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Los Angeles

Drive Time

A Sensory History of Car Cultures from 1945 to 1990
in Los Angeles

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

Peter Sebastian Chesney

2021

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2021

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Drive Time

A Sensory History of Car Cultures from 1945 to 1990

in Los Angeles

by

Peter Sebastian Chesney

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Eric Avila, Chair

This project began with questions about the tremendous amount of time those in Los Angeles have spent inside their automobiles. “Drive Time” argues for the significance of car cultures as sites where drivers articulated numerous varieties of social difference, which have included sexual, racial, moral, and spatial hierarchies. Sensory studies has proven a helpful methodology for work about undocumented uses of technology, for drivers left traces of their hidden activities and personal attitudes all over their vehicles and along roadside strips in the half-century after the Second World War. “Drive Time” presents these findings in a series of twelve case studies of McDonald’s, of the Rose Parade, of *Rebel Without a Cause*, of Pop Art, of the Beach Boys, of the 1965 Watts Rebellion, of former Governor Ronald Reagan’s talk radio show, of Cheech & Chong, of the Hillside Strangler attacks, of the *Thomas Guide*, of taco trucks, and of drive-by shootings. Readers will find this approach involves polysensory descriptions of taste, touch, smell, sight, and sound. The result is a rereading of the centrality of the automobile to the forming of the senses - as well as their reformation - in Los Angeles’s motorist monoculture.

The dissertation of Peter Sebastian Chesney is approved.

Lauren Derby

Marques Vestal

Peter Lunenfeld

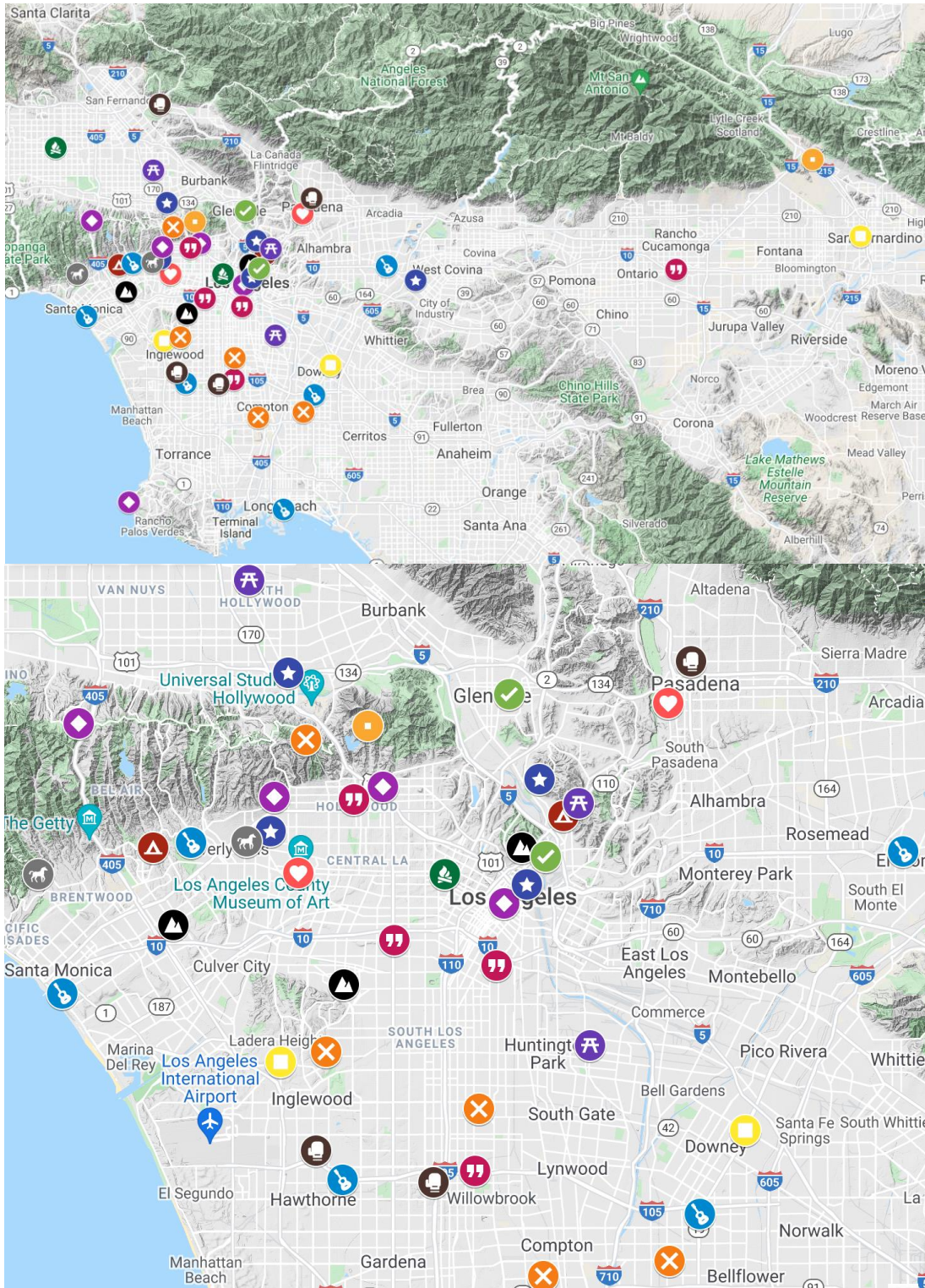
Eric Avila, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2021

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Greater Los Angeles at the end of the Second Millennium
 The distribution of the sites mentioned in “Drive Time”¹

¹ https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1mQpy6WbMN_SjldSj8LvD3vn23khr01mQ&usp=sharing

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Lastly, to my family, my guiding stars, you have cared for me and given me the best early-to-middle years. Thank you to my parents Kent and Susan, my sister Laura and her fiancé Xander, my cousin Julia, my partner's people: Joanne, Colin, Jasmín, Joaquin, and Damian. To my partner Broghan, you have been the best part of my time at UCLA, and I'm so glad this ends just in time for us two to begin a greater work. My love to you, little Alistair, our solstice baby.

VITA

Prior to these eight years at UCLA, I was born and raised in L.A. County. My interest in culture and history is a reflection of what members of my family learned at institutions like Glendale Community College and Occidental College.

I started to plan for a career in history at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. My advisor, Dr. Mita Choudhury, and a number of other historians on the faculty inspired me. I wrote a thesis about political violence in the French Revolution graduated with a B.A., cum laude, in 2008. The department gave me the Laura Adelina Ward prize for my accomplishments in English and European history. I was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, the Mu chapter of New York.

Between my undergraduate and graduate years, I worked for five years as a middle- and high-school teacher at an independent school. When I arrived at UCLA, I found myself nearly alone in a cohort of students who had gotten master's degrees, some from elite universities like Chicago and Columbia, others from nearby public institutions like the Cal States. The next fall, 2014, I passed my exams and won "best paper" at a conference at Washington University St. Louis. The following years, I got to showcase my talents as a teacher, first as a T.A. for one year and then as the department's Teaching Excellence Coordinator for two years.

While a graduate student, I took odd jobs and gigs because I did not want to become beholden to grant-giving institutions like rightwing foundations or the federal government. The only time I ever trusted such philanthropy was when I worked with the Luskin Center for History and Policy. There I contributed to two year-long projects, a study of rent control and a study of traffic reduction. My other gigs have included stints as a substitute teacher, show development for Netflix's *The Warmth of Other Suns*, and research assistance for four books. Head hunters approached me with the chance to leave my Ph.D. ABD for a career in industry, but I didn't.

Drive Time

A Sensory History of
Car Cultures
from 1945 to 1990 in
Los Angeles



“the two calmest and most rewarding hours of their daily lives”
Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, 1971²

Reyner Banham, a visiting architecture historian from Great Britain, noticed automobile drivers in Los Angeles had learned to love their commutes. The sight of a car seemed to make them about as happy as a dog that has just seen its master grab the leash before a walk. With this enthusiasm in mind, I have decided not to use pejorative terms “rush hour” and “peak hour” in my dissertation about the history of driving. Those sociologically-inflected terms date to the

² Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (Harper & Row, 1971), 204. For the image, see Justin McGuirk, “Reyner Banham: Icon of the Month,” *Icon*, 16 December 2009.

Victorian city and its transportation by omnibus, train, carriage, or subway. These were the years before the automobile's mass adoption. They evoke the discomforts of an early morning or a late afternoon navigating train stations packed with rushing commuters. The definitive moment during these hours of daily life was the wait in a line while sometimes watching one full train car after another pass by before the commuter got to embark.³ With regard to morning and afternoon automobile driving, I find the better term for Banham's "two calmest and most rewarding hours" to be "drive time," which came from the culture industry and which I have chosen as my title.⁴

Banham never used the term "drive time," but a survey of Los Angeles area newspapers shows the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, a Black-owned serial publication, had recently coined it in a 1967 article promoting radio station KGFJ's Larry McCormick and his "drive-time show." A Black man, he had studied at Kansas City University and hosted a campus radio show. There McCormick cultivated a talent for voice work. He then moved to Los Angeles for a job as a "deejay" - or disc jockey - and a pioneering talk show host from 1958 until leaving radio in 1969 for television news. He started at channel 13 and then anchored for 33 years at KTLA.⁵ By 1972,

³ For histories of public transportation in the United States and in Los Angeles, see Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Harvard University Press, 1962), William Fulton, *The Reluctant Metropolis: The Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), Jeremiah B.C. Axelrod, *Inventing Autopia: Dreams and Visions of the Modern Metropolis in Jazz Age Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2009), and James Nicholas Stroup, "Jitneys, Buses, and Public Transportation in Twentieth Century Los Angeles," University of California Riverside dissertation, 2015.

⁴ The "culture industry" was what the German Jewish refugee Marxist intellectuals who came to the U.S. from the Frankfurt School to work in cultural propaganda, military intelligence, and university teaching called Hollywood filmmaking, Madison Avenue advertising, and other forms of mass entertainment during their stay. See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment* (Verso, 1997 [originally in 1944]) and Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Beacon Press, 1964). For more on the Frankfurt School and the stops of its exiles in Los Angeles, see Stuart Jeffries, *Grand Abyss Hotel: The Lives of the Frankfurt School* (Verso, 2016) and Ehrhard Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism* (University of California Press, 2007). I take this categorical term from the culture industry in answer to a call from James W. Cook, "The Return of the Culture Industry," in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present & Future*, James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O'Malley, eds. (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 291-317.

⁵ "Radio Disc Jockey Hosts Talk Show," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 30 March 1967. Ron Dungee, "Newsman Larry McCormick Honored by KTLA," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 31 May 2001. Dennis McLellan, "Larry McCormick, 71," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 August 2004.

Los Angeles Times announced “drive-time” radio had commenced the “battle for ratings points.” These segments of time now stretched from 6 to 10 A.M. and from 3 to 7 P.M., so local radio producers had to curate eight hours per weekday of original driver-oriented programming.⁶ Television stations also adjusted their scheduling to daily commutes. Producers and marketers wanted drivers to have an opportunity to watch the news before leaving for work in the morning and upon coming home later in the day. In 1978, television executives at KNXT extended the length of the late afternoon news to two-and-a-half hours, because “Los Angeles has an arrive-home pattern so staggered you have to spread your news over a broad period of time.”⁷

Entertainment was the order of the day for drivers who watched television before they got in the car, listened to car audio while driving, and went home to watch more television. Not all had this privilege of time at home as time off work. In 1984, a conservative columnist named William Safire lamented the many phone calls he had to field at home and then denounced the coming of car phones and cellular phones. They constituted threats to “my blessed ‘drive time.’ My car is a 1969 Cougar, and its violent trembling when in neutral soothes my back better than any lounge chair with built-in vibrator-massager now being featured in the catalogues. A modern cassette stereo radio sits in the dashboard, playing the old Sinatra-Garland-Jolson songs that - if I tried playing them at work or home - would make my colleagues and family members sick. (My ‘Prince’ remains Machiavelli).”⁸ To Safire, who commuted from the suburbs into Washington, D.C., drive time was synonymous with leisure time. Access to communications in the car might have raised his productivity and shortened his workday, but the delights of operating a sporty

⁶ David Shaw, “Morning Radio: Fierce Battle Among Jockeys,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 September 1972.

⁷ Jay Sharbutt, “KNXT to try longer news show June 19,” *San Bernardino Sun*, 6 June 1978.

⁸ William Safire, “Calling All Cars - Well, Almost All Cars Maybe,” *Desert Sun*, 12 December 1984.

two-door car mattered even more. This “trembling” interior space constituted a complex pleasure for a man who had nowhere else to go and to listen, unharassed, to his preferred commercial Pop.

For the contrast to Safire, consider Raymond Novaco, the University of California, Irvine psychologist who studied the effects of driving and traffic delays on mood. The work he took to a 1988 UCLA symposium, “The Car and the City,” indicated not all drivers partook in Safire’s enthusiasm for automobility. Novaco used surveys to gather anonymous data from residents in California’s Orange County, and many of them confessed to recurring feelings of murderous rage while driving. These findings convinced the psychologist that driving in heavy traffic contributed to the high rates of violent crime in Southern California. One symptom of the mass frustration was a recent wave of freeway shootings, which had made international news. Novaco’s focus on displeasure in the car fit conveniently with the interests of the Drivetime Foundation,⁹ which had sponsored his research with \$5000 - just over twice that amount in 2021 dollars. Drivetime was a short-lived philanthropic organization belonging to entrepreneur Abraham Levy of Westlake Village. He patented CARCOOL, an accordion screen for drivers to keep beneath the windshield in order to prevent vehicles parked uncovered in sunlight from getting so hot. If driver anger was at all related to elevated temperatures in their cars, Levy sold them a palliative, but his funding for a study of road rage made this problem of road rage seem questionable, even a little fake.¹⁰

By tracking three uses of the term “drive time,” I have established the rising significance of driving as a less-studied portion of everyday life in U.S. cities of the middle-to-late Twentieth

⁹ Raymond W. Novaco, “Automobile Driving and Aggressive Behavior,” in *The Car and the City: The Automobile, the Built Environment, and Daily Urban Life*, Margaret Crawford and Martin Wachs, eds. (University of Michigan Press, 1992).

¹⁰ “Car Device Inventor Donates to UCI Study,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 February 1988. For more about how billionaire families, religious institutions, corporations, and foundations use philanthropy to shape intellectual and political life in the USA, see Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (Doubleday, 2016).

Century.¹¹ While driving, drivers were immersed in popular culture, lost in individual thought, and pulled into interpersonal conflict. Drive time was valuable to capitalists who recognized the driver's hunger for in-car entertainment and greater bodily comfort. The case studies I collect indicate that driving was also a matter of strenuous intellectual and political debate between car culture's apologists and boosters versus its critics and debunkers. A discourse about the uses and the joys of automobility endures, so neither side has yet won. Indeed, I myself feel ambivalent about everyday driving, for it is both a pleasant escape from work and home and terribly toxic for the earth's environment.¹² Driving involves a huge investment of non-renewable resources, including untold hours of our waking lives. To drive, especially for the average person in Los Angeles, has been more time-intensive than everything except working, sleeping, schooling, and

¹¹ Histories of everyday life in U.S. cities have highlighted fixed settings like the workplace, the home, the school, and "landscapes of consumption" (Cohen) For urban workplaces, see Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton University Press, 1996) and Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). For urban (and suburban) housing, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1987) and Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (University of Chicago Press, 2002). For urban schools, see Matthew D. Lassiter, *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton University Press, 2006) and Bryan Kovalesky, "Contested Campuses: Politics, Race, and the Battles over Public Education in the Greater Los Angeles Area, 1949-1972," UCLA dissertation, 2017. For consumption and entertainment, see Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (Vintage, 2003) and Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2004).

¹² A few of car culture's great apologists include Banham, *Los Angeles*, Ross D. Eckert and George E. Hilton, "The Jitneys," *The Journal of Law & Economics* 15 (1972), Scott Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of the Modern City* (University of California Press, 1987), Melvin M. Webber, "The Joys of Automobility," in *The Car and the City*, Matthew W. Roth, "Mulholland Highway and the Engineering Culture of Los Angeles in the 1920s," in *Metropolis in the Making*, Tom Sitton and William Deverell, eds. (University of California Press, 2001), Jeremy Packer, *Mobility without Mayhem: Safety, Cars, and Citizenship* (Duke University Press, 2008), and Genevieve Carpio, *Collisions at the Crossroads: How Place and Mobility Make Race* (University of California Press, 2019). A few of car culture's great debunkers include Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of the Great American Cities* (Vintage, 1961), Ralph Nader, *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-In Dangers of the American Automobile* (Grossman, 1965), Bradford C. Snell, *American Ground Transport: A Proposal for Restructuring the Automobile, Truck, Bus, and Rail Industries* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), Jane Holtz Kay, *Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Take It Back* (Crown, 1997), Katie Alvord, *Divorce your Car!: Ending the Love Affair with the Automobile* (New Society Publishers, 2000), Peter D. Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City* (MIT Press, 2008), and Eric Avila, *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

consuming.¹³ However, historians consistently show more interest in far less time-intensive activities, e.g. formal politics and elitist intellectual endeavors. For decades, people in this city were far more likely to drive than they were to vote in elections or to read books. “Drive Time” is thus a history of what people in Los Angeles actually did with their days instead of a history of what a few politically- or intellectually-engaged scholars wish had been done with all those days.

¹³ Works that brilliantly document how early the car’s shift to centrality in Los Angeles happened are by historians Clay McShane, *Along the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (Columbia University Press, 1995) and Matthew Allen Ides, “Cruising for Community: Youth Culture and Politics in Los Angeles, 1910-1970,” University of Michigan dissertation, 2009.

Sensory History

Impairment and Enhancement



The visionary experience is so very highly prized that throughout the ages of recorded history people have done their best to produce visions - they try to go to this other world by various artificial vehicles. Aldous Huxley, "Visionary Experience" (1960)¹⁴

Categorical differences between the intellectual vs. anti-intellectual and the political vs. apolitical collapse in sensory studies of human and parahuman consciousness. At the level of physical impression, prior to the mind's act of selecting sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and other feelings and then curating them into perceptions, seminal historical events and basic everyday life seem more than a little alike. At least, that has been the case for normative subjects with an unimpaired or an unenhanced sensorium. For my project, it is precisely the anomalies of impairment or of enhancement that are key sites in sensory history. Consider Aldous Huxley, the Los Angeles-based British expat scientist, novelist, philosopher, futurist, psychonaut, and person who lived with intermittent, partial-to-full blindness. During a quest for a cure, Huxley thought

¹⁴ For the images and the quotation from Aldous Huxley's lecture called "Visionary Experience" (6/4), see the Huxley Papers, Young Research Library Special Collections, UCLA, box 66, folder 48 and box 23, folder 10.

extensively about the mechanics of vision. His definition of myopia ranged from an inability to detect visual data with the eye to an inability to make sense of those data. For instance, when “[w]alking through a wood, a city dweller will be blind to a multitude of things which the trained naturalist will see without difficulty.”¹⁵ My dissertation reconstitutes this line of reasoning as:

Driving on plane R, person x will be trained to see [or will be blind to] a multitude of things.

That driver **x** sees less of the environment (plane **R**) is a recurring motif among the car culture’s most critical observers. Ray Bradbury, a Los Angeles-based science fiction writer who opted never to learn to drive a car, warned about a future with profound desensitization among high-speed drivers in 1953’s *Fahrenheit 451*.¹⁶ Huxley, who also never drove, claimed the opposite. His time riding in motor vehicles supposedly helped him regain capacity for sight. In *The Art of Seeing*, the author said, “When travelling by bus or car, myopes should take the opportunity provided of glancing with quick, ‘flashing’ regards at the lettering on billboards, shop-fronts and the like...Glance for a moment, and close the eyes. Then, if the movement of the vehicle permits it, glance again.”¹⁷ Huxley’s training in so-called “flashing” opened his eyes to a multitude of roadside attractions in plane **R**. The training continued, later with the help of the hallucinogenic drug mescaline, which Huxley described in 1954’s *The Doors of Perception*. Huxley staged his first ever trip as a literal car trip, for his wife drove him through Los Angeles, to a viewpoint in the Hollywood Hills, down to Schwab’s Drugstore, and out into the sprawl. There he experienced the best visuals: “The magic began to work again only when we turned

¹⁵ Aldous Huxley, *The Art of Seeing* (Chatto & Windus, 1943), 19. The copy I read is at Young Research Library Special Collections, UCLA.

¹⁶ A character named Clarisse asked, “Have you ever watched the jet cars racing on the boulevards down that way?...I sometimes think drivers don’t know what grass is, or flowers, because they never see them slowly...If you showed a driver a green blur, Oh yes! he’d say, that’s grass! A pink blur? That’s a rose garden! White blurs are houses. Brown blurs are cows. My uncle drove slowly on a highway once. He drove forty miles an hour and they jailed him for two days. Isn’t that funny, and sad, too?” Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (Ballantine Books, 1953).

¹⁷ Huxley, *The Art of Seeing*, 111.

down into a new suburb and were gliding between two rows of houses. Here, in spite of the peculiar hideousness of the architecture, there were renewals of transcendental otherness.” The hallucinating author in the passenger seat of a moving car believed he had seen the glowing sunlight, a Southern California signature, glinting off the suburban city’s stucco surfaces.¹⁸

Huxley was hardly the only person x in Los Angeles history who used vehicles like the car to transcend a sensational deficit and to create an enhanced sensorium. His ocularcentric visionary experience reflected a scientist’s belief in the supremacy of sight, which eclipsed other doors of perception. The bias was in keeping with the author’s pan-European, scientific roots. From ancient times when the prophets saw the future in the motion of celestial bodies to the so-called Enlightenment, the visual has reigned supreme among senses as a means of acquiring true knowledge in White men’s times of high technological modernity. To break away from this paradigm has long been a priority in ethnic, women’s, and queer studies, for the oppressed subject has often relied on other senses to evade the near-hegemonic power of the gaze in order to coordinate acts of solidarity among rebels and radicals. Historians who attend to bodily sensations like sound, smell, taste, touch, and any polysensorial combinations of two or more of the above can decode past acts and plans of oppressed peoples. Otherwise, their patterns of behavior have often appeared senseless to scholars as much as to observers occupying positions of power in the past.¹⁹ Indeed, master narratives that people in power told tend to collapse under the scrutiny of sensory history. We who read thickly for extra-visual sensual detail can pick apart visualists’ false or embellished stories, which masquerade as history. The sensory historian’s task

¹⁸ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (Harper & Row, 1964 [originally 1954]), 61-62.

¹⁹ Mark M. Smith, “Still Coming to ‘Our’ Senses: An Introduction,” *Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (September 2008), 378.

is to showcase anomalies from the archives, which have included impeded sightlines, misplaced tastes, unlikely smells, rehearsed-sounding exclamations, or an impossible resilience to pain.²⁰

These skills are useful for exploring the past in what I call the *synesthetic city* of Los Angeles. For proof that the city boasted an unusual cluster of synesthetes, see *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Modern Age* (2014). This last volume in a six-part history of the senses up to 2000 opened with a reference to Disneyland on page 1 and then revisited Los Angeles on 10 of the 30 pages in the introductory essay. Examples included the experience of being in a car in California, the “great future in plastics” from *The Graduate* (1967), the “dumb-de-dumb-dumb” theme music from the *Dragnet* police procedural, and Huxley’s high hopes for a “non-verbal humanities.” With regard to this last example, author and anthropologist David Howes added that drug use “transformed the user’s sensory perceptions, inducing sensations of vibrating colors and shifting shapes, and deepening the experience of music.” Hallucinogens helped intellectuals alter their sensoria and find meaning in newly enhanced abilities, but earlier signs of the synesthetic city were also already present in mass experiences of cinema and driving. The film industry’s “quite synesthetic” movie palaces were places where patrons simultaneously sat in “sumptuous” seats, listened to a “live orchestra,” and ate from “elegant cafés.”²¹ This effect did not stay with the movie in the theater. After one of several famous visits to California, French philosopher Jean Baudrillard stated that in 1980s Los Angeles, the “fusion of the kinetic and the cinematic produces a different mental configuration and overall perception from our own.”²²

²⁰ For a richly sensory account of a botched execution, which was supposed to adhere to an intricate procedure on the medieval books for how to kill a regicide, and proved physiologically impossible to reenact, see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan, tr. (Pantheon Books, 1977).

²¹ David Howes, *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Modern Age* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 1-30. For another book where the Southern Californian setting figures prominently in the articulation of a sensual culture, see Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (University of California Press, 1993).

²² Jean Baudrillard, *America*, Chris Turner, tr. (Verso, 1989), 57.

Driving and movie viewing came together as, to quote the critic Fredric Jameson, “an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions.”²³ With adequate time, critics had learned that experiences of driving were implicated in the drive to cultivate a complex sensibility beyond mere visualism.

Sensory enhancement came at a tragic social cost. Historians who approach elitist high cultures from the bottom up stress the accumulation of capital needed to fund cinema and car cultures, the exploited labor which produced films and automobiles, and the displacement of homes to make space for huge sprawling movie lots and concrete freeways. Often forgotten in these accounts is how making the world more synesthetic for the many adversely impacted those of us like Huxley without the normative human sensorium. Critical disability theory, a line of thinking established in the struggle against ableism, is a useful framework for sensory histories of technology.²⁴ Cinema is a classic example of a sensory experience that grew inaccessible - thus more ableist - with increased complexity. Though less synesthetically engaging for the fully hearing subject, silent movies had made sense to Deaf audiences, and “talkies” tragically ended a cultural renaissance in Deaf filmmaking.²⁵ Meanwhile, cars came with an array of newfangled doodads on the typical postwar dashboard, which granted most drivers newfound abilities to fill the interior with sounds of car audio, to light cigarettes, and to adjust the air temperature. Sadly, just such a hard metal piece partially blinded Sammy Davis, Jr. one early morning on Route 66

²³ Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review* (July/August 1984) as recycled in *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1991), 39.

