wants to use when arguing for immigrants… 'it's a country of immigrants, it's about succeeding in America.'" However, Reies believes that even though socio-economic insecurity could have been the condition for someone's displacement from the "community" as well as from narratives of the past, but as far as housing went, people would have to move all the time and they could always find another place to live that was affordable nearby. We all agreed that this is not the case today. Lack of opportunity in the labor market coupled with instability in housing has made staying in the neighborhood much more difficult. This overall condition of vulnerability for low income and immigrant neighborhoods is one created and exploited by a California real estate lobby that deteriorated tenant protections over the course of two decades, when rent control was first implemented in the city (i.e. Costa Hawkins). Maintaining a tenant's vulnerability secures landlords'

ability to get the highest return on their investments by opposing all future measures for tenant protection.[167]

The way we organize and the way we remember must take into consideration the increasing precarity of the contemporary period. This forces community to become more abstract, forcing us to organize around varying levels of insecurity. Romo and Reies both inherited property and both state that if it wasn't for that fact then they would never have been able to live in this neighborhood, but even at their "level" as Reies said "we made it," but conditions of vulnerability still do not escape them. However, historical, and generational levels of exclusion, stigmatization, etc. that result in cumulative levels of instability have resulted in the massive amounts of displacement and homelessness we see in our neighborhoods currently. Exclusion from home ownership and stable income has made it impossible for people to lay material roots in the neighborhood. Does a politics in place represent a privilege in position? Can and should we have attachments to place? Reies mentions that Los Angeles has always been a stopping place for immigrants and refugees. Our neighborhoods have always been a traditional "first stop" for people to settle or move on somewhere else. He laments that as these neighborhoods become more gentrified this will no longer be that kind of place.

[167] "Meet California's Biggest Players in the Battle over Rent Control Expansion and Proposition 10," San Francisco Business Times, accessed September 30, 2019, https://www.bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco/news/2018/10/09/prop-10-rent-control-biggest-donors-blackstone.html.

The Time and Space for (anti-)Displacement

Romo and Reis rearing in the place-based politics of Los Angeles' Chicanx Nationalist tradition informed their earliest conceptualization of the Franklin mural project. The larger timeline and historical narrative that the series of murals portrayed was one common to the alternative histories espoused by Chicanx intellectuals and activists. In four parts, four themes emerged to create the whole story. The emphasis on precolonial identity and tradition aimed to recapture and celebrate pre-Colombian ontologies. The second and third depicted a reemerging a narrative of how colonization impacted Los Angeles as a landscape. My attention on this mural focuses on it as a text that reveals layers of meaning associated with the genealogy of anti-displacement carried in the pedagogical praxis of Romo and Reies as teachers and mentors. They act as conduits to a tradition rooted in NELA as a place and that acts as a basis for, as they put it, political agency. Yet it is their ability to carry on tradition, build upon it and adapt it to the imperatives of the moment that help sustain and push forward the anti-displacement genealogy into the next generation. They are successful where others might not have been because of their flexibility and intuitiveness. As our current generation of scholars and activists are inspired to do, we revisit tradition to expose gaps and reinterpret the usability of certain tropes.

Together Romo, Reies and I reflected on this idea of temporal distance as we began to question if it was a useful one to engage. As Romo noted "when I think about what my father tells me about Northeast LA, I know a lot of it is heavily idealized." Furthermore, when he thinks about the trajectory of his family's history, he recognized

that "it mimics a simplified immigrant experience." "I feel like my trajectory is that immigrant experience that everybody wants to use when they are arguing for immigration… 'this is a country of immigrants,' 'it's about succeeding in America'." Romo admits that his great grandfather and grandfather were merchants (Romo's grandfather owned his own store in Lincoln Heights) and that all his uncles entered professional careers. Romo recognized the stability in his family's "immigrant experience." I believe at this moment in our collective conversation we introduce an alternative reading of a place-based history, one that does not ignore nor make excuses for a politics of place, but that examines narratives of place for gaps and occlusions. A politics of anti-displacement that recognizes social/ economic/ political precarity's ability to not only remove people from place, but to remove them from the narratives and histories of place as well.

Continued critiques of Chicanx territoriality have led the Chicanx studies scholars to question the usefulness of a place-based identity in measures of political agency.[168] Aztlan, as a metaphor and mythical homeland, was pivotal in asserting a collective identity and territorial reclamation against the socio-spatial marginalization's of US white supremacy. However, Aztlan as a place and political tool, has been criticized for perpetuating a colonial logic of possession that erases and/or obfuscates native claims to land. It is a critique Romo and Reies were aware of and wary of repeating. Similar to Glen Coulthard and Leanne Simpson's theory of grounded normativity, Reies and Romo

[168] Pulido, "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity III"; Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo, "Indigenous but Not Indian?"; Saldaña-Portillo, "Who's the Indian in Aztlán?"; Alberto, "Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas."

as pedagogist and conduits for the anti-displacement genealogy, were attempting to do what generations of organizers and activists had done before them, empower people in place and defend, without reservation, places that have been affixed to racialized devaluation (a necessary precursor to the trope of "revitalization" in gentrification – what Coulthard refers to as "Urbs Nullius"). Examining without perpetuating the tropes of Chicanx Nationalism, Romo and Reies relied on historic reinterpretations of indigeneity, but to a different effect.

Chicanx nationalism use of Aztlan as a place relied on mythological and archaeological evidence to establish a connection with the lands of the US Southwest. It borrowed heavily from the nationalist project of the Mexican nation-state that hinged its political, economic and territorial claims to indigenous land in Mexico by asserting a nationalist identity of mestizaje.[169] Mestizaje, as a purported project of deracialized liberalism, claimed that all Mexican citizens were both of European and Indigenous racial stock, creating a new racial identity that in name was supposed to eliminate racial difference for the sake of social equality. Following the fall of the Porfiriato, this idea of a racial democracy was conceptualized and promoted by Jose Vasconcelos. Carried forward by the intellectuals and artists of the Chicanx movement, mestizaje helped Chicanx nationalists articulate a spatial, spiritual, and ethno-racial identity that contested socio- and political-economic hierarchies of US white supremacy. To that end, Chicanx spiritual and cultural nationalism was also a way to contest colonial white supremacy in

[169] Pulido, "Geographies of Race and Ethnicity III"; Saldaña-Portillo, "Who's the Indian in Aztlán?"; Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo, "Indigenous but Not Indian?"; Alberto, "Making Racial Subjects"; Alberto, "Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas."

its promotion and reclamation of indigenous identity. However well intentioned, the conceptualizations of indigeneity used by Chicanx nationalists perpetuated a paternalistic view of indigenous communities in Mexico that sought to homogenize the pluralities of an indigenous identity into a single category that could be embodied and/ or instrumentalized on behalf on the Nation-state. This is evident in the early examples of indigenous-Chicanx iconography that relied heavily upon the centrality of Mexica/ Aztec identity.[170]

Martha Menchaca covers an extensive history of empirical shifts in early colonial and late pre-colonial central Mexico to make a point about the use of nationalist origin myths to legitimate and perpetuate claims of political and territorial sovereignty. Menchaca demonstrates that the way the Spanish were able to assert power and control over their new subjects was to maintain the political, social, and economic structures of the Aztec empire to complete a smoother transition of power. The claim over the Aztec origin myth was utilized in different measures to assert power over people and land. It became ingrained in the nationalist fabric of Mexico and was the official narrative of nationalist identity. It became an end all be all for indigenous identity in Mexico that could legitimate Mexico's nationalist claim of mestizaje and their right to govern over the lands indigenous groups in Mexico inhabited.[171]

Early iconographic reclamations of indigenous identity in Chicanx art would rely on this Mexican nationalist conceptualization of indigeneity. Aztec monuments, theology

[170] Alberto, "Nations, Nationalisms, and Indígenas."
[171] Martha Menchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans* (University of Texas Press, 2001).

and origin myths would be asserted in the murals, paintings, and poetry of early Chicanx nationalist. Alurista's profession of Aztlan as the mythical homeland of the Chicanx people embodies an origins myth that once again uses an Aztec lineage for the territorial claim of lands once belonging to the Mexican nation-state, now the US Southwest. Native and Chicanx scholars have since heavily critiqued the use of Aztlan as undermining various tribes and nations claims to sovereignty over their traditional lands. Romo and Reies questioned a Chicanx nationalism that perpetuated homogeneity for the sake of territorial claims of possession. Their conception of a precolonial landscape did not remove the Tongva peoples or attempt to reduce them to objects of history, lost to the march of time. They instead imparted to their students the importance of engaging history from a critical perspective, a decolonial lens.

For Melissa, this early education about reclamation helped instigate a path of consciousness raising that led to her, indirectly, to the politics of grounded normativity that Coulthard and Simpson espouse. Facilitated by art and pushed further into political action, Melissa remarked that Romo and Reies taught her the importance of promoting a decolonial history. As it applied to her own life, she reflected that it was critical in understanding the different systems of oppression that impact her, her family and her community. Romo's and Reies' pedagogy asked their students to research local indigenous history, to meet/talk with experts and descendants of the Tongva nation, and they put students through an experience of connection with the landscape. They asked their students to pose in the natural landscape of Los Angeles, to engage with it as they had learned the native inhabitants of that land had once done. Melissa was a part of that

experience. She also witnessed, as Romo and Reies were progressing to initiate the second stage of the mural with a new cohort of high school students from Franklin, how they put their students through an imagined experience of missionization that attempted to translate the trauma of separation. These powerful engagements with history did not ask the students to think of the Tongva as tragic casualties, but literally and metaphorically of what it means to engage with your landscape under conditions of pre-coloniality, post-coloniality, and de-coloniality. This led Melissa to question the different power structures that have impacted her and her family.

Melissa understood that what historically colonization has meant for her indigenous ancestors has been the stripping of lands, forceful indoctrination in Christianity and a loss of an autonomous sense of self – leading to mental and physical health loss. For her more immediate family, she understands the post-colonial tradition to continue in the perpetuation of moral and cultural values disseminated by the church, the family and elsewhere. She sees these traditions as the generational passage of familial wounds and proscribed gender roles informed by trauma. Melissa shared with me stories of violence in her home that she believes stems from her father's inability to express emotion beyond anger and frustration, the prototypical role of the macho. Melissa came to understand that this violence was inherited from his mother, her grandmother. Melissa's grandfather on her father's side had abandoned her grandmother, forced to raise the kids on her own. Melissa's family story is like many, fractured by the structural and political-economic pressures of the time. Many men like her grandfather, father and uncles often left their families behind to labor for the money to be sent back home; some

returned and others did not. Melissa saw this pressure impose itself on her father, who had relegated himself to the role of breadwinner. Thinking again of the universality of structural factors that affected her own family, Melissa could understand that trauma translated into violence and vice versa, "violence in the home which also leads to violence in community." A similar experience of patriarchal violence that Julia expressed she had encountered in her home.

In my conversation with Julia, she insisted that the land was not stolen but that it was taken. Her comment took me for surprise. So much of what I had been taught led me to believe the opposite of Julia's statement, that of course it was stolen. Julia was more diplomatic in her approach. Thinking back on that moment, I tied Julia words to that Byrd et al. Our need to challenge the "dis/possessive" and the "disturbed relationalities" it foments, echoes in Julia's words over the collective and shared responsibility towards making Los Angeles a better place to live for all. For Julia, the taking of the land did not negate the relationship, as she states, "that makes it, that doesn't break the relationship, but when you steal something you are either going to destroy it, sell it and you're not going to admit to stealing because it puts it in a different perspective." The land that is claimed by the various empires that claimed Los Angeles over its many generations as a colonized Tongva place, can be said to have been stolen repeatedly. Beginning with the Spanish and landing in our contemporary moment with the theft of homes by finance capital's constant need for a "spatial fix", the agenda of empire is the refusal to admit to stealing it [land], as Julia put it, and/or to give it back. The basis of empire, its material

and social wealth is dependent on this theft and refusal. A "place against empire"[172] with a politics of mutual responsibility and reciprocity with the land as the natural environment, but also the sets of relationships that constitute the social ecology, a "grounded normativity,"[173] requires from Latinx peoples, (as arrivants) to be engaged in campaign that returns what was taken. As Julia insisted, when you take something you can always give it back, nicer than the way you found it or accompanied with a gift.

[172] Glen Coulthard, "Place against Empire: Understanding Indigenous Anti- Colonialism," n.d., 5.
[173] Coulthard and Simpson, "Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity."

CHAPTER 3

NELA's Anti-Black Cartographies

"Yes. Your Honor, I just want to express my opinion about the defendant -- I mean the prosecutor -- whatever. But anyway, my son was Christopher Bowser. And I was aware that he made a statement about not having a part of his murder, that it was just part of the gang. So my understanding is he's clear about that. And from my heart, I don't feel any opinions against him. And it's between you to sentence him and he has to answer to God. That's my feelings."

In this chapter I continue my examination of the Latinx cartographies of Northeast Los Angeles' social landscape. As I argued in the introduction, the cartesian dimensions of anti-blackness and de-indigeneity actualize the subjectivity of non-black Latinx renters, homeowners, and displaced individuals engaged in a campaign for economic survival and cultural preservation, a *place-based politics of belonging*. In this chapter, I analyze the political tactics, rhetoric, and strategy of anti-displacement organizers in their ability to engage the "moral universe of obligation" and its perpetuation of an urban "racial banishment" that disproportionately affects black bodies.[174] In this chapter, I argue that the desire to rebuke captivity and repossess a self-determining capacity over life (including and extending beyond economic wellbeing), is made explicit in the political and libidinal economies of carceral institutions, reflecting a desire for belonging and a

[174] Wynter Sylvia, "No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues," in Forum NHI Knowledge for the 21st Century, Knowledge on Trial, vol. 1, 1994, 42–71; Ananya Roy, "Racial Banishment," Keywords in Radical Geography: Antipode at 50, 2019, 227–230.

self-determination also present in housing justice advocacy and onto-epistemes of urban inhabitation.[175] Focused on a series of events spanning more than two decades, this chapter highlights the anti-black gang violence perpetuated by the Avenues, a non-black Latinx gang in Highland Park. The following two and a half chapters highlight the triadic of Carceral Landscapes (i.e. local, state, and federal housing and policing policies built with a fundamentally anti-black architecture), non-Black Latinx spatiality and Black geographies. Captured in and around the details of case against the Avenues gang members (USA v. Martinez et al.), the succeeding chapters reveal how non-Black Latinx communities negotiate space and claim place both against the State and through anti-Blackness.

Reading various legal documents, court transcripts, press releases and reports of the case USA v Merced Cambero (a subset of the larger case USA v Martinez et al), I highlight conversations between Merced Cambero, Judge Percy Anderson, Ms. Prudhomme and Ms. Brown. Both Ms. Prudhomme and Ms. Brown are mothers of two of the three men who were targeted and killed by the Avenues gang. Judge Percy Anderson is a George W. Bush appointed judge for the United States District Court for the Central District of California. As an administrator of justice on behalf of the US federal government and a Black man, Judge Anderson was employed to carry out the sentence against Merced on both a material and metaphoric level. The US District Attorney's case against Merced extended beyond murder and the illegal use of a weapon. It charged him

[175] Jared Sexton, Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism (U of Minnesota Press, 2008); Frank B. Wilderson III, Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms (Duke University Press, 2010).

and the other Avenues members with "conspiring to violate the civil rights of African Americans who resided in Highland Park" by denying their free use of public space or right to own/ lease property without fear of racial reprisal or discrimination. [176]

The direct and indirect exchange between Merced, Judge Anderson, Ms. Prudhomme and Ms. Brown mirrors the triadic I reference above. Each individual actor or set of actors come to represent more than just themselves. Merced represents generations of young men and women who have been inculcated in the carceral geographies of an expansive prison industrial complex as well as unproblematized anti-Blackness in Latinx communities. Judge Anderson represents the benign and benevolent positionings of the State as well as the neoliberal and carceral logics those positionings mask. Ms. Prudhomme and Ms. Brown represent Black motherhood, within an emphasis on anti-Black violence that broadens the focus of its impact beyond the men.[177] Their conversation represents a social formula where the US federal government, as instigator and original source of the violence that plagues Black and Brown (disproportionately Black) communities in Los Angeles, can recast itself as the "justice" to be meted out against the "true" offenders. Their conversation is captured in the various reports, legal documents and in their literal words to each other.

Following on the intervention of Luciane de Oliveira Rocha who focuses on anti-Black violence's "less visible effects on Black women," this chapter centers the

---

[176] Department of Justice, "Longtime Fugitive Enters Plea in Federal Hates Crimes Case Alleging Racially Motivated Murders of African Americans," February 14, 2017, https://www.justice.gov/usao-cdca/pr/longtime-fugitive-enters-plea-federal-hates-crimes-case-alleging-racially-motivated.

[177] Luciane de Oliveira Rocha, "Black Mothers' Experiences of Violence in Rio de Janeiro," *Cultural Dynamics* 24, no. 1 (March 2012): 59–73, https://doi.org/10.1177/0921374012452811.

testimonies of the women who live the consequences of their loved ones' death. Both Ms. Prudhomme and Ms. Brown were present in the final sentencing of Merced Cambero. They both had an opportunity to say their piece and deliver their final words to Merced before he would serve his lengthy prison sentence for the murder of Kenneth Wilson.[178] The state's and the La Eme's (Mexican Mafia) use of fungible Black flesh as a rhetorical device (for their individual campaigns for sovereignty) is something my own study is persistently in danger of repeating.[179] My critique of non-Black Latinx spatiality is a challenge presented to anti-displacement organizers and urban studies theorists to investigate the centrality of anti-Blackness in their fights for and studies of the urban built environment and social landscape. As such, the mistake I avoid repeating is to reduce Black suffering as an object of analysis as opposed to a subject central to the praxis of urban place-making and anti-displacement theory. I center Ms. Brown and Ms. Prudhomme's final testimonies in and their reported actions (or not reported in the case of Ms. Brown)[180] leading up to Merced's case to highlight how each mother (one Black and one White) espouse a different standard of *justice* that represents their disparate capacities to navigate Los Angeles' *carceral geographies*.

---

[178] Merced was not being convicted of the murders of Ms. Brown or Ms. Prudhomme's son, but they were witnesses in the original case against Merced's co-conspirators where federal hate crime statues were used to convict them.

[179] La Eme refers to the Mexican Mafia – that started in California Prisons, but that now has expanded their reach and power over an extended geography. See Tony Rafael, *The Mexican Mafia* (Encounter Books, 2007); Sam Quinones, "Race, Real Estate, and the Mexican Mafia: A Report from the Black and Latino Killing Fields" (University of California Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520275591.003.0011.

[180] Although extensive coverage of Ms. Prudhomme's actions at the time were recorded in various newspaper articles, Ms. Brown was hardly ever mentioned nor considered. The coverage was disproportional.

I do not seek to further promote tropes of Black forgiveness, ethnic/racial tolerance, nor a liberal sense of multiculturalism that does nothing to undermine systemic anti-Blackness.[181] Solidarity, as both a practice and a question, is invariably foreclosed if deeply entrenched carceral and anti-Black logics are not at the very least acknowledged and taken on as a central impetus for social justice work. Latent and explicit forms of anti-Blackness taken on by the Northeast Los Angeles Latinx community only serve to further the community's displacement. Institutionalized notions of justice do nothing to address the conditions that accelerate the displacement carceral institutions produce in Black and Latinx neighborhoods. Was the historic use of federal hate crime statutes against a non-white group really intended to foster Black life? Or was it a neoliberal agenda to reclaim Highland Park, and Los Angeles more generally, for consumer and speculative capital? These are questions that don't have singular or clear answers. My intention is to illuminate the ongoing conversations around the abolition of carceral logics and the probability of coalitional politics in the void of a direct challenge to the anti-black architectures of Latinx neighborhoods, a conversation that I believe was being held, even if indirectly, between Merced and Ms. Brown.

I continue my relational racial/spatial analysis of Latinx placemaking and Black spatiality in Los Angeles, drawing on a conversation with Leonna Calderon Irvin, a young Black woman who grew up Highland Park during the Avenue gang's active campaign against Black people in the neighborhood. Our conversation highlights the

[181] John D. Márquez, *Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South* (University of Texas Press, 2014).

quotidian acts of anti-Blackness that marks Black bodies as other in their own spaces. Leonna was a teenager in a predominantly Latinx neighborhood, going to public schools whose demographics she describes as "90% Hispanic." Focusing in on her story moves the chapter beyond the most explicit forms of anti-Black violence considered in this piece. This conversation of Blackness and belonging illuminate the ways that Leonna was also able to maneuver and negotiate her environment in an "anti-Black city".[182]

Anti-Black Violence and non-Black Latinx Spatiality

Beginning in 1995 and continuing into the early 2000s, a Latinx gang in Highland Park, nown as "the Avenues" carried out a series of violent acts against the neighborhood's Black residents. Their intention, as outlined by the US Attorney's Office, was "to harass, intimidate, use racial slurs against, threaten, assault, and, if necessary, kill African-Americans in order to drive African-Americans out of the Highland Park neighborhood claimed by the Avenues street gang".[183] The Avenues' campaign against Highland Park's Black residents resulted in the murders of Kenneth Wilson, Anthony Prudhomme and Christopher Browser. Along with the murders, they also "shot a 15-year-old boy riding a bike; pistol-whipped a jogger; knocked a woman off a bike and beat her in the head; beat a man at a payphone with a metal club; and drew the outlines of human

[182] Jaime Amparo Alves, The Anti-Black City: Police Terror and Black Urban Life in Brazil (University of Minnesota Press, 2018); João H. Costa Vargas, Never Meant to Survive: Genocide and Utopias in Black Diaspora Communities (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010).
[183] Lawrence S Middleton, "NICOLA T. HANNA United States Attorney," n.d., 10.

bodies and scrawled a racial slur in chalk on a family's driveway" among many other acts, both large and small [184].

The men who committed these deeds were captured, tried, and sentenced to lengthy prison terms. Before 2018, all but one man had faced sentencing. Merced "Shadow" Cambero was one of two men who pulled the trigger on a 38-year-old Kenneth Wilson, a Black man who was looking for a parking space while visiting his nephew in Highland Park. Merced had been on the run in Baja California for nearly 15 years before Mexican authorities caught him and turned him over to the FBI. I focus on the case against Merced Cambero by the US federal government. This case was the culmination of a 15-year-old, unprecedented legal trail where federal hate crime statutes had been used successfully against a group not directly identified as a white nationalist organization.

The events that would take place have been covered in detail by various academics and journalists.[185] Read one way, this violence is a misfortunate result of a gang rivalry that begins in California prisons, subsuming the streets, and adds fuel to the

---

[184] Joe Mozingo, "Highland Park Gang Trial Paints a Landscape of Hate," *Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 2006, http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jul/25/local/me-avenues25/2.

[185] Sam Quinones, "Avenues Gang Bastion Is Demolished," *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 2009, http://articles.latimes.com/2009/feb/05/local/me-drewstreet5; Christine Pelisek, "Avenues of Death," L.A. Weekly, July 14, 2005, http://www.laweekly.com/news/avenues-of-death-2140290; Christine Pelisek, "'"They Wanted All Blacks Out,"'" L.A. Weekly, July 26, 2006, https://www.laweekly.com/news/they-wanted-all-blacks-out-2144524; Christine Pelisek, "Avenues Gang Members Meet the End of the Road," L.A. Weekly, August 2, 2006, http://www.laweekly.com/news/avenues-gang-members-meet-the-end-of-the-road-2144629; Tanya Katerí Hernández, "Latino Anti-Black Violence in Los Angeles: Not 'Made in the USA,'" January 7, 2007, 5; Brentin Mock, "Latino Gang Members in Southern California Are Terrorizing and Killing Blacks," Southern Poverty Law Center, 2007, https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2007/latino-gang-members-southern-california-are-terrorizing-and-killing-blacks; Mozingo, "Highland Park Gang Trial Paints a Landscape of Hate"; Fred Shuster, "Ex-Fugitive L.A. Gang Member Gets 20 Years for Killing Black Motorist," *Los Angeles Sentinel* (blog), June 7, 2018, https://lasentinel.net/ex-fugitive-l-a-gang-member-gets-20-years-for-killing-black-motorist.html; Sam Quinones, "Race, Real Estate, and the Mexican Mafia: A Report from the Black and Latino Killing Fields" (University of California Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520275591.003.0011.

fire of racist hatred some non-black Latinx individuals held against the black population amongst them. In a different light, the deaths were a cold and calculated business decision to gain control over the lucrative racketeering and drug trade economies in Southern California. Yet another explanation suggests that the violence was the result of racial animosities generated through the "proximity and propinquity" of overly dense and neglected neighborhoods.[186] The reading I offer does not contest the truths of previous interpretations. Aligned with the purpose of this chapter and my larger thesis, my analysis points to the manner in which Latinx geography (rewritten here as a "gang territory") is reproduced through the gratuitous violence that hinders black bodies' capacities to claim space or create place in Highland Park.

As Sam Quinones points out, the wave of anti-black violence perpetuated by La Eme (Mexican Mafia) was neither totally informed by race hatred (some attackers said that they were not racist against black people, while others were entirely motivated by their anti-black attitudes) nor did the monetary gains garnered from the attacks always prove to be substantial.[187] The persistent fact that non-gang affiliated black individuals were often the target of these attacks points to the wages earned from the libidinal economic infrastructure of anti-blackness, when the political economic benefits were

---

[186] "When you're fresh out of lockup everything is racial. It's not like there aren't Mexicans in predominantly black Crip and Blood sets, and blacks in mostly Latino cliques. After all, on the street it's all about proximity and propinquity. Your alliance is to the homies and to the hood, regardless of race. Something happens to the indentity politics in prison. Maybe it's like movies where it's white versus black versus Mexican versus white, no ifs, ands, or buts, and I do hear tell of some hardcore, color-blind thugs who roll into lockup and dance with the niggers or the vatos who brung 'em. *Fuck La Raza, Chinga black power. This nigger's mother used to feed me when I was hungry, so later for the stupid shit (original emphasis)."* from Paul Beatty, *The Sellout* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), pg. 235; Quinones, "Race, Real Estate, and the Mexican Mafia."

[187] Quinones, "Race, Real Estate, and the Mexican Mafia."

moot. Latinx gang members inculcation in said infrastructure, Tanya Katerí Hernández argues, is an historical precondition of Mestizaje and ontological vector of Mexican nationalism. I argue that their inculcation is furthered within their negotiations of the prison's operational logics, fundamentally organized as a technology for the captivity of Black bodies.

The prison is both an ideological and repressive state apparatus. It is a microcosm of civil society within an institution of political society that, as Frank Wilderson argues, is inseparable and fundamentally organized around the non-contingent and gratuitous violence against black bodies.[188] The fungibility of the black body is here engaged by the desire of non-black Latinx gang members to access the realm of the human/property form, after it had been barred to them through the conditions of their own captivity. In the case of Highland Park and the Avenues, the context surrounding these murders is steeped in the paramilitaristic campaign to rid gangs from Los Angeles. The Community Law Enforcement and Recovery program (CLEAR) in 1996 was the convergence of local and federal state agencies and was part of the Clinton administration's national construction of the "super predator,"[189] arguing for the expansion of the prison industrial complex. It was born from the national outrage over the death of Stephanie Kuhen, a three-year-old Caucasian girl who was killed by the Cypress Park Avenues (a subset of the Avenues

[188] Frank Wilderson III, "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?," *Social Identities* 9, no. 2 (2003): 225–240.
[189] Nathan J. Robinson, *Superpredator: Bill Clinton's Use and Abuse of Black America* (Demilune Press, 2016).

separate from Merced's) when her family's van made a wrong turn in Cypress Park (a neighborhood in NELA).

NELA's shifting urban/racial landscape lands within the contemporary manifestations of displacement vis-a-vis gentrification. The mass eviction of Brown and disproportionately Black tenants from Los Angeles is the result of a rampant financialization of housing that represents the deepening neoliberal logics of governance in the city. Quinones details in his reporting of the mass-wave of anti-black violence perpetuated by the street gangs under La Eme's control, that the apartment construction boom of the mid- to late- 1980s precipitated a demographic shift that was result of low demand for rental units and federal housing policy under the Clinton administration. The instantiation of Section 8 vouchers boomed in the mid-1990s when the Housing Urban Development's (HUD) Housing for People Everywhere (HOPE VI) program allocated money to local housing authorities to demolish public housing projects across the United States. This resulted in the loss of more than 1,000 housing public housing units by 2001 as public housing units were removed and never replaced. The neoliberal turn in federal housing policy aimed to transition public housing residents into the private market for affordable housing. Quinones describes this moment as the time when black families found themselves in neighborhoods that had previously had many fewer Black residents.

Previous iterations of HOPE VI nominally favored and promoted homeownership (Homeownership Opportunities for People Everywhere) because, as Raquel Rolnik details in her book *Urban Warfare*, housing's expanding role as a site of financialization necessitated more demand for the growing supply of finance capital eagerly scouring the

earth for a new "spatial fix."[190] Since the mass construction of suburbs, pushed by the Federal Housing Administration revolutionary restructuring of the private home loan and which was the basis of a universal wealth building mechanism for white suburban families across the country, housing has been pervasively remodeled as a commodity and site of stable investment. The systematic denial of these loans to non-white populations coupled with the racialized devaluation of non-white neighborhoods (i.e. redlining) has led to expansive wealth gaps, but also the creation of new markets of "necrospeculative" investment. Community Empowerment Zones, Private-Public Partnerships, etc. have been the state-sponsored and backed financial mechanisms that have infused capital in places where risk had been racially conditioned. The "empire of finance," as Rolnik describes it, also created the conditions for subprime lending crisis which disproportionately preyed on Black and Brown homeowners and borrowers.