²⁴ For a remarkable synopsis of this literature, see Melinda C. Hall, “Critical Disability Studies,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, uploaded 23 September 2019, accessed 24 August 2021.

²⁵ John S. Schuchman, “The Silent Film Era: Silent Films, NAD Films, and the Deaf Community’s Response,” *Sign Language Studies* 4, no. 3 (Spring 2004) and John S. Schuchman, *Hollywood Speaks: Deafness and the Film Entertainment Industry* (University of Illinois Press, 1988).

in 1954. When the famed crooner's car crashed on the way to Los Angeles, his head bounced off the steering wheel, and the luxury Eldorado's horn button popped his left eye.²⁶ Synesthetic suburbs often became sites of enclosure for those with sensory impairments: ones born impaired, others who later became impaired, and in this case, one maimed with a sensory apparatus.

Besides these simplistic master narratives of desensitization, synesthetic suburbs and their car cultures additionally left a vivid record of driving and resensitization. Rather than just assuming talkies had no meaning to Deaf fans - and thus pitying them - sensory historians are ready and willing to learn from folks in the Deaf culture which cultural experiences they find rich and interesting. Deaf audiences have invented unique ways to consume media oriented to a person with hearing, and Deaf artists and filmmakers have never stopped creating.²⁷ Another round of thinking about Sammy Davis, Jr. is also warranted. As a sensory historian, I refuse to let his car crash story end in ocularcentric terms with blinding, recovery, and a triumphant return to the stage. I am more curious about Davis, who claimed he was taking a nap in the passenger seat while his driver drove and then slammed his eye into the steering wheel's horn button. With attention to polysensoriality, which side steps the hierarchy separating high sight and low touch, I believe I have found the crash's hidden subtext. Through the darkness of a road trip by night, Davis appears to have been performing oral sex, a practice known in both queer and straight car cultures as giving the cis-male driver "road head." Later, Davis reminisced about his bisexuality while stationed with the U.S. military in the U.K. At the height of porno chic, he enjoyed treating his group of friends to mixed-sex viewings of films like *Deep Throat* (1972).²⁸ We need sensory

²⁶ Sammy Davis, Jr. with Jane Boyar and Burt Boyar, *Sammy: An Autobiography* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 158-161.

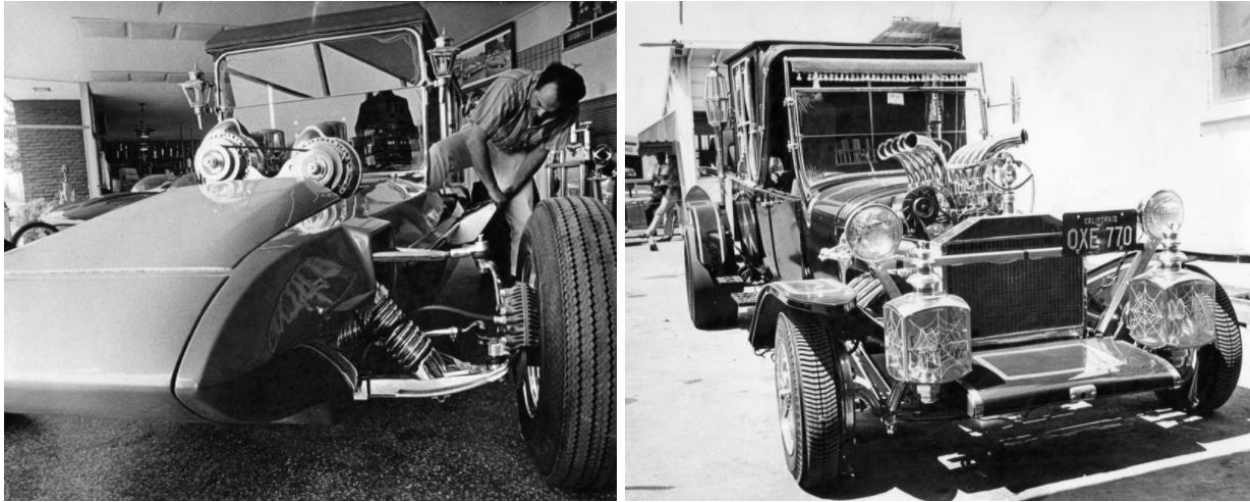
²⁷ Consider the music videos by ASL users for Deaf fans by D-PAN, the Deaf Professional Arts Network, d-pan.org, accessed 24 August 2021.

²⁸ Paul Anka with David Dalton, *My Way: An Autobiography* (St. Martin's Press, 2013), 274-275.

history because it can hold the pain and the pleasure encapsulated in such a morning on the road.
Only then can we make flashes of meaning from the ambivalence of human embodiment.

Car Cultures

Sexual, Racial, Moral, Spatial



Wouldn't you like to own a car that's totally different from Mr. Average Public?
Wouldn't you like to have a car that would express your own personal individualities?
George Barris, 1953²⁹

Mechanic, movie car customizer, and entrepreneur George Barris was emblematic of a generation of autodidact California engineers and artists who tinkered the automobile into an art masterpiece during the years after the Second World War. Alongside Barris were figures like used car dealer and television spot showman Cal Worthington, radio personality and car audio innovator Earl “Madman” Muntz, lowrider perfectionist Jesse Valadez, and journeyman into the realm of light and space Robert Irwin. The works of their days came from car cultures. In the United States and other wealthy Twentieth-Century countries, social scientists and critics have often cited *the* car culture. It is a scapegoat in works about urbanism, environmentalism, bad design, and social inequality. Spaces in cities and the country that are not geared for public transit use but rather for private automobiles are ugly to those who hate cars and inaccessible to anyone who cannot afford a car. Furthermore, driving increases the pollution emitted into the

²⁹ “George Barris Quotes,” *Custom Car Chronicle*, 29 November 2015, accessed 26 June 2021. Photographs by George Brich, 1964, Valley Times Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

atmosphere and contributes to the looming climate catastrophe.³⁰ To some, a car culture is more a subculture. Frighteningly masculinist or nationalist hobbyists have cultivated an enthusiasm for racing and customizing “chopped” vehicles like hot rods, gassers, fuelers, or trailer queens.³¹ With respect to scholars who cite car culture in these two ways, I prefer to think of car cultures in the plural as unscripted sites for the production of many personal and/or political differences along the lines of sexual identity, racial identity, moral identity, and spatial identity.

Like Barris before, the anthropologist Daniel Miller has explained how we have a power to endow cars with personality. His book *Car Cultures* (2001) “seeks to reveal and consider the evident humanity of the car...an integral part of the cultural environment within which we see ourselves as human.”³² Any such vehicle - motorcycles and big rigs too - serves as the bearer of sexual, racial, moral, spatial, or perceptual characteristics. After all, these are social constructs when in human bodies, which philosopher Donna Haraway has called human-animal-machine hybrids or “cyborgs.”³³ Why would we not also be just as capable of constructing senses for sexuality, ethnicity, ethics, or territoriality into any given technological innovation? These inputs, alongside the many creative ways automobile drivers can use these vehicles, mark the car as the preeminent “culture machine” of the years prior to personal laptop computers and mobile smartphones. According to media theorist Peter Lunenfeld, the difference between cinema or television screens and a computer screen is that the latter device’s user gains a function: to create and to upload content. Never just downloading, or receiving information to which viewers

³⁰ James J. Flink, *The Car Culture* (MIT Press, 1976). This was also the historian who coined the term automobility. A decade later, he was at “The Car and the City” and called GM’s 1950s output “the most grotesque mass-produced cars in automotive history,” James J. Flink, “The Ultimate Status Symbol,” in *The Car and the City*, 166.

³¹ David N. Lucsko, *The Business of Speed: The Hot Rod Industry in America, 1915-1990* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008) and Gary Cross, *Machines of Youth: America’s Car Culture Obsession* (University of Chicago Press, 2018).

³² Daniel Miller, *Car Cultures* (Berg, 2001), 2.

³³ Donna J. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge, 1991).

cannot respond immediately, those of us with computerized devices are empowered to create relentlessly and to share content.³⁴ Prior generations had this same élan for getting cars, fixing them up, racing them, making out in them at drive-ins, and using them to explore neighborhoods of cities and their vast hinterlands with a sense of adventure not unlike those of us who are still customizing computers and busily using them to explore the darkest corners of the Internet.

These pathways into identification are historically specific. Sex, race, morals, and space each has a human origin, however far back it debatably goes, and they hold differing meanings from place to place. In the United States, these meanings shifted during the Second World War, which radically intervened in all aspects of life.³⁵ The roles women assumed in war work made sex seem less like a trait with which a person was born than a performative way of being that he, she, or they acquired with age.³⁶ The fight against racist enemy ideologies abroad - and at home -

³⁴ Peter Lunenfeld, *The Secret War Between Downloading and Uploading: Tales of the Computer as Culture Machine* (MIT Press, 2011).

³⁵ Sarah Frohardt-Lane, "Promoting a Culture of Driving: Rationing, Car Sharing, and Propaganda in World War II," *Journal of American Studies* 46, no. 1 (May 2012): 337-355.

³⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, H.M. Parshley, tr. (Knopf, 1953) and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990). Recent work on sex and sexuality in history has shown the intimate side of life has undoubtedly mattered outside bedrooms (or those notorious parked cars on lovers' lane). See John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Harper & Row, 1988). From beyond the USA, we have learned about places like Eighteenth-Century Iran and Nineteenth-Century China where gender identity and sexual orientation exceeded strict male-female and heterosexual-homosexual binaries. See Afsanah Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches, Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (University of California Press, 2005) and Howard Chiang, *After Eunuchs: Science, Medicine, and the Transformation of Sex in Modern China* (Columbia University Press, 2018). Inside the USA, modern categories of sex and sexual difference have played constitutive roles in the making of suburban culture, the border, the welfare state, and the anti-liberal New Right's winning 1970s turn to "breadwinner conservatism." See Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (Basic Books, 1988), Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton University Press, 2009), and Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2012). Feminist technology studies has proven that engineers have designed gendered and sexualized biases into all objects, including both sexually reassigned human bodies and auto bodies, which might seem ungendered at first glance. The car was a man's machine by virtue of resembling the phallus and because it brought him into intimate proximity with any given desired sex partner. The car was also available to women, children, and non-binary people who have sought safe and dependable refuges while in transit through the pervasive misogyny, predation, and transphobia of yesterday and today's public sphere. Like those using "private browsing" on the Internet now - or in a New York City park bathroom in the early Twentieth Century - a person in a car was cloaked and relatively anonymous in Los Angeles during the decade and a half after the Second World War. See David Serlin, *Replaceable You: Engineering the Body in Postwar America* (University of Chicago Press, 2004). Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work, and Family Life*, revised and expanded

inspired the rise of a liberal notion of race alone as insufficient grounds for condemning a nonwhite person of merit to poverty, obscurity, or institutionalized abuse.³⁷ The push for unity within a religiously pluralistic country fostered a Judeo-Christian ecumenicalism, which downplayed divides between Jews, Catholics, and Protestants and preached nationwide political and moral consensus.³⁸ A great expansion of the country's productive capacity, plus the rising

edition (W.W. Norton, 2002) and George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (Basic Books, 1994).

³⁷ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (Harper, 1944) and Howard Winant, *The World Is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy since World War II* (Basic Books, 2001). Scholars of race and ethnic studies have proven racism adapted to liberalism in the 1960s and has survived into the present under the auspices of color blindness and the plausibly deniable dog whistle. See Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) and Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Harvard University Press, 2005). From beyond the USA, we have learned about Australia, where the erasure of racial difference was part of an ongoing genocidal settler campaign, and how the Dominican Republic's biracial leader promised racial transformation to the mostly biracial constituents of his populist regime. See Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* (2006) and Lauren Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo* (Duke University Press, 2009). Intersectionality in the USA helps expose the ways Whites have used discourses of sex and sexuality, faith and morality, or space and territoriality to target unwanted people of color for removal. They are girls who act out sexually and men who catcall women, ex-cons with a criminal record and the Nation of Islam's devotees, or the so-called slum or ghetto Negro who is now designated a member of the urban underclass. See Brenda Stevenson, *The Contested Murder of Latasha Harlins* (Oxford University Press, 2013), Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (The New Press, 2010), and William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (University of Chicago Press, 1987). Afro-pessimists and some others in ethnic studies criticize technologies like cars - or cyberspace - as profoundly precarious sites in a moment defined by police violence and algorithmic bias. However, Afro-futurists and the like are dreaming about a time when empowered BIPOC seize technology and turn it to abolitionist ends. If this was possible on the moving stages that were buses in Montgomery and in the cars where Black hip hop fans played their tunes, then it's possible online. See Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," (Penguin Classics, 2018), Jennifer L. Eberhardt, *Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do* (Viking, 2019), Kelly Lytle-Hernández and Danielle Dupuy, *Million Dollar Hoods* (September 2016), and Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New Press, 1996).

³⁸ Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the 'American Way': The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2007) and Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (Basic Books, 2015). In religious studies, a rising wave of scholarship is questioning bias against pre-modern and non-Western ontologies. To provincialize Europe and the Enlightenment's secularism requires consideration of faith in the non-human agencies of gods and spirits. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000). In the USA, but not of the USA, some peoples exist in sacred spaces like the borderlands or in sacred temporalities outside of "settler time." See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza* (University of Texas Press, 1987) and Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Duke University Press, 2017). Ever mainstream, Christian belief structured modern social movements like the Struggle for Black Freedom and the service-oriented work culture at Walmart. See Sarah Azaransky, *This Worldwide Struggle: Religion and the International Roots of the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2017) and Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Harvard University Press, 2010). Though free market fundamentalism found a receptive audience among Christians, some believers made decisions like where to live according to a "moral geography." See George Lipsitz, "The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race,"

spending power of Whites with privileged access to credit, sparked a boom in the making of space devoted to suburban tracts, public highways, and popular entertainment.³⁹ Women, great numbers of men of color, and once-urbanized Jews and Catholics were now more likely to purchase cars. The conditions were ripe for the historical emergence of diverse car cultures.⁴⁰

Intersectionality factored into the formation of car cultures beyond ones with just straight, White, middle-class, believing cis-males. In *Taking the Wheel* (1991), historian Virginia Scharff

Landscape Journal 26, no. 1 (July 2007): 10-23. That said, anyone outside the core binary of Judeo-Christian faith traditions versus strictly rational materialism found themselves sidelined from U.S. history. Through literature, trance, and high technology, a few visionary writers and seekers in 1970s California tapped into other possibilities. They then urged readers and followers to retreat from contemporary urban and suburban life, to drive back to the land, or to go onto the Internet. See Erik Davis, *High Weirdness: Drugs, Esoterica, and Visionary Experience in the Seventies* (MIT Press, 2019) and Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (University of Chicago Press, 2006).

³⁹ Avila, *Popular Culture* and David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (University of Chicago Press, 2007). These books explained how categories like city, suburb, and property came to be so racially charged in the age of White flight and resegregation. During the spatial turn in social sciences, geography and space replaced history and time, as postcolonial theory generated a sustained loss of confidence in modernization. Much of what once counted as world history was exposed as a means of division between the self-styled West and its “developing” shadow, the Rest. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978). The making of cars and extraction of carbon-based fuels once served as an indicator of how modern an economy was, but scholars found the car (and rubber) had an important history in purportedly backward Brazil. Meanwhile, coal mining and burning mattered in purportedly underdeveloped Diné or Navajo Indian country. See Joel Wolfe, *Autos and Progress: The Brazilian Search for Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 2009), Greg Grandin, *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford’s Forgotten Jungle City* (Metropolitan Books, 2009), and Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton University Press, 2014). Historians have taken more of an interest in America and the world, both the patterns that impact this country and others in common and the linkages along which ideas, people, and materials have flowed through gateways into the USA. See Carl Nightingale, *Segregation: A Global History of Divided Cities* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West* (University of California Press, 2011), and Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (University of California Press, 2013). History has shown that trucks and cars had the power to help produce spaces like massive warehouses in California’s Inland Empire and the prison system built just within range of coastal commuters in the Central Valley. Places the car and the truck have broken include racialized neighborhoods sacrificed to make way for freeways and also small towns freeways have bypassed. See Avila, *Folklore of the Freeway*, Carpio, *Collisions at the Crossroads*, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *The Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California Press, 2007), Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America’s Wal-Mart Economy* (Princeton University Press, 2008), and William Leach, *Country of Exiles: The Destruction of Place in American Life* (Pantheon Books, 1999).

⁴⁰ The car cultures were both an outcome of the cultural politics of groups like Whites, Black Americans, and Mexican Americans and a legacy of the state transforming the physical conditions of cities and their hinterlands into a car country, at the behest of drivers, automakers, car dealers, and the industries keeping these vehicles running. See Cotten Seiler, *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), Denise M. Sandoval, “The Politics of Low and Slow/*Bajito y Suavecito*: Black and Chicano Lowriders in Los Angeles, from the 1960s through the 1970s” in *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition*, Josh Kun and Laura Pulido, eds. (University of California Press, 2014), and Christopher W. Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (University of Washington Press, 2013).

recounted the emergence of a women's car culture in the American West of the early Twentieth Century, but the cis-female drivers had the privilege of being mostly wealthy, White, and liberal arts college educated.⁴¹ In *The Warmth of Other Suns* (2010), Isabel Wilkerson collected an oral history from Robert Pershing Walker, a Black Louisianan of the Great Migration who moved to Los Angeles after the war and treated himself to a white new-model 1955 Cadillac. For African Americans to have "moved up in the world" like so was undoubtedly important but not much of a surprise for Dr. Walker, an up-and-coming, cis-male, married physician.⁴² By contrast to Black bourgeois car consumer narratives, consider Paul Gilroy's "Driving While Black" (1999), which mentioned the ways driving has elongated the distances between mainline church-going, affluent Black families in suburbs and poor folks left behind in so-called slums.⁴³ However, the car trip has also constituted a bridge enabling new cross-racial relationships. In light of work by Natalia Molina, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and Ramón A. Gutiérrez, scholars must stop "examining racialized groups in isolation and in relation to whiteness."⁴⁴ My dissertation instead spotlights case studies like the time a Black girl and a Chinese American girl broke the Rose Parade pageant's color line in the same year, a song an Arab American man wrote about a queer Black woman killed in a riot, and the Chicano-Chinese stoner comedy duo called Cheech & Chong.

To find alternatives to the mainstream car culture, I have followed Saidiya Hartman's example with polysensory close readings of sources other scholars have only read through the reductionist lenses of social or political history. Hartman has boldly written speculative histories

⁴¹ Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (Free Press, 1991).

⁴² Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (Penguin, 2010), 299-301.

⁴³ Paul Gilroy, "Driving While Black," in Miller, *Car Cultures*, 81-104. For another fantastic reflection on the fraught relationship between the car, race, and class in Black communities, see "Swing Low, Sweet Cadillac" in George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Temple University Press, 1998).

⁴⁴ Natalia Molina, *Relational Formations of Race: Theory, Method, and Practice* (University of California Press, 2019), 5.

involving looks between the lines of texts she has pulled from the archives in order to speak about the personal lives of Black wayward girls in more intimate detail than repressed and repressive White cis-female social workers were willing to commit to their reports. Rather than going so far as fictionalizing stories for this dissertation, I include as much sensory data from lives lived in and around the car as I was able to find. Thus I allow you, the reader, to seize the day and to immerse yourself in Los Angeles car cultures. You can now imagine what became possible in these as-yet, partially-written life worlds.⁴⁵ For now, like a polysensory historian of racism in the enslaved and segregated South named Mark M. Smith, I can confirm that all senses contributed to the formation and reformation of identity in Los Angeles and its car cultures. With the automobile as a framing device for sensing the city, drivers did not “have to think about race” or other valences of difference. Instead, “the senses facilitated the rule of feeling that made men and women unthinkingly comfortable with their racial, [sexual, moral, and spatial] worlds.”⁴⁶ As much as Pullman sleeping cars, the “mobile privatisation” of car traffic became a retreat from the mixed public into an anodyne capsule for those with the means to drive.⁴⁷ As much as slave patrolmen on horseback, black-and-white squad cars with their flashing lights and sirens were a painful symptom of the still-nearly-unassailable social order: sexual, racial, moral, and spatial.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (W.W. Norton, 2019).

⁴⁶ Mark M. Smith, *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 4.

⁴⁷ “[W]hat is experienced inside the[cars] - in the conditioned atmosphere and internal music of this windowed shell - is movement, choice of direction, the pursuit of self-determined private purposes. All the other shells are moving in comparable ways but for their own different private ends. They are not so much other people, in any full sense, but other units that signal and are signalled to, so that private mobilities can proceed safely and relatively unhindered. And if all this is seen from the outside as in deep ways determined, or in some sweeping glance as dehumanised, that is not at all how it feels inside the shell, with people you want to be with going where you want to go.” Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000* (Chatto & Windus, 1983), 187-188.

⁴⁸ Sarah Seo, *Policing the Open Road: How Cars Transformed American Freedom* (Harvard University Press, 2019) and Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Harvard University Press, 2013). Another great source on this is psychoanalyst Gilles Deleuze, who speculated, “You do not control people with a highway. But by making highways, you multiply the means of control. I am not saying this is the only

aim of highways, but people can travel indefinitely and ‘freely’ without being confined while being perfectly controlled.” Seiler, *Republic of Drivers*, 144.

1945 to 1990

Ubiquity and Banality



“...the central vehicle of all twentieth-century modernization, the automobile.”

Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (1995)

Kristin Ross used the speed-up of cars as a case study for making sense of the impact of technological modernity in postwar France. These vehicles were central to changes in how hard the French worked, how heavily they consumed, and who they imagined themselves to be after the fall of their empire. Relatively soon, historians began to ignore this ubiquitous-though-banal object called a car. By Ross’s reckoning, the erasure reflected a “temporality of repetition” on the car’s assembly line, during commutes, and in congested city streets.⁴⁹ The obliteration of time or a “history of forgetting” has also been a trope in histories of Los Angeles.⁵⁰ The left image above shows Madame Chiang Kai-shek visiting Chinatown and Hollywood in 1943. She sat in the back of an open touring car next to Mayor Fletcher Bowron. At the time, China depended on Los Angeles to manufacture materials for use in the country’s resistance to Japanese invasion, so the generalissimo’s wife had to make the most of every moment with her

⁴⁹ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (MIT Press, 1996), 19-21. The first image above is by Harry Quillen in the Los Angeles Photographers collection, Los Angeles Public Library. The next is from a post by u/cyclura on *reddit*, 13 September 2014, accessed 26 June 2021.

⁵⁰ Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (Verso, 1997).

hosts. Three decades later, Faye Dunaway's *Chinatown* (1974) character fled her corrupt, rapist, kingpin father into the nighttime streets of Chinatown at the wheel of that very same Packard touring car. In pursuit, a cop fired a bullet, which blew out Dunaway's left eye (also pictured).⁵¹ To look at Los Angeles car cultures is to risk losing sight of the passage of time, especially considering the hobbyists in this city who keep classic cars in excellent working condition. To this day, they still bring the old vehicles back on the road to be featured on the screen. My dissertation struggles against such presentism and nostalgia by stressing dynamism and diversity in the postwar car cultures.⁵²

Well before the Second World War began, a two-decades-long slump in the manufacture of automobiles coincided with the Great Depression. Production did not return to its 1929 peak of 5 million units until 1949, after the war had ended.⁵³ City officials had grown dissatisfied with multimodal streetscapes, where motor vehicles shared roads with streetcars and bicycles. Plans for a switch to motor monoculture dated to the 1920s when the automobile industry and its fans began to lobby transportation engineers in Los Angeles and other cities to redesign streets and highways for fast, unimpeded, and free-flowing automobile traffic. This freedom, not the lack of tolls, was what the term "freeway" signified. Economic crisis and total war only delayed the transition, for localities were to acquire funds at the levels of federal and local state government to initiate a mammoth freeway building campaign. Communities retired electric streetcar public transit networks in favor of buses that burned carbon and stopped at the curb rather than riding

⁵¹ *Chinatown*, directed by Roman Polanski (1974: Paramount Pictures).

⁵² François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time* (Columbia University Press, 2003).