The triadic of the state, (non-Black) Latinx spaces, and Black geographies is captured in the most recent court proceedings against Cambero. It is in this juxtaposition that the state, as arbitrator and prosecutor, can act as defender of human and civil rights while absolving itself of any complicity in the violence that plagues Black and Brown communities. Rhetorically, the murders of Kenneth Wilson, Christopher Browser, and Anthony Prudhomme were used to push forward the conviction of Merced and Martinez et al. on the crimes of "conspiracy against rights, interference with federally protected activities, and the use or discharge of a firearm during a crime of violence causing

[190] Raquel Rolnik, *Urban Warfare* (Verso Books, 2019); David Harvey, "Globalization and the 'Spatial Fix,'" 2001.

death."[191] The fungible flesh of the suffering black body was here used as a rhetorical device to protect the sanctity of the "free market" where all consumers are judged by their ability to afford the commercial good of housing.

Carceral Regimes and Landscapes

The ubiquity of the prison system in civil society and its major institutions perpetuate, condense, and concentrate the racial and gendered logics that informed its construction. Carceral regime logics are based on an imperative of elimination, as Kelly Lytle Hernandez describes it, that seeks to exterminate and exclude racial others.[192] These logics are not isolated to the prison alone. As scholars like Damien Sojoyner and Sarah Hayley argue, they determine most civic institutions' relationships to Black people in the United States, across space and time.[193] The federal and state prison system and the larger prison industrial complex that racializes and criminalizes Black and Brown people, albeit to varying degrees, informs a carceral geography that breeds and distills the prison's operational logics of anti-blackness outside of the prison.

Lewis R. Gordon defines anti-Black racism as "the self-deceiving choice to believe that Black people are inferior to all other races and that Black people are not fully

[191] Court transcript of Merced Cambero's final sentencing; June 4th, 2018.
[192] Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965* (UNC Press Books, 2017).
[193] Damien M. Sojoyner, First Strike: Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles (University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Sarah Haley, No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity (UNC Press Books, 2016).

human beings." He describes it as a process of denial as well as self-denial.[194] Tryon P. Woods in *Surrogate Selves* describes Gordon's conceptualization of anti-Blackness as "an onto-epistemic condition of negation… according to the Manichean terms of the modern world, the opposite of white (human being) is its negation, Black (human nothingness)."[195] Jaime Amparo Alves, Frank Wilderson III and others aligned or assumed within an Afro-pessimist school of thought, likewise argue that civil society is itself fundamentally anti-Black. In other words, citizens can enjoy their civil liberties exactly because Black people are denied their freedom to live. Alves claims that, as this practice is spatialized, the state produces geographies of death and privilege. However, even as the picture he paints is grim, he is careful to not just associate Black people with victimization. I do not want to perpetuate a reductive reading of Black subjectivity as victimization. The Black Diaspora finds life in their strategies of resistance against and in spite of the persistent conditions of death.

In the *Anti-Black City,* Alves illustrates "how the city becomes a prison and the prison becomes a city through the mapping of discourses and practices of Black individuals serving time in overcrowded prisons in the heart of the city."[196] I extend his analysis to the anti-Black violence of the Avenues gang. Carceral regime logics and the violence it promotes is not contained nor did it originate in the prison. Prisons become sites where these logics, specifically anti-Blackness, are distilled and repackaged as

---

[194] Lewis Ricardo Gordon, "Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism: A Study in the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre" (PhD Thesis, Dissertation, 1993).
[195] Tryon P. Woods, "Surrogate Selves: Notes on Anti-Trafficking and Anti-Blackness," *Social Identities* 19, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 120–34, https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2012.753348.
[196] Alves, The Anti-Black City.

hideous acts of racial terror on the streets of Highland Park. Alves' example of an "anti-Black city" is Sao Paulo, but his analytic applies to many other cities enmeshed in the global network of neoliberal capital, where the economic and carceral logic of the plantation were foundational in its development as a global city. In a place like Los Angeles, I use Alves' insights to theorize anti-Blackness in urban space. I do so through an investigation of the non-Black Latinx relation to the technologies of anti-Black policing, confinement and urban banishment.

Turning to an analysis of the prison itself, Phillip Goodman in "It's Just Black, White, or Hispanic" demonstrates how prison guards, and oftentimes the prisoners themselves, act as mediums for the larger racial logics that guide prisons. Not a direct policy, the practice of racial segregation within prisons persists as a de-facto policy, an unwritten law. Goodman highlights in his ethnographic research that despite how a prisoner may or may not identify, he must conform to the racial categorizations of "White, Black, or Hispanic." He argues that the inmates (and the guards) "perform an understanding of 'race' as fixed and immutable."[197] Goodman marks this performance as a completely necessary operational condition to the maintenance of the prison as a viable and legitimate institution for criminal justice. It is these mundane expressions of racializing logic that Goodman highlights as the basis and foundation for the prison's existence. As Goodman states, "The interactions analyzed in this study demonstrate that

[197] Philip Goodman, "'It's Just Black, White, or Hispanic': An Observational Study of Racializing Moves in California's Segregated Prison Reception Centers," Law & Society Review 42, no. 4 (2008): 735–70.

prisons are not just a product of a racialized society (as scholars such as Wacquant have made abundantly clear) - they are also places in which 'race' is made and remade."[198]

Prisons (and other carceral institutions) produce the proximity that engenders both solidarity and opposition amongst Los Angeles' most socially aggrieved groups. In prisons, the rivalry between Mexican and Black gangs reproduce carceral logics of racialization that then permeate into the streets where anti-Black violence is carried out in the name of racially divisive prison feuds. Scott H. Decker and David Pyrooz in "The Real Gangbanging is in Prisons" argue that gang affiliations inside of prisons vary from those found outside. They state that "according to gang members in prison, gang activity in prison… symbolizes achieving a higher level of seriousness… [it] includes both the emotional commitment to the gang as well as the actions that support that commitment – actions that are often violent." I mention their scholarship to discuss how gang affiliations outside of prison often dissolve for the sake of the prison gang. Street based rivalries are cast aside to foster alliances based on racial affiliation.

Decker and Pyrooz state their own methodological limitations as I would like to make mine. Their analysis of the prison and how it operates is tempered by the fact that their perceptions are mediated by the prison guards and other bureaucrats. It is a subjective perception of the prison that stands only to justify and reproduce their carceral logics. My reading of all the documents and reports of these events is fundamentally troubled by these facts. In addition, I want to argue against Decker and Pyrooz's position

[198] Goodman.

on prison gangs as the main source for prison's dysfunctionality, looking instead to the prison itself.

The Avenues gang's violence against Black people on the streets of Highland Park leads me to consider the racializing logics of the carceral regime. As Black Studies scholars more directly and Carceral Studies scholars less directly identify, the racial logics that make prisons and policing possible exist because of the prison's relationship to civil society. Avenues gang members, following the demands of the Mexican Mafia to first remove all Black people from their gangs and second to expunge Black people from Latinx neighborhoods is possible because of this connection. In other words, as "race is made and remade" in the prisons, they ultimately stem from an imperative to remove and distance Blackness from Latinidad for the sake of non-Black Latinx people's access to social capital and institutional privilege. As João Costa Vargas argues, even in situations where Latinx peoples seem to have been completely robbed of any such capital, they are still able to negotiate their access through an instrumentalization of anti-Blackness.[199]

Leonna's Upbringing in Highland Park

Leonna Irvin Calderon was only five years old when her mother decided to move her and her three siblings from Pasadena to Highland Park. Leonna stated that the move and subsequent relocations (all within Highland Park) were out of necessity and determined by personal affairs that her mother was trying to protect her children from.

[199] João H. Costa Vargas, "Can the Line Move? Antiblackness and a Diasporic Logic of Forced Social Epidermalization," in Critical Ethnic Studies, by Critical Ethnic Studies Editorial Collective, ed. Nada Elia et al. (Duke University Press, 2016), 63–91, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822374367-004.

The overall move to Highland Park was significant because it took Leonna and her family away from a strong Black community in Pasadena (where her mother's family still resides in large numbers) to the predominantly Spanish speaking and non-Black Latinx Highland Park. Her families came from places like Nebraska and New Jersey, as well as from the Dakotas (the family believes that they have Lakota ancestry through her paternal grandfather). This latest migration to Highland Park established another location that Leonna's family could lay claim to, adding another node to the larger network of intimate spaces created by her family's mobility. These migrations, not always under completely voluntary circumstances, are representative of a US-based Black Geography and even though Highland Park is a predominantly non-Black Latinx space, it does not foreclose its functionality as a Black geography.[200]

Leonna lived in Highland Park until she was 18 years old when she left Los Angeles to go attend college at the University of California, Berkeley in 2007. Leonna's story is significant in the context of this article because she came of age in Highland Park exactly when the Avenues' gang was holding its campaign of anti-Black violence and its immediate aftermath. I asked Leonna to recount to me her experience growing up in Highland Park, both of us already having an intimate knowledge of the space and the people that embody its character. She remarks on the experience as a generally positive one. She made a lot of friends and that she got along with most everyone. She noted that unlike most of her siblings, her closest friends were ethnically and racially diverse. Also,

[200] Marcus Anthony Hunter and Zandria Robinson, Chocolate Cities: The Black Map of American Life (Univ of California Press, 2018).

unlike her siblings, most of her formative years were spent in Highland Park. She was the youngest of four. This meant a lot of things for Leonna. One, she was exposed to and more natural with an environment that was predominantly non-Black Latinx. Second, it impacted, in a generative way, her ability to adapt to places where she was one of few or the only Black person. As Leonna herself explains,

> "My technique … keep it cool with everybody. I knew the gangsters. I knew the nerds. I knew the punkers, the metalheads. I just kept it cool with everybody. That was my way of making sure that nothing was going to happen to me. People are not going to 'hit me up' if I'm cool with so and so. And these people aren't going to 'start shit with me' if they know I'm cool with… and I'm not saying I've never had problems ever, but I think I was well rounded. I knew a lot of different people."

Although Leonna generally reflected on her experience in Highland Park with nostalgia, she also expressed feelings of being marginalized and discriminated against because she was Black. She described multiple instances of being treated as "other" in her own neighborhood. She was made to answer all the questions other kids would have of her family, her hair and all other racist stereotypes.

Leonna wondered what it would have meant if her mother had never decided to move her family out of Pasadena, with its stronger Black demographic. She described her move to Berkeley as that opportunity to explore a part of herself that she felt she never could while growing up in Highland Park. She completely immersed herself in African-American Literature, Music and History. I asked if she was trying to "discover her roots?" She responded,

> *Leonna*: "No, not even just my roots because I feel like I've always been close with my family. I think more look for pride. Growing up around people, 'oh your hair! You're this, you're that.' It took me a while to really love myself. I think that was my takeaway from my experience growing up. I let people get in my head because I was always different. I always had to always kind of embrace that."

> *Luis*: "what do you mean by that? You were always trying to conform so people wouldn't see you different?"
>
> *Leonna:* "There was no way to truly conform. But of course, as a kid you want to fit in. With my friends… I never felt like that."

My exchange with Leonna exposed multiple things to me. First, she complicated my conception of "roots." Pushing back against a notion that "discovering your roots" can only come from an institutional retelling, Leonna understood her roots at this moment as her family. She was always connected to them and was thus intimately aware of all things that made her existence possible. This fact is embodied by her mother, her aunts and uncles. Second, our exchange captured what the Anthropologist Anthony Jerry describes as the formative moment when at a young age you are inculcated into a racial system defined by anti-Blackness. [201]Microaggressions of the sort that intended to categorize or other her, she describes, have the power to marginalize and exclude people of color and African-Americans in particular.[202] However, Leonna did not allow herself to be excluded by others. Her strategy, as mentioned above, was to become well known and well liked among her school age peers. My ignorance of her experience led me to infer that she was trying to conform. She corrected me right away, "there was no way to truly conform."

---

[201] Anthony Russell Jerry, "The First Time I Heard the Word: The 'N-Word' as a Present and Persistent Racial Epithet," Transforming Anthropology 26, no. 1 (2018): 36–49.

[202] Derald Wing Sue, Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics, and Impact (John Wiley & Sons, 2010); Derald Wing Sue, Christina M. Capodilupo, and Aisha Holder, "Racial Microaggressions in the Life Experience of Black Americans.," Professional Psychology: Research and Practice 39, no. 3 (2008): 329.

In Berkeley, Leonna no longer had to adapt herself to an environment constructed on a Manichean order based on Latinx's/ Chicanx's fraught relationship with Whiteness, an environment where whiteness operates as a structural and repressive force rather than as a physical demographic. As my larger project argues, within this power struggle anti-Blackness has been used by Latinx peoples to negotiate and appropriate white-supremacist logics and institutions, to work in their favor. This disrupts a traditional Black-White binary that fails to make a distinction between the racial subjectivities of Black and Brown populations in the US.[203] Quite literally, in the physical spaces that non-Black Latinx peoples create, anti-Blackness has been used to cohere both a spatial identity as well as a racial one. Blackness in these neighborhoods is not allowed to exist, except for as "the other." Afro-Latinx populations are foreclosed from existence. For Leonna's siblings and the other Black students at Franklin High School it meant mostly associating with each other. For Leonna, it required a different approach, one that was filled with constant exposure to prejudice and discrimination.

Leonna reflected on her experience at that moment, now having left Highland Park, with the wisdom that age and distance brings. As I stated earlier, Leonna's memories were mostly nostalgic. She claims that it wasn't the same for her mother. Even while living in Highland Park, she noted that her mother was never truly content. In fact, while at Berkeley Leonna's mom decided to move her family once again. This time taking the family to Fontana, California, exactly fifty miles east of Highland Park where rent was cheaper and space ampler. This is where our conversation took place, in

[203] Vargas, "Can the Line Move?"

Leonna's children's play room, surrounded by toys, we spoke of the epigenetics of trauma and the generational psycho-social effects of slavery in the United States. We conversed more about her mother and her uncle, discussing how they didn't reach the levels of success they wanted in all the arenas of life. She insists that they were still successful, but that as a single mom, her mother had to sacrifice. Mostly, her time was spent on making sure that her four children had the things they needed to survive and prosper. Leonna claimed her uncle, who also had children to care for, had to sacrifice some of his sanity. She felt that he often drank too much.

Leonna postulated that such circumstances could stem from the inability to control your surroundings. Speaking specifically to Highland Park, but also Camden (New Jersey) where her mother was originally from, she said that her mom's family was trying to hold on to and live a conservative and traditional lifestyle. Her grandma was a stay at home mom, her husband worked, and they lived in an idyllic and tight knit community. However, according to Leonna "everything fell apart little by little" and that's why they moved to California. She continued, "you end up in an area where you can't really control the outside influences. That's what Highland Park was and that's why my mom hated it. Oh, it was so bad there." Speaking specifically to the gang violence, her mother was like the mothers of Anthony Prudhomme and Christopher Bowser, attempting to escape and preserve their children's innocence from the pervasive violence, only to come to the realization that it was a condition that followed them into almost every neighborhood they would go.

Criminal or Justice Otherwise

Anthony Prudhomme was 20 years old when he decided to leave his mother's home in the San Fernando Valley. She advised him to avoid living with his father in South Central Los Angeles, fearful of the gang violence that might lead to her son's early death.[204] This was the same violence Cristopher Browser and his mother were trying to escape when they left South Central for Highland Park. Christopher had been pressured to join the local gang and was also struck in the leg by a stray bullet during a drive-by. Anthony and Christopher were victims of the Avenues gang's campaign against Highland Park's Black residents in the mid to late 90s. Their selection was not random.

The Avenues gang harassed and intimated Anthony and Christopher because neither of them would allow themselves to take their abuse passively. Avenues gang members arrested in the murder of these men attested that "whenever [Christopher] left the Highland Park apartment he shared with his mother, he cruised the streets with a boombox thundering rap music, acting as if 'the neighborhood was his neighborhood.'" [205] Anthony was a tall and undeniable figure that drew the attention of the Avenues gang as well. Their placemaking practices, as the resistance and response to conditions of anti-Black displacement, would become the grounds for Prudhomme's and Bowser's ultimate denial of space. Their murders served as a warning to Highland Park's remaining Black residents.

[204] Mozingo, "Highland Park Gang Trial Paints a Landscape of Hate."
[205] Mozingo.

Both Anthony's and Christopher's mothers expressed concern over the well-being of their children and acted when possible to secure it. After the murders of their sons both mothers had different reactions. Anthony Prudhomme's mother was very vocal about pressuring the LAPD to investigate and make arrests of her son's murderers. As the Southern Poverty Law Center's (SPLC) report of the initial 2005 case against the Avenues gang describes:

> "Since the trial, [Ms. Prudhomme] has become obsessed with the Avenues gang. She routinely drives Highland Park, looking for signs of the gang, talking to anyone willing to talk. She has homicide detectives, lawyers, and parole officers on her cell phone's speed dial. She's made numerous visits to the site of her son's murder, as well as the spots where Bowser and Wilson were shot down. Believing the gang member who actually pulled the trigger on her son has yet to be brought to justice, she posts reward signs throughout the neighborhood, usually right next to Avenues gang graffiti."[206]

Christopher's mother's reaction to her son's murder does not get the same amount of coverage. SPLC's article mentions that "unlike the mothers of other victims like Bowser and Wilson, [Ms.] Prudhomme feels relatively safe on streets claimed by the Avenues. That's because she's white."[207] Anthony was of mixed (Black and white) descent. His story is the one most profiled, due in part to his mother's insistent search for justice. The details she provided of her son's life humanized Anthony, saving him from being "just another victim" of gang violence. As the article continues:

> "'As he grew up people thought that' [Anthony] might have been some race other than Black, says his stepfather Lavelle. 'But you could tell by the way he dressed that he leaned more toward his African-American side.' That preference may well have cost him his life, something that infuriates his mother. 'A friend of mine asked me do I hate Mexicans now,' says [Ms. Prudhomme]. 'I said, 'I hate murderers.' I am prejudiced … against murderers.' [Ms. Prudhomme] asked the man, who was Latino, if he spoke

[206] Mock, "Latino Gang Members in Southern California Are Terrorizing and Killing Blacks."
[207] Brentin Mock, "Latino Gang Members in Southern California Are Terrorizing and Killing Blacks," Southern Poverty Law Center, 2007, https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2007/latino-gang-members-southern-california-are-terrorizing-and-killing-blacks.

> English. He did, and they chatted for about five minutes about the infamous 'Avenues 43' and the tattoos they leave all over the area he landscapes. [Ms. Prudhomme] walked away from him, laughing, before turning to say, 'I hope they get them all. We want to get all of them off the streets.'"[208]

Ms. Prudhomme's search for justice on the streets of Highland Park mirrors the same positioning that the state assumed when carrying out the convictions against the culpable parties. The state's case against Merced Cambero was premised on his "conspiring to violate the civil rights of African Americans who resided in Highland Park."[209]

Starting in 2017 and ending in 2018, Merced faced trial for the murder of 38-year-old Kenneth Wilson, a man looking for a parking spot when visiting his nephew in Highland Park. During the trial there was an exchange between the judge and Merced, as Fred Shuster of the City News Service reports,

> "U.S. District Judge Percy Anderson demanded Cambero state exactly why he murdered Wilson. 'Tell me in your own words what you did in April 1999,' the judge asked. 'I shot him,' Cambero replied, not expecting an interrogation. 'And why?' Anderson, who is himself Black, continued. 'He was a different color,' the defendant responded, looking down. 'And that's why you decided to shoot him?' the judge asked. 'Yeah.'" [210]

Having been on the run for nearly 15 years, Merced was finally meant to answer for acts he carried out nearly 20 years earlier in Highland Park. Merced cast himself as remorseful for his actions, as this handwritten note to the judge demonstrates:

> "I want to apologize to everyone in Highland Park for all the hurt I caused a as member of the Avenues 43rd gang. I think about the mother of the man, Mr. Wilson, that I killed on Avenues 52, that night 20 years ago. I wish I could tell her to forgive me, but I was told that she died. I think about how she must have felt, because her son was not there to take care of her. I know there were a lot of other people who I hurt back then. I didn't kill

[208] Mock.
[209] Department of Justice, "Longtime Fugitive Enters Plea in Federal Hates Crimes Case Alleging Racially Motivated Murders of African Americans."
[210] Shuster, "Ex-Fugitive L.A. Gang Member Gets 20 Years for Killing Black Motorist."

> those other people, but I was a gang member. I was not raised to hurt people. And I was not raised by my parents to be hateful or disrespectful to people of any race, including Black people. I am very ashamed that back then when I was running with the gang. I went against everything my family has taught me. I wish with all my heart I could go back and change the things that happened. But I know I can't. So many people were hurt by the things I did including my own family."[211]

This positioning of Merced was reinforced by his defense lawyer's depiction of him as a misguided youth and a product of his environment.[212] We may never know what Merced was thinking, then or now, nor what emotions he was processing. His display of remorse could just as easily be read as an act, a fabrication, of Merced's defense lawyer. Merced took a plea deal, his lawyer negotiated 20 years in prison with strict 5-year probation period to follow, thus saving him from what would have normally been a life sentence.

Ms. Prudhomme was also present to give her statement. Affirming her previous position, she stated, "'it's the worst thing in the world to lose a child … murdered in cold blood in that way,' she said, adding Wilson's late mother would have agreed. "I pray that there's justice for all of our loved ones." [213] Ms. Prudhomme speaking on her own behalf and that of the now deceased Ms. Wilson, was there to see justice delivered and that peace come to all souls (living and dead) over this matter. Christopher Bowser's mother also spoke, but with a different intent. Directed at Judge Anderson, she said "from my heart, I don't have any vengeance against [Merced]. He has to answer to God" (ibid). Merced also knew one day that he would have to answer to a higher power; his place in the courtroom affirmed it. The judge reluctantly accepted the plea deal, stating that "This

[211] Merced Cambero, "Letter of Apology to Ms. Wilson (Mother of Kenneth Wilson) Submitted by His Lawyer Stephen Frye," n.d.
[212] Stephen G Frye, "1 LAW OFFICE OF STEPHEN G. FRYE," n.d., 11.
[213] Shuster.

is a particularly troublesome decision for the court in light of the fact that three people lost their lives, if for no other reason than the color of their skin." [214]

I do not believe that Merced or anyone else involved in these acts should be excused for what they did, nor do I want to cast Latinx gang members as complete victims of a system that leaves them with limited life chances, as Merced's lawyer attempted to picture him. In the process of writing and thinking through the events that took place in Highland Park through the 1990s and 2000s I wanted to tow a careful line between speaking of people in precarious situations, as victims of circumstance and agents of their own free will. This is in part because I recognize that the pathological view of racialized peoples, both Black and Brown, are what justifies institutional violence. I do not want to perpetuate a narrative that further criminalizes racialized communities. However, I also do not want to excuse the racist views and violent acts of the men who executed acts of "ethnic cleansing" against people, a charge led by the United States Federal Government in the indictment against Latinx gang members in Highland Park.

It's a treacherous terrain to write from, but scholars like Gilberto Rosas have been able to navigate it with careful consideration. As Rosas writes in his book *Barrio Libre: Criminalizing States and Delinquent Refusals of the New Frontier*, the mistake of most literature on "cholos and related youth cultures" is that they all too often rely on the "scripted positions of adolescent resistance." As Rosas says, "Such analyses restore

[214] Shuster.

agency to the structurally oppressed. But they repress the painful realities of deprivation and the street – or, in this case subterranean – violence of emerging economies forged in abandonments and in new exclusions."[215] In many of these cases and people that I talk about, choices were limited, but they were made. They had to be, oftentimes for the sake of their own self-preservation.

Merced's case, I argue, indirectly embodies 30 years of institutional and quotidian violence against Brown and Black people in Los Angeles and violence in all its forms: intimate, systemic, etc. and at its varying scales, communal and institutional. The systemic and institutional violence that created our contemporary prison system, as has been argued in this chapter, stokes the animosity between two differently racialized but similarly affected groups. It has also catalyzed and justified gentrification in Black and Brown neighborhoods in Los Angeles.[216] The State represented here by Judge Percy Anderson, the Department of Justice and the Attorney General's office, willingly or not, sits on a sense of justice that depicts itself as an objective and moral authority. This is nowhere truer than in Merced's case.

[215] Gilberto Rosas, *Barrio Libre: Criminalizing States and Delinquent Refusals of the New Frontier* (Duke University Press, 2012), 81.
[216] Ana Muñiz, *Police, Power, and the Production of Racial Boundaries* (Rutgers University Press, 2015).

Conclusion

The fact that Anthony was half-white did not preclude his exposure to a "geography of death"[217] that Ms. Brown and her son Christopher were trying to escape when they moved to Highland Park in the mid-1990s. In that sense, Black motherhood comes from an intimate awareness of far reaching effects of anti-blackness, something that Christopher Bowser's, Kenneth Wilson's and Leonna Calderon Irvin's mothers were more familiar with.[218] On the opposite end, Merced and the others in his clique would come to embody another avenue of Black death and denial.

Merced was able to evade his captors for more than 15 years. However, he could never escape the reality of the acts he committed as a teenager and the life that he took. He is responsible for his own actions and should have to answer for them. Merced and others like him, represent a generation of young men and women who would become involved in a "world of crime"[219] where their agency is not completely their own. However, Merced and his friends also acted on the behalf of their own self-interest. Their inculcation in a proto-capitalist shadow-state fueled their desire to progress in the ranks of the deeply hierarchical structure of their gang, unquestioned loyalty and murder was the quickest way to achieve that.

Nevertheless, if we were to believe his letter, Merced laments his actions. He apologizes to both his neighborhood (Highland Park) and Wilson's mother, whom he

---

[217] João Costa Vargas and Jaime Amparo Alves, "Geographies of Death: An Intersectional Analysis of Police Lethality and the Racialized Regimes of Citizenship in São Paulo," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 4 (2010): 611–636.
[218] Rocha, "Black Mothers' Experiences of Violence in Rio de Janeiro."
[219] Alves, *The Anti-Black City*.

claims he has had in his mind his entire time on the run. Prudhomme's mother, in her statements, still seeks "complete justice" (as made obvious through her pressure on the police to catch her son's killer) through a dependence on the prison industrial complex. Bowser's mother, on the other hand, held a different stance. I interpreted Ms. Brown's words, unlike Ms. Prudhomme's, as an inability to rely on the criminal justice system, a complex of institutions that in the grander scheme is culpable in her son's death, and the deaths of the sons and daughters of many just like her. Justice for her, in that case can only be meted out by a metaphysical entity, God, an ultimate authority and one that sits above the State.

Leonna Calderon Irvin credits this in part to proximity. Having never really been an environment where there were many White people, Leonna said that most of the racism she experienced came from Latinx people. However, we both also agreed that Latinx people in the context of the neighborhoods we grew up in never really aspired to whiteness. In fact, many of the people we went to school with, I argued, were or knowingly or unknowingly motivated by a cultural zeitgeist influenced by anti-authoritarian cultural nationalism stemming from post-war political liberationist movements and manifested in various pop culture mediums. In fact, many of the major events that would come to characterize the Chicanx movement's history happened in and adjacent to the neighborhoods Leonna and I both grew up in. Yet, as this chapter aims to prove, anti-Blackness is constitutive of white supremacy and not the other way around. This is evident in the non-Black Latinx community and in their struggles against disproportionately race-based practices of displacement in NELA.

As I write, people across Los Angeles are experiencing displacement through mass evictions and landlord harassment. Real estate speculation and an affordable housing shortage have resulted (among other things) in year after record breaking year of rising homelessness in Los Angeles (Los Angeles City – 38,000, Los Angeles County – 50,000+).[220] Latinx and Black neighborhoods alike have been impacted by gentrification. It is the newest development in a long history of housing segregation, loan discrimination, de-industrialization, hyper-concentration of poverty, and predatory loaning practices.[221] Coupled with the rise of the prison industrial complex, police and carceral institutions have proven to be a predictable antecedent to gentrification.[222] The over criminalizing and policing of Latinx communities in Highland Park and Los Angeles more generally, have resulted in the overcrowding of state prisons and local jails with Brown as well as Black bodies.[223] Yet, the displacement I focus on here is an internal form of displacement. It is the policing of the "community's" borders, that which coheres a Latinx spatial identity and geography through the logics of anti-Blackness.

[220] Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, "1371 - 2017 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count - Data Summary - City Of Los Angeles," accessed March 28, 2018, https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=1371-2017-homeless-count-results-city-of-los-angeles.pdf.
[221] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Temple University Press, 2011).
[222] Muñiz, *Police, Power, and the Production of Racial Boundaries*.
[223] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, vol. 21 (Univ of California Press, 2007).

CHAPTER 4

Gentrification and the Necrospeculative

"to them it was an investment…
and it was meant to be sold, eventually."
- John Urquiza, NELA Alliance

This chapter elaborates on the necrospeculative practices of real estate (specifically multi-family housing) investors that would instigate a highly contentious battle over the soul of a neighborhood. In this chapter and the following, I will tease out the layers of racialized belonging evoked in the fight surrounding the Marmion Royal (a 60-unit multi-family residence) and its tenants (with all its interwoven dynamics and multidimensional battlefields) to push forward a larger assessment of the moral argument implicit and explicit in the tactics, strategies and rhetoric in housing justice and anti-displacement organizing circles – "housing is a human right." Borrowed from the 25th article of the United Nation's universal declaration of human rights, and its subsequent elaborations from housing justice advocates internationally, housing as a human right insists that all peoples regardless of status, position, gender, sex, race, etc. are entitled to one of the most basic necessity for human survival, shelter.[224]

[224] Eric Tars, "Housing as a Human Right," *Advocates' Guide*, 2017, 1–13 to 1–15; UN General Assembly, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," *UN General Assembly* 302, no. 2 (1948).
The human/ property form: the human is a human within the confines of a shelter – they are then bestowed with certain legal and civil rights that would otherwise not be afforded to them if they were not grounded or established in a sedentary position, a position marked by the cartesian

This is a story about the Marmion Royal and its centrality in a material and symbolic fight over Highland Park. It starts in 2016 when Azusa Pacific University, a Christian college in the San Gabriel Valley, put the Marmion Royal up for bid. They had held the building as a rental property for an entire decade after it was donated to their endowment as a real estate investment. The sale of the building in 2016 went to the partnership of Skya Ventures and Gelt Inc., corporate pseudonyms for Keith and Galena Wasserman, a newlywed couple from an affluent suburb of Los Angeles and the millions of investment capital they accumulated from national and international sources. The Marmion Royal was many things for many people. For the Wasserman family the building was a business opportunity, for the residents who would eventually become a tenants' union it was their home, and for the housing justice movement it would become a key site of contestation against economic displacement. Beyond their apartments, the tenants of Marmion Royal were also fighting to stay in the neighborhood, increasingly unaffordable and unavailable to them. Their evictions were a breaking point for the tenants and those who would come to support them - their neighbors, allies from other neighborhoods experiencing the same displacement pressure, housing rights activists fighting a legal battle against no-fault evictions, and neighborhood defenders against the cultural and economic erasure of gentrification.