⁵³ The precise prewar peak was 5,337,087 automobiles in the year 1929. That was a fivefold annual increase over the previous decade and a half. Production dropped to 1,331,860 in 1932. In 1937, 1940, and 1941, the numbers had approached five million again, but then the war began. U.S. automobile production rose with only a few exceptions for three decades until it peaked in 1978 with 12,899,202 units. John B. Rae, *The American Automobile Industry* (Twayne Publishers, 1984), 180-182.

on tracks in the middle of streets. These reforms turned more of the city's land over to driving,⁵⁴ and the number of cars per household - plus the very size of the vehicles - expanded to fill this newly available territory. In 1962, economist Anthony Downs published his "law of peak hour traffic congestion," which predicted that "on urban commuter expressways, peak hour traffic congestion rises to meet maximum capacity." Meanwhile the gloating title of the official history of the Automobile Club of Southern California was *Three Cars in Every Garage* (1968).⁵⁵

These four decades of unlimited motor monoculture in Los Angeles are the focus of my dissertation, which has a chapter about each decade. In the 1950s, the motor vehicle occupied a position in American life and economics so dominant that journalist David Halberstam devoted chapters eight, thirty-two, and forty-two of his 46-part chronicle of *The Fifties* (1993) to the state of the General Motors corporation. In another passage, readers learned how James Dean got a part in *East of Eden* by taking director Elia Kazan for a spin on his motorcycle. "He was showing off," remembered Kazan, who looked back after Dean's death in a car crash and called him "a country boy not impressed with big city traffic."⁵⁶ By the 1960s, Dean had set the tone, according to sociologist Todd Gitlin, for a rising middle-class generation first getting the taste for "the oppositional mood of the Sixties." Gitlin began his *The Sixties* (1987) with an observation that Dean films taught fans this was to be a time when "living fast is living right."⁵⁷ But the decade ended on a different note with *Easy Rider* (1969), which juxtaposed the counterculture's bikers with Southerners in pickups. A hick passenger grabbed his shotgun off

⁵⁴ Martin Wachs, Peter Sebastian Chesney, and Yu Hong Hwang, "A Century of Fighting Traffic Congestion in Los Angeles, 1920-2020" (Luskin Center for History and Policy, 2020), 19-21.

⁵⁵ Anthony Downs, "The Law of Peak-Hour Expressway Congestion," *Traffic Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (July 1962). Richard R. Mathison, *Three Cars in Every Garage: A Motorist's History of the Automobile and the Automobile Club of Southern California* (Doubleday, 1968).

⁵⁶ David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (Villard Books, 1993), 483.

⁵⁷ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Bantam Books, 1987), 33-34.

the rack and shot dead the film's heroes for no reason but simple anti-hippie bigotry. To labor historian Jefferson Cowie, this scene demonstrated the "bitter contempt" of "professional middle-class makers of popular culture" against "white male blue-collar America."⁵⁸ A realigned political culture had resignified the car. Once the symbol of postwar urban and suburban modernity, a car with a car lover for a driver was now a repellent symptom of unreconstructed hate in the unsophisticated countryside.

For twenty years, the car was ubiquitous but became increasingly banal in the eyes of urbane critics and critical urban planners. They strongly condemned the pollution cars emitted and the loss of space to traffic and parking. At the neighborhood level, NIMBY protests staged a revolt against finishing the freeways. In 1974, business consultant Jack Nilles contemplated alternatives to automobile dependency and coined the term "telecommuting." His forecast, picked up by Alvin Toffler in *The Third Wave* (1980), promoted a future when a small, flexible portion of office workers in Los Angeles and other cities was to do their jobs remotely at least part of the time.⁵⁹ The 1970s proceeded with damaging shocks to car cultures, including two epic gasoline shortages, new environmental and safety regulations, and the popularity of imports from Japan. A presidential daughter, Susan, appeared in advertisements to say, "Take it from a Ford. Drive a Subaru."⁶⁰ These were the conditions for Los Angeles to approve a half-cent sales tax in 1980, which was to fund the return of rail to a city that had ripped out its streetcar tracks. Ten years later, the Rapid Transit District opened an 18-mile light-rail passenger route connecting

⁵⁸ Jefferson R. Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New Press, 2010), 295-296.

⁵⁹ Jack M. Nilles, *The Telecommunications-Transportation Tradeoff: Options for Tomorrow* (John Wiley & Sons, 1976). Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (Bantam Books, 1980), 201-204.

⁶⁰ Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 62.

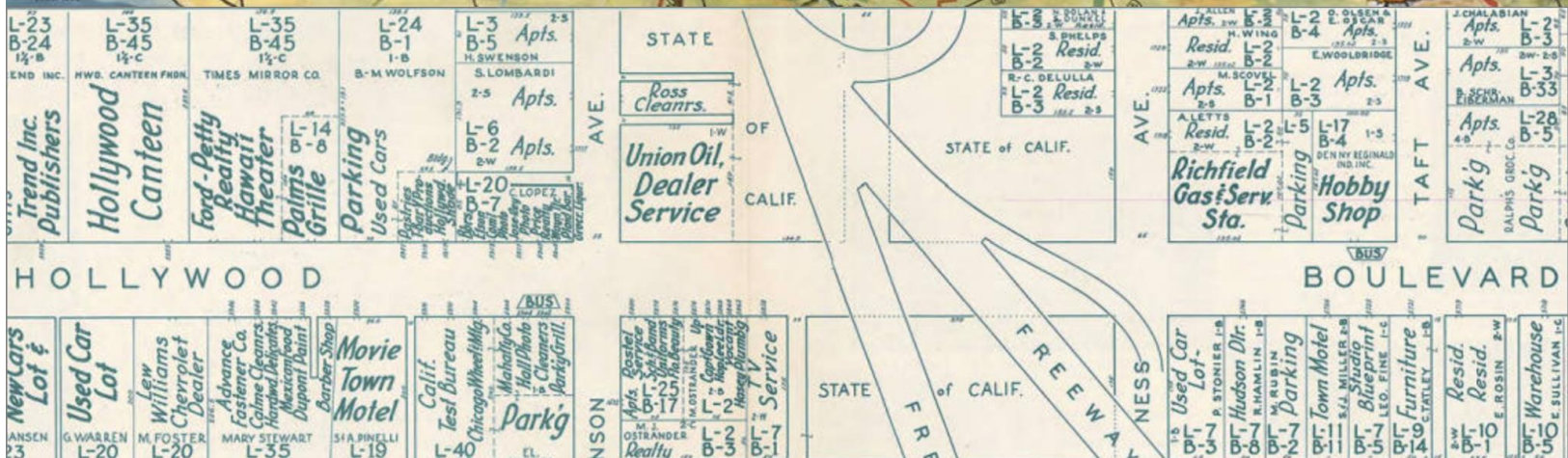
Long Beach and Downtown.⁶¹ With this in mind, I mark 1990 as an end to motor monoculture in Los Angeles. Today, over thirty years later, the system has nearly 100 miles of track and almost 500 miles of bike lanes. As much as attitudes about automobiles in Los Angeles shifted from 1945 to 1990, the motor vehicle only became effectively decentered with the end of the 1980s.⁶²

⁶¹ Wachs, "A Century of Fighting Traffic Congestion," 15.

⁶² "To the extent that the car is indispensable, the challenge is to retain or enhance its charm by evolving it, while also displacing it with attractive alternatives whenever they can be found. In addition to the vehicles, modes, and routes in our system, we might consider altering patterns of ownership." These were concluding words at 1988's "The Car and the City" from architect Marvin Adelson, "The Car, the City, and What We Want," *The Car and the City*, 291.

Los Angeles

L.A. Hinterlands / L.A. Neighborhoods



“Nineteen suburbs in search of a city”
Newsweek, 15 September 1941⁶³

People who live in L.A. - and those who have visited - tend to know the city and its
 eponymous county as a mosaic of neighborhoods with an expansive regional and even global

⁶³ W.W. Robinson, *What They Say About The Angels* (Val Trefz Press, 1942), 76. *Historic Roads to Romance*, 1946 and the *Nirenstein Atlas*, Hollywood, 1956, Map Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, accessed 25 June 2021.

hinterlands. But they do not know the geographical specifics. They can find Hollywood on a map but cannot say for sure if it is outside the Los Angeles city limits (like the relatively young city of *West* Hollywood) or inside the city (right answer). They are perplexed at Athens Park and La Crescenta, each of which is neither in the city nor a city of its own. Instead, they rest miles apart on the same kind of unincorporated county land. Pomona, Long Beach, and Lancaster are all incorporated cities just inside the boundaries of Los Angeles County, but the cities Simi Valley, Huntington Beach, and Fontana are all barely outside it. Some folks rent vacation houses outside the county in Lake Arrowhead, San Clemente, or Yucca Valley for weekend getaways but rarely notice that they are vacationing in places whence a few locals commute all the way into Los Angeles for work. A person says they were “in South Central” at a party that was actually in Baldwin Hills, about five miles west of Central Avenue. Another mentions a Oaxacan restaurant “on the east side” that is in Koreatown, seven blocks east of Western Avenue and about eight miles west of Eastern Avenue, a true spine for “East Los Angeles.” These examples show how geographically inscrutable “Los Angeles” is. It cannot represent itself; it must be represented.

The boundaries of Los Angeles shifted wildly in the century after the Spanish colonial pueblo’s founding and the half-century after the U.S. military seized the land from Mexico in a war of conquest. At first, the city expanded in fits to the north into the Silverlake and Highland Park areas. Furthermore, it bounded westward, first into Hollywood, and next all the way to the sea at Venice Beach. Spreading southward, the city annexed San Pedro and convinced the federal government to build an artificial harbor, which is now the busiest in the Western Hemisphere. The city annexed the agrarian San Fernando Valley to the northwest in time for irrigation water to pour in along an aqueduct that the city built from Owens Valley, over two hundred miles away. Since then, the boundaries of Los Angeles’s 450 square miles have been static. Cities with

access to foothills-based water supplies, like Glendale and Pasadena, kept their sovereignty. Company towns like Standard Oil's El Segundo, the meatpacking mecca of Vernon, and the aptly named City of Industry have remained independent.⁶⁴ No matter, for the City of Los Angeles had gotten enough room for growth. In 1950, the city of two million had just surpassed Detroit to become the USA's fourth largest. By 1990, Los Angeles almost doubled and surpassed Chicago. As the second city to New York City in the 1980s, Los Angeles claimed the same status that once drew gawkers to the 1893 Columbian Exposition and gave rise to the Chicago school of urban sociology. Statistics about commuting showed Los Angeles, for its great size, was an outlier and a forerunner of nationwide trends. In 1960, the percentage of the workforce in Los Angeles using private vehicles to get to their jobs was 77.24% at a time when New York City's was 37.24% and San Francisco's was 66.40%. By 1990, the number for Los Angeles had risen to 87.80%, while New York was at 62.5% and San Francisco was at 81.30% (5-2 and 5-3). Los Angeles boasted the largest carpooling community of any major city in the USA: 1,052,249 or 15.45% in 1990. In New York and San Francisco, the percentages were respectively 10.31% and 13.01%. However, 72.86% of Los Angeles workers drove to their jobs alone and only 4.56% took buses. In New York and San Francisco, 27.80% and 9.29% of commuters used transit (5-7). The 310,563 transit users in 1990 Los Angeles were just over 2% of the metropolitan area's total population.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ For excellent surveys of bourgeois White supremacy and the aggressive territorial growth of Los Angeles in its transition from a pueblo to a metropolis, see Carey McWilliams, *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1946), William F. Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (University of California Press, 2004), Avila, *Popular Culture*, David Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.: Race, Space, and Municipal Power in Los Angeles, 1781-1894* (Yale University Press, 2013), and Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

⁶⁵ Michael A. Rossetti, *Journey-To-Work Trends in the United States and its Metropolitan Areas, 1960-1990* (Federal Highway Administration, 1993), 5-2, 5-3, 5-7, and P-9.

The abundance of space beyond the Los Angeles periphery is where its hinterlands begin. Those are the places where capital and labor based in the city has had an outsized power to shape how people live, work, and identify. Historians Andrew Needham and Allen Dieterich-Ward have pushed for studies of cities beyond the metropolitan area of suburbs and “edge cities” into “metropolitan regions.”⁶⁶ Los Angeles has been a magnet drawing workers, resources, and cheap energy from across the USA, north from Mexico and Central America, and west from the Pacific World. By ship, train, bus, truck, and car load, stuff has streamed into Los Angeles to keep this behemoth running during years of Cold War, Pop experimentation, fashion and foody fads, real estate booms, and increasingly free trade with Asia. The city’s profits flowed out as capital investments as far afield as Mexico, Southeast Asia, and Arabia.⁶⁷ Los Angeles also generated a disproportionate amount of media entertainment. One recurring message in these narratives, advertisements, and massively reproduced images and sounds is that the car was essential to the contemporary urban and suburban lifestyle. To view or to listen was to learn that the most desperately down-and-out person in Los Angeles, who had been reduced to driving a pathetically low-functioning car, still had one! And they were skilled at driving it!⁶⁸ Heroic automobilized drivers on and off the screen are always on the move by car in and out of Los Angeles. “The

⁶⁶ Andrew Needham and Allen Dieterich-Ward, “Beyond the Metropolis: Metropolitan Growth and Regional Transformation in Postwar America,” *Journal of Urban History* 35, no. 7 (2009). Also see William Cronin, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (W.W. Norton, 1991).

⁶⁷ Few ever said this with more clarity than railroad baron Henry Huntington, who predicted in 1932, “I believe that Los Angeles is destined to become the most important city in this country, if not in the world. It can extend in any direction as far as you like; its front door opens on the Pacific, the ocean of the future. The Atlantic is the ocean of the past. Europe can supply her own wants; we shall supply the wants of Asia.” A. Edward Newton, “The Course of Empire,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 150 (1932). Also, the name of California-Arabian Standard Oil Company, founded in 1933 and now known as Saudi ARAMCO, is telling. See Jessica Kim, *Imperial Metropolis: Los Angeles, Mexico, and the Borderlands of American Empire, 1865-1941* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019), Nancy Kwak, *A World of Homeowners: American Power and the Politics of Housing Aid* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), and Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, & Power* (Simon & Schuster, 1990).

⁶⁸ *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, directed by Thom Andersen (2003: Thom Andersen Productions).

transients”⁶⁹ have included customers at the first McDonald’s on Route 66, Ed Ruscha who photographed gas stations on trips to his home state of Oklahoma, Governor Ronald Reagan who wrote his radio essays during drives from Santa Barbara, and LAPD cops who clustered their families in greenbelt enclaves along highways as far as possible from the city they policed.

As opposed to the huge scale of cities, counties, hinterlands, and metropolitan regions, the small scale of neighborhoods is another useful unit of analysis in urban history. Community and town studies have been a hallmark of social, cultural, and sensory history since at least the publications of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s *Montaillou* (1975), Carlo Ginzburg’s *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976), and Alain Corbin’s *The Foul and the Fragrant* (1982). No one has more influentially brought this approach to one fragment of Los Angeles than Becky M. Nicolaides, whose 2002 *My Blue Heaven* illustrated the rich meanings, grounded in a politics of race, class, and gender, to be found in a suburb called South Gate. A generation of geographically-minded historians have answered with additional neighborhood-level studies.⁷⁰ My cue came from the

⁶⁹ For an influential sociological account of “The Transients,” who were ironically some of the most successful of postwar professionals in an era that painted an entirely new portrait of once-pejorative “rootlessness,” see William H. Whyte, Jr., *The Organization Man* (Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957 [originally 1956]), 295-309. To see how race in Nazi Germany informed a positive reevaluation of mobility, including commuting and traveling, but only among Whites, see Andrew Denning, “‘Life is Movement, Movement is Life!’: Mobility Politics and the Circulatory State in Nazi Germany,” *American Historical Review* 123, no. 5 (December 2018): 1479-1503.

⁷⁰ Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (University of Chicago Press, 2002). For critical local studies of places like Edendale, Little Tokyo, the San Fernando Valley, Palm Springs and Catalina Island, the San Gabriel Valley, Pico Rivera, South Los Angeles, East Hollywood, and Boyle Heights, see Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* (University of California Press, 2007), Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton University Press, 2008), Lawrence Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America* (Oxford University Press, 2010), Laura Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege* (University of Georgia Press, 2011), Wendy Cheng, *The Changs Next to the Díazes: Remapping Race in Suburban California* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013), Jerry Gonzalez, *In Search of the Mexican Beverly Hills: Latino Suburbanization in Postwar Los Angeles* (University of Texas Press, 2017), Kellie Jones, *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* (Duke University Press, 2017), Mark Padoongpatt, *Flavors of Empire: Food and the Making of Thai America* (University of California Press, 2017), and George Sánchez, *Boyle Heights: How a Los Angeles Neighborhood Became the Future of American Democracy* (University of California Press, 2021). Prior to the Nicolaides boom, the best localized work out of Southern California included Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (University of California Press, 1967), Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (University of Texas Press, 1983), John M. Findlay, *Magic*

collaboration of Laura Pulido, Laura Barraclough, and Wendy Cheng, whose *A People's Guide to Los Angeles* (2012) sampled centuries of radical local history and turned it into a critical urban tour book with 114 short, sourced entries.⁷¹ My dissertation includes 12 longer, place-based case studies. Each is ~10 pages grounded in the archives and the critical theory of the moment and framed in a discourse of polysensoriality. Now go race through L.A. - parts north of Imperial Highway - and slow for stops in neighborhoods like West San Bernardino, Pasadena, DTLA, the Sunset Strip, Lancaster, Watts, Palisades, Van Nuys, Glendale, Leimert, East Los, and Chino.⁷²

[end of the introduction]

Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940 (University of California Press), Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (University Press of Virginia, 1995), and Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁷¹ Laura Pulido, Laura Barraclough, and Wendy Cheng, *A People's Guide to Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2012).

⁷² Once this project takes book form, another chapter on the dynamics of chronological age in car cultures will bring readers to three additional stops in Charles Bukowski's San Pedro, Dick Montjoy's Monrovia, and Walt Disney's California Adventure in Anaheim.

Ch. 1: Bread and Roses

A Sexual History of Car Cultures in 1950s Los Angeles



The minute she stepped out on the main drag
Susie found herself in pretty fast company
Susie the Little Blue Coupe (1952)⁷³

In 1950, the Walt Disney Company released *Motor Mania*, a cartoon animated short about the social and psychological problem of aggressive driving in Los Angeles. “Goofy” was a calm pedestrian, Mr. Walker, who became the furious Mr. Wheeler when he got into his car.⁷⁴ Looking at street signs and fantasizing that each featured a version of his name, the hostile man declared his tax dollars entitled him to drive how he pleased. When Mr. Wheeler saw another Goofy, a Mr. Walker, he murderously trained the luxury Lincoln-Zephyr’s hood ornament on the

⁷³ This image is by artist Mary Blair. She did some styling for the adaptation of cartoon animator Bill Peet’s *The Auto Biography of Susie the Little Blue Coupe* into Disney’s cartoon animated short 1951 film called *Susie the Little Blue Coupe*. Michael Sporn, “Last of Susie,” *Michael Sporn Animation, Inc.*, uploaded 3 March 2008, accessed 7 January 2021. For more on Mary Blair, see John Canemaker, *The Art and Flair of Mary Blair* (Disney Editions, 2003). *Susie the Little Blue Coupe*, directed by Clyde Geronimi (Walt Disney Productions, 1952), *YouTube*, uploaded 7 August 2011, accessed 7 January 2021.

⁷⁴ Goofy had evolved from a racialized, thus more doglike, southern hick into the model white suburban “everyman” in the early 1940s. Christopher P. Lehman, *American Animated Cartoons of the Vietnam Era: A Study of Social Commentary in Films and Television Programs, 1961-1973* (McFarland, Incorporated, 2014), 27-28.

hapless pedestrian and accelerated. Afterward, like with fighter planes during a war, the driver stamped his door with nose art: an outline of the victim. Los Angeles and its suburbs were in fact a home to an outsized population of Second World War veterans, especially air men. The strong feelings they expressed with their cars made an impression on Disney animators, who crafted the film admonishing drivers to drive less dangerously. Police departments in the State soon ordered copies of *Motor Mania* to screen in traffic schools for repeat offenders against the speed limit.⁷⁵

Two years after this narrative of men's anger, another cartoon short called *Susie the Little Blue Coupe* addressed the roles of women in car cultures by endowing an anthropomorphized, sentient vehicle, an object, with female physical traits. These included big, innocent eyes with long lashes for a windshield and a roof colored blond like a head of hair. Animators gave Susie expressive gestures, but she was without a voice. The plot followed her from one male owner to the next. Susie was sitting in the window of a beautiful showroom when she caught the eye of a buyer who fell in love with the "new model" commodity. But soon, he tired of her and sold her to Maniac Martin (a reference to the local ad man, "Madman" Muntz). From there, Susie was sold to a White ethnic, working-class man who negligently parked her at the curb of an inner-city street and left her vulnerable to a grand theft auto. Stolen and with police hot in pursuit, Susie crashed, and she was sent to sit at the junkyard. However, this postwar consumer good had a second life.⁷⁶ An enterprising White male teenager purchased the "old blue heap," brought her to his garage. He retooled her into a sleek hot rod convertible. As opposed to the psychological crisis of adult masculinity in *Motor Mania*, Disney's *Susie* had higher hopes for youths. For a

⁷⁵ *Motor Mania*, directed by Jack Kinney (Walt Disney Productions, 1950), *YouTube*, uploaded 2 July 2017, accessed 8 January 2021. The Greater Los Angeles Chapter of the National Safety Council met in September 1953 for a viewing of Walt Disney's *Motor Mania* at the Biltmore. The engineers granted Disney an award, and he received commendations from the Los Angeles mayor and the city's chief of police. "Los Angeles Regains Top Place in Traffic Safety Rate for Eight Months, Lowest Since '24," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 September 1953.

⁷⁶ Myriam Ertz, Fabien Durif, and Manon Arcand, "Towards Multilife Marketing: How Goods Multiple Lives Practices Create Value for Consumers," *Journal of Promotion Management* 24, no. 6 (2018).

voluntary hobby, they had developed useful skills for rationing on the homefront (and for war on mechanized battlefields). According to the technologist Vannevar Bush, “Every corner garage, every radio club, was a sort of center of training, training that could be readily transformed in a short time, when the test came, into the ability to operate the complex instruments of war.”⁷⁷

Car cultures of the Twentieth Century, like offices, factories, and suburban homes, were “born in a masculine manger,” according to Virginia Scharff, the preeminent historian of women and driving. Men spoke of the place for women in the car as its passengers - or not there at all.⁷⁸ Los Angeles was no exception to this nationwide, century-long trend. Postwar hot rod argot, which linguists collected from youths studying at Pasadena City College, proved that hobbyists were thinking about gender when they talked about cars. Men and boys used the terms “cherry” or “virgin” in praise of mint-condition vehicles, which were “attractive, unaltered [and] with the original paint job and an undented body.” Evoking the “virginity” myth, they desired to drive cars with minimal visual and tactual signs of use by others. In turn, they denied women had any sense for judging the quality of cars. A vehicle that “appeals to the female sex” was just a “sex wagon.” This phrasing echoed two other identitarian slurs: “Gook wagon” and “Gomez wagon.” Laden with “cheap accessories,” these vehicles reputedly appealed to the prevailing sensibilities in Asian American and Latinx communities. Suburbia’s Whites, devoted to midcentury modern minimalism, dismissed the taste for cars with ostentatious styling as racialized and emasculated.

⁷⁷ Vannevar Bush, *Modern Arms and Free Men: A Discussion of the Role of Science in Preserving Democracy* (Simon and Schuster, 1949). This passage is also quoted in Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, Mark Polizzoti, tr. (Semiotext(e) 2006: originally 1977), 51.

⁷⁸ Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (University of New Mexico Press, 1992), 13.

In sum, car culture's tastemakers made race-and-sex-based claims to the authority to decide which cars were worthy of reverence (and therefore worthy of the highest resale value).⁷⁹

The stories above evoke an era when driving served as a performance of masculinity. The true man had the drive to possess the best quality cars and the confidence to consider himself and other men the arbiters of good taste in cars. Though these factors cultivated men's self-reliance and independence, my work illustrates something beyond driver individualism in postwar car cultures. As men escaped from the home or the workplace into their cars,⁸⁰ they often took solo drives and plugged into intimate, interpersonal, and mixed-sex-and-sexuality networks. Sensory history is the method I use to uncover these "clandestine arrangements."⁸¹ To families, to bosses, and to cultural authorities, the time men put into commuting and cruising was unsupervised. Drawing from a rich, polysensorial archive of sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and touches,⁸² I expose what has mostly gone unmarked during those lonesome drives on Route 66, the Mother Road, which passed from Chicago through the U.S. heartland and into Los Angeles. In San Bernardino, entrepreneurial and laboring women invented the postwar industrial cuisine we call fast food and fed it to hungry men. In Pasadena on New Year's Day, teen beauties waved at crowds of bachelors from motorized floats festooned with fragrant roses. In Downtown, sex

⁷⁹ Don Mansell and Joseph S. Hall, "Hot Rod Terms in the Pasadena Area," *American Speech* 29, no. 2 (May 1954), 93-94, 97, and 101. For two influential assertions that gender has been a linguistic system useful for structuring and naturalizing race, class, and other valences of social difference, see Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986) and Joanne Meyerowitz, "A History of 'Gender,'" *American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (December 2008), 1349.

⁸⁰ Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Anchor, 1983).

⁸¹ "The senses are solicited and overwhelmed. Look over here. Let your eyes take it all in: the handsome thugs lining the courtyard like sentinels; the immoderate display of three lovely flowerpots arranged on the sill of a tenement window, the bed-sheets, monogrammed handkerchiefs, embroidered silk hose, and whore's undergarments suspended on a line across the alley, broadcasting clandestine arrangements, wayward lives, carnal matters." Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (W.W. Norton, 2019), 6.

⁸² Mark M. Smith, "Still Coming to 'Our' Senses: An Introduction," *Journal of American History* 95, is. 2 (September 2008), 379. See FTS or "feminist technology studies" for the model I used to find "richly textured analyses of how technology use intertwines with sociality, including the expression and affirmation of gendered identities and forms of intimacy and relatedness." Francesca Bray, "Gender and Technology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 36 (2007), 46.

workers strutted seedy streets and solicited men in cars to purchase intimacy with a woman, with a man, or with a transgender person. Los Angeles provided men with cars routes into complex new pleasure formations, and they were quick to slow, to stop, and to satisfy these appetites.⁸³

⁸³ Regarding “complex pleasures,” critical theory has often flirted with the idea that the lower senses of taste, smell, and touch are closely linked and even interchangeable. For a history of Black women’s sexual labor and enthusiasm for representations of it characterized in gustatory terms, see Mireille Miller-Young, *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography* (Duke University Press, 2014), 4-5.