---

dimensions of a map. Hate crime legislation: Anti-black violence impinges on the civil rights of African Americans, who as citizens may not face discrimination or otherwise be deterred from living wherever they choose. Civil rights and housing rights coalesce under neoliberalism as consumer's rights vs a human right.

Indeed, the Marmion Royal contained multiple layers of meaning in a battle over community development. The protest against the tenants' evictions was galvanized by the dissatisfaction/ frustration over the already established pattern of gentrification in Highland Park along York Blvd and that was now making its way down its other main thoroughfare, N. Figueroa Ave. It was a fight against the legal and market hegemonies that gave unrestricted access to landlords and developers, leading to pervasive harassment and displacement of residents and businesses. It was the site of a standoff for those in the neighborhood/city who had had enough, those who had already experienced multiple social, psychological, cultural, spiritual, and economic displacements. The people who had called Marmion Royal or Highland Park home for decades, that had been evicted from other buildings, were formerly houseless with Section 8 housing vouchers, and/or had lost their homes in the foreclosure crisis, were no longer able to find an affordable place to live in the neighborhood where they had spent most of their life. It was a flashpoint in the clash over a racialized and ethnic belonging between the groups that wanted to maintain Highland Park as an accessible destination for low-income, immigrant, and refugee communities seeking haven versus those that saw those demographics as a detriment to their bottom line. Even further, for some it was a fight over the preservation of Highland Park as either a Latinx and/or working-class community against its development into a landing site for those in the knowledge and creative economies (the incoming demographic the new owners intended to profit from), where new businesses provide the amenities for middle class leisure vs those of economic survival.

The battle over Marmion Royal would culminate in a court case between the newly established Marmion Royal tenants' union and the new owners (Gelt Ventures and Skya Inc.). It was a series of legal rulings and settlements that reflected the tiered nature of the evictions inflicted on the tenants. Alleging discrimination, the legal strategy of lawyer representing the tenants' union was based on the unwillingness of the new owners to extend the leases of its current non-white residents, negotiating only with its few white residents to complete new leases after the renovation of the building. The case never made it to trial because the judge overseeing it decided that there was not enough evidence to justify discrimination against the tenants and their suit was denied its day in court. In this case and in others, the ethical and moral human and civil rights to housing could not supersede the rights of property owners to, in effect, see a rightful return of their investment.

The necrospeculative in the example of Marmion Royal and Highland Park reveal that the financial formulas of real estate investors are a derivative of a social calculus that relies on the anti-value of a racialized body and the homes they create. Profit for the new owners' investment is only possible when the building itself has been cleared of its depreciating elements (i.e. its largely non-white, immigrant and working-class tenants). To proclaim that the mass of eviction of Marmion Royal's tenants was a long time in the making is an understatement of differing measures. The entire struggle (from purchase to eviction) would take place over the course of 2 years. The financial policies and practices that would make this possible had already been cemented for decades in the political economic landscape of California and Los Angeles' housing market. However, as my

next chapter will discuss in more detail, the necrospeculative displacement-dependent investments of real estate actors depends largely on the differential (anti-)values of life that the Marmion Royal tenants could and would also mine in order to preserve their place in the community.

The Marmion Royal

The Marmion Royal is a 60-unit apartment building located between Avenues 58 and 59. It is in a central nexus of multiple geographies. It is exactly one block removed from N. Figueroa Ave., a lively commercial corridor and a historically significant thoroughfare for the traffic connecting Pasadena to Los Angeles and the Midwest to the "shining Pacific," the famed route 66.[225] It sits adjacent to the metro line, the "Highland Park Stop" on Los Angeles the Gold line. When the Gold line finished construction, and began operation in 2003, it opened Highland Park, but more specifically the area surrounding Marmion Royal to increased transporter access, mirroring the origins of Los Angeles and Highland Park's original real estate booms that came as the result of the rail lines, both transcontinental and regional. The street adjacent to the Marmion Royal, Ave 58, is also the location of the weekly Highland Park Farmer's Market.[226]

---

[225] Security Trust & Savings Bank (Los Angeles Branch Calif) Highland Park, *The Five Friendly Valleys: The Story of Greater Highland Park* (The Branch, 1923); Charles J. Fisher, *Highland Park* (Arcadia Publishing, 2008).

[226] "It is a nexus shared by many in the community. Business owners such as that of Las Cazuelas lived here on their rise to middle class; a bus operator listed this as her last residence before her and her son became homeless; veterans living on section 8 reside here as their first home after living on the street for years; while immigrant families with multiple income streams living in overcrowded conditions called this home." – A editorial note from John Urquiza, July 2020).

The context surrounding the Marmion Royal's purchase precedes the economic impact of the "Great Recession." Gentrification in Highland Park, many people would insist, began on the corner of avenue 50 and York Blvd where Café de Leche opened its doors in 2008. They were the first business in a predominately working class Latinx neighborhood that catered to the taste of new residents moving in. This made demographic phenomena into an economic trend and opportunity. Café de Leche precipitated what many believe to be the beginning of the end of a working-class and immigrant curated York Blvd. An assessment of York Blvd today gives credence to that theory. Business after business would soon get flipped; pet stores for high end restaurants, automotive stores for ice cream and donut shops, party stores for boutiques, discount stores for custom furniture, etc. Even the businesses that were able to adapt and accommodate the new taste soon fell victim to the rising rent of commercial spaces that signifies the gentrification of a neighborhood.

During this time, Figueroa Ave was a refuge from the gentrification York Blvd was experiencing. As the second central business district and other main thoroughfare for Highland Park, Figueroa Ave maintained the businesses that still served the needs of working class and immigrant populations. However, it was not long before Figueroa Ave would succumb to the same economic pressures.[227] Businesses were priced out and replaced and eventually Figueroa Ave started to resemble York Blvd. Yoga studios, cafes

[227] "In 2015 five properties sold, losing almost 25 businesses… however, if there was ever an epicenter it would be Ave 57/ Figueroa [sic] intersection, but it did not grow as linear as York. I have called the greyhound [bar in Highland Park] in the past an epicenter as it turned sooner, but not as obvious. Chicken boy, [LA city council member Gil] Cedillo's office, the bank building all elements, but not as visible…" – editorial note from John Urquiza, June 2020.

and restaurants emerged. Mr. T's bowling alley, which served in its later years as an iconic punk venue, along with other buildings that housed the Highland Park Swap Meet, whose upper floors acted as highly affordable Single Room Occupancy Units (SRO), were all displaced; for some it was a banishment from the city.

The Marmion Royal was built in 1986, a fact that would prove significant for its tenants 30 years later. The building was sold twice, once in 1989 and again ten years later in 1999 (each time for roughly for 2 million dollars) before it was donated to the private Christian University, Azusa Pacific in 2011. At that time, the assessed value of the building was $5,550,000. By 2016, the market conditions had proven themselves to be right for a sale. Highland Park had been trending for some time, well before the 2008 recession put a halt to most real estate transactions in the city. The post-recession real estate boom in Los Angeles was especially impactful on Highland Park. As business was to be continued as usual, the neighborhood redevelopment programs, that had been gearing up for some time, reached the precipice of a market frenzy that started in 2013.[228] The Marmion Royal's sale in 2016 was part of a series of real estate transactions up and down N. Figueroa Ave. and in various residential pockets of the neighborhood. The sale of commercial, industrial, mixed use, single family and multi-family zoned properties had precipitated a transformation in the neighborhood's social and economic geography, a transformation that incentivized Azusa Pacific's sale of the building, positioning its non-white tenants as an expendable variable in the financial formulas of Highland Park's speculative investors.

[228] Paul Ong, Chhandra Pech, and Deirdre Pfeiffer, "The Foreclosure Crisis in Los Angeles," 2013.

The building was purchased on May 13th, 2016 by Galena and Keith Wasserman doing business as Gelt Ventures, LLC and Skya Ventures, Inc (also known as Marmion Partners, LLC) for $14,250,142, a value that nearly tripled its 2011 assessment. This large investment in a building that had long faced maintenance issues due to the neglect of previous management companies was similar to many others in close proximity. With huge amounts of finance capital, prowling for a "spatial fix,"[229] finding Highland Park's real estate market as a lucrative opportunity to generate high returns. As Gelena Skya-Wasserman, head of Skya Ventures, puts it,

> "…demand is huge for this neighborhood and it continues to increase. Young families looking to own a home in Los Angeles started to move into Highland Park due to its location, affordability, and walk score. As more families started to move in, more businesses emerged to support the growing population. However, what we found was that there was still a shortage of apartments for rent to support the growing creative millennials seeking to live, dine, and shop in Highland Park…. Investment in the area to help meet that high demand is certainly attractive." [230]

In her interview Gelena implicitly ties the practice of gentrification to the family unit. Here Highland Park is defined as having been absent of a pattern of young families looking to start homes or businesses intended to support them, not until they came from a specific social, racial, and class category. This sort of necrospeculative vision of the neighborhood extended to the building itself. The realization of the Marmion Royal as one that would serve the increasing demand for housing by the "growing creative millennials" came at the expense of multiple family units, some having lived in that building for multiple decades. This imagination of an "Urbs Nullius" is not

---

[229] David Harvey, "Globalization and the 'Spatial Fix,'" 2001.

[230] Kelsi Maree Borl, | May 26, and 2016 at 02:36 PM, "Multifamily Investors Are Heading to Highland Park," GlobeSt, accessed February 24, 2020, https://www.globest.com/sites/kelsimareeborland/2016/05/26/multifamily-investors-are-heading-to-highland-park/.

circumstantial, but a necessary precondition to enact a profit-generating investment in the displacement of undesired bodies, leading potentially to their premature deaths.

The fates of the tenants of Marmion Royal had been decided over two decades prior with the passage of Costa Hawkins in California. This legislation severely limited the scale and scope of rent control in all municipalities across the state. The Marmion Royal was built after October 1st, 1978. As a result of Costa Hawkins, it pushed the Marmion Royal outside of the protections the City of Los Angeles' Rent Stabilization Ordinance (RSO or "rent control"). "Rent control" means that your landlord cannot forcibly evict you from your home, without reason. If the landlord has a reason, he can then begin a lengthy legal process through the courts to evict someone out of their unit. Otherwise, you have the legal right to stay in your apartment for as long as you want while still paying rent and following apartment guidelines. Other protections under control include stabilized rent which meant that the property owner could only raise your rent on average 3% each year. If the landlord wants possession of a tenant's unit, by the rent stabilization ordinance, they then have legal right to housing relocation money (amounts vary according to household size and status). People in rent control buildings also have the leverage to negotiate for more money if the landlords really want the person to vacate. For Marmion Royal, who did not have the security of rent control, this meant that without penalty of the law, the new owners could justifiably (in legal terms) evict any all tenants without "just cause," in other words, through no fault of the tenant.

The Costa-Hawkins Act (1994) and Prop 10 (2018)

As a reaction to the tenants' rights movement of the late 1970s, an increasingly powerful real estate lobby in the California state government pushed to reverse the protections gained during this period. This culminated in the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act of 1994 and put into effect in 1995. The act was passed by a Republican-dominated state assembly and senate with strong support from Governor Pete Wilson (the staunch anti-immigrant governor responsible for Proposition 187).[231] The Los Angeles Times reporting at the time, "State Sen. Jim Costa (D-Fresno), who led the Senate push to repeal such ordinances, said the legislation represented 'an 11-year effort to try to end extreme forms of rent control in California.'"[232] Supported by democrats and republicans alike, the bill represented the entrenchment of a neoliberal political-economic order that was likewise affecting housing policy at the federal level under a democratic president, with regards to the privatization of affordable and social housing. The "extreme forms of rent control" referenced by senator Jim Costa was the vacancy control provisions that early forms of rent control had employed to maintain the affordability of units in perpetuity. Landlords could not raise the rent even if the unit had been vacated by its previous tenant. It was a means of stabilizing the rent for all future tenants. Costa Hawkins also prevented all municipalities in California from enacting rent control laws

[231] Proposition 187 was an anti- "illegal immigration" bill in the state of California that intended to criminalize undocumented immigrants and their advocates. It made it a crime for any government run or funded services to provide resources to undocumented peoples, including public education, hospitals, etc. This bill was later shot down in the courts, but revealed and represented a deep anti-immigrant and anti-Latinx sentiment in one of the most progressive states in the United states.
[232] MAX VANZI, "Legislature Deals Blow to Rent Control," *Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 1995, http://articles.latimes.com/1995-07-25/news/mn-27574_1_rent-control-feature.

on multi-family residential buildings constructed after the bill's enactment (1995) as well as condominiums and single-family dwellings. Ever further, for those municipalities that had already passed rent control, these protections would be held static at the year when they were put into effect. For the city of Los Angeles that cutoff date was October 1st, 1978.[233]

The campaign to remove Costa-Hawkins and challenge the hegemony of real estate interests in the California state government reached a landmark in 2018 when housing rights advocates were successful in getting on the ballot Proposition 10, the Local Rent Control Initiative, or the repeal Costa-Hawkins Act. The campaign was a collective grassroots effort across the state to ease the effects of the affordable housing shortage that had resulted in major losses of housing for some of the state's most vulnerable inhabitants. Despite the argument pushed forward by the pro-build, lax-regulation forces behind Costa Hawkins that only an increase in supply would help stabilize costs, most developers had refused to incorporate affordable housing in their complexes. Geoff Palmer had successfully sued the city of Los Angeles, undoing the city's affordable housing ordinances that aimed to increase the low-income housing stock in the city.[234] The resulting shortage of affordable housing coupled with weakened tenant protections incentivized landlords in trending real estate markets to remove their low-

---

[233] Peter Dreier, "RENT DEREGULATION IN CALIFORNIA AND MASSACHUSETTS: POLITICS, POLICY, AND IMPACTS," n.d., 70.

[234] Anna Scott Writer Staff, "Developer Wins Lawsuit That Could Jeopardize Affordable Housing Plan," Los Angeles Downtown News - The Voice of Downtown Los Angeles, accessed May 15, 2020, http://www.ladowntownnews.com/news/developer-wins-lawsuit-that-could-jeopardize-affordable-housing-plan/article_a8e848a8-7f6f-587c-90b7-6c0655f358ff.html; "'Why Are Developers Only Building Luxury Housing?,'" Strong Towns, accessed July 17, 2019, https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2018/7/25/why-are-developers-only-building-luxury-housing.

income tenants by any means necessary (i.e. violent tenant harassment, Ellis Act evictions, Tenants-in-common and condominium conversions, etc.).[235] This allowed landlords and developers to raise rents to "market-rate" at the accelerated speeds of speculation in Los Angeles and elsewhere.