Pt. 1: Fast Food

Cars and Dining in 1950s Los Angeles



“A tidy, crisp homage to Midcentury America”
Patricia Escárcega, *Los Angeles Times*, 14 September 2019⁸⁴

Out of all the legacies of postwar Southern California car cultures, none has ranked higher in significance than McDonald’s. This roadside hamburger stand on Route 66 grew into a global corporate empire. Scholars have long debated food enterprise from postwar Los Angeles, its suburbs, and its hinterlands. In a 1983 article for the *Journal of American Culture*, sociologist George Ritzer presented McDonaldization as the “paradigm case” for rationalization in the late capitalist epoch. The ubiquitous chain set global expectations for the provision of products and services faster, more cheaply, and at an unprecedented scale.⁸⁵ Some have gone on to celebrate this industry as the work of its founders, their personalities and vision,⁸⁶ but less celebratory accounts link the McDonald’s model to the exploitation of food workers, health problems in poor

⁸⁴ The photograph of three women is from Inland Empire local historian Steve Oquendo, who shared it with Lisa Morehouse, “So much more than tacos: San Bernardino’s Mitla Cafe,” *KALW*, 25 July 2018. The photograph of the fourth ever McDonald’s franchise, located in Alhambra, is from the Charles Fish collection and republished by Jimmy Stamp, “The Golden Arches of McModernism,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, 24 July 2013. Patricia Escárcega, “The best thing our restaurant critic ate this summer,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 September 2019.

⁸⁵ George Ritzer, “The ‘McDonaldization’ of Society,” *Journal of American Culture* 6, no. 1 (March 1983), 107.

⁸⁶ *The Founder*, directed by John Lee Hancock (2016, FilmNation Entertainment). John F. Love, *McDonald’s: Behind the Golden Arches* (Bantam, 1986).

communities, and an unsustainable consumer society threatening the future of human life.⁸⁷ Furthermore critics accuse fast food of forcing values and tastes from 1950s California on the whole country and throughout the rest of the world.⁸⁸ But roadside food also has its vociferous defenders. The “fast food” eatery made hot meals affordable for low-income and single-parent households and paved the way for entrepreneurs, including women, from marginalized groups.⁸⁹

A sensory history of fast food and car cultures makes room for thinking beyond the seeming contradictions in literature about these business enterprises. Instead of trying to decide whether fast food was helpful or harmful to life in Southern California and the world, I account for the many effects of automobile interiors becoming a place where men, women, and families ate. The shrinking distance between dining and driving massively changed the people’s palate in the postwar United States. Those who once mostly ate food available in the home (or served from sidewalk vendors to pedestrians) began to soothe their hunger by getting into the car for a trip to a restaurant or by parking the car after seeing an advertisement. Successful roadside food entrepreneurs struggled to outmaneuver one another by generating the most desire for food in the minds and bodies of passing drivers and providing them relief the most quickly or the most affordably. A disproportionate amount of those on the road were straight men, so entrepreneurs framed their pitches in male-oriented terms by melding heterosexual appeal and high speed.

⁸⁷ Annalise Orleck, *“We Are All Fast Food Workers Now”*: *The Global Uprising Against Poverty Wages* (Beacon Press, 2018). Chin Jou, *Supersizing Urban America: How Inner Cities Got Fast Food with Government Help* (University of Chicago Press, 2017). Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

⁸⁸ For a business history of marketers using visual standardization to substitute for taste standardization, see Ai Hisano, *Visualizing Taste: How Business Changed the Look of What You Eat* (Harvard University Press, 2019). Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria After the Second World War*, Diana Wolf, tr. (University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Philip Langdon, *Orange Roofs, Golden Arches: The Architecture of American Chain Restaurants* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1986).

⁸⁹ Marcia Chatelain, *Franchise: The Golden Arches in Black America* (Liveright, 2020).

Soon enough for families too, the norm of the three-meal day began to unravel in a geography where anyone with a car was able to access the instant gratification of a delicious roadside treat.

Mitlá Café in San Bernardino helped pioneer roadside dining. Lucia Montañó founded this small business in 1937 after immigrating to the U.S. from Jalisco. She lived just two blocks from the restaurant on Mt. Vernon Avenue, the spine of Mexican American San Bernardino. In the years since, *Los Angeles Times* food critic Patricia Escarcéga, a daughter of a Montañó family friend, has touted this resilient restaurant as a testament to the importance of Mexican Americans in the making of postwar foodways. Mitlá's taquitos dorados con carne molida are proof that tacos do not have to be soft to be authentically Mexican.⁹⁰ Indeed, these "tidy" little tacos were not at all ornamental, which counters the assumptions behind racist hot rodders' use of the slur "Gomez wagon." Mitlá's food was as particular and dynamic as any aspect of life for Mexican Americans residing in the Inland Empire. Thus forty-one World War II veterans of "Latin-American" heritage chose Mitlá as the place where they invited Anglo American Legion members for a friendly discussion about establishing a separate Spanish-speaking post.⁹¹ Mitlá's operators also generously invited a young food entrepreneur, Glen W. Bell, Jr., into the kitchen, where he saw how the tacos were made. Bell learned this lesson well and founded Taco Bell.⁹²

Mitlá's taco as an engine of capitalist enterprise is more than just a story of appropriation. Government engineered the marginalization of West San Bernardino when officials designated Mitlá's stretch of highway as "Alternate 66." Jack D. Rittenhouse's 1946 travel guide to Route 66 encouraged drivers speeding along the way in and out of Los Angeles to take Mt. Vernon in

⁹⁰ Escarcéga, "The best thing our restaurant critic ate this summer," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 September 2019.

⁹¹ "Latin Veterans Ask Legion Post," *San Bernardino Sun*, 19 January 1946.

⁹² Gustavo Arellano, *Taco U.S.A.: How Mexican Food Conquered America* (Scribner, 2012), 69-70. John A. Jakle and Keith A. Skull, *Fast Food: Roadside Restaurants in the Automobile Age* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 257-261.

order to bypass traffic. For those wanting to stop for a bite to eat, the book suggested “City 66” or E Street, the business loop through downtown.⁹³ This option took customers away from Mitlá and delivered them straight to Bell’s eatery and also the McDonald’s drive-in barbeque. Brothers Richard and Maurice McDonald had moved to the area in 1940 and founded McDonald’s after the failure of a prior business venture in the San Gabriel Valley. With plenty of hungry teens - and cheap labor - at the nearby high school, the brothers earned the profit needed to capitalize retooling as a hamburger stand. Such food likely had more appeal to the impatient drivers who preferred a rushed meal, so-called fast food, which they were able to eat with their hands - rather than utensils - inside of their (moving) cars.⁹⁴ Later, Route 66’s drivers shifted onto the new 215 freeway, but McDonald’s had franchised nationally. Mitlá never got any such chance to retool.⁹⁵

Though Mitlá has survived almost a century, memories of the restaurant’s origins have proven rather fragile. A woman founded this restaurant, and women did the work in its kitchen, but the journalists asserting Mitlá invented the fast food taco have missed this dimension of the story because they have over relied on interviews with the heirs. They say it was “Don Salvador” who founded the restaurant, gave it its name, and spilled its secrets to Bell.⁹⁶ The U.S. Census records tell another story. In 1940, “Lucile Montana,” railroad mechanic Salvador Rodriguez’s sister-in-law (and later wife), was “proprietress” at Mitlá. The household earned \$1441 a year at a time when the median income for a working man was \$956. Montaña, her daughter Teresa, her niece Mary Rodriguez, her boarder and dishwasher Biciento Ortiz, and her neighbor, the waitress Lorenza Rajas were all listed as working, but the household income was not disaggregated.

⁹³ Jack D. Rittenhouse, *A Guidebook to Highway 66* (self-published, 1946), 123.

⁹⁴ Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, 19-20.

⁹⁵ Preston Jones and Charles Palmer, “An Embattled City: Toward an Explanation of the Decline of San Bernardino, California,” *Southern California Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 33-52.

⁹⁶ P.G. Torrez, “Mitla fans happy; the vacation’s over,” *San Bernardino Sun*, 15 September 1982.

Nevertheless, the census specifically reported the five women had worked 77, 56, 35, 25, and 54 hours during the most recent week.⁹⁷ Enumerators were notorious for miscommunication with people in Spanish-speaking communities,⁹⁸ but this data provides clear evidence against the family's memories about Salvador as founder. Mexican American women innovated an original approach to roadside fast food, and male entrepreneurs took their idea and industrialized it.

McDonald's business model, for its first eight years, hinged on women's labor. In 1940, a female "carhop" in a sexy short dress and high boots had been pictured on the cover of *Life* magazine, which asserted that "a shapely thigh, a fresh young mouth smiling prettily has a stimulating effect on the male appetite."⁹⁹ That was also the year McDonald's opened, and it had a crew of female carhops serving customers who sat and ate in their cars. These meals involved at least four carhop visits: bringing menus, taking orders, serving the food, and collecting dirty dishes with the payment. At the end of his life, Richard McDonald was still complaining about this inefficient and "terribly slow system," for customers dithered while deciding what to get, the carhops forgot items, or they flirted in exchange for a bigger tip. Sexual politics disrupted the production at the other end too. McDonald recalled cooks, all male, wanted to date carhops. Rejected, cooks retaliated by selectively delaying orders for girls who had said no to them. This pattern of quid pro quo workplace sexual harassment became such a problem that ownership switched to a workplace without women at all.¹⁰⁰ In 1948, McDonald's fired carhops in favor of a self-service system. Customers parked their cars and walked to a window to order from a man.

⁹⁷ 1940 Census, *Ancestry*.

⁹⁸ David Hayes Bautista, *La Nueva California: Latinos in the Golden State* (University of California Press, 2004), 29-32; Clara E. Rodríguez, *Changing Race: Latinos, the Census and the History of Ethnicity* (New York University Press, 2000), 101-104.

⁹⁹ "Houston's Drive-in Trade Gets Girl Show with its Hamburgers," *Life*, 26 February 1940. Jakle and Sculle, *Fast Food*, 54.

¹⁰⁰ *Burger Town*, directed by Daniel Linck (1998, CineAmerica), Amazon. In 1958, *Modern Office Procedures* advised managers to establish termination as a consequence for both parties in the event of any workplace romance. Julie Berebitsky, *Sex and the Office: A History of Gender, Power, and Desire* (Yale University Press, 2012), 175.

The tradeoff was a cheap meal served at a quicker pace than at the typical food stand. If in a hurry, the customers were able to eat their hamburgers and fries one-handed while driving off. In the postwar U.S. city, that modernist setting, driving had revived the “sensuous indulgence... Satisfying on a deep, animal level” of eating food with the hands rather than with utensils.¹⁰¹

When McDonald’s grew into a nationwide chain, it eschewed hiring women in any public-facing capacity for the entirety of the 1950s. The bosses did not want young men coming to ogle carhops.¹⁰² In 1947, “An Open Letter On McDonald’s Code of Good-Neighbor Relations” had been posted. This document subjected patrons to strict rules, including a five-mile-per-hour speed limit in the parking lot, a ban on loud noises like honking, peeling tires, or profanity, and “a twenty minute time limit in car stalls” after 7 P.M.¹⁰³ Without business from randy young hot rodders, McDonald’s sales stagnated for months after reopening. The former carhops defiantly came back to “heckle” the suddenly single-sex operation.¹⁰⁴ But with time, a growing segment of customers embraced self-service. The automation of women’s work of all sorts became a priority in the years after World War II. In Hollywood, 1949, machinist Kenneth C. Purdy invented an “automatic drive-in” called a “motormat” of “conveyor belts, gears, and gadgets - guaranteed not to charm a fat tip out of you with a big smile.”¹⁰⁵ Five years later, McDonald’s next owner, Ray Kroc, paid the popular San Bernardino stand his first visit and learned food without sexuality was precisely what some male customers desired. A young carpenter said he ate there “[e]very damned day...It sure beats the old lady’s cold meatloaf sandwiches.” “And you don’t have to wait and mess around tipping waitresses,” added a more

¹⁰¹ Keridwen Cornelius, “Eating with Your Hands,” *Gastronomica* 9, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 14.

¹⁰² Love, *McDonald’s*, 141-142.

¹⁰³ “An Open Letter On McDonald’s Code of Good-Neighbor Relations,” 1947, Original McDonald’s Museum.

¹⁰⁴ Love, *McDonald’s*, 15.

¹⁰⁵ Virginia MacPherson, “Cute Carhops Are On Way Out Because Of Motormat Invention,” *Madera Tribune* 17, no. 6, 9 July 1949.

respectable, middle-class man in a seersucker suit. Kroc went to the restaurant's owners and proposed franchising McDonald's in Illinois.¹⁰⁶

Franchising for automated "self-service" was a rising trend in Southern California. The need dated to labor shortages during and after the Second World War. In 1947, Whittier's Frank Urich had opened the first self-service gasoline station, which offered five cents off to customers who did their pumping. He cited as his inspiration the cafeterias in Los Angeles where diners put items from a counter on their trays.¹⁰⁷ McDonald's first automated service one year later. Then three men, service station owners Neil Fox of Occidental Petroleum and his two brothers-in-law, accepted the logic of the McDonald's model for roadside food enterprise. In 1953, they were the first to buy the rights to franchise restaurants, one in Arizona and the other in Downey (close to Urich's Whittier). Now an incipient chain, McDonald's had the extra capital to hire engineering consultants to come perfect the "Speedee Service System" in 1954.¹⁰⁸ The Eng-Skell company was undoubtedly a leader in food science. The U.S. military had recently commissioned this San Francisco firm to design machines and packaging needed to feed hot meals and ice cold desserts to millions of soldiers and workers on the move in multiple theaters of war and occupation.¹⁰⁹ The restaurant layout Kroc brought first to the Midwest and then the world was Eng-Skell's.



Prior to McDonald's move to Chicago, this enterprise was not alone in designing the postwar roadside environment along gendered lines. Googie's, by architect John Lautner, was a 1949 coffee shop fitted for an awkwardly-shaped lot next to Schwab's Pharmacy on the Sunset Strip. The name "Googie" soon became the namesake for a contemporary modernist style when

¹⁰⁶ Ray Kroc with Robert Anderson, *Grinding It Out: The Making of McDonald's* (Henry Regnery Company, 1997), 7.

¹⁰⁷ Keith Reid, *National Petroleum News* 96, no. 10 (September 2004): 20-21. John Margolis, *Pump and Circumstance: Glory Days of the Gas Station* (Bulfinch Press, 1993), 112-113.

¹⁰⁸ "McDonald's Speedee Service System" blueprints, 18 October 1954, Original McDonald's Museum.

¹⁰⁹ "Our History," *ESCO Foods*, n.d., accessed 11 December 2020.

a photographer, Julius Shulman, took visiting critic Douglas Haskell on a drive up Crescent Heights Boulevard. Having caught sight of the restaurant, Haskell yelled, “Stop the car!...This is Googie architecture.”¹¹⁰ In February 1952, his term appeared in an early issue of *House & Home* magazine as a satire written in the outrageous voice of an architecture professor willing to accept any trend in order to keep up with the times.¹¹¹ What the author likely did not know was how this restaurant’s name originated in a man’s mocking nickname for his wife. Googie’s belonged to Mort Burton, a restaurateur who called his wife Lillian , because “her big eyes reminded him of Barney Google, a character in the funny pages” .¹¹² At the same time that women like the entrepreneurs and workers at Mitlá and McDonald’s were disappearing from roadside dining, they were also reemerging symbolically as the butt of misogynistic jokes.

In 1953, McDonald’s made a major contribution to Googie with its two signature arches, which first appeared after Richard McDonald commissioned the design from a Fontana architect. Like the nickname Googie, the Golden Arches are part of a quietly gendered history. McDonald never admitted these structures were anything more than an echo of the novelty architecture boom between the wars in Southern California. Such roadside delights were mimetic. Food chains standardized their look, so customers could see a façade and then recall other times this provider had fed them. The power of association subliminally whetted their appetites. Designers sometimes gave these buildings the appearance of a product or service. Donut shops came with towering plaster donuts rising from the roof into the sky. The Golden Arches were ambiguous

¹¹⁰ Shulman and architecture critic Esther McCoy conveyed this account in interviews with Alan Hess, *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture* (Chronicle Books, 2004), 66-68.

¹¹¹ *Time*, 25 February 1952.

¹¹² Images from Della Hansmann, “What is Googie Architecture?,” *Moss Design*, uploaded 1 March 2016, accessed 9 January 2021, <http://moss-design.com/what-is-googie-architecture/>; “Barney Google and Spark Plug,” 1923, *My Comic Shop*, n.d., accessed 9 January 2021, <https://www.mycomicshop.com/search?TID=427421>

but no less capable of the industry's so-called "ABCs" or "Always Beckoning Customers."¹¹³

After Kroc bought McDonald's, he planned to purge every trace from the previous regime, but a psychoanalyst business consultant in marketing named Louis Cheskin saved the golden arches from obliteration. He claimed the yellow curves in the logo evoked "Mother McDonald's breasts,"¹¹⁴ and made drivers, driven by a compulsive, childlike hunger, need to stop and feed.

Cheskin evoked postwar beliefs in the deterministic power of design to precipitate action and to shape attitudes.¹¹⁵ In 1951, he published *Color for Profit* and established a reputation as an expert on how to choose colors in sales. This book established a binary between cools like blue and green versus warms like red, orange, and yellow. The former were pleasant, so they held a viewer's attention, but the latter were stimulating. Cheskin advised companies to complement warm and cool colors in their branding if they wanted first to catch and then to hold customers.¹¹⁶ However, McDonald's and many other similar restaurants paired red and yellow, for a roadside enterprise solicited drivers rushing so quickly they were not going to linger there long enough to warrant the holding effect. In fact, these warm colors drove them to eat quickly and then to get back on the road, which kept seats and parking spots available for the next customer. Helen Fong was another leading practitioner in color theory and used it for her Google approach to interior decorating (though she had nothing to do with Google's, which tellingly, went out of business). Fong crafted enduring examples of the melding of 1950s car culture and

¹¹³ "Always Beckoning Customers...the ABC's of Good Design," *American Restaurant* 40 (May 1957): 214-216. For an oppositional perspective of this same gendered phenomenon, especially the impulsivity of men in supermarkets, see Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (D. McKay Company, 1957), 111.

¹¹⁴ "Packaging gives products personality and appeal," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 25 June 1995. Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, 98.

¹¹⁵ Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (Pocket Books, 1957).

¹¹⁶ Louis Cheskin, *Color for Profit* (Ig Publishing, 1951), 61-62.

food culture, including Norm's (beloved to Pop Artists), the omnipresent Denny's, and the award-winning Pann's.¹¹⁷

Fong was a rare Chinese American woman in Los Angeles area architecture. Educated in the first cohort of city planning students from the University of California, Berkeley, Fong learned from German Jewish emigré Erich Mendelsohn. He claimed a building is “not an indifferent spectator to the whizzing cars and the ebb and flow of traffic, but has become a receptive and contributory element in the movement around it.” Fong took this lesson to heart, for the critic Alan Hess identified this effect at Pann's on its “island formed by the confluence of La Tijera, La Cienega, and Centinela Boulevards in Inglewood[.] Pann's multicolored terraced roof hovers with no apparent support over a lush garden of exotic subtropical yuccas and palms. Behind invisible walls of gem-clear plate glass, diners sit in climate-controlled comfort, at once protected from and in the midst of the swirl of traffic around them.”¹¹⁸ In 1958, the same year Pann's opened, *Rafu Shimpo* interviewed Fong, who said her work was not merely commercial. Hers was an art of “flowing linear forms, functionalism, compatibility with environment and spatial penetration.” She added, “Just being a woman makes me deplore monotony.”¹¹⁹ Fong opted to use her personal cosmetics, nail polish, to paint red squares on tiles behind the counter. The excitement mirrored the traffic pandemonium just behind the sitting and eating customers.¹²⁰

The feminine taste of Pann's interior designer was indicative of a shift in food enterprise from the assumption restaurants were to appeal to single men or to male heads of households. In

¹¹⁷ “Pann's Coffee Shop,” *Los Angeles Conservancy*, accessed on 10 December 2020.

¹¹⁸ Hess, *Googie Redux*, 108 and 93.

¹¹⁹ “Vermilion and Lanterns,” *Rafu Shimpo*, 20 December 1958.

¹²⁰ Elaine Woo, “Helen Liu Fong, 78; Architect Created Futuristic Designs for Coffee Shops,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 April 2005. For a critical reading of petroleum-based cosmetic products and the making of the contemporary woman, see Cecily Devereux, “‘Made for Mankind’: Cars, Cosmetics, and the Petrocultural Feminine,” in *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture*, Sheena Wilson, Adam Carlson, and Imre Szeman, eds. (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017).

1959, *American Restaurant* reported the results of a study showing wives were twice as likely as husbands to suggest going out for dinner.¹²¹ McDonald's first appearance in *TIME* magazine, 1961, described "a cooked-out housewife" in Rockford, Illinois who "packed her three children into the family car and set her course for a peppermint-striped glass-and-tile structure boasting a huge sign." The nameless woman then ditched her "waiting brood" in the car and walked over to order four hamburgers and milkshakes.¹²² To get a break was undoubtedly significant for women with cars who lived by day in these suburban worlds where the children typically outnumbered the adults.¹²³ McDonald's doubled down on the centrality of women's sensibilities after Southern California became saturated with many choices of eatery. Marketing tried a local advertising blitz that hired airplanes with wings beaming McDonald's in neon to do flyovers over freeways during drive time. These calls to commuters, mostly male, hardly increased sales. What worked were children's television commercials with the slogan: "Give Mom a Night Off." With a small \$180,000 budget, Kroc got "a smash hit. It turned Californians into our parking lots as though blindfolds had been removed from their eyes, and suddenly they could see the golden arches."¹²⁴

The number of McDonald's in the U.S. grew to 500 in 1963, and still, none of the stores hired female employees. At corporate headquarters, June Martino was an exception with her job as Kroc's treasurer-secretary. It was Martino who publicly came to the defense of McDonald's when she wrote a letter lambasting *Fortune* magazine for an attack on the appearance of the company's roadside arches. To her, the monumental designs constituted "a way of humanizing

¹²¹ "Why Do They Eat Out?," *American Restaurant Magazine* 43 (May 1959), 212. For more on gender and the feminization of eating out, see Andrew Hurley, "From Hash House to Family Restaurant: The Transformation of the Diner and Post-World War II Consumer Culture," *Journal of American History* 83, no. 4 (March 1997), 1294.

¹²² *TIME*, 3 November 1961, 81.

¹²³ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (The MIT Press, 1981), 258.

¹²⁴ David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (Fawcett Columbine 1993), 163. Love, *McDonald's*, 224. Kroc, *Grinding It Out*, 130-131.

what is still an overwhelming landscape.”¹²⁵ Another path for women into this enterprise was as the “mom” in “Mom & Pop” operations. Franchise holders traded corporate a cut of the profits for the right to use a recognized brand and business model in an exclusive territory. *TIME* added, “small franchisers (and usually their wives) must work at least a ten-hour day, six days a week.”¹²⁶ Like with Mitlá, McDonald’s became an enterprise where credit gravitated to a father figure and women’s contributions appeared parenthetically. The sexual discrimination only started to abate in 1964 in Elkhart, Indiana. The town’s male workforce was fully employed, so the local franchise hired women as servers in the restaurant. Corporate briefly resisted but then acquiesced after producing strict rules for women in the McDonald’s workforce. These included prohibitions against wearing colored nail polish, jewelry, or perfume. The updated operations manual specified, “women with serious complexion problems should not be scheduled for window work,” and Kroc admitted in an interview, “We figured the first women that we hired should be kind of flat-chested.”¹²⁷ The boss wanted no human bust to eclipse the sight of the golden arches.

McDonald’s projected 1950s values into the future. Southern California native son Richard Nixon had been vice president in that era, and Kroc later donated over a quarter-million dollars to Nixon’s 1972 reelection campaign.¹²⁸ At a Texas beef summit, California Governor Ronald Reagan heralded McDonald’s as a lodestar for free enterprise. He advised public schools to follow the lead of a white flight suburb outside Little Rock, AR and to let McDonald’s operate in public school cafeterias.¹²⁹ In the bicentennial year of 1976, the company released an 18-part series of road maps for drivers to keep “in your glove compartment.” These guides illustrated the

¹²⁵ Max Boas and Steve Chain, *Big Mac: The Unauthorized Story of McDonald’s* (Mentor, 1977), 38.

¹²⁶ *Time*, 24 May 1963, 90.

¹²⁷ Love, *McDonald’s*, 291-292.

¹²⁸ “Leading Nixon Contributors,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 July 1973.

¹²⁹ “*On Free Enterprise*”: *Ronald Reagan’s Important New Message to America*, W.S. McBirnie, forward (Community Churches of America, n.d.), 9.