The grassroots campaign for prop 10 had faced strong opposition from the deeply entrenched pro-real estate (and especially pro-speculation) forces in the California. However, their campaign was bolstered by a large contribution from the AIDS Healthcare Foundation. They donated 10 million dollars to the Yes on 10 campaign, which at that moment multiplied the campaign's budget almost 5 times. Ultimately, the Yes on Prop 10 campaign was able raise $26, 165, 040 dollars, a considerable amount of money. However, they were outspent by their competition who managed to accrue $76,174,303 to fight the Yes campaign. California Rental Housing Association, California Apartment Association, Apartment Association of Orange County, Santa Barbara Rental Property Assn Issues PAC, among others represented the hegemonic bloc of the corporate real estate lobby groups were the primary contributors to the No on Prop 10 campaign.[236] Utilizing the power of political rhetoric, they used such labels as "Californians for Affordable Housing, No on Proposition 10"; "No on Prop 10 - A

[235] An "Ellis act" eviction dictates that if a landlord wanted to exited out of the rental housing market they could do so and evict their tenants if and only if they kept the units out of the market for a minimum of 5 years to follow or they converted their units to private condominiums. The same is true for the tenants-in-common provision, it's another means by which units of a multi-unit residence can be divided up as separate properties to be owned by the tenants "in-common". Both strategies have been used by speculative landlords and financiers to displace tenants and resell their buildings at a profit, even if its 10 years down the line and the units may sit vacant. It's the future sale that is the incentive.

[236] "multiple large and corporate landlords donating a million dollars to as high as ten million to squash prop 10." – editorial note John Urquiza, June 2020

Flawed Initiative that will Make the Housing Crisis Worse a Coalition of Housing Advocates, Renters, Large and Small Businesses, Taxpayer Groups, and Veterans"; and "No on Prop 10; Californians for Responsible Housing, a Coalition of Veterans, Seniors, Affordable Housing Providers, Social Justice Groups, Taxpayer Associations, and Labor". The result was a defeat of the proposition in a statewide vote that saw 7, 251,443 votes (59.43%) no votes against the 4,949,543 votes (40.57%) in favor of repealing Costa-Hawkins.[237]

The Case Against No-Fault Evictions

The Marmion Royal as a site for the housing justice struggle, was amongst many in the neighborhood, city and state that had united to endorse an end to "no-fault evictions." As stated above, the Marmion Royal was built in 1986 so was outside the window of legal protections from the City of Los Angeles' Rent Stabilization Ordinance. That made the building susceptible to the type of mass evictions happening across the city. Highland Park was especially hard hit. The result of cultural trends and social position in relation to the rest of Los Angeles, so explained in the previous chapters. The necrospeculative imagining of Highland Park made the neighborhood an exceptional site of investment for the abstraction of the "market," leading to the mass exchange of property and the mass eviction of Highland Park's most vulnerable residents.

[237] "California Proposition 10, Local Rent Control Initiative (2018)," Ballotpedia, accessed May 15, 2020, https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_10,_Local_Rent_Control_Initiative_(2018).

This moved John Urquiza, member of NELAA and founder of Sin Turisitas, to learn more about the economic trends. John, with the help of members from Occidental [College] Students United Against Gentrification (OSUAG) and NELAA, began to research recent building purchases in Highland Park. The records indicated what we had already sensed and experienced "in the field." Raquel Rolnik describes the types of financialization we were seeing in NELA as the banality of an exchange, sterile, faceless, and immediate, that results in massive socio-economic shifts felt disproportionately along racial lines. In purely economic terms, the new speculative value of the land and the building does not match the cumulative rent of all the tenants, what Neil Smith refers to as the "rent gap." In my conversation with John, he described it as a return for the years of value lost when Highland Park moved from being a White middle-class suburb to a non-white immigrant and working-class enclave.

Based on the research conducted, as a collective we were then moved to go investigate. According to John's early evaluations of property sales in Highland Park and NELAA's experience with the stories of evicted tenants throughout the neighborhood, we concluded that a new purchase was more than likely the precursor to an eviction notice, as new landlords and investors were eager to see quick returns for large investments. Adding to that, John assessed that around 20% of all apartment buildings in the study area were not protected under Los Angeles Rent Stabilization Ordinance (i.e. rent control), resulting in a minimum of 20% of multi-family residential tenants being displaced from Highland Park before this cycle of "economic revitalization" would be complete. In a subsequent conversation, John further elaborated that what he found

through his study: “it made no difference for mass evictions occurring in rent-controlled vs non-rent controlled [buildings]. The quest for profit was so great in these undervalued assets that existing landlords, speculators, and investors were willing to displace tenants.”[238]

In collaboration with the Los Angeles Tenants Union and others we reached out to vulnerable tenants across NELA. Going from building to building and door to door, we spoke with tenants of recently purchased buildings, made announcements at local churches and public events about tenants’ rights workshops that informed and connected at-risk tenants to legal advice. It was during one of those outreach events that John and others would meet the tenants of Marmion Royal. He, along with Melissa Uribe and Lis B., spoke with the residents of the Marmion Royal, some of whom already heard the news and others that had no idea that their building had just changed owners. Their concern was that Marmion Royal, while home to many families, working class peoples, senior citizens, and disabled folks, would most certainly face a mass eviction. With 60 units, it would be one of the largest mass evictions Highland Park had seen to date since evictions started happening on a mass scale. Out of all the recently purchased buildings John and NELAA investigated, John decided that Marmion Royal would be the building we worked with for this very reason.

Every piece of undeveloped land, every building with potential for quick returns, is sold to someone who can facilitate that amount of capital. In the case of residential apartments, for an old or new landlord to see higher returns in their investment they need

[238] Editorial note, John Urquiza (June 2020)

to be able to charge the new market-rate rent, rising with the rate of speculation. Coupled with the displacing impacts of concentrated policing (i.e. gang injunctions) and the cultural/ aesthetic displacement (e.g. "whitewashing" murals), have been the rise of what is referred to as "no-fault evictions."[239] A no-fault eviction is an eviction that occurs for no legitimate reason other than the landlord wants a tenant to vacate. Some people living in apartments in Highland Park have been living there for decades. For the case or Marmion Royal, some people have been living in their units for more than 20 years. The drive towards mass eviction stems from the fact that landlords can raise their rents as high as they want, in some cases even double the previous rate. This can happen in rent-controlled units, as long as the standing tenants leave, and new tenants come in. The rate at which the new tenants are charged is up to the landlord and "market-rate" is usually in reference to a collective push upward of rent prices. If there are people willing to pay those higher rents, this economic incentive towards displacement will continue. This is what Neil Smith referred to as the "Rent Gap" between the market rate and current rate of rent tenants pay in rent-controlled units.

The case against "no-fault" evictions was adopted by housing justice grassroots organizers as the basis for the strongest movement forward. From a media standpoint, most people recognized that no-fault evictions were morally wrong, if not ethically questionable, and will usually support an endeavor to stop it. In the face of a growing rate

[239] "superseding the injunctions… NELA experienced a sweep never before seen in 2012 or 2013 where after a two-year investigation LAPD and LASD arrested more than a hundred avenues gang members. The direct result following a shooting of a sheriff officer in front of his Glassell Park home which was precipitated by the LAPD shooting of a popular gang leader in Atwater whose gentrification processes were in the advanced" – editorial note John Urquiza, June 2020

of houselessness and the work of grassroots organizations to change the narrative on gentrification, eventually journalists, politicians, and policy makers all admitted to gentrification's growing negative effects. From a regulatory standpoint, "no fault" evictions could also be illegal. Early in our outreach we encountered many people who lived in rent-controlled units that did not know the full extent of their rights. Many of our undocumented neighbors, as well, were fearful of involving any city or state institution for fear of deportation. This reflects that despite the protections written into law, enforcement was often non-existent and wholly inadequate for the mass scale of illegal evictions that would come as the result of market forces. When a landlord decides that they want their tenants out they will resort to any measure, from harassing tenants with daily phone calls or unannounced visits to physical intimidation and threats of violence. When people refer to the traumas of displacement and health consequences of gentrification, they are referring to not only the stress of moving your entire life to another place and not knowing where in LA you can find another affordable unit, but also the stress and depression that comes from being forcibly removed from your home. It is a precarious condition of life that is in part defined by housing instability.

Again, because Marmion Royal was built after 1978 it was not protected by rent control. Members of NELAA in collaboration with the Los Angeles Tenants Union and Eviction Defense Network choose to work with Marmion Royal residents to reject the evictions that sought to remove them from their homes. As a non-rent-controlled building, they did not have the protection of the city if they wanted to stay in their homes nor were they entitled to any form of relocation assistance. The purchase of their building

meant that the new owner, after having spent $14,000,000 on a building that was valued at less than 1/3 of that price 5 years ago when it was donated to Azusa Pacific University, was most likely going to displace the entire building's residents. In fact, their new owners' intentions were explicit, and the tenants were told that their time was limited.

The decision to work with these residents to defend against their evictions became a pivotal fight in the battle against Highland Park's gentrification. The cumulative effect of cultural, physical, and spiritually displacements positioned the Marmion Royal as a galvanized "last stand." It was part of a city, county, and statewide campaign for the preservation of affordable housing and a statement against "no-fault" eviction. This campaign sought to extend the legal rights of people not covered by rent control in different ways. The first was to get the city to implement a moratorium for no-fault evictions. Housing justice advocates also wanted to press the city to extend rent control to all buildings in the city limits, not just those built before October 1978. They hoped this fight would be a landmark moment in the timeline of anti-displacement organizing in Los Angeles. We also hoped, as NELAA, that organizing residents of the Marmion Royal into a tenants' union would inspire other buildings to do the same. The Marmion Royal was supposed to be a turning point for the city, but more importantly, an example for other buildings to follow. It is the Los Angeles tenants' union model. The union itself is made up of strictly renters. Members pay $1.00 a month in dues to have the protection and support of a union when going up against their landlord. The tenants in Marmion Royal who chose to stay and fight against their eviction, organized into a union and that union utilized every tactic it had to achieve what it wanted. John claims that the Marmion Royal

was "a training ground for organizer[s] to examine the errors and successes" of this model of organizing.

What the union wanted was varied. Some decided that Highland Park was their home and they would do whatever it took to stay. Others knew, or would eventually find out, that Los Angeles no longer had an available stock of affordable housing to choose from, and thus chose to stay because it would be much more difficult to leave. Others had children in local schools and wanted to keep them there. Still others understood that with this large union supporting them that they then had the leverage to negotiate for relocation money, something that they would have otherwise had no access to given that the building was not rent controlled. With all these reasons and maybe many others, the Marmion Royal tenant's union decided to go on a rent strike.[240]

The rent strike gained its legitimacy by first describing the protest as against the deplorable conditions of the building. The new owners inherited the neglect and disrepair of the building, but as the owners, were then liable for making their tenants' living situation hazard free. The tenants recorded water damage, pest infestations, mold, and other conditions that made the units unsafe and dangerous to inhabitants. The rent strike was legitimized because of these conditions. The underlying motivation was to pressure the new owners into a negotiation that ultimately resulted in the tenants staying in their units. The rent strike delayed the process of eviction and gave the Marmion Royal

[240] "I believe the first motivation was the mass or multiple evictions. Tenants felt entitled to the space after years of model tenants infuriated them as to the new landlord's devaluation of tenants. Several tenants went to their local councilman office seeking help only to be told there was nothing they could do. Infuriating them even more when nascent policy and legal discussions at…" – editorial note by John Urquiza, June 2020

Tenants' Union time to organize and strategize. The new owners decide to continue with their plan and began remodeling with the tenants still inside, further compromising the already low quality of life conditions of the units.

John said that "after the rent strike, they start doing these harassment tactics. Construction, turning on water, turning off water, turning the power off, making snap inspections. And then they started the sandblasting. The sandblasting was like the last straw." [241] The sandblasting and other renovations to the building continued as the tenants continued to strike inside. Not able to remove them, the new owners decided to use the construction as a harassment strategy, creating noise and air pollution (particularly with the sandblasting); covering windows and cutting off light; and restricting access to building from 9am to 5pm for more sandblasting inside. The tenants had had enough and barred the construction workers from entrance. While people took shifts standing guard at the doors, others inside danced and broke bread as part of their continued and defiant inhabitation of the building.

According to John, the Marmion Royal was a central part of the community where many people in the neighborhood had lived previously or were related to someone who had lived there. "Everybody passed through that building in one sense or another." John commented that the tenants in the building had each gone through multiple forms of displacements prior to this one, either because of civil war, economic hardship, or because of a predatory loan that some in the building had lost their home to before

[241] "it is important to note that this all escalated day by day. Before the rent strike it was low level threats by the landlord, minor harassment and disinformation."

moving into the Marmion Royal. This building, and the larger neighborhood, was in many ways a refuge for people. The union itself would also become a site for actual community development. “And their kids were playing together. And they knew of each other. They knew this person, but they never actually met them. And so, it was beautiful to see them all coming together at the church and these meetings and interacting socially and coming together.” John continues, “… this is credit to Lis, she was always doing henna on the kids. And I think a lot of that helped, because it built this trust and family with the kids so much that we took [th]em on a field trip. We took [th]em to the Audubon [center].”

Chapter 4.5

"Housing is a Human Right"



Figure 4.5-1: "Housing is a Human Right" light projected onto a building vacated by Moses Kagan in an employment of the Ellis Act.[242] Photo Credit: Miguel Ramos.

My project has broadly focused on the (anti-)displacement genealogies evoked by anti-displacement organizers in Northeast Los Angeles. In Highland Park, a predominantly non-Black Latinx neighborhood in NELA, the expression of a Chicanx place-based anti-displacement genealogy is often rooted in the terms of race and its internalized positionings of otherness juxtaposed to Los Angeles' Anglo history and identity, The

[242] The Ellis Act is a provision under California legislation that allows landlords to exit out of the rental market. The act has been used as a wide spread tactic in gentrifying cities up and down the state to evict low-income tenants. The landlord is given the legal right to do so as long as the property is removed from the rental market for the minimum of 5 years.

battle over gentrification, as I have demonstrated, has often taken on this binary, where a paradigmatic Latinidad is placed in opposition to the figurative and literal whitewashing gentrification brings and speculation requires. My analysis thus far has challenged the ways in which in that binary has summoned other genealogies/ traditions of (anti-)displacement rooted in the region's settler colonial and anti-Black history and overall (social, political, economic and libidinal) infrastructure. My emphasis on anti-Blackness as a central instrument for non-Black Latinx community's capacities to take shape and claim hold of the Los Angeles social, political and economic landscape, directs me to investigate the anti-Black subtext contained within anti-displacement organizing. In other words, this chapter interrogates the commonly declared statement of anti-displacement activist who protest that "housing is a human right." I ask, which standard of "human" is being reinforced? Adding, what does it mean to center Black lives in (anti-)displacement organizing, and in the context of predominantly non-Black Latinx neighborhoods?