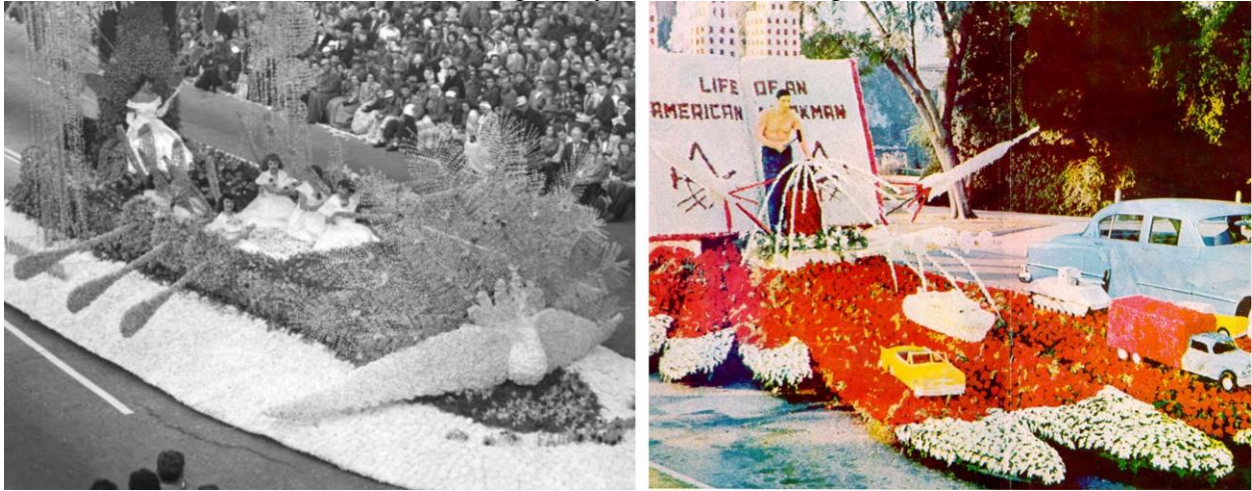
contiguous U.S., historical sites to visit throughout, and where in every region to stop for meals - or for breaks - at a local McDonald's. Whom the company expected to read these maps was clear from each region's exhaustive monthly calendar of annual festivals. For the Los Angeles area, the events were mostly in far-flung commuter towns. Visitors were invited to eat McDonald's on trips to San Juan Capistrano for the Golondrinas Fiesta at the mission in March, to Ontario Speedway's 500-mile car race in September, or to Pasadena for the New Year's Rose Parade.¹³⁰ Like other postwar cultural institutions,¹³¹ McDonald's lured families from cities to the suburbs.

¹³⁰ "Heritage Maps" full set, Original McDonald's Museum.

¹³¹ Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2004).

Pt. 2: Parade Route

Cars and Pageantry in 1950s Los Angeles



“It should be noted that we were at *all* times chaperoned.”
Rose Princess Sylvia Van Peebles, 2020¹³²

The annual New Year’s morning Tournament of Roses parade dates to the year 1890 in Pasadena when horse-drawn carriages adorned with fragrant roses processed down Colorado Boulevard. These gardens concealing machines¹³³ were a paradox worthy of Leo Marx, who found American pastoralists have often feared technological civilization was “invading the land, transforming the sensory texture of rural life - the way it looks and sounds.”¹³⁴ But in Southern California, the Rose Parade reversed this trend. The making of U.S. suburbs has involved shifts of people and values from the countryside into the peripheries of cities.¹³⁵ Festive culture from

¹³² Image from Dave Duricy, “1954 Pasadena Tournament of Roses Review,” *Imperial Club*, uploaded 24 March 2002, accessed 9 January 2021. Sylvia Van Peebles, “Memoirs of a Rose Princess,” *LetterPile*, 2 July 2020.

¹³³ Tournament of Roses rule number 6 decreed, “A float shall be deemed a vehicle on which the frame or platform shall not be less than 6 by 10 feet, completely covered with decorations or greenery or flowers including the sides and ends thereof or any object thereon, and completely concealing the wheels of the vehicle.” *Tournament Rules*, 1942, Research Library and Archives, Pasadena Museum of History.

¹³⁴ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford University Press, 1964), 31-32.

¹³⁵ C. Vann Woodward, a noted historian of the U.S. South, coined an awkward term for this process: “rurbanization” or moving directly from country to suburb and “skipping the phase of urbanization entirely.” Matthew D. Lassiter and Kevin M. Kruse, “The Bulldozer Revolution: Suburbs and Southern History since World War II,” *Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (August 2009), 694. For the preeminent example of such a study of rural migration to Los Angeles, see Nicolaidis, *My Blue Heaven*, 2002).

urban and rural traditions has ranged in style from respectable events to rowdy, carnivalesque parties where ordinary people found moments for comfort and joy.¹³⁶ Los Angeles area elites took the Rose Parade and its beauty pageant as an opportunity to perform an ode to U.S. military might, consumer bliss, and stringent gender binarism.¹³⁷ Then in the 1950s, rebellious women of color reclaimed this event and seized upon its “potential for disruption or disjuncture.”¹³⁸

A sensory history of pageantry and car cultures closes the gap between the extremes of formality and festivity by stressing how olfactory delight served as a common denominator for the two. Each kind of event, plus events featuring strong hints of both order and disorder, has scent functioning as a signifier of special circumstances. Gifts of flowers marked the moment for a date, a holiday, a funeral, or a wedding, according to many etiquettes from around the world. Such events typically called for fragrances to mask unwanted odors like the funk of musty clothes, the reek of trash, the putrefaction of death, or the stink of air pollution. In Southern California after the Second World War, the smog from auto exhaust, oil drilling, and heavy industry gave the atmosphere the brown look and bleach smell of smog. With visiting fans in town for the Rose Bowl football game, Pasadena remade itself into the Rose City. Homologous to that famously fertile San Gabriel Valley soil, perfect for growing everything from roses to citrus, was the region’s social environment for raising gorgeous, well-bred daughters. While in fact a caravan of carbon-burning flatbed trucks was slowly rolling in reverse, the parade route looked and smelled like paradise itself to all but the least naive among millions of spectators.

¹³⁶ Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Temple University Press, 1986), 20.

¹³⁷ The best work on elite parading in Southern California is “The Fair,” in Phoebe Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (University of California Press, 2006), “History on Parade,” in William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (University of California Press, 2004), and Lon Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival, 1934-1990* (University of California Press, 2002).

¹³⁸ Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (University of California Press, 1999), 7.

During Southern California's population booms from 1888 to 1929, attendance at the Rose Parade grew at a furious pace. After wartime cancellation from 1942 to 1945, the tradition resumed in 1946, and more spectators than ever came. A 400,000-vehicle traffic jam, reputedly the most massive to that point in world history, had formed. With intersections along the route closed, Pasadena's network of streets and roads was overwhelmed. One and a half million auto passengers parked in and around downtown that morning, then they almost all left at once for the football game at the Rose Bowl, and later, many crossed town again for the horse races at Santa Anita. In 1947, the Automobile Club of Southern California printed maps of alternate routes for visitors. The traffic plan was featured in *Westways*, the club's official magazine. Twelve hundred police officers, including many from the Los Angeles Police Department and the county sheriffs, deployed to assist local authorities. Literally overseeing them all was Pasadena's police chief, who observed the entire scene from the vantage point of a blimp floating above the city. When and where traffic slowed, the chief noticed and used a radio to broadcast instructions to police vehicles so officers could redirect traffic from bottlenecks and save the city from gridlock.¹³⁹

At the Rose Parade, police had roles beyond traffic enforcement. They provided security at an event that was a target for those threatening to make a political statement. In 1952, Valley Decorating Co. had fired six workers with "tough attitudes." The night before the parade, they retaliated by sabotaging 12 floats they had recently built. The vandals cut off an exhaust pipe and stuffed flowers into the pipes of others. They loosened the nuts on the wheels, tore out the ignition wires, disconnected the brake rods, and damaged the starters. In one of the disabled flatbed trucks, the fumes overwhelmed the driver, and he passed out.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, threats of violence against the parade's famed Grand Marshals occurred multiple times. The Truman

¹³⁹ Robert Clark, "Policeman in the Sky," *Westways* (December 1946), 24.

¹⁴⁰ "Rose Queen's Float Gassed," *Madera Tribune* 60, no. 233 (5 January 1952).

administration's Marshall Plan coordinator Paul G. Hoffman, a former auto executive, rode past 1.5 million people in 1950 knowing "several anonymous postcards had been received which stated that I would be bombed somewhere along the line of march. I rather assumed that if a serious effort was going to be made to bomb me, I wouldn't have been warned, but I couldn't fully erase from my mind the possibility." Anti-civil rights activists threatened Grand Marshal Earl Warren, former California governor and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. This happened on the New Year's after *Brown*, the judge's controversial 1955 school integration decision.¹⁴¹

The selection of Grand Marshals for the Rose Parade told thousands of spectators lining the parade route - and millions more reading the paper, listening to radio, or watching TV - how war, industry, and politics were entangled in the U.S. Of the sixteen 1950s-era marshals, six were recent Medal of Honor recipients who spent New Year's, 1952, stateside from their deployments in Korea. One of them, Joseph C. Rodriguez of San Bernardino, became the first nonwhite Grand Marshal¹⁴² until Thailand's foreign minister, Thanat Khoman, was chosen for 1967 at the height of conflict in Southeast Asia. Next to warriors, business leaders were likely candidates for Grand Marshal. These included two automobile executives: Hoffman (Studebaker) and Charles "Engine Charlie" Wilson (General Motors). The latter was Dwight Eisenhower's befuddled nominee for Secretary of Defense who wondered aloud at his 1953 Senate confirmation hearing, "I thought what was good for our country was good for General Motors, and vice versa."¹⁴³ In 1953, the Grand Marshal was Vice President-elect Richard Nixon, who rode in Chrysler's new 21.5-foot Imperial Phaeton parade car, one of the three made for the whole country.¹⁴⁴ Chrysler also

¹⁴¹ Joe Hendrickson, *Tournament of Roses: The First One Hundred Years* (Knapp Press, 1989), 113 and 122.

¹⁴² Joseph C. Rodriguez, "Experiencing War: Stories from the Veterans History Project, *Library of Congress*, n.d.

¹⁴³ Justin Hyde, "GM's 'Engine Charlie' Wilson Learned to Live with a Misquote," *Detroit Free Press*, 14 September 2008.

¹⁴⁴ The City of Los Angeles still owns and operates this same vehicle during parades. Chrysler sent another to New York and offered the third to the White House, but for legal reasons, the president could not accept the gift, and it

debuted a new hybrid tea rose the automobile company had sponsored as a tie-in with their new model Imperial. A total of 3500 citrus-smelling *rosas Chrysler Imperial* covered the car. A Big Three auto brand had thus inserted itself permanently into the scientific taxonomy of species.¹⁴⁵

The Rose Parade hailed both women and men by synthesizing the purportedly feminine love of flowers with a masculine romance for the automobile. A record-shattering 53,000-bloom 1953 float called “Moonlight and Roses” carried riders in Victorian costume. This was a joint venture by the Southern California Floral Association and the Chrysler Corporation. Every bloom was a fresh All-American-winning Chrysler Imperial Rose.¹⁴⁶ For the City of Detroit’s entry, 25,000 of these same brilliant red flowers in the foreground gave the impression of molten steel. In the back, a shirtless, heavily muscled worker hammered an anvil, and each of the sparks shooting forth guided the eye to the products of his labor: a car, a truck, or a tank.¹⁴⁷ The float’s name was “Life of an American Workman,” which referenced Walter Chrysler’s autobiography. He had chronicled a bootstraps narrative from humble origins, including years as a freight-riding hobo, to the executive office of the world’s second greatest automaker. In 1950, ten years after Chrysler died, a new edition came out. The co-author wrote a postscript revealing what kind of man Chrysler was. His combative dealings with business leaders belied an everyday concern “for the dignity of workingmen” born of memories from his days as a young man in overalls with no certainty of success. Without exception, these reflections had brought Chrysler to tears.¹⁴⁸

remains in Detroit. “1952 Chrysler Imperial Parade Car - Jay Leno’s Garage,” *YouTube*, uploaded 22 July 2015, accessed 21 December 2020.

¹⁴⁵ *Tournament Review*, 1953, Research Library and Archives, Pasadena Museum of History.

¹⁴⁶ “Rose Parade Float,” *San Bernardino Sun* 59 (number 97), 23 December 1952. Tournament of Roses rule “allows nothing in the way of decorations except fresh flowers.” *Pigskin Review: Official University of Southern California Football Program* 33, no. 7 (1 January 1955), 13.

¹⁴⁷ *Tournament Review*, 1954, Research Library and Archives, Pasadena Museum of History.

¹⁴⁸ Walter P. Chrysler with Boyden Sparkes, *Life of an American Workman* (Dodd, Mead & Company, 1950), 213-214 and 219. For sexuality and manliness in Progressive Era hobo culture, see Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880-1930* (University of Illinois Press, 2003).

Strong feelings characterized how men in the 1950s described the Rose Parade in prose and visualized the event in home movies. Gene Sherman of the *Times* presented 1953's parade, themed "Melodies in Flowers," as a polysensorial paradise. "Winter wizardry in the Southland," he rhapsodized, "made a symphony of splendor in Pasadena yesterday and its blossom-scored strains were wafted to a world in wonder."¹⁴⁹ The crowds showed the same level of enthusiasm as they applauded from the stands and sidewalks. Amateur filmmakers, hobbyists with access to market-rate equipment, shot the passing floats, horse riders, dancers, and marching bands, often in brilliant Kodachrome color. Even though the men who shot these scenes typically put the parade in the center of the frame, the adoring crowd was there too, at the frame's edge. To view these films is to find the crowds were animated. They rose to watch the floats, clapped their hands, waved programs, turned to share glances with one another, and laughed. Others brought chairs to rooftops for a better view.¹⁵⁰ Sports fans erupted with enthusiasm at the sight of their team colors, gardeners were there daydreaming about the spring bloom to come after Southern California's January rose planting, and couples wondered whether their children and children to be were one day going to be marching by with the band or riding by waving from a bed of roses.

Home movie makers were not the only ones filming the Rose Parade. Television crews came in 1947 to film the event live for KTLA. By 1954, NBC broadcast the parade nationally in color. Over two decades, the TV audience grew to 125 million, globally. A 1973 study from Canada showed the parade's "enjoyment factor," the proportion of viewers reporting they liked

¹⁴⁹ Gene Sherman, "Throngs Acclaim Pasadena Rose Fete," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 January 1953.

¹⁵⁰ The best sources I found were from the Model Colony Audio-Visual Collection at the Ontario City Library: "1956 Rose Parade," *archive.org*, uploaded 12 April 2013, accessed 26 August 2021 and "Southern California footage vol. 5," 1958, *California Revealed*, accessed 26 August 2021.

what they saw, was 90%.¹⁵¹ Networks hired various commentators to give viewers a backstory for each float and the general impression of being there in California. Future governor and U.S. president Ronald Reagan assumed this responsibility for ABC in 1959. At NBC, television pioneer Betty White hosted from 1955 to 1974. NBC had White announce her first Rose Parade assignment during the last episode of her daytime talk show, *The Betty White Show*, which aired on New Year's Eve. After a mournful last day, White awoke early the next morning to visit the parade lineup and to "crawl all over the floats" at 3 A.M. A masterful ad-libber since the early days of television when actors like her had to improvise for thirty hours a week, White went and found something to say about each float. This was her New Years' ritual for two decades. She later joked hosts must have an ability to make anything entertaining: "It got so that if a signal went red and six cars lined up, I'd announce them, you know, 'yes and there's a Buick...'"¹⁵²

Though the Rose Parade showcased the talents of women like White, teenage beauty pageant winners stole the show. In the years after the Second World War, the gym curriculum at Pasadena City College required every unmarried female student to try out for the Rose Court. In 1959, an administrator observed 2000 contestants over several days and selected 165 to advance. Tournament of Roses Association officials culled this number to 50 who participated in another round at the Huntington-Sheraton Hotel. There local "businessmen" decided who best resembled "a wholesome American girl, a typical co-ed...Beauty isn't the only consideration. We will also judge on such factors as poise, graciousness, charm and posture. In addition, the girls must be good students."¹⁵³ The *Times* unveiled the winner: "Margarethe Bertelson, a tall, brown-eyed

¹⁵¹ David Shaw, "Rose Tournament: No Thorn Left Unclipped," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 December 1973. Compare the 125 million viewers in 1973 to County Supervisor Warren Dorn's estimate: 60 million in 1960. "Supervisors Honor Rose Queen, Court," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 December 1959.

¹⁵² Betty White, interview with her agent Tony Fantozzi, *Archive of American Television*, 4 June 1997.

¹⁵³ "Co-eds vie for Rose Queen title," *Eagle Rock Sentinel* 50, no. 90 (22 October 1959).

beauty of Danish descent.” Since three section frontpage photographs were not proof enough, Smith quantified the Rose Queen’s weight at 120 pounds and height at 5 feet 8 inches.¹⁵⁴ Mass consumerism had just brought restaurant meals and frozen food within reach of the average person in the U.S., and now Rose Parade judges’ tastes turned to thinness and induced young women hoping to marry well to join a “cult of slimming” unlike anything since the 1920s.¹⁵⁵

Queens were supposed to delay marrying for the duration of their one-year commitment to the Rose Parade, but then they raced to the altar. From 1950 to 1959, ten pageant winners aged 16 to 19 averaged 22.5 months from coronation to their nuptials.¹⁵⁶ Often, they had transferred from the college in Pasadena when a graduating senior or graduate student proposed marriage. This is what happened for Nancy Thorne, a “B+” student, who wanted “to enroll in Stanford to study architecture [and] to acquire enough knowledge of architecture to design my own home, and marry and settle down in that home.” The next August, she was engaged to a fraternity brother from Stanford Medical.¹⁵⁷ Critics once lambasted coeds for attending universities just to get a so-called “Mrs. degree,”¹⁵⁸ but this assumption did not account for the likes of Thorne and her agenda. Marriage was part of the plan, but Stanford coursework offered Thorne considerable skills for shaping her future home. The beauty queen was a practical and proactive contrast to the

¹⁵⁴ Jack Smith, “Tall Pasadena Coed Named Queen of Rose Tournament,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 December 1959.

¹⁵⁵ Avner Offer, “Body Weight and Self-Control in the United States and Britain Since the 1950s,” *Social History of Medicine* 14, no. 1 (April 2001): 79-106. Also, Lois Banner, *American Beauty: A Social History Through Two Centuries of the American Idea, Ideal, and Image of the Beautiful Woman* (Figueria Press, 1983).

¹⁵⁶ *Ancestry*, California, U.S., Marriage Index, 1949-1959. “1951 Rose Queen Betrothed to Larry W. Pritchett,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 April 1954. “Thorne Rite Scheduled,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 August 1953. “1953 Queen of Roses Wed to Former Texan,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 August 1953. “Rose Queen of 1954 Says Vows,” *Los Angeles Times*, 25 July 1957. “‘55 Rose Queen Marilyn Smuin to Become Bride,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 June 1955. “Marriage Announcement,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 March 1957. “1957 Queen of Roses to Be Married,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 August 1957. “Pamela Prather, John King, to Wed,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 January 1960.

¹⁵⁷ “17-Year-Old Blonde to Reign as Rose Queen,” *San Bernardino Sun* 58, no. 91 (14 December 1951). “Thorne Rite Scheduled,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 August 1953.

¹⁵⁸ Kathryn A. Huggins, “Here for the Mrs. Degree: Women’s College Major Choice and Marital Status,” *Sociation Today* 14, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2016).

passive sufferer Betty Friedan diagnosed with “the feminine mystique” after life in monotonous prefabricated tracts. Though pageants paraded girls like livestock,¹⁵⁹ they also provide the tools of survival for becoming what Michelle Nickerson has called the “mothers of conservatism.” This maternalist midcentury political sensibility, predominant in Pasadena and Orange County, formed after many a meeting at the tastefully decorated homes and in the lusciously landscaped backyards of adult female volunteers for movements like the 1964 Barry Goldwater campaign.¹⁶⁰

Once married, pageant winners raced into motherhood. In 1961, the former Leah Feland spoke of a luncheon with 20 queens. For fun, they tabulated how many babies they had birthed, and Feland laughed, “I’ve forgotten how many we all had - but the number was staggering.”¹⁶¹ Public fascination with the Rose Court led reporters to interview prewar winners, women who were, to quote historian Joanne Meyerowitz, “not June Cleaver.”¹⁶² They used this forum to register complaints about gender in the postwar U.S. In 1955, May McEvoy was “an attractive matronly brunette” with a husband and two children who had completely forgotten she served as queen in her movie star days in 1923. What changed since? “For three years they chose queens for their accomplishments,” she averred. “Since then they’ve taken girls from colleges. They’ve never been interested in film careers. Most married right away.”¹⁶³ Rose Queen Margaret Huntley Main (1940), hated the celebrity after her reign ended. “You begin to feel self-conscious and it stays with you. Pretty soon you’re afraid of people. They seem so critical. You think twice

¹⁵⁹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (W.W. Norton, 1963). “No More Miss America!” in *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement*, Robin Morgan, ed. (Random House, 1970).

¹⁶⁰ Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton University Press, 2012).

¹⁶¹ “20 Former Rose Queens in 7th Reunion,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 December 1961.

¹⁶² *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, Joanne Meyerowitz, ed. (Temple University Press, 1994).

¹⁶³ *Blade Tribune*, “Rose Ruler Who Became Movie Star Says Others Miss For Lack Of ‘Drive,’” 28 December 1955.

before you go to the store in jeans.” Her family of six moved to Sunland’s hidden hills in search of anonymity for the sake of escaping those who relentlessly judged the oldest daughter’s looks.¹⁶⁴

Other communities around Los Angeles used pageants to determine which girl or girls were to ride floats that these towns and cities entered. From 1957 to 1959, Indio sponsored the construction of three floats, the first of which won the Rose Parade’s Sweepstakes Prize. Waving from these vehicles were pageant winners from the previous February’s Riverside County Fair and National Date Festival. The selection process was quite different from Pasadena’s. Female high school juniors and seniors were given a choice whether or not to enter, and “[p]rofessional modeling experience disqualifies a candidate.” In 1958, the chamber of commerce offered the crown to the most successful fundraiser among nine finalists. For Indio, floats cost from 9 to 12 thousand dollars.¹⁶⁵ The victor in this contest of salesmanship became Queen Scheherazade. The title dates to 1947 when the fair adopted its “Arabian” motif.¹⁶⁶ This was also the year the classic Orientalist film *Song of Scheherazade* was released. The title role went to Yvonne de Carlo, a white actor in brownface who had become famous on the prewar beauty pageant circuit. The film’s “Scheherazade” was an exotic dancer in 1887 Morocco, and the sexy outfit Queen Jeaniene Cook wore to the 1957 Rose Parade echoed the Hollywood film’s costume design.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ “Rose Queen of 18 Years Ago Says Problems Follow Reign,” *San Bernardino Sun* 64, no. 96 (21 December 1957).

¹⁶⁵ “Queen Scheherazade To Be Named Feb 2 At Indio,” *Desert Sun* 30, no. 108 (22 January 1957). “Fund Raising for Indio Float Is Under Way,” *Desert Sun* 32, no. 79 (7 November 1958). “Indio Bows Out Of Rose Parade,” *Shin Nichibei*, 5 August 1959.

¹⁶⁶ “History of the Riverside County Fair & National Date Festival,” datefest.org, accessed 26 August 2021. For a history of the Arab American diaspora in Southern California, the greatest enclave of this sort in the U.S. by 1940, see Sarah Gualtieri, *Arab Routes: Pathways to Syrian California* (Stanford University Press, 2019).

¹⁶⁷ Page 33, Pasadena Tournament of Roses Parade, 1957, *Los Angeles Examiner* Digital Photographs Collection, USC Digital Library, accessed 23 December 2020. Yvonne de Carlo with Doug Warren, *Yvonne: An Autobiography* (St. Martin’s Press, 1987).

Plainly offensive ideas about race and nationality also factored in float design. The public utility Southern California Edison won the 1950 grand prize for “Showboat.” Riding that float were stock figures, like an antebellum Black “mammy” and a smiling “pickaninny” holding a comically large slice of watermelon.¹⁶⁸ In 1958, there was a cosmopolitan rage for Japanese style. Cold War imperative drove business leaders to make overtures to the people their government had bombed abroad and “interned” at home. Two El Segundo oil companies, which had refined oil fueling Boeing B-29 Superfortresses and the buses that took Japanese Americans to their desert camps,¹⁶⁹ celebrated Japanese gardens, pagodas, and women wearing kimono.¹⁷⁰ Union Oil placed three Japanese Americans on “A Dream of Far-Off Places.” Mitzi Miya, who was later to serve as the Nisei Week Queen, rode Standard Oil’s “Day Dreams of a Flower Garden.”¹⁷¹ Army Recruiting Service also sponsored such a float, one with six girls from distinct races. Men were given an impression that if drafted, they might bring home one of these “global beauties,” to quote the *Times*. “Local” might have been the better term for Linda Nakatsuka. A third-generation Japanese American Sansei, she had spent her girlhood at the Manzanar camp.¹⁷²

For over half a century, the Tournament of Roses did not recognize young women or girls of color in its beauty pageants even though a large Black community lived in redlined northwest Pasadena.¹⁷³ Then in 1958, officials gave Miss Crown City to Mrs. Joan Williams, one among

¹⁶⁸ See the minute 10 mark in “1950 61st Tournament of Roses Parade Pasadena California,” *YouTube*, uploaded 27 July 2016, accessed 9 January 2021.