The Libidinal Economy of Housing

Frank Wilderson, quoting Jared Sexton, defines the libidinal economy as the "economy, or distribution and arrangement, of desire and identification (their condensation and displacement), and the complex relationship between sexuality and the unconscious." The organization of desire and its inter-exchange with its political-economic elements fuel the housing market and sustain it as an industry actively commodifies desires, making "the home" (or property as a concept) a fetish object. The home for Black and Brown people who have been denied access to property view the

home as an object of displaced desires for security, stability, and wealth (social and material). However, in the United States, the concept of property itself exists in the form of an enclosure that necessitates exclusion of the "Black body" from the "White home". As Craig Willse writes in *The Value of Homelessness,* "a house is a technology for the organization and distribution of life, health, illness, and death…. a house is a thing that makes live and lets die", adding that "to be housed is to be disciplined into ways of living and being that allow for forms of security and protection afforded within a neoliberal economy. This is an economy that extracts value from the abandonment of entire populations of people."[243] In other words (and has been evident in the history of residential segregation and extralegal murders of Trayvon Martin, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor[244], among countless others), the property form becomes tangible through the death and exclusion, the ontological denial/ negation of Black bodies.

Borrowing from Martha D. Escobar's critique of immigrant rights discourse, an emphasis on families (and specifically working families) is an implicit distancing from a pathological narrative of Black families and subjectivity in the United States [245]. Gesturing towards a politics of respectability, this leads to an internal policing of the Latinx community. A criminalizing rhetoric of Latinx youth, that is a measure of disassociation with the abjection of blackness, creates the fissures that facilitate internal

---

[243] Craig Willse, *The Value of Homelessness: Managing Surplus Life in the United States* (U of Minnesota Press, 2015).
[244] CNN, "Warrant in Fatal Encounter between Breonna Taylor and Police Was Linked to Gentrification Plan, Family's Lawyers Claim."
[245] Robin DG Kelley, Yo'mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America (Beacon Press, 2001); Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Diacritics 17, no. 2 (1987): 65–81; Martha D. Escobar, Captivity beyond Prisons: Criminalization Experiences of Latina (Im) Migrants (University of Texas Press, 2016).

models of displacement within Latinx neighborhoods.[246] The unwillingness to work with houseless people, gang members, people suffering from substance abuse and other mental health issues lend credibility to the benign and benevolent posturing of capital and the state (in gentrification and policing). Jodi Melamed's conceptualization of neoliberal multiculturalism encapsulates a form of "propertied citizenship"[247] that requires aspects of "community policing,"[248] or the recruitment of Black and Brown people to be the mediators for police as well as speculative capital.[249]

If we accept the premise that the property form can only exist in the matrix of anti-Black ontological denial then to what end does the inclusion of non-white and specifically Black people into the realm of the property form mean for its underlying architecture of negation, not only of Black subjectivities, but of Indigenous subjectivities as well? Do reparations in the forms of government subsidized homeownership or assisted housing models that have worked to materialize white privilege and wealth while systematically denying (or requiring) the exclusion, incarceration, and surveillance of black bodies work to unravel the underlying architecture? Does a radical call to humanity and housing as a human right implode the property form and all its associated benefits?

---

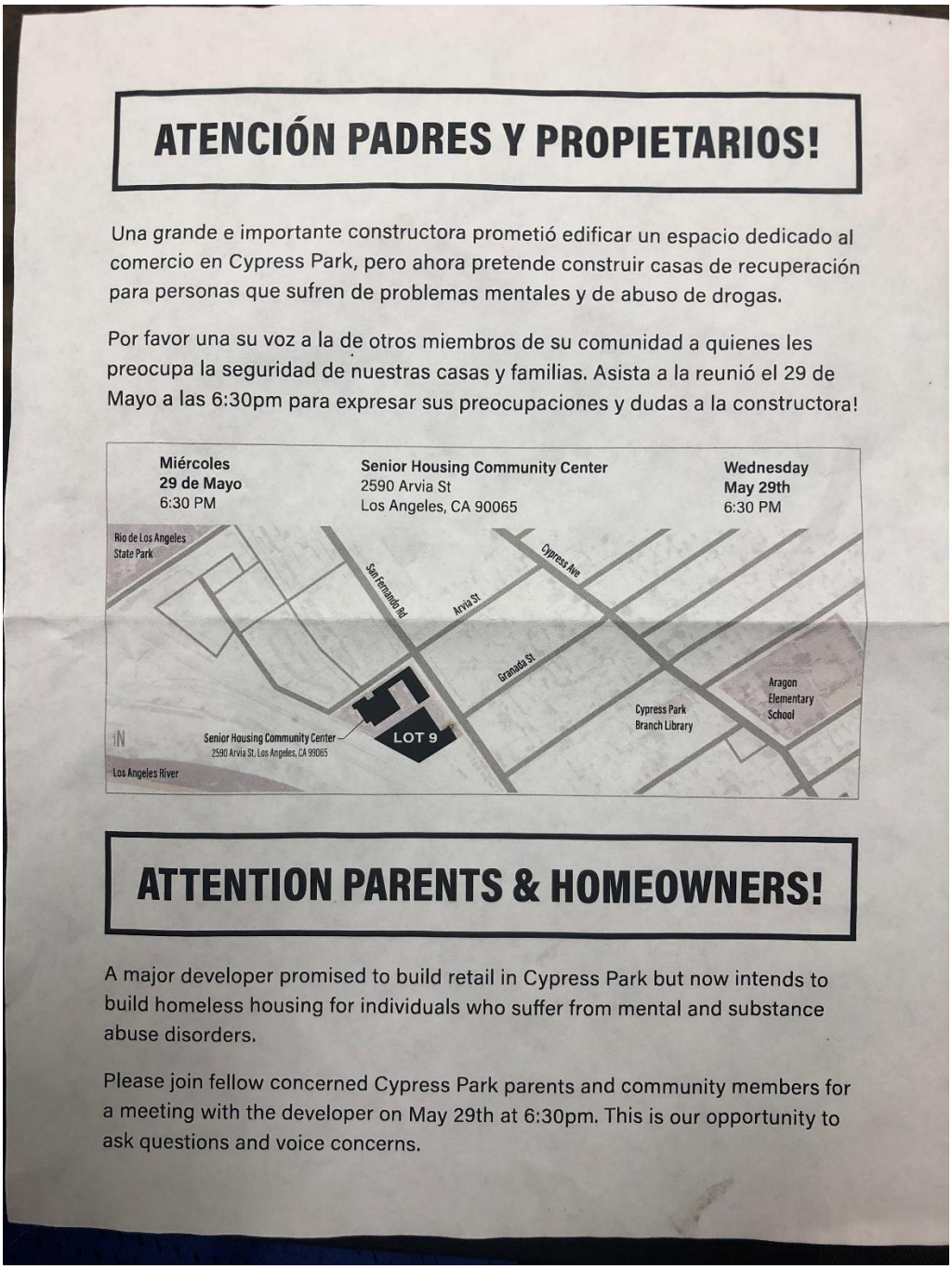
[246] De Genova, "' American' Abjection."
[247] Ananya Roy, "Paradigms Of Propertied Citizenship," *Urban Affairs Review - URBAN AFF REV* 38 (March 1, 2003): 463–91, https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087402250356.
[248] Jaime Amparo Alves, *The Anti-Black City: Police Terror and Black Urban Life in Brazil* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Muniz, "Disorderly Community Partners and Broken Windows Policing"; "Community Law Enforcement And Recovery (CLEAR) - Los Angeles Police Department," accessed May 23, 2020, http://www.lapdonline.org/special_operations_support_division/content_basic_view/1013.
[249] Jodi Melamed, Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism (U of Minnesota Press, 2011), https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=X9bo7r8G1iYC&oi=fnd&pg=PP2&dq=represent+and+destroy+melamed&ots=vLDnOMPl80&sig=UFmb65C12qFaziQTUGIIKpKomFA; Alves, The Anti-Black City.

At this point in my research these are only questions I can pose and cannot assume to answer.

However, access to wealth, homeownership (as a personal rather than a speculative investment), and housing stability are important and immediate causes to fight for in housing justice. Examples outside of Northeast Los Angeles also demonstrate where the creation of Black and Brown coalitional communities through the organization of land trusts do allow for a collective identification of struggle against predatory necrospeculative forces.[250] Outside of the realm of political organizing, the intimacy of Black and Brown Los Angeles have also fostered itself in the arts, collective cultural identities, and interpersonal relations.[251] These collective histories and strategies are important to note and represent a path forward for future generations of housing justice advocates and anti-displacement grassroots organizers. This chapter is a challenge to reassess the paradigmatic violence that coheres and contains non-Black Latinx communities in NELA. How has the non-Black Latinx community become complicit, not only in its own displacement, but the perpetual displacement of Black subjectivities to the point where Black Latinx peoples have been erased from the terrain of Latinidad in general? How has the Latinx communities' indignations over the mechanisms of

[250] "Back to the Land Trust," South Side Weekly, April 16, 2019, https://southsideweekly.com/looking-back-community-land-trust/; "Trust South LA - About Us," *T.R.U.S.T. South LA* (blog), accessed August 28, 2020, https://trustsouthla.org/about-us/.
[251] Gaye Theresa Johnson, "Spatial Entitlement: Race, Displacement, and Sonic Reclamation in Postwar Los Angeles," *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition*, 2014, 301–314; Josh Kun and Laura Pulido, *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition* (Univ of California Press, 2013); "Blaxicans of Los Angeles (@blaxicansofla) • Instagram Photos and Videos," accessed May 31, 2018, https://www.instagram.com/blaxicansofla/.

displacement that disproportionately affect Black people in Los Angeles worked to usurp Black suffering without actually addressing it?



ATENCIÓN PADRES Y PROPIETARIOS!

Una grande e importante constructora prometió edificar un espacio dedicado al comercio en Cypress Park, pero ahora pretende construir casas de recuperación para personas que sufren de problemas mentales y de abuso de drogas.

Por favor una su voz a la de otros miembros de su comunidad a quienes les preocupa la seguridad de nuestras casas y familias. Asista a la reunió el 29 de Mayo a las 6:30pm para expresar sus preocupaciones y dudas a la constructora!

Miércoles
29 de Mayo
6:30 PM

Senior Housing Community Center
2590 Arvia St
Los Angeles, CA 90065

Wednesday
May 29th
6:30 PM

ATTENTION PARENTS & HOMEOWNERS!

A major developer promised to build retail in Cypress Park but now intends to build homeless housing for individuals who suffer from mental and substance abuse disorders.

Please join fellow concerned Cypress Park parents and community members for a meeting with the developer on May 29th at 6:30pm. This is our opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns.

Figure 4.5-2: "Attention Parents and Homeowners!" - A flyer in opposition to the buidling of permanent supportive housing for formerly houseless populations in Los Angeles.

The Human/ Non-Human Divide

John Urquiza, beyond working with NELAA, also works with Recycled Resources. It is a group that seeks to help homeless people by giving them access to basic utilities. Generated as a response to the houselessness that gentrification and displacement creates, they, in collaboration with All Saints Episcopal Church in Highland Park, opened a temporary winter shelter. At the time, Los Angeles was becoming aware of the unfolding crisis of record houselessness in the city. In Highland Park especially, we had dozens of people set up encampments along the arroyo. People who grew up in Highland Park, faced displacement, but refused to leave or had no other option/ place to go, "estimated as nearly 200 folks in 75 encampments" according to John. He also calculated that about 80% of the people in the shelter were self-professed from the neighborhood.[252] The opening of the shelter was also in response to one of the wettest winters Los Angeles had seen in quite a few years.

The shelter houses 40 people on any given night in winter. Its open for 3 months out of the year and just closed on a successful second year at the time of our interview. The shelter reaches capacity every night that its open. John says it is not enough. All the shelters in Los Angeles are full and this shelter is no exception. The demand is too high. In the first year, John comments on how the shelter struggled to gain political support and

[252] "everyone I interviewed, spole with could list an address where they lived or name the school they attended. In the clusters of homeless encampments there were many locally grown attachments including one group who lived in the same building on avenue 57 others who went to elementary school together." – editorial note by John Urquiza, June 2020.

financial support. They ran on donations for food and volunteers to staff it. Some of the neighbors were critical of its opening, considering it is in a residential neighborhood, they hated to see the "blight" of homelessness on the streets. However, the residents of highland park in general recognize that gentrification is happening. It is a working-class neighborhood that is sympathetic to its neighbors that faced displacement. All in all, the only people who feel impacted by an opening and running of a shelter in their neighborhood are those that spent a lot of money to buy or renovate their property.

After the closing of the shelter this year, John comments that all the people had to go back to the streets. He says it is always a hard experience for him and this year was no different. He says that a lot of them took up residence in the parking lots that sit behind the recently bought and renovated buildings on Figueroa Ave. Just down the street from the shelter itself, he says they will stay there until they are most likely kicked out (either by police or private security). The experience he comments on with his friend, is that one night she was summoned to a real estate company's party whom just occupied an office on the top floor of the Frank's Camera in Highland Park (just above a new butcher shop and beauty salon). The real estate company had promised to donate 2500 dollars towards the shelter and John's friend and colleague was there to pick it up. When she arrived, she was taken aback by the large presence of luxury cars. She also came across the houseless people that stayed in the shelter she helped found and run. Once they recognized her, they called her over at which point they graciously moved aside their tents to give her the parking sport they had been occupying. As soon as she reached the second floor of the building to collect the check, she was once again hit by the grandeur of wealth in front of

her face. She could not handle it. The emotion running through her body moved her to burst out in tears and run away. She left with the check, “but remained conflicted for weeks” according to John.



Figure 4.5-3: Frank's Camera in Highland Park. Credit: The Eastsider LA

John stated that “what Rebecca was telling me about the party that she went to that night, was that they were giving money to the homeless shelter, and they were completely oblivious of the homeless people in the parking lot, and around them, and

how they got there." He says the arrogance and entitlement of gentrifies lies in their unwillingness to come face to face with the impact they are having on the neighborhood.[253] As covered by Marketplace in their series *York and Fig*, on the gentrification of Highland Park, the business of "retenanting" is a normalized practice with all its implications of adverse effect:

> "find commercial buildings with low-rent tenants occupying storefronts, ideally on month-to-month leases, then 'kick them out, retenant the property with new tenants at market rate,' Nicole explained. Nicole admits this can sound predatory. 'I do feel bad,' she said. 'But it is a business. And when these people are paying under-market rents, and we have a client that owns the property, we have to look out for our client's best interest.'"[254]

John had developed relationships with people who had been and are still vulnerable to displacement. He says it is an awareness that most people moving in avoid. People who see homelessness as a nuisance or bad for their business. John states that according to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), around 80% of people homeless in the streets of Los Angeles are in neighborhoods that they had resided in for more than 10 years. Based on field work John had done at the encampments aligning the arroyo and 110 freeway, he states "there were 75 encampments in the arroyo, almost 200 people. 90% of them were from Highland Park." He said their families with children, the elderly and everyone in between, evicted from buildings, their homes foreclosed on, and with no place to go.

---

[253] "not to mention a couple living in the parking lot had previously lived in that same upstairs protoin of frank's camera building was displaced when the property was purchased." – editorial note by John Urquiza, June 2020.

[254] "York & Fig | Marketplace.Org," accessed December 16, 2017, https://features.marketplace.org/yorkandfig/the-blog/.

The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority year after year conduct a homelessness count, to capture a point in time assessment of the houseless population in Los Angeles County. Beginning since 2013, when the housing market made its resurgence from the recession, every year has seen a rise in the number of makeshift encampments, total number of unhoused, and people experiencing houselessness for the first time. Measures H and other voter approved propositions, has funneled more money into services and transitional and permanent supportive housing. Correlating directly to rise in the number of people housed every year. Despite (and maybe because of the money's obscuring effect on the underlying issues) houselessness has continued to rise every year, breaking the records the previous year had set. Included in all of this is the disproportionate representation of the Black population among those unhoused. In 2017, 47% of the total unhoused population in Los Angeles was Black, despite only making up 9% of the total population of the city.

Non-Black Latinx Necrospeculative Investments

The response to the housing crisis and rising rate of encampments in NELA are varied. Part of what Laura Pulido and Manuel Pastor suggested when they claimed that the housing and "foreclosure crisis is leading to greater social and economic polarization among Latinas/os with racial implications." John Urquiza encountered it in his continued tenant outreach after Marmion Royal. He claims that it made it very difficult to organize rent-control buildings especially, because of the lack of unity and peoples' preference for a cash buy out. John describes it as such, "so there was several apartments there with

gang members. And it was really difficult to reconcile all these different sides. There're Spanish-speaking immigrants, undocumented. There's Chicano immigrants, there's some white dudes. Well, one white dude." Some in the community were all enlisted to enforce the evictions of other tenants. Speaking on the experience of his fellow organizers,

> these two guys, Latinos working for the owners to vacate the building, making cash for keys offers ... They literally assaulted him to get him out the building, and kept pushing, and pushing, and pushing. They knocked him down and got him out of the building, physically with physical violence. And so, and here they are trying to rip off immigrant families that are paying $700 a month for an apartment.

Returning to Pulido and Pastor, they note that the expanded numbers of Latinx first time home buyers, in the suburbs and city, were more precarious than previous generations. It's exactly because of this fragility that their possessive claims to the human/ property form have been so staunch. John likewise commented that "the established people there [Lincoln Heights] are all pro-gentrification. They want development. They voted for the Lincoln Heights jail to go to a luxury loft developer. And that's why they're fighting five lot affordable housing or transitional housing."

This reaction had been growing for some time. As mentioned in chapter 1, it is a reverberation of the necrospeculative infrastructure of Highland Park as an enclosure racially exclusive to Black bodies especially. The position of middle class and other Latinxs invested in the respectability politics of homeownership viewed upon the decades of white flight and subsequent influx of immigrant populations as a void in Highland Park's history, filled with gangs and violence. John classified it as such,

> "well, the gangs. Their difference, their isolation, their ... They were the others in this community. And so, the economic decline and the value of their own ... Well, actually no they didn't lose value, they just didn't gain value like the rest of the country, or the rest of

> the city. Now they've gained that value. But they're also losing what was here. That's a big part of why Latinos are for gentrification, too. Is the value of their own stuff." [255]

This was true of white residents who during this time harkened back to the "good bones" of the community, the architectural and White history of Highland Park as the basis of a campaign to return to that history in lieu of what took its place. Something much darker and more undesirable. This desire was institutionalized in the Highland Park Heritage Trust and Highland Park Historic Preservation Overlay Zone. This return was also desired by Latinx peoples who hoped for some dividends in their investments to the human/ property form. John, referring to a mutual friend, said that "Celestina said it best. She said when her family moved here, for them it was like moving to Beverly Hills. This was the nice Mexican part of town, or the nice Latino part of town."

The continued Latinx investments in the police, real estate, and a politics of respectability are fundamentally anti-Black. They are complicit and sometimes flat out guilty in perpetuating a rhetoric that informs policies of violence leading to the disproportionate impact and premature death of Black lives in Los Angeles. Are divestments in all three are necessary to attack the infrastructures of Black death. They also are not conducive to a strategy that preserves non-Black Latinx places either, as we encountered with the Marmion Royal and other buildings.

[255] John further elaborated that "stuff" refers to "assets social, cultural and economic."

The Moral Universe of Obligation

A focus on the necrospeculative, or the financial apparatus of necropolitical will for the market-state, reveals other elements of the neighborhood's up trending exchange value that similarly required, as with the Marmion's removal of its low-income tenants, a premature death of its "subversive racial elements." The very utterance of "housing as a human right" reveals the fabric of a systemic negation that express the limits of the category and its exclusions of black bodies. Sylvia Wynter refers to this as a differential between the "classes (upper middle, middle, lower middle and working, whether capital owners or jobholders)" subsumed under a "universe of moral obligation", a term she borrows from Helen Fein's conceptualization of the discursive mechanisms for Armenian and Jewish genocide.[256] Written out of this Universe is "the category of the non-owning jobless young of the inner cities; primarily Black and Latino, and increasingly also, White, assimilated to its underclass category."[257] This differential is more than circumstantial, leading to life outcome disparities for Black bodies. As Wynter declares, "statistics with respect to this empirical fact have been cited over and over again."[258] Anti-blackness to the "Universe of moral obligation" (i.e. civil society) is "*an imperative condition of its own systemic function* [original emphasis]."[259]

An appeal to the morality of the market state within a "universe of obligation" fell flat as a tactic as evidenced by the defeat of the Marmion Royal Tenant's union in pre-

[256] Wynter Sylvia, "No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues," in *Forum NHI Knowledge for the 21st Century, Knowledge on Trial*, vol. 1, 1994, 42–71.
[257] Sylvia.
[258] Sylvia.
[259] Sylvia.

court briefing and not long after, the defeat of Prop 10[260], a bill overpowered by the insurmountable spending of the real estate lobby in the campaign to preserve the precarity of low income tenants in California. However, it was the tenants' union's capacity to inscribe themselves within the moral universe of the "Human" (overrepresented by Western European Man[261]) as working families that their campaign was able to gain traction. The implicit (and sometimes explicit) anti-black rhetoric pushed forward is one that Martha D. Escobar has similarly identified within the campaigns for immigrant rights in the US.[262] The declaration of a belonging to the human/ property form that is expressed within the "American grammar" where the black body "becomes a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific."[263] As Wilderson writes elsewhere, "dreams of liberation… are inessential to and more parasitic on the Black, and more emphatic in their guarantee of Black suffering, than any dream of human liberation in any era heretofore."[264]

Like Escobar, my reading of the housing justice movement in Northeast Los Angeles examines how the technologies of captivity can and do subsume non-black populations (as Wynter expressed). However, it is the tactic of evasion employed by anti-

[260] Prop 10 in 2018 was a statewide campaign spearheaded by housing justice advocates to remove Costa Hawkins legislation. In 1994 Costa Hawkins was passed after nearly a decade of the real estate lobby's work to reverse the protections gained by renters in the passing of rent stabilization ordinances in key municipalities at the end of the 1970s. Costa Hawkins prevents all municipalities in the state from updating their rent control laws, arresting their applicability on new developments and removing vacancy control – a provision to hold rent control units in affordability, in perpetuity.
[261] Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom."
[262] Martha D. Escobar, *Captivity beyond Prisons: Criminalization Experiences of Latina (Im) Migrants* (University of Texas Press, 2016).
[263] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe."
[264] Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black*, 29.

displacement organizers that reproduce the captivity inherent to the "systemic functioning" of the "moral universe of obligation."[265] The argument of causality connecting the current and expanding houselessness crisis (breaking records every year) with the lack of affordable housing often falls short of identifying the systemic nature of necrospeculative finance that actively requires displacement in order to generate profit. The critique of this socio-economic calculus is present in grassroots anti-displacement circles and has made its way into almost all levels of the "universe of obligation", resulting in governmental calls for rent moratoriums and stronger legislation protecting vulnerable tenants.[266] Almost wholly missing from the sources of this critique is a recognition of the disparity produced by the "empirical fact" of anti-blackness and the technologies of captivity, reducing to the flesh, a specter of the houseless figure who haunts and threatens the order of civil society. A houseless population overly represented by Los Angeles' black population and the result of what Ananya Roy terms a "racial banishment", to which we can relabel as a perpetual *black banishment* from the cartographies of the human/ property form.[267] The call for "Housing as a Human Right" on one end can be considered a radical claim to humanity, and on the other as a proscription of certain bodies from the category of the "human".

---

[265] Sylvia, "No Humans Involved."
[266] "Newsom Signs California Rent Cap Bill to Protect Tenants - Los Angeles Times," accessed May 15, 2020, https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2019-10-08/california-rent-cap-tenant-protections-signed; "New L.A. Ordinance Slaps Moratorium on Evictions Ahead of Jan. 1," Los Angeles Times, October 22, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2019-10-22/los-angeles-eviction-moratorium.
[267] Ananya Roy, "Racial Banishment," *Keywords in Radical Geography: Antipode at 50*, 2019, 227–230; "2823 - Report And Recommendations Of The Ad Hoc Committee On Black People Experiencing Homelessness," accessed March 1, 2020, https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=2823-report-and-recommendations-of-the-ad-hoc-committee-on-black-people-experiencing-homelessness.

The Burden of Proof

The moral argument presented was a plea to both the state and the new owners for a sense of humanity or ethical responsibility to not push out the tenants from their building and effectively, from the neighborhood and maybe even the city. The premise of their inclusion into the "moral universe of obligation" was tied to a value system that emphasized the hetero-patriarchal family structure and their social positions as laboring, and thus deserving, bodies. A positionality that Martha Escobar identifies as implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) anti-Black.[268] Although the tenants were from diverse backgrounds (i.e. Black, White, Asian, and Latinx), the grand majority were Latinx; zero, first, and second generation from North, Central, South America. Most tenants in the building decided to join the union minus one White family whom firmly opposed the indignation of the other tenants, and a couple others who did not want to compromise their Section 8 status (the waitlist at that point was 10 years long in Los Angeles). The one young white couple that did decide to side with the rent strike and join the union was a fairly new addition to the building and neighborhood. Part of the new of tenants Gelena Wasserman stated in the article quoted above, that created a demand for high-end apartments. Her inclusion to the union was central to the overall legal defense of the eviction proceedings the union would become embroiled in shortly.

The accusation of discrimination was levied against the new owners because of their unwillingness to grant a right of return to their non-white tenants. Unlike the other

[268] Escobar, *Captivity beyond Prisons*.

tenants, who were told only to leave as soon as possible, the new owner had extended a right of return to their white tenant. At a slightly higher cost, she was afforded the opportunity to return to her apartment once the remolding was over. The financial formula that makes the investment of the building a lucrative endeavor is a derivative of the social calculus that declares the lives of non-white people's differential and undervalued. From a history of redlining in Los Angeles, Black bodies especially have historically represented "subversive elements" that equate to a racialized risk for financial institutions (i.e. banks), depreciating the value of their adaptions to the human/ property form. In the case of Marmion Royal and the many buildings like it throughout the city, the human right to housing and the civil right protecting against housing discrimination only applies to those able to afford the commercial good.

To the new owners, the only obligation they had were to their investors. Their purchase of the building was an aggressive financial move to create profit for the Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) that the Wasserman's were coordinating.[269] From their perspective, the obligation to the tenants they inherited were none. They did not even recognize them as "their tenants" and when they began to resist their evictions, they then became a nuisance, apropos a "subversive racial element." They then worked just as aggressively to remove the tenants. The attempt to bargain with the new owners on terms that did not result in the tenants' immediate dispersal were not entertained. They effectively saw them as non-subjects. The sense of injustice that was pushing these

[269] "the wassermans are part of a larger real estate investment family who assests include more than $200 million worth of assets throughout the southwest." – editorial note by John Urquiza, June 2020.

tenants to fight, motivated them to get aide from their elected representatives as well. As the press release for Marmion Royal Tenants Union *Ya Basta Action* reads,

> The markets exploitive nature and Los Angeles' impotent *Rent Stabilization Ordinance* offer no protections. Tenants Florina V. and husband Oscar B. and several neighbors found out the hard way when they visited Councilman Cedillo's office seeking help. The staffers' told them their building was not under rent control and there was nothing they could do to help. Only multi-unit buildings built before 1979 qualify for rent control and the Marmion Royal was built in 1989. This lack of protection allows landlords to raise rents as high as they deem, but it also releases a flood of evictions when the housing demand is too high. Spanish speaking Flor and Oscar moved into the building when their son Eric was only nine years old. Today, Eric is knocking door-to-door asking his neighbors to save his home and stand with him and the forty-three other tenants against the Wassermans' real estate empire.

The tenants' union with the support of their lawyer, Elana Popp of Evicition Defense Network, Los Angeles Tenants Union, NELAA, and members of the surrounding community took the fight to the public, with the moral argument growing firmly on their side. They built a legal defense that alleged housing discrimination based on the differential treatment of the white vs non-white tenants in the building, as mentioned above. On the day of the pre-trail hearing each side presented their case. The judge presiding over the case had heard many cases involving discrimination before. John said he "had basically heard all the evidence and said, 'you don't have enough here for a case, get out'." The union was refused their day in court, their collective experience insufficient evidence in proving they had been discriminated against, the new owners would not negotiate, and the state was not only complicit in their eviction they enforced it through the Sheriff department-issued unlawful detainer. John explains this moment as such,

> this is a pivotal moment for me, is the day that the sheriffs came and locked the first five tenants out of the Marmion. It was raining that day. It was drizzling, it was gray. I just got a text from one of the tenants saying the sheriff was here. I ran down there. By the time I got there, the sheriff was gone. I couldn't find anybody. I walked into the parking lot and I see Hortensia and her family sitting in their van and I had my camera in my hand and

> her husband's at the wheel, like just waiting to go. Hortensia is like fidgeting and she's like kept rubbing her leg. She was just super nervous. Her kids were in the back, like three kids in the backseat, like playing on their phones. One of the daughters was asleep in another car because she worked nights. That was the moment where I could unequivocally say gentrification is violence.

John claims that after they lost their day in court and every tenant had been displaced from the building 60% of them had to leave Highland Park and the NELA region. Adding, as John states, "the 40% that stayed, their rent increased to more than 50% of their income. One of them even 70% of his income." Four families became homeless immediately after their evictions. They eventually found housing, some as far as Hesperia (the exurbs of Los Angeles) while still commuting 3 hours to Hollywoood to continue their position as a security guard. One of the fourth was still living from motel to motel, unable to find affordable housing. They eventually did in South Central, another part of the city of Los Angeles experiencing their own unique forms of racial banishment.

John asserts that despite all this, there was still a sense of accomplishment.[270] "The victory was in that tenants were able to save eight months' rent." In addition, to the monetary gain that otherwise acted as relocation assistance for the tenants, the lesson was that resistance was possible and without it they could have been in a worst position. They made the owners listen to them, disturbed their bottom lines, prevented them from renovating the building fully, they got the city to pay attention, and organized their neighbors in a popular movement against displacement in the region.

[270]John subsequently defined it as "a 'desperate sense of accomplishment'" – editorial note by John Urquiza, June 2020.