¹⁶⁹ For a fantastic review of oil in California history, see the essays in a special issue of *Pacific Historical Review* 39, no. 2 (May 1970).

¹⁷⁰ Meredith Oda, *The Gateway to the Pacific: Japanese Americans and the Remaking of San Francisco* (University of Chicago Press, 2018).

¹⁷¹ Page 29 and Page 31, Pasadena Tournament of Roses Parade, 1958, *Los Angeles Examiner* Digital Photographs Collection, USC Digital Library, accessed 23 December 2020. “Pasadena Float Design Revealed by Standard Oil,” *Rafu Shimpo*, 7 December 1957. Densho Digital Repository, <https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-njpa-4-731/>

¹⁷² Jack Smith, “Rose Parade Delights Huge Throng,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 January 1958. For evidence of the time Nakatsuka spent at Manzanar, see her record at *Ancestry*.

¹⁷³ James E. Crimi, “The Social Status of the Negro in Pasadena, California,” sociology master’s thesis, USC, 1941.

the city government's fifteen pretty young clerical workers. For 12 years, this "aesthetic labor"¹⁷⁴ competition determined which girl got to ride on the City of Pasadena's float. When Williams won, *Jet* put her on the cover and announced the big news to Black readers nationwide. A short article introduced her as "a tawny-complexioned mother of two" whose husband was "so elated, he bought me a new wardrobe."¹⁷⁵ Excitement soured when the office staff shunned Williams, the mayor stopped attending public events where Miss Crown City had duties, and the parade's host city made the unprecedented decision to cancel its float that year. The tournament officials who picked the winner had misconstrued Williams' racial identity. She kept her crown and got free tickets to the game, but *Jet* lamented the "queen without a domain." A 1959 article ended with these words from the queen: "If I had to do it all again, I would refuse the title."¹⁷⁶ Williams deserved better, but this scandal prefigured the transformations coming for the Rose Parade.

White supremacy endured on the parade route for another ten years. Then in 1968, the Tournament of Roses came into alignment with the times when officials selected the first two princesses of color. These two high school girls were named Sylvia Peebles and Janice Lowe, an African American and a Chinese American. Both students were from prominent local families. Peebles' older brother Melvin Van Peebles was a celebrated filmmaker. The next year, Lowe's father Al won election to the school board. Soon thereafter, Pasadena became the first segregated district outside the U.S. South to receive a court order to integrate. Lowe favored busing, and this courageous and controversial stance cost him his seat in the next election.¹⁷⁷ Meanwhile in Los

¹⁷⁴ Ashley Mears, "Aesthetic Labor for the Sociologies of Work, Gender, and Beauty," *Sociology Compass* 8, no. 12 (2014): 1330-1343.

¹⁷⁵ *Jet*, 18 September 1958, 62.

¹⁷⁶ *Jet*, 15 January 1959, 50-51.

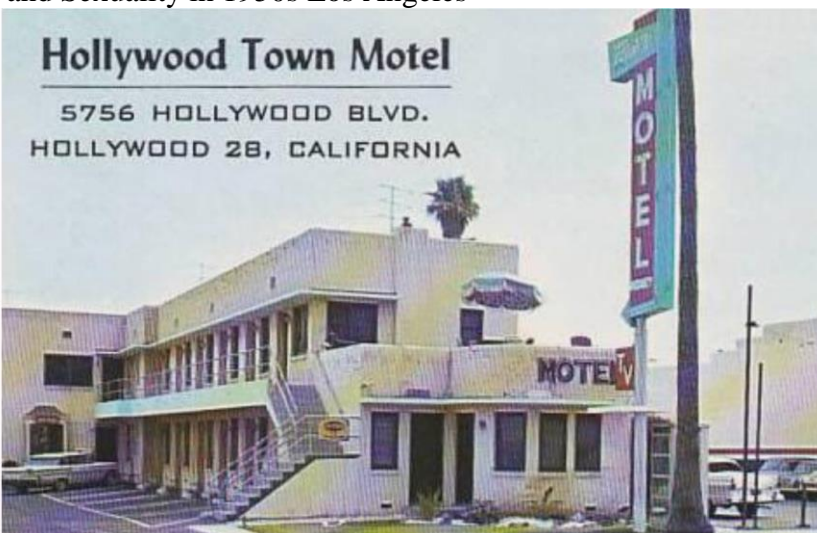
¹⁷⁷ NAACP newsletter, Pasadena, November 1968 and Ed Essertier, "Breakthrough: A Negro Princess," *Pasadena Star News*, 1968, Pasadena Museum of History Collection, USC Digital Library. "Al Lowe, Pasadena Education Trailblazer, Dead at 92," *CalSchoolNews*, 6 December 2018, accessed 24 December 2020.

Angeles, queer activists known as homophiles had also seized onto parading as a stage for bring visibility to their civil rights. In 1966, 15 cars with signs on the roofs demanding an end to discrimination against Gays in the military took to the streets on 21 May, Armed Forces Day. The “protest on wheels” wended through Los Angeles and drew a groan from a pedestrian at the corner of Wilshire and Fairfax. It was Saturday, the Sabbath. Then activists went on talk radio to spar with the rightwing provocateur Joe Pyne on his program.¹⁷⁸ In Southern California, the car and pageantry had put queer men and women inside a motorcade of anonymous capsules where drivers demonstrated with confidence in the power to speed away from vicious homophobes. They had also pioneered a national urban tradition now known as the Gay Pride Parade.

¹⁷⁸ Don Slater, “Protest on Wheels,” *Tangents* 1, no. 8 (May 1966).

Pt. 3: Full Service

Cars and Sexuality in 1950s Los Angeles



“I was just regarded as a sort of child prostitute.”

Don Bachardy, *The Village Voice*, 2 July 1985¹⁷⁹

Bachardy was life partners with Christopher Isherwood, who had found the teen boy in an area known for gay cruising. The 50-year-old writer then published *The World in an Evening* (1954), which critic Susan Sontag referenced in “Notes on Camp” (1964). Isherwood mentioned but seemed not to understand Camp, with which Sontag was more familiar as a precocious Los Angeles kid that had finished high school at 15 and gone straight to college. Sontag defined Camp, in part, as an enthusiasm for gender-and-age play among stage performers. The sensibility ran from a taste for “the androgynous” to “something that seems quite different but isn’t: a relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms.” Among examples of this style which she cited were the actors Marlon Brando and James Dean.¹⁸⁰ In Hollywood, such affectations drew fire from reactionaries during the anti-Gay “lavender scare” that coincided with

¹⁷⁹ Raye Penber, “Announcing the Dean Harrington: A Jacket Fit for a Rebel,” *Craftsman Clothing*, uploaded 24 January 2020, accessed 9 January 2021. Hollywood Town Motel postcard, n.d., author’s possession. Armistead Maupin, “The First Couple: Don Bachardy and Christopher Isherwood,” *The Village Voice* 30, no. 16 (2 July 1985).

¹⁸⁰ Susan Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” *Partisan Review* 31, no. 4 (Fall 1964): 515-530. Carl Rollyson and Lisa Paddock, *Susan Sontag: The Making of an Icon*, revised edition (University Press of Mississippi, 2016).

the anti-communist “red scare.”¹⁸¹ Meanwhile, sexual nonconformity had a few outlets, like the homophile movement in Silver Lake called the Mattachine Society¹⁸² or male bachelor-oriented magazines.¹⁸³ Finally, the “hustlers” and “queens,” i.e. homosexual, heterosexual, and pansexual sex workers, came out and Camped the city’s streets by selling drivers sex from the sidewalk.¹⁸⁴

A sensory history of sexuality and car cultures eschews the records of censors or civil groups in the search for other signs of intimate life. Though influential, puritanical crusaders who tried to enclose sexual touch to within housing and to restrict it to opposite-sex adult partners in legal marriages hardly came close to completion. Though worthy of scholarly attention, print culture and social movements were never more than partial avenues into sexual liberation from the repressive forces of government officials and moral authorities. After the Second World War in Los Angeles, the car opened numerous additional routes for seeking sexual pleasure without leaving concrete, specific evidence. To find such stories, I relied on representations of gestures, coded language, and secret meeting places in both fictions and quasi-fictions: films, novels, and tell-all memoirs. Memories and fantasies of sexuality in postwar car cultures might be faulty or misleading, but they allude to the great diversity of forms intimacy took once driving secured drivers heightened privacy and a widening range of contact points. The sex lives of drivers, their passengers, and pedestrians left more-or-less faint sensual impressions in the classic cinematic drama *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and in the celebrated hustler novel *City of Night* (1963).

¹⁸¹ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (University of Chicago Press, 2004); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (Basic Books, 1988).

¹⁸² Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (University of California Press, 2009); Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* (University of California Press, 2008).

¹⁸³ Todd C. White, *Pre-Gay L.A.: A Social History of the Movement for Homosexual Rights* (University of Illinois Press, 2009), 28-40; Carrie Pitzulo, *Bachelors and Bunnies: The Sexual Politics of Playboy* (University of Chicago Press, 2011); Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁸⁴ Barry Reay, *New York Hustlers: Masculinity and Sex in Modern America* (Manchester University Press, 2010).

Since the institution of Will H. Hays' Motion Picture Production Code in 1934, filmic allusions to sexuality were split into plausibly deniable innuendo and representation for the sake of condemnation. No one mastered the latter subgenre quite like the film producer Sid Davis. His first so-called mental hygiene or social guidance documentary short was called *The Dangerous Stranger* (1950). The director heard of a man raping and murdering his 6-year-old neighbor.¹⁸⁵ John Wayne, a conservative actor for whom Davis served as stunt double,¹⁸⁶ invested \$1000 in the production. LAPD lent the director access to a squad car and an officer to guest star. The narrative began with police advising children in a playground to be wary of male drivers offering young hitch-hikers rides, for they might drive recklessly, maintain their cars inadequately, or "mean harm" not just to girls but also to boys. From the presentation, Davis cut to dramatizations where too-trusting little girls got in cars with strange men. The dead body of the first girl was found in the desert. In the second case, a heroic boy saved the day, for he wrote the car's license plate down, and police apprehended the kidnapper in time to avert a tragedy. Schools and other institutions proceeded to purchase \$250,000 worth of copies to show their charges.¹⁸⁷ The trend reappeared in the police procedural television show *Dragnet*, which proceeded to air an episode about child sexual exploitation in Hollywood called "The Big Producer" (1954).¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ "How to Protect Our Children," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 November 1949. Cecilia Rasmussen, "Girl's Molestation, Murder in 1949 Prompted Tougher Laws," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 August 2004.

¹⁸⁶ Wayne refused body doubles into the 1940s and found actors who did not perform their own stunts "unmanly," but Sid Davis is proof that in his middle age years, he relented on this conviction. Randy Roberts and James Stuart Olson, *John Wayne: American* (University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 260.

¹⁸⁷ *The Dangerous Stranger*, directed by Sid Davis, (Sid Davis Productions 1950), *Archive.org*, uploaded 15 September 2004, accessed 1 January 2021. Peter L. Stein, "A Rejected Genre: Those kitschy and cautionary starchy industrial and educational films provide an illuminating peek at the past 75 years of American culture." *San Francisco Chronicle*, 31 August 2003. This short film proves the stigmatization of hitch-hiking had begun earlier than 1953, when the film *The Hitch-Hiker* was released, which is described in Jeremy Packer, *Mobility Without Mayhem: Safety, Cars, and Citizenship* (Duke University Press, 2008), 77-110.

¹⁸⁸ Christopher P. Wilson, *Cop Knowledge: Police Power and Cultural Narrative in Twentieth-Century America* (University of Chicago Press, 2000). "The Big Producer," 1954, *YouTube*, uploaded 20 November 2018, accessed 27 August 2021.

When “The Big Producer” broadcast on 27 August 1954, the viewers included director Nicholas Ray, producer Lew Wasserman, and his wife Edie. An alumnus of the Federal Theater Project and thus a victim of greylisting for too-progressive politics, Ray proposed for Hollywood to produce its take on problematic youth in Los Angeles. Wasserman replied, “What’s in the headlines.”¹⁸⁹ Two days later, the *Los Angeles Times* printed an article entitled “Six Injured in Head-on Collision on Sepulveda.”¹⁹⁰ A car-load of youths mentioned in this article had been playing a dangerous game that inspired the frightful “chickie run” in *Rebel Without a Cause*, Ray’s answer to the moralizing panic exhibited by the likes of Sid Davis and *Dragnet*’s Jack Webb. Warner Bros had toyed with such a film since buying the rights to stories Ray adapted. The first was a psychological study, the transcription of 46 hours of interviews with a hypnotized White ethnic in detention, called *Rebel Without a Cause: The Story of a Criminal Psychopath* (1944). The next was the screenplay for “Main Street, Heaventown” by two women named Sylvia Richards and Esther McCoy, the architecture critic. These two narratives populated the finished screenplay with a title, themes like absentee parents, and settings like the Planetarium at the Griffith Observatory. According to Richards, Ray’s only original addition was the car, but car cultures framed the “Main Street Heaventown” screenplay, which opened with a car chase.¹⁹¹

BOBBY: Maybe he [a motorcycle cop] got the license number.

DUFF: He was too far back.

BOBBY: Mr. Purdy really did say you could use his car, didn’t he?

DUFF: Sure...but I don’t have a driver’s license.

BOBBY: Because when I said it would be nice to go riding, I didn’t mean for you to...¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ My translation of “Qu’est-ce qui défraie la chronique?” Bernard Eisenschitz, *Roman Américain: Les vies de Nicholas Ray* (Christian Bourgois, 1990), 277.

¹⁹⁰ “Six Injured in Head-on Collision on Sepulveda,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 August 1954.

¹⁹¹ Robert N. Lindner, *Rebel Without a Cause: The Story of a Criminal Psychopath* (Grove Press, 1944). Richards told Ray’s biographer, “il a ajouté l’histoire des voitures.” Eisenschitz, *Roman Américain*, 277-278. Richards was a screenwriter who cooperated with HUAC, unlike Ray, who spent those years in self-imposed Spanish exile until McCarthy’s fall in the summer of 1954.

¹⁹² “Main Street, Heaventown,” n.d., page 2, Esther McCoy Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Box 11, Folder 26.

In the Richards and McCoy screenplay, trouble dogged two teenagers who went on a date in a stolen “Chevvy” with a radio blaring “be-bop.” Ray took the tired film noir motif, literally set in the bank-repossessed mansions of Bunker Hill, and adapted it to suburban life on a quiet street in Southeast Los Angeles near Ladera Park. In lieu of the scenes of poverty, courtroom back-and-forth, and forestry camp,¹⁹³ *Rebel Without a Cause* emphasized the paradox of unhappy middle-class children, car owners, who still had angst. According to *Time*’s review, “juvenile delinquency is not just a local outbreak of tenement terror but a general infection.”¹⁹⁴ Even at the palisades overlooking the sea, a boy plunged to his death after the contest to see who would be first to jump from their vehicle as it sped toward a cliff. The survivor, played by James Dean, was Jim, and he was new to the neighborhood. The family had just moved there after some mysterious adolescent drama in their prior community. Judy, the love interest played by Natalie Wood, lived next door and spent her time socializing with a rather tough gang of boys wearing expensive leather jackets and quiff haircuts. The film opened with the image of Jim lying in the middle of a nighttime Hollywood street, drunk. At the police station, Jim saw Judy, who was wearing a bright red dress and heavy makeup. She explained herself to an officer named Ray.

JUDY: He looks at me like I was the ugliest thing in the world. He doesn’t like my friends. He doesn’t like one thing about me. He called me...he called me a dirty tramp! My own father...

RAY: Do you think your father really means that?

JUDY: Yes, no, I don’t know, maybe he doesn’t mean it, but he acts like he does. He grabbed my face, and he started rubbing off all the lipstick. I thought he’d rub off my lips, and I ran out of the house.

RAY: Is that why you were wandering around at 1 o’clock in the morning? Weren’t looking for company, were you?¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ “Main Street, Heaventown,” page 1.

¹⁹⁴ *Time*, 28 November 1955.

¹⁹⁵ *Rebel Without a Cause*, directed by Nicholas Ray (Warner Brothers, 1955).

Judy's father reacted to his teen daughter's increasingly mature look like a man who had seen the thriving market for sex on the roads of postwar Los Angeles. From Hollywood to the city's plainest-looking suburban homes, pimps and madams had so-called "tramps" on call and set up in quasi-secret brothels.¹⁹⁶ Ray frankly asked Judy if she had become a street walker, and her ambivalent answer and silence indicated the resemblance had been her intent.¹⁹⁷ The fictive conversation on screen in fact echoed the actor's actual transformation from child star to teenage ingenue. The 15-year-old girl had begun with intimate, one-on-one "singing lessons" with Frank Sinatra in 1954, right after the 38-year-old star won an Oscar. He had his valet mix their young visitor cocktails and then leave the room: "I don't want you to testify," he joked."¹⁹⁸ Wood used a similar series of private castings with Nicholas Ray to win a role in *Rebel Without a Cause*. An initial offer of a bit part dissatisfied Wood, and she later engineered a late-night car crash. At the hospital, the teen recited the private phone number at Ray's Chateau Marmont bungalow as her emergency contact. A doctor scolded both Ray, 44, and the girl, "a goddam juvenile delinquent," for the fact that she knew the number. Wood got the lead, and no one reported the scandal.¹⁹⁹

RAY: Is that why you moved from the last town, because you're in trouble?
JIM: You know, they think that they can protect me by moving around all the time.
RAY: You had a good start in the wrong direction back there. Why'd you do it?
JIM: What do you mean? Mess a kid up? Called me chicken.
RAY: Your folks didn't understand?

The police interrogation of Jim proved no less sexually coded than the one with Judy. Jim expressed strikingly sensitivity to the insult "chicken." On the surface, this word suggested a

¹⁹⁶ Two of the most notorious brothels in postwar Los Angeles were located in the hills above the Sunset Strip at 8436 Harold Way and 1354 Miller Place. "Judge Lashes Immunity," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 August 1948. For a doorman remembering a guest who asked him to hire a "well built" married female bank teller for a \$300 job, see Earl "The Pearl" Watson, *Doorman to the Stars: Hollywood Knickerbocker Hotel, 1945-1962* (Xlibris, 2013), 88.

¹⁹⁷ I owe this interpretation of Judy to John Francis Kreidl, *Nicholas Ray* (Wayne Publishers, 1977), 100-101.

¹⁹⁸ George Jacobs and William Stadiem, *Mr. S: My Life with Frank Sinatra* (Thorndike, 2003), 70-71.

¹⁹⁹ Eisenschitz, *Roman Américain*, 290. Suzanne Finstad, *Natasha: The Biography of Natalie Wood*, second edition (Crown, 2009), 175-176. Bill Higgins, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 2 December 2011, page 80.

person was a coward and challenged his masculinity. However, “chicken” has contained another layer of meaning in the history of sexuality. Sailors once affectionately called the boys assigned to ships “chickens.” Then in the early 1900s, the term featured in homosexual men’s parlance. “Chickens” were younger men and boys for whom some men explicitly expressed a strong sexual preference. The term appeared in Long Beach, 1914, in an exposé about a secret society called the “606 club” and later in 1959’s *The Naked Lunch* by novelist William S. Burroughs.²⁰⁰ Such habits of speech would have been no secret to Nicholas Ray, for he was a man who sometimes had sex with other men. Screenwriter Gavin Lambert, an assistant to Ray in the 1950s, remembered them as “on-and-off lovers” during an interview in 2005, the last year of his life.²⁰¹ The director’s sexual history is a useful tool for deciphering Jim, who violently resisted becoming a “chicken” to men but then accepted adoration from a baby-faced character named Plato, played by Sal Mineo. Later an out-and-proud bisexual, Mineo went on to describe Plato as “in a way, the first gay teenager in films.”²⁰² He had the right name, which referenced the author of the ancient Greek *Symposium*, a philosophical conversation about homoerotics, but then again, the Hollywood boys’ gang Ray hired as cultural consultants were called The Athenians.²⁰³

BUZZ: Give me some dirt.

²⁰⁰ In 1890 before Congress, a witness from the Andersonville hospital recalled, “I saw an admirable illustration of the affection which a sailor will lavish on a ship’s boy to whom he takes a fancy, and makes his ‘chicken,’ as the phrase is...a bright handsome little fellow of about fifteen, had lost one of his arms in the fight. He was brought into the hospital, and the old fellow whose ‘chicken’ he was was allowed to accompany and nurse him. This old ‘barnacle back’ was as surly a growler as ever went aloft, but to his ‘chicken’ he was as tender and thoughtful as a woman.” *Congressional Record containing the Proceedings and Debates of the Fifty-first Congress, First Session XXI* (Government Printing Office, 1890), 3637. In November 1914, sex scandal beset Long Beach when vice officers uncovered an underground queer sociability. An anonymous letter writer, objecting to calls for silence on the matter, after one suicide and two threats of suicide among the accused, alleged that “the jaded appetites of these loathsome degenerates, after a time, are not satisfied with each other; they demand young boys - ‘chickens’ they call them - and they will stoop to almost anything to satisfy their desire in this regard.” “Publicity is Needed and then More Publicity,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 November 1914. A “homosexual tourist” twice called Carl a “chicken” in William S. Burroughs, *The Naked Lunch* (Grove Weidenfeld, 1992 [originally 1959]).

²⁰¹ Sam Kashner, “Dangerous Talents,” *Vanity Fair* (March 2005).

²⁰² Boze Hadleigh, *Conversations with My Elders* (St. Martin’s Press, 1988).

²⁰³ Actor-consultant and son of a silent star Frank Mazzola of the Athenians gave advice about slang, looks, and cars. Susan King, “They’re Rebels With a Cause,” *Los Angeles Times*, 25 October 2000.

JUDY: *She scoops dirt into Buzz's outstretched hands, and he rubs them together*
BUZZ: Hey, toreador! She signals, we head for the edge, and the first man who jumps is a chicken. All right?
JUDY: *She kisses Buzz three times on the chin, the forehead, and the lips*
JIM: *Holding an object to his lips, he asks Judy, Me too, may I have some dirt please?*
JUDY: *She scoops dirt into Jim's hands, which he claps in thanks, before running off to assume the role of the impromptu race track's flag girl, Hit your lights!*

The “chicken run” scene took the love triangle linking Jim, Judy, and her boyfriend Buzz and represented it as a car race culminating in a deadly crash. These terms were acceptable to the censors and legible to audiences. While Buzz and Jim publicly competed for Judy’s interest, the characters also bonded with one another through the intimacy of the dirt rubbing ritual. Jim made an ambiguous bid, “Me too,” after Judy kissed Buzz. Judy hurried over, dropped to the ground, picked up some soil, and then plopped it in Jim’s hands. The need for a firm, dry grip on the steering wheel during the race served as an alibi, which cloaked Jim’s desire to touch not simply a beautiful girl’s hands but also the same two hands that a beautiful boy had just touched. The race proceeded as the thinly-veiled enactment, via driving, of a sexual encounter. The boys were in a sense auditioning for the part of a skillful lover with an appropriate mixture of self-control and that risk-seeking drive to take sex to the edge of crisis. Neither boy wanted to come across as prematurely ejaculating, but then Buzz’s inability to pull out of the car before it soared off the cliff evoked the great fear of failure at coitus interruptus. Car cultures provided a stage for the articulation of these anxieties. The film’s fictive setting, a “bluff near Millertown,” was the kind of dark place with a view where teens with cars lined up at night for semi-public sex.

A sprawling, low-density city, Los Angeles abounded with lovers’ lanes. The best evidence of these secluded spots can be found in the annals of city planning and true crime. The unsupervised teens, closeted queer adults, and cheating spouses who parked their cars along

empty routes like the Mulholland Highway west of Sepulveda Boulevard,²⁰⁴ rarely publicized the best places to park for a nocturnal encounter. The exception to this rule was when victims of a crime had to approach the police, who found lovers' lanes on Montecito Drive in Northeast Los Angeles and on Yarmouth Road in Palos Verdes hills.²⁰⁵ Police officers applied these lessons to the 1956 search for the "lover's lane bandit." For three weeks in August, a 35-year-old man named Willie Roscoe Fields began deliberately passing as a vice officer and approaching teens parked in their cars. He flashed the tin badge, ejected the boys from the car, and drove to a new spot where he assaulted the girls. The cycle repeated seven times before the police lured Fields into a sting. LAPD had hired movie makeup artists to costume eleven men in dresses, makeup, and wigs. Two to a car, officers waited night after night at numerous known lovers' lanes "South of Olympic Blvd and between Vermont and La Brea Aves" until Fields finally approached two undercover officers, one male and the other female, near Our Lady of Loretto High School.²⁰⁶


LAPD officers and *Rebel Without a Cause* actors both seemed to take the roads of Los Angeles and its California hinterlands for a movie set. Filming wrapped on 27 May 1955, and at 2:45 A.M., the cast piled into Ray's Cadillac for an early-morning meal at Googie's across the street from the director's bungalow. Dean put on a show during the drive over when he "threw his legs over the rear of his motorcycle and stretched out his arms 'like a flying angel.'"²⁰⁷ Once the film debuted in October, the *Los Angeles Times* relished the "irony" of Dean's having died just weeks prior in his Porsche Spyder after a crash on the road the Salinas, for no such harm had

²⁰⁴ In 1964, the *Valley Times* reported initial plans to convert Mulholland Highway, west of Sepulveda, "from a narrow lover's lane to a spectacular scenic highway" leading to thousands of new homes. "Present Mulholland Drive is scenic, but unpaved," *Valley Times* Collection, Digital Collections of the Los Angeles Public Library.

²⁰⁵ "Nurse Kidnapped, Driver Slugged in 'Lovers' Lane," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 April 1950. "Teen-age Lovers' Lane Gang Captured by Posse," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 October 1955.

²⁰⁶ "Lover's Lane Bandit Seized With Aid of Policewoman and Make-up Artist," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 August 1956.

²⁰⁷ Lawrence Frascella and Al Weisel, *Live Fast, Die Young: The Wild Ride of Making Rebel Without a Cause* (Touchstone, 2005), 218-219.

come to his character.²⁰⁸ Three of the other young stars, namely Wood, Dennis Hopper, and Nick Adams, later staged a daring trip into the queer heart of Los Angeles in 1957. They went to hone their acting. A photographer from *Life* tagged along as the three teens stopped for a snack at Cooper's Do-nuts near Pershing Square at the terminus of Route 66. The magazine featured an image with the name of the eatery  on the window behind the trio, as they went “[s]eeking characters to re-create (sic)” in the heavy-drinking, mostly-male, middle-of-the-night crowd.²⁰⁹ Readers likely had no idea these students had taken the country on a tour through one of postwar Los Angeles's hustler havens, which was to feature prominently in *City of Night*.

Two years after Wood and company's field trip, hustlers, gay men, and trans women staged a small riot in Cooper's, which novelist John Rechy cast as “Hooper's” in his roman à clef, *City of Night*. The book recounted life in the not-so-conservative 1950s as experienced by a Mexican American hustler, who had worked city streets from El Paso to New York City, New Orleans to Los Angeles. For queer life in California, 24-hour coffee shops and “all-night moviehouses” provided a refuge, for state law required bars to close from 2 A.M. to 6 A.M. Often lacking stable housing during those hours, LGBTQ+ people avoided “the copcar...a slowly moving hearse” and police charges of lewdness or vagrancy by retreating into business establishments to drink cheap cups of coffee.²¹⁰ Nevertheless, officers still occasionally stormed these sanctuaries. In 1959, they entered Cooper's and roused Rechy along with two others. The resistance of the crowd quickly graduated from shouting objections to “flinging gathered trash at the cops, forcing them back into the squad car. Trapped, the cops called for backup. Defiance became almost festive. A queen danced around the isolated squad car; two men rocked it. Sirens

²⁰⁸ Philip K. Scheuer, “James Dean Cheats Car Death in Bit of Film Irony,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 October 1955.

²⁰⁹ *Life* 42, no. 4 (23 January 1957), 97. Also see <https://www.life.com/people/natalie-wood-rare-photos/>

²¹⁰ John Rechy, *City of Night* (Grove Press, 1963), 181.

wailing as if wounded.”²¹¹ Rechy’s retelling convinced historian Susan Stryker to see the “spur of the moment resistance” as the political equivalent to what happened at Stonewall in 1969.²¹²

The walking city has featured prominently in the history of sexuality,²¹³ but in Los Angeles, closeted men in cars came into the urban core. Between Hollywood and Sunset ran Selma Street, “a dark purgatory” where men went after striking out at the bars. Rechy vividly recalled the sight of “parked cars you think at first are empty, until a match, lighted suddenly, erupts, revealing a pair of staring eyes in the match-shadowed face.”²¹⁴ For years, Rechy kept revealing details, which amounted to a kind of queer street atlas of the city. By “the 1970s, there was an actual demarcation [between so-called hustling and cruising turfs] and in the middle, at Santa Monica Boulevard, was a limbo area.”²¹⁵ Other than Rechy, another witness to the parade of drivers seeking sex was Miss Destiny. In the language of that era, she was a “transvestite,” for this trans woman wore dresses and makeup in lieu of traditional men’s attire. *City of Night* included a passage where Miss Destiny amorously pursued Rechy and a number other hustlers,²¹⁶ but she also personally bartered sexual intimacy for payments. “I prostituted myself from the time when I first discovered that men would keep me,” stated Miss Destiny, who estimated she served “as many as 20 tricks in one night. My favorite corner for pick-ups was the south east corner of 4th and Broadway.” These details had gone unmentioned in *City of Night*, so Miss Destiny took her story to the homosexual-oriented *ONE* magazine. She posed as the

²¹¹ John Rechy, *About My Life and the Kept Woman: A Memoir* (Grove Press, 2008), 245.

²¹² Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution* (Seal Press, 2008), 82.

²¹³ Chauncey, *Gay New York*.

²¹⁴ Rechy, *City of Night*, 180-181.

²¹⁵ Interview with Steve Lafreniere of *VICE* magazine in Rechy, *City of Night*, 483.

²¹⁶ Rechy, *City of Night*, 117-147.

publication's September 1964 cover girl and gave a frank interview about queer, urban, working-class life.²¹⁷

Further verification of Rechy's accounts of a queer men's car culture surfaced with the publication of *Full Service* (2012) by Scotty Bowers. A sex worker to postwar Hollywood's closeted movie stars, the author identified himself as *City of Night's* "Smitty." "Smitty, you might say, had risen from the ranks: from gas station attendant, in Los Angeles; that's where he began - right in the station restroom. Then he became a bartender, a famous call boy; acquired some other boys - five or six - which he sent out on assignments." The cost for an outcall was \$15,²¹⁸ and Bowers later explained how he drove himself and other men and women to secluded mansions on the West Side. Before retooling into a high-end business, Bowers relied on roadside infrastructure. The service station, where drivers had long stopped for fuel, maps, directions, and recommendations, had potential as a "tearoom" where closeted men went to cruise or to hustle for sex with men in semi-public.²¹⁹ Regulars established a private, one-on-one rapport with their favorite attendant before asking where to find sex. Bowers detailed such an encounter in vividly tactual terms when he filled an actor's tank. "[W]hen I came back to the driver's window [Walter] Pidgeon had his hand on the sill. He was holding a few dollars for the gas between his thumb and forefinger and squeezed between his middle and index fingers was another crisp bill...'What are you doing for the rest of the day?' he asked in a very friendly tone, his face remaining expressionless."²²⁰ At a station like the Richfield Oil on the north side of Hollywood,

²¹⁷ "Editorial," *ONE*, September 1964, *ONE* National Gay and Lesbian Archives, USC Digital Library, accessed 1 January 2021.

²¹⁸ Rechy, *City of Night*, 90.

²¹⁹ Robert Humphreys, "The Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places," dissertation in sociology, Washington University in St. Louis, 1968. For the romance of the station attendant, see Jay Leno's preface to *It's a Gas!: The Allure of the Gas Station*, Robert Klanten and Sally Fuls, eds. (Gestalten, 2018).

²²⁰ Scottie Bowers with Lionel Friedberg, *Full Service* (Grove Press, 2012), 2.

just east of Van Ness Avenue, patrons made such bids and then slipping with a sex worker into the on-site restroom, into a trailer parked on the lot, or across the street to the Towne Motel.²²¹

Debunkers have called the legends of Scotty Bowers into doubt, but many memoirists in the tell-all convention retold his story (and some even used the name Scotty). These included Cecil Beaton, Debbie Reynolds, and Gore Vidal.²²² Although Hollywood writers have verified Bowers existed, they only provided partial authentication. *Full Service* was the work of an unreliable narrator. For example, the story of a traffic stop after Bowers left a party at a queer actor's house leading to a homosexual encounter hinged on an impossible chronology. The host died in 1958, and Bowers claimed the cop went on to recognize the sex worker's car, and to pull him over for more rounds of sex, by a license plate reading "DONNA." The "vanity license plate" did not become available until 1970 when Governor Ronald Reagan proposed selling motorists a right to personalize them.²²³ However, discontinuity only goes so far to discredit Bowers. Before the late 1940s, Hollywood had been a liberated mecca for queer men, especially the ones with cars, whose drive for same-sex play did not go away with the rise of a repressive apparatus. The risk of exposure for men who courted men in the industry must have made sex work seem like a safe, discreet, and necessary alternative during the Lavender Scare. To engage with the Bowers' legend, *City of Night*, and *Rebel Without a Cause*, is to consider the possibilities of a queer car culture. This result is a quasi-fictive sexual history akin to *ars erotica*.

Stories based in a mixture of true life and everyday fantasy became vehicles for more and more candid discourse about sexuality in Los Angeles and throughout the U.S.. Many members

²²¹ Bowers, *Full Service*, 54-58. Peter Debruge, "Scotty Bowers: Bartender to Babylon," *Variety*, 22 June 2006.

²²² Cecil Beaton, *Beaton in the Sixties: The Cecil Beaton Diaries as He Wrote Them, 1965-1969* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 355. Merle Ginsberg and Gary Baum, "Vidal Gores Critics," *Hollywood Reporter*, 24 February 2012. Review of Debbie Reynolds' *Make 'Em Laugh*, *New York Daily News*, 4 October 2015.

²²³ The host was Franklin Panghorn. Bowers, *Full Service*, 164-167. David Larsen, "Words You Can't Drive By," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 January 1970.

of the generation that came of age after seeing *Rebel Without a Cause* cited its influence on the student protesters of the 1960s. In 1970, Ray gave critic Roger Ebert an interview about his plan to turn the trial of the Chicago 7 into a drama.²²⁴ Meanwhile, the Doors' "L.A. Woman" (1971) recounted days and nights of driving the suburbs, roaming the alleys, driving the freeways, and asking a female-presenting "woman" if she were "a lucky little lady in the city of light / Or another lost angel, city of night."²²⁵ Either way, the lyricist Jim Morrison, his name an anagram of the later line "Mr Mojo Risin," responded with signs of interest. *Rebel Without a Cause*'s Mineo had also come out, and by 1972, he was fielding bold questions about whether he had ever street hustled or worked the casting couch. He winkingly denied both possibilities but had no qualms about discussing his "relatives, over in Sicily," who worked as "*ragazzi di vita*."²²⁶ When the 37-year-old was stabbed to death in his West Hollywood carport, four years later, the investigators found Mineo had an address book filled with the names of hustlers and call-boys.²²⁷

²²⁴ Roger Ebert, "Nick Ray Promises a Movie on 'Chicago Seven,'" *Los Angeles Times*, 8 March 1970.

²²⁵ Barney Hoskins, "The City That Celebrates Itself: Los Angeles on Los Angeles," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 24, no. 3 (2012), 316.

²²⁶ Hadleigh, *Conversations with My Elders*.

²²⁷ James Ellroy, "Cracking the Case of Murdered Actor Sal Mineo," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 21 December 2018.



Original shot from photographer Kristen Bedford's Cruise Night (Damiani, 2021)

Well after the 1950s ended, motifs from the sexual history of Southern Californian car cultures have endured, especially among Chicano lowriders. Consider artist Jesse Valadez and his customized art car named the Gypsy Rose. Imagery of this 1964 Chevrolet Impala broadcast nationally in the opening credits to the 1970s television show, *Chico and the Man*. By 2017, the vehicle appeared in a glass case on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Though the lowrider came to fame well after the period I cover in this chapter, it is a vessel carrying aspects of 1950s gender ideology into our present and into the future. Valadez named his car for the red roses he painted onto its roof in a style reminiscent of Southern Californian parading culture. While the Rose Parade was Pasadena's showcase of beautiful Anglo women and girls, the event had long drawn significant interest from Mexican American fans. In 1952, Spanish simulcasts of the Tournament of Roses began on both television and radio. Valadez also evidently named the car in a nod to the era's famed burlesque dancer, "Gypsy" Rose Lee. She performed in cities across the country until McCarthyists accused Lee of subverting American family values. She later

joined the ranks of the vindicated after years of paranoia. A feature film adaptation of Lee's life, *Gypsy* (1962), starred Natalie Wood.²²⁸ The best of 1950s gender ideology lives in the Gypsy Rose.

The title of this chapter echoes the 1910 feminist workers' political slogan, "Bread for all, and Roses, too." Organizer Helen Todd, who coined this phrase, traveled with it throughout the country by automobile and by rail. In 1911, California suffragists marched under banners claiming a double entitlement to bread and roses, to sustenance and to pleasure. By the 1950s, car cultures quietly fostered a sexual movement for bread, for roses, and for human connection. Unlike a men's motorist movement à la Jack Kerouac's Dean Moriarty or John Updike's Rabbit Angstrom, two of the most famous literary representations of men and their cars in the 1950s, driving became more than a search for the authentic self or an escape from conformity.²²⁹ My work proves cars fostered opportunities for new ways of having sex and intimacy. Driving gave the many more access to an unprecedented quantity of cheap, filling, and delicious fast food. For a select rich or adventurous few, parading, hustling, and cruising brought before their eyes an incredible array of beauties from which to choose a partner for life or for the hour. Not all men, but enough to support a booming marketplace for sex workers, prowled the streets of Los Angeles in their cars looking for a queen - or a stud - to satisfy their growing sexual appetites.

²²⁸ Gypsy Rose Lee, *Gypsy: Memoirs of America's Most Celebrated Stripper* (Frog, Ltd, 1999 [originally 1957]). *Gypsy*, directed by Mervyn LeRoy (Warner Brothers, 1962).

²²⁹ W.T. Lhamon, *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Harvard, University Press, 1990).

Ch. 2: Sight and Sound

A Racial History of Car Cultures in 1960s Los Angeles



I want a dream lover
So I don't have to dream alone
Paris Sisters, "Dream Lover" (1964)

In 1964, twelve winners received \$10,000 each from the Ford Foundation to make films.²³⁰ One of them was Kent McKenzie, USC graduate and director of *The Exiles* (1961). For years, he had filmed this social realist portrait of life among urban Indians from throughout the U.S. living in downtown Los Angeles. In one night of action, Native actors portrayed themselves drinking in dive bars, driving through downtown's tunnels, and driving into the hills. At these sites, they listened to ubiquitous rock 'n' music, oftentimes playing on the car radio, including the surf rock song "Comanche," which the filmmakers had commissioned from The Revels.²³¹ The film ended with a powwow on Hill X, the reputed open-air safehouse for a local ring of car

²³⁰ Eric Malnic, "Lone Wolves Nipping at Hollywood Heels," *L.A. Times*, 16 Aug 1964.

²³¹ *The Exiles*, directed by Kent McKenzie (1961: Contemporary Films, 2008). Kent McKenzie, "A Description and Examination of the Production of *The Exiles*: A Film of the Actual Lives of a Group of Young American Indians," USC Master's Thesis, 1964, 98 and 103-104. The postwar dispersal of American Indians to large cities from their rural homelands and reservation were officially known as "relocation" and the "termination policy." Nicholas G. Rosenthal, *Reimagining Indian Country: Native American Migration and Identity in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 52.

thieves, who took vehicles there to strip them for parts. Soon, bulldozers were to level that hill in order to make way for the outfield of Dodger Stadium,²³² but images of this independent, illicit, and informal world survived with the preservation of the film. Indians, like any other community of color, had created a car culture of their own in Southern California.²³³ Automobiles were not so inaccessible, and racist policing against nonwhite drivers was never so total, as to divide the city into two parts: a White car culture vs. other peoples of color dependent solely on transit.²³⁴

Another of those 1964 grant winners was a Gay experimental filmmaker named Kenneth Anger.²³⁵ He produced a film short that lasted the length of the standard three-minute pop song. “Dream Lover,” a Wall of Sound style cover by the Paris Sisters of Bobby Darrin’s 1950s hit, was the soundtrack to *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (1965), arguably the earliest-ever music video.²³⁶ By taking three C-words and turning them to K-words, Anger evoked a wordplay endemic to California. Car customizer George Barris had helped to popularize the trend at his Kustom Auto Shop in Lynwood and then at North Hollywood’s Kustom City. However, Anger’s trio of K’s also evoked the Ku Klux Klan. In juxtaposition to the subaltern drivers of *The Exiles*, Anger staged the car as a place for White supremacist organizing. He cast a blond, blue-eyed, and blue-garbed man as the star, who meticulously polished his car to perfection. This film resonated with rumors of “sundown towns” with White toughs called “spook hunters”²³⁷ but gave them a queer,

²³² Matt Weinstock, “The Indian in L.A. - With No Reservation,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 June 1962.

²³³ Gretchen Sorin, *Driving While Black: African American Travel and the Road to Civil Rights* (Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020). Chapter four of Cotten Seiler, *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²³⁴ In 1995, households reporting no access to a car amounted to 5.40% among Whites, 24.10% among Blacks, and 12.20% among Latinxs. Steven Raphael and Michael A. Stoll, “Can Boosting Minority Car-Ownership Rates Narrow Inter-Racial Employment Gaps,” *Brookings-Wharton Papers on Urban Affairs* (2001), 102.

²³⁵ Art Seidenbaum, “Movie Censorship War Flickers Up Once More,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 Apr 1964.

²³⁶ Matthew Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual: Camp, Capital, Cinema* (Duke University Press, 2002), 127.

²³⁷ The introduction to the acclaimed exposé *Sundown Towns* ends with a quotation from a sign reading “N*gger, Don’t Let the Sun Set On You In Hawthorne.” The only source for this was a single 2001 Internet post by a white history blogger from the area who remembered his father telling him about the 1930s-era sign. A Black man had complained about the lack of diversity in the blog. The host rebuked him, brought up the sign as a reason why

sensuous, and fetishistic spin.²³⁸ The imperative to uphold whiteness had shaped suburbs and built racial barriers to entry into these neighborhoods,²³⁹ but *Kustom Kar Kommandos* slyly alluded to the most important racist tradition in automobile history. Were the Aryan hot rodders the most dangerous racist bigots, or had Anger just redirected public attention to the Ford Motor Company's founder, Henry, who won a Nazi medal in 1938 for printing anti-Semitic literature?²⁴⁰

In 2001, critic Paul Gilroy wrote "Driving While Black," an essay about the place of the car in critical studies of race. Instead of chronicling Black people using driving to seek freedom or White drivers using it to defend privilege, Gilroy noted how Black people - and all racialized subjects - gaze into the car's "reflexive surfaces," which then "show us our distorted selves."²⁴¹ Consider "The Driver's Mind," a 1966 psychological symposium for *Westways*, the members' magazine of the Automobile Club of Southern California. In one essay, professor of education

Hawthorne had been so white for so long, and finished: "the Jesse Jacksons or the David Dukes of the world do not belong here." Neither the sign itself nor any image of it has yet to surface in the archives of Hawthorne or Los Angeles history. James Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (Touchstone, 2006), 43 and 46. *Set the Night on Fire* has quoted assertions from teenagers about so-called "spook hunter" gangs in a 17 May 1960 article from the *California Eagle*. The previous year on 24 December, the Black-oriented *Los Angeles Sentinel*, reported civil rights activist John A. Buggs went searching for these rumored white gangs and failed to find a single direct eyewitness to their existence. Buggs concluded the gangs and the "inflammatory...insignia" on their letter jackets were not real. In case of further evidence proving otherwise coming to light, the newspaper supplied a postal address for Buggs' own Commission on Human Relations. Jon Wiener and Mike Davis, *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (Verso, 2020), 47.

²³⁸ For a queer theorist's reading of sexual desire in this film, see Robert L. Cagle, "Auto-Eroticism: Narcissism, Fetishism, and Consumer Culture," *Cinema Journal* 33, no. 4 (Summer 1994): 23-33.

²³⁹ Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (University of California Press, 2006), 17-18.

²⁴⁰ Albert Lee, *Henry Ford and the Jews* (Stein and Day, 1980), 14 and 113.

²⁴¹ Paul Gilroy, "Driving While Black," in *Car Cultures*, Daniel Miller, ed. (Berg, 2001), 89. Numerous consumer objects have resembled such mirrors where people self-regard during racial formation. Beyond cars, we have also looked to our homes, into our closets, to our electronic devices, and even to our pets for cues about how we identify. See David M.P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy & White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (University of Chicago Press, 2007). Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York University Press, 2017). Michael Bull, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience* (Taylor & Francis, 2015). Unna Lassiter and Jennifer Wolch, "Changing Attitudes toward Animals among Chicanas and Latinas in Los Angeles," in *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles*, William Deverell and Greg Hise, eds. (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005).

James Malfetti of Columbia University Teachers College addressed skill differentials among drivers. Asked if bad drivers had worse driving records, Malfetti demurred, for he believed police enforced traffic law too unevenly for scientists to trust those statistics. Experts instead depended on surveys to identify the risky vs. “super-safe driver.” The latter, the professor stressed, represented a social type with certain disadvantages, for “[t]hey were conformists in the sense that they did most everything in a very traditional and unexciting way...one would wonder whether it would be wise to attempt to create individuals like this solely for the sake of improving traffic safety.”²⁴² Instead, he recommended a traffic regime balancing room for risk *and* safety. In a racist society, this goldilocks zone would have been for White drivers only, since they alone could count on any leeway to drive more riskily, as opposed to nonwhite drivers, who experienced racial profiling and the so-called “respect deficit.”²⁴³ Unevenly intensive traffic policing placed them at higher risk of being disciplined into so-called “super-safe” subjects.

These stories tell of driving as one among many factors separating racial groups in 1960s Los Angeles. The car initiated the age of White flight, when affluent residents, employers, and consumers abandoned urban neighborhoods in favor of life in almost-all-White suburbs, work in edge city office parks, and leisure in malls or along commercial strips.²⁴⁴ White sight and White sound were two twin sensory analogs to White flight. Through the medium of driving, the inner city was still visible and audible to suburban drivers, but at a remote distance. Windshields gave

²⁴² James L. Malfetti, interviewed by Larry L. Meyer, *Westways* (July 1966), 31-33.

²⁴³ Sarah A. Seo, *Policing the Open Road: How Cars Transformed American Freedom* (Harvard University Press, 2019). Jennifer Eberhardt, *Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do* (Penguin, 2019), 97-105.

²⁴⁴ Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2004). Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (Vintage, 2004). Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (University of Chicago Press, 2002). Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (University of Michigan Press, 1991). Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

Whites devices for framing communities of color.²⁴⁵ With car radio, Whites gained the capacity to hear the sound of the city filtered through the suburbs, for rock ‘n’ roll’s musical style, earliest performances, and recordings had been established and perfected in urban communities of color.²⁴⁶ With cars as an essential creative tool for the likes of producer Phil Spector, designer Ed Ruscha, songwriter Brian Wilson, and others, driving left impressions all over 1960s Pop style.²⁴⁷ However, the car also situated Whites in a site of vulnerability to new forms of racial protest and rebellion.²⁴⁸ Blatant misconduct by police in South Los Angeles against a Black

²⁴⁵ For visual and graphic design histories of identity in Los Angeles and other world cities, see Peter Lunenfeld, *City at the Edge of Forever: Los Angeles Reimagined* (Penguin, 2020). Adam Arenson, *Banking on Beauty: Millard Sheets and Midcentury Commercial Architecture in California* (University of Texas Press, 2018). Kellie Jones, *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s* (Duke University Press, 2017). Eric Avila, *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014). Andrew Friedman, *Covert Capital: Landscapes of Denial and the Making of U.S. Empire in the Suburbs of Northern Virginia* (University of California Press, 2013). Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the City: Mexico City at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 2012). Sarah Schrank, *Art and the City: Civic Imagination and Cultural Authority in Los Angeles* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). Anna Pegler-Gordon, *In Sight of America: Photography and the Development of U.S. Immigration Policy* (University of California Press, 2009). Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Duke University Press, 2009). Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (Simon & Schuster, 1982), 341. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Penguin Books, 2008 [originally 1972]).

²⁴⁶ For auditory and sound design histories of identity in Los Angeles and other world cities, see Lunenfeld, *City at the Edge of Forever*. Deborah Wong, *Louder and Faster: Pain, Joy, and the Body Politic in Asian American Taiko* (University of California Press, 2019). Robert M. Marovich, *A City Called Heaven: Chicago and the Birth of Gospel Music* (University of Illinois Press, 2015). Tyina L. Steptoe, *Houston Bound: Culture and Color in a Jim Crow City* (University of California Press, 2015). Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (Verso, 2015). Matthew F. Delmont, *The Nicest Kids in Town: American Bandstand, Rock ‘n’ Roll, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in 1950s Philadelphia* (University of California Press, 2012). Peter La Chapelle, *Proud to Be an Okie: Cultural Politics, Country Music, and Migration to Southern California* (University of California Press, 2007). Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (University of California Press, 2005). George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place* (Verso, 1994). Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock ‘n’ Roll Music* (E.P. Dutton, 1975).

²⁴⁷ Pop was an aesthetic movement in music, art, design, architecture, lifestyle, and ideas that was characteristic of the 1960s and predominant in California. For the global roots of this phenomenon in the history of ideas, see Daniel Horowitz, *Consuming Pleasures: Intellectuals and Popular Culture in the Postwar World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). For a history of Los Angeles as the Pop urban landscape that was in turn mirrored in the fine arts, see Cécile Whiting, *Pop L.A.: Art and the City in the 1960s* (University of California Press, 2008).

²⁴⁸ For three definitive studies of community organizing and cultural pushback against racist, aggressive policing, see Felicia Viator, *To Life and Defy in L.A.* (Harvard University Press, 2019), Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD* (North Carolina Press, 2018). Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (Free Press, 1994). The car and mobility infrastructure remain important chinks in the armor of neoliberal capitalism and neoconservative statism. Rebels of all political ideologies have planted snipers and roadside explosive devices along the routes of politicians and transformed trucks and automobiles into car bombs for ramming into military installations. Protesters have built street barricades out of vehicles. They have also recognized the cars parked on the street as possessions of affluent consumers, horrible bosses, and government authorities and then vandalized them. Protesters have also staged occupations of driveways

driver provoked a massive summer 1965 rising during which participants stoned White-driven cars and burned White-oriented roadside enterprises. Cars were no longer so safe, and even while in motion, Whites were forced to feel that thrilling sensation of driving through a city in revolt.

to the parking lots of businesses and institutions they oppose, of intersections in elite urban enclaves or commercial business districts, and of heavily-trafficked highways and freeways leading to the suburbs. During the Arab Spring revolt in Egypt, Cairo activists blasted their way through the walls of a ring road for fast-paced, free-flowing traffic for the sake of opening onramps and offramps into their bypassed neighborhood. See Mike Davis, *Buda's Wagon: A Brief History of the Car Bomb* (Verso, 2017). Asef Bayat, "Plebeians of the Arab Spring," *Current Anthropology* 56, supplement 11 (October 2015), S41.

Pt. 2: White Sight

Cars and Pop Art in 1960s Los Angeles



My cars were called ‘Chopsticks Specials’
Larry Shinoda, letter to Karl Knecht (1992)

New transportation technology always leaves impressions in the arts. Back in 1977, critic Wolfgang Schivelbusch found railroads changed how people saw the world through which they had started traveling so fast. Places lost a remoteness that made them feel special, and riders perceived whole nations in a panoramic succession of glimpses.²⁴⁹ Much like the ways changes in transportation informed the European Impressionist art movement, the suburbanization of postwar cities led to a wave of innovation in Pop Art. Creatives drew on the growing legitimacy of commercial advertising from New York City’s Madison Avenue, but sprawling Los Angeles’s environment also shaped Pop sensibilities. In 1962, one of the earliest Pop-themed exhibitions was at the Pasadena Museum of Art. The pieces contained multitudes of contradictory messages. Pop continued a long-standing populist revolt by the fun-seeking masses against elitist cultural hierarchy²⁵⁰ but was also a “fable of abundance” businessmen and “bourgeois bohemians” alike

²⁴⁹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space* (University of California Press, 1986 [originally 1977]), 41-42 and 61-62.

²⁵⁰ Daniel Horowitz, *Consuming Pleasures*. John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978).

embraced during the postwar period's "conquest of the cool."²⁵¹ Pop was a bottom-up expression of vernacular urban sensibilities²⁵² and the tool powerful insiders used to claim authority in contested landscapes.²⁵³ Southern California driver-artists used their cars to invent a new visual culture. White Sight was a way of seeing race for White motorists in the age of White Flight.

Studies of popular culture and the everyday sensory life of artists and art consumers have helped link the history of a process, White Flight from cities to de facto segregated suburbs, to the most powerful visual symbols designed in that same society. Racial knowledge, ideas about human bodies and the geographies they inhabit, has to be learned, and in the ocularcentric U.S., people tended to acquire that knowledge visually. In the eye of the beholder, the most minute differences in the shape of the nose or the color of houses in a neighborhood became cues to a long succession of assumptions. Thus the ugliness of a city's freeway infrastructure, "the roar of traffic coursing above or below surface streets, the shadows cast by soaring interchanges, the dead ends and circuitous detours, the odor of traffic emissions, and the foreboding maze of concrete walls, piers, and embankments," became the everyday sights of home that Latinx people saw while walking or driving the surface streets of East Los Angeles. By comparison to this

²⁵¹ T.J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (Basic Books, 1994). David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (Simon & Schuster, 2000). Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of the Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (University of Chicago Press, 1998).

²⁵² James Rojas, "The Latino Use of Urban Space in East Los Angeles," in *Urban Latino Cultures: La Vida Latina en L.A.*, Gustavo Leclerc, Raul Villa, and Michael J. Dear, eds. (Sage, 1999). Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. City* (Verso, 2000). Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic* (Yale University Press, 2008).

²⁵³ Eric Avila, *Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014). No one has ever so well illustrated how 1960s Pop Art is imbricated in the politics of White supremacy, the male gaze, and the dynamics of master and servant like Latinx artist Romiro Gomez. I will develop this point more in a later chapter, but for now, I stress how art patrons invited painters and designers like British expatriate David Hockney into their backyards to illustrate manicured lawns, pristine pools, and unobstructed views. Gomez has added in these frames the forgotten labor that made possible these visions of the California dream. Gardeners, "pool boys," landscapers, and maids, all with Brown skin, appear in the foreground in each of Gomez's Hockney "hacks." Janelle Zara, "Hacking Hockney: The Mexican American Painter Bringing Latino Culture into Art," *The Guardian*, 22 August 2017.

vision of the car in Southern California, urban and suburban drivers passing by more swiftly claimed a more privileged positionality.²⁵⁴ From inside cars, they witnessed the freeway at its most functional, and engineers had planned for it to function by minimizing the amount of time drivers spent looking at neighborhoods like East Los Angeles or South Central. The White Sight of the city through the windshield mass produced naïveté about the city’s diversity of peoples and a consciousness of the color line as a problem of living in the Jim Crow South.

White Sight was a collective cultural production involving drives by countless people in the region, including many who did not identify as White. This is why I begin with a case study: Kiyoshi Lawrence Shinoda, a Japanese American automobile designer who was born in Lincoln Heights in 1930. After wartime incarceration at the Manzanar concentration camp with other members of his ethnoracial group, another man might have scorned the White supremacist order and society which had just caged his people. Instead, “Larry” studied at a commercial art school, worked the pit for a friend from childhood in races at the Indianapolis 500, and moved to Detroit to be a Big Three automakers designer. There, Shinoda made contributions to iconic vehicles like the Corvette Stingray Coupe, the Mustang Boss 302, and the Rectrans Discoverer. Critic Peter Lunefeld has noticed the connection between the first of these three vehicles and Los Angeles’s journalist-novelist Joan Didion. She drove a String Ray while she was writing the manuscript for her novel *Play It As It Lays* (1970). The divorcée heroine’s sense of autonomy and pleasure at having mastered driving the freeways, to the musical beat of the car radio in her sports car, was contingent on an unmentioned artist of color having designed Didion’s beloved vehicle.²⁵⁵

Naïveté about racial and class differences in car cultures was central to White Sight. Suburban drivers, almost always White newcomers to the region, had not seen the districts that

²⁵⁴ Eric Avila, *Folklore of the Freeway*, 120.

²⁵⁵ Peter Lunefeld, *City at the Edge of Forever: Los Angeles Reimagined* (Penguin, 2020), 176-180.

were bulldozed to make way for the freeways or the workers who built and designed the cars they so loved to drive. Unlike middle-class 1960s consumers, hobbyists in car cultures of the 1950s hailed from blue-collar communities and were better acquainted with difference. In 1992, Shinoda wrote a letter recalling pre-Detroit years when clients wanted his “Chopsticks Specials.” Stereotype about East Asia was readily apparent in this moniker, but Shinoda’s craftsmanship warranted an attention to the artist’s race as a signature of his skill. Shinoda stressed not having been the only Asian American in this world. He recalled a bitter rivalry with a Chinese American mechanic named Bob Lee who “worked at a Ford dealership as a (sic) automatic trans expert.” In 1953, this man had once cheated Shinoda through an act of impersonation. Lee fooled a White vendor into thinking he was Shinoda, the presumptive buyer who had made a phone call asking about some discounted equipment. Shinoda learned about the scam, and the next day, the Japanese American mechanic went and “grabbed old Chinaman Lee by the neck” until he gave up the Pink Slip to a ‘32 “deuce” coupe. Shinoda customized that very car to great acclaim.²⁵⁶

Shinoda was a celebrated participant in Los Angeles car culture. Bob Thomas of the *L.A. Times* attended the 1964 Auto Show where he arranged an interview with Shinoda. The designer admitted he was “a maverick” and made no effort to mute his sarcasm at auto industry publicists who found one of his new models, the Monza SS, “not right for today’s public.” He mockingly blamed them for the failed late 1950s Ford “Edsel...a market research baby.”²⁵⁷ Combative and quite arrogant, Shinoda had an attitude that was in perfect accord with other skillful gearheads of Detroit and Los Angeles. These qualities made him a quandary for the Japanese American newspaper, *Rafu Shimpo*. Journalist Eugene Matsumura adapted the Thomas piece, almost line

²⁵⁶ Larry Shinoda’s letter of 22 December 1992 to Karl Knecht, *Kustomrama*, last modified 25 March 2010. The estimated cost for such a vehicle in 1948 was \$900, a value of roughly ten times that amount in 2020 dollars. Gary S. Cross, *Machines of Youth: America’s Car Obsession* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), 31.

²⁵⁷ Bob Thomas, “Dreaming Up Dream Cars Has Its Harsh Realities,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 October 1964.

by line, into a 1965 feature. However, editors must have cut Shinoda's workplace braggadocio. Readers instead only found another Japanese American success story that began at Eagle Rock High School, then continued at Southern California Timing Association (where Shinoda won "Top Eliminator" in 1950), then at the Air National Guard during the Korean War (where he served "as a heavy equipment mechanic"), and briefly at Art Center College (where he studied "transportation design").²⁵⁸ Shinoda the Pop Art maverick had disappeared from *Rafu Shimpo*.

Journalism embraced such personality quirks in reports of a mechanic named George Barris, who had founded Kustom City at 10811 Riverside Drive in North Hollywood. That very address appeared in full in a celebratory *Esquire* article about suburban teen life and Southern Californian car culture. Barris went on to thank the writer, Tom Wolfe, for "the publicity." Wolfe was a scab reporter who got the magazine writing assignment during a printers' strike in 1963 against his employer, the *New York Herald Tribune*.²⁵⁹ "There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored (Thphhhhh!) Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby (Rahghhh!) Around the Bend (Brummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm)... " published with an epigraph from Ford vice-president L.A. Iacocca: "This is the decade when the postwar babies come of age. In the automobile business, coming of age means the age at which they enter the automobile market." By contrast to the Big Three automakers, Kustom City was just a small business, which Wolfe called Barris' "studio." The path to Los Angeles began when Barris left Sacramento in 1943, the year when Shinoda was in a concentration camp. Not facing incarceration due to racial ideology, Barris also enjoyed the advantage of never having to serve time in the U.S. military. He had registered for the draft up north but then swiftly left town for Southern California, where he began to teach

²⁵⁸ Eugene Matsumura, "With Monza Junior," *Rafu Shimpo*, 10 December 1965.

²⁵⁹ Marc Weingarten, *Who's Afraid of Tom Wolfe?: How New Journalism Rewrote the World* (Aurum Press, 2005), 88 and 66-7.

himself to customize cars that he had salvaged from the city's wartime junkyards. This learning continued at Art Center where Barris, like Shinoda, studied "mechanical drawing, shop, and free art."²⁶⁰

Wolfe believed Barris had inspired Detroit designers to adopt their streamline styling by 1962. The article cited "the 'fastback' look of the Rivieras, Sting Rays (sic), and few other cars" as proof of the appropriation. Wolfe alleged that the Sting Ray's designers had merely copied Californian mechanics, but he clearly did not know a Californian man of Japanese descent had actively brought Detroit that background in the first place. However, Wolfe showed an interest in the names of Barris's celebrity clients: e.g. "Barry Goldwater" who drove "a Jaguar with a lot of airplane-style dials on the dashboard."²⁶¹ To mention the far right Arizona Senator and Air Force veteran with a penchant for fighter jets was to engage in the rumor-mongering about his plans to run for president against incumbent John F. Kennedy. The conservative network in Barris's orbit also included John Wayne, a pro-war anti-communist on and off the movie screen, and Andy Griffith, an affable Southern television sheriff at a moment the real thing was Birmingham's Sheriff Bull Connor ordering attacks with hoses and dogs against civil rights protesters. No less suffused with racial significance was Barris' collaboration with the culture industry's Capitol Records. Kustom City crafted "mini-surfers" for all five guys in a band called the Beach Boys and twenty more vehicles went to their luckiest fans. These came with state-of-the-art car audio: the latest-generation Muntz stereo tape deck. Winners stood to gain a high-tech

²⁶⁰ Thomas K. Wolfe, "There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored (Thphhhhh!) Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby (Rahghhh!) Around the Bend (Brummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm)..."*Esquire* (November 1963): 114 and 118. George Barris draft card, Sacramento, 23 November 1943, at *Ancestry Library Edition*.

²⁶¹ Wolfe, "There Goes..." 158.

means of playing rock ‘n’ roll while cruising along California’s (still segregated) beachside communities.²⁶²

The best-known contributions by Barris to White Sight in Los Angeles were his movie cars, none of which became more famous than the Batmobile. *Batman* was a masked private detective from a 1939 comic book series that 20th Century Fox adapted into a three-season TV show from 1966-1968. Just 15 days before production began, producers offered Barris \$15,000 to make a functioning vehicle for the masked vigilante to drive. Barris owned a Ford concept car called the Futura and stored it at Kustom City. Barris put a black and orange-red custom paint job on the body and then added to the roof a rotating red light, like California law required for its emergency vehicles. In effect, this was a fantasy upgrade for the contemporary police squad car, except the Batmobile had newer gadgetry. These innovations foreshadowed developments in the works for vehicular law enforcement. Dashboard labels indicated this vehicle had a capacity to expand the human sensorium of the driver. Batman used a “closed circuit camera” system to screen moving images on his in-car “bat eye TV screen.” With his radar “detect-a-scope,” he could monitor suspects.²⁶³ *Batman* aired automobile-age propaganda in favor of technologized urban policing and set expectations for more to come. When President Lyndon B. Johnson had declared a “war on crime” and called for support for “law and order” in March 1965, television responded with a slate of police procedurals, like *Batman*, *Dragnet 1967*, and *Adam-12* (1968).²⁶⁴

²⁶² George Barris and Jack Scagnetti, *Cars of the Stars* (Jonathan David Publishers, 1974), 16-17, 39, 71-72.

²⁶³ “TV’s Original Batmobile,” *Barris Kustom Industries*, last modified 2013. *The Batmobile Documentary*, directed by Roko Belic, Warner Brothers, 2012.

²⁶⁴ Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 56. Journalist Robert Conot was to say the look of the CHP motorcycle officer, a White man who pulled Black motorist Marquette Frye over in August 1965, “had the impersonality of a comic strip Batman.” Robert Conot, *Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness* (Bantam, 1967), 9.

Shinoda and Barris were both examples of artists who “end up with the ‘L.A. look,’” but others “end[ed] up looking at L.A.”²⁶⁵ In a 1982 essay, the critic Peter Plagens counted among the latter Ed Ruscha, a graphic designer, book publisher, and photographer whose Pop Art pieces had achieved renown in the 1960s. Ruscha used this whole skill set when he designed *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966). The limited edition art book melded car culture and Pop Art by doing more than merely creating a vehicle. Instead, Ruscha specially equipped a truck with an automated camera facing left, and it snapped a succession of photographs automatically as the vehicle cruised. Cinema had already pioneered something similar. European directors shot the city from rail in *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis* (1927) and from a truck in *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). However, Ruscha was the earliest to pan photographs of the roadside city strips from a moving automobile and to glue the hundreds of images together into 25-foot strips. On one long page, folded like an accordion, the results were bound into a small coffee table art book. The Strip, a one-and-a-half-mile stretch of Sunset Boulevard in West Hollywood, had been reproduced in print at 1/300th scale. Ruscha made a book capturing the experience of everyday driving along one of the most famed drives in the world. A curator explained to collectors in Newport Harbor, “The best way to appreciate the books is to thumb through them all quickly; a feeling emerges.”²⁶⁶ This mode of looking fleetingly at art, in the manner of a speeding driver who only sees the city in glances, was the hallmark of White Sight in 1960s Los Angeles.

Ruscha had long experienced such views of and from automobiles. A young participant in the exhibition at Pasadena Museum of Art called “New Painting of Common Objects” (1962),

²⁶⁵ *The Works of Edward Ruscha* (Hudson Hills Press, 1982), 35.

²⁶⁶ Introductory essay by Henry T. Hopkins, *Joe Goode Edward Ruscha* (Fine Arts Patrons of Newport Harbor, 1968). A Ruscha biographer has added, “One must physically move one’s head or one’s body in order to view this book... Physical movement and a shifting series of images are an essential part of the book, just as they are to the experience of the city of Los Angeles itself.” Alexandra Schwartz, *Ed Ruscha’s Los Angeles* (The MIT Press, 2010), 147. Edward Ruscha, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (Edward Ruscha, 1966).

Ruscha designed the pareidoliac's vision of a woman's face melding into the grill of a car. A poster, this image featured four mystery numbers, 3327, and the word "DIVISION."²⁶⁷ Patrons who knew the Los Angeles suburbs by car likely recognized the street address. In fact, Ruscha's Mount Washington studio was found on Division. In the years prior to going West, to the West Side, Ruscha lived near historic Route 66, which was his road home to Oklahoma. The artist's first book, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963), included images he snapped during a road trip along there. The proud Okie had made art that appealed to other Southern Californian drivers with Okie heritage.²⁶⁸ In 1964, art-loving drivers were positioned to read another influential Ruscha image fluently. Actor, photographer, and *Rebel Without a Cause* alum Dennis Hopper snapped the shot, "Double Standard" (1961), and it featured on a poster for Ruscha's one-person exhibition at the Ferus Gallery.²⁶⁹ Only "Ruscha" featured below Hopper's photograph, but those who drove Beverly Hills likely recognized the intersection of Melrose, Santa Monica, and La Cienega and knew it as the crossing point into West Hollywood along the road to Ferus.

Refusing to read Ruscha in the rush he prescribed, critics learned to mimic him. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour brought a Yale architecture seminar to Los Angeles in 1968, and the students met the artist before spending 10 days studying Las Vegas. The visit helped the studio "question how we look at things" and to look in a "more tolerant way."²⁷⁰ They made an "'Edward Ruscha' elevation of the [Las Vegas] Strip," after shooting it from traffic. According to the conventions of architecture, an elevation was a vertical projection

²⁶⁷ Edward Ruscha, *Division* from *New Painting of Common Objects* (1962), MoMA.

²⁶⁸ Edward Ruscha, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (Edward Ruscha, 1963). La Chapelle, *Proud to Be an Okie*. For the claim, "Ruscha is our preeminent nostalgia artist," see Bill Berkson, "Sweet Logos: Ed Ruscha Spells," *Artforum* 25 (January 1987): 100.

²⁶⁹ Todd Alden, "SPOTLIGHT: Ed Ruscha in 1964," *Alden Projects*, last modified 2012.

²⁷⁰ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas* [1972], revised edition (MIT Press, 1977), 3.

of a building at scale, but Ruscha had convinced the studio to make elevations of entire strips at a minute scale. With a camera mounted on a car, the driver got to visualize the strip as a singular structure. From this perspective, they learned to appreciate the signs of the free market at work. Set far apart, casinos “can be comprehended at high speeds” and “welcome right-lane traffic.” “The rate of obsolescence of a sign” for businesses competing with others “seems to be nearer to that of an automobile than that of a building.”²⁷¹ Reyner Banham took similar inspiration to see the beauty of disposability in unregulated real estate markets. Banham came to the conclusion: “Los Angeles has room to swing the proverbial cat” - British imperial slang for a whip, the cat ‘o nine tails - “flatten a few card-houses in the process, and clear the ground for improvements.”²⁷²

Reviewing Banham’s *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (1971), critic Peter Plagens wrote “The Ecology of Evil,” an environmentalist’s antiracist and anticapitalist critique of the book. The 1972 essay attacked Banham for representing “L.A. [a]s really a groovy place in spite of its evils and often because of them, if you know how to look at it right.”²⁷³ This method required a car, and the author had said he “learned to drive to read Los Angeles in the original.”²⁷⁴ Never doubting that driving was enough, Banham acknowledged the influence of Ruscha as a muse, whom Plagens claimed “surreally prettifies L.A.’s banalities.” His name sat with “a collection of people whose in-city trips east of Main Street or south of Olympic could be counted on Mickey Mouse’s fingers.”²⁷⁵ By this, Plagens meant that Ruscha and company might have driven the city an awful lot, but they hardly ever ventured beyond a contained geography

²⁷¹ Venturi et al, *Learning from Las Vegas*, 32-5.

²⁷² Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (University of California Press, 2001: originally 1971), 223 and 225. For Banham’s interview with Ruscha, see *Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles*, BBC, 1972.

²⁷³ Peter Plagens, “Los Angeles: The Ecology of Evil,” *Artforum* (December 1972): 67-76.

²⁷⁴ Banham, *Los Angeles*, 5.

²⁷⁵ Plagens, “Los Angeles: The Ecology of Evil,” *Artforum*.

(and if so, only to go to Disneyland?). That mention of Main resonated, for the Ruscha archives at the Getty prove that he photographed Sunset all the way from the Pacific to Main in 1966 for *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*. However he cut shots from outside the strip in places like Echo Park from the book's final draft. Furthermore Ruscha had chosen to hook a U-turn in downtown at the intersection where Sunset changed into Brooklyn Avenue. He could have kept driving into Mexican American East Los Angeles but ceased his experiment at Placita Olvera.²⁷⁶

Before 1972, the Los Angeles art criticism establishment hardly saw Mexican American culture. The legacy of White Sight was so strong that Cécile Whiting wrote 2006's *Pop L.A.* about the 1960s in the city with the second greatest Mexican population in the world without once mentioning a Latinx name.²⁷⁷ All along, people of color looked back and made art that observed and documented the ways they got framed out of White Sight. *Con Safos*, a short-lived journal published in a vernacular mix of English and Spanish called Caló, became a front in the group's struggle for self-determination through the right to artistic expression. One founder, "Chairman Rafas" a.k.a. Ralph Lopez-Urbina, called out Pop Art by name.²⁷⁸ Signed in his hand were cartoons labeled "Chicano Pop" or "Barrio Pop," which appeared once per year from 1969-1972.²⁷⁹ The satirist told Anglo artists, especially those interested in typography like Ruscha, that their work was no better than "Cholo-print" graffiti culture, and that graffiti was no worse than

²⁷⁶ See strip 326 in the series "Edward Ruscha Photographs of Sunset Boulevard and Hollywood Boulevard, 1965-2010" *Getty Research Institute, Research Library*, Accession no. 2012.M.1. These are the photographs from the furthest east that Ruscha ventured. There Ruscha turned off Sunset onto Alameda Boulevard, where he shot Union Station and the back entrance to El Paseo Inn on La Placita Olvera. In 1994, Los Angeles discontinued the formal use of the name Brooklyn Avenue and renamed this street and the stretch of Sunset extending east from Figueroa "Cesar E. Chavez Avenue." The name change came one year after the iconic labor organizer's death. Julia Wick, "How L.A.'s Brooklyn Avenue Became Avenida Cesar Chavez," *LAist*, 27 March 2017.

²⁷⁷ Whiting, *Pop L.A.*; Eric Avila, *Southern California Quarterly* 89, no. 2 (2007): 237-39.

²⁷⁸ Gilbert Sánchez Luján, interviewed by Jeffrey Rangel, *Smithsonian Archives of American Art*, 1997. Michael Quintanilla, "A Cultural Victory," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 June 1995. David R. Diaz, *Barrio Urbanism: Chicanos, Planning, and American Cities* (Routledge, 2005).

²⁷⁹ *Con Safos* (January 1969), 10. *Con Safos* (June 1970), 43. *Con Safos* (December 1971), 22. *Con Safos* (January 1972), 34.

Pop. Anyone who knew Ruscha's art books would have seen how *Con Safos* put the reader in the same position, sitting inside of a car facing the sidewalk. Unlike Ruscha, who had boasted about how his decision to take early morning drives in search of empty streets "seem[ed] to unconsciously eliminate people,"²⁸⁰ *Con Safos* made space for stylish Chicanas and Chicanos who posed and occupied the banqueta. Readers got their chance to see Chicano culture from the vantage point of drivers who cruised Whittier Boulevard in their carruchas and their ranflas.

Readers who did not know carrucha or ranfla as Caló terms for basic cars or kustom jobs could find the definitions in a glossary at the back of the journal. *Con Safos* also presented a new Chicano criticism for art and design. The 1970 issue featured a "Ranfla sculpture," a beautifully finished '48 Chevy attributed to photographer Oscar Castillo and Magoo, a.k.a. Gilbert "Magú" Luján.²⁸¹ This was the same Luján who went on to found the radical Chicano artist collective, Los Four. The next issue included a correction and thanked the car's owner by name. Luján explained he did not make the car, nor did he own it, but rather, he had curated it on the basis of his trained eye for Chicano aesthetics. He prioritized finding and sharing "folk art such as sculptured ranflas, the calligraphy of wall writings (graffiti), the gardens of our *abuelos*."²⁸² This sensibility endowed Luján with authority akin to Wolfe's when he daringly categorized hot rods and customized cars as baroque-style sculptures.²⁸³ Rafas vouched for Luján as a local: "Magoo de Bassett." Bassett was a bit of unincorporated Los Angeles County along a stretch of the San Gabriel River with a history of migrant colonias.²⁸⁴ Paired with cartoon graffiti that named actual

²⁸⁰ Ed Ruscha interviewed by Willoughby Sharp, *Leave Any Information at the Signal: Writings, Interviews, Bits, Pages*, Alexandra Schwartz, ed. (MIT Press, 2002), 71.


²⁸¹ *Con Safos* (June 1970), 24.

²⁸² *Con Safos* (December 1971), 11.

²⁸³ The term was repeated 17 times in Wolfe, "There Goes..."

²⁸⁴ Jerry González, *In Search of the Mexican Beverly Hills: Latino Suburbanization in Postwar Los Angeles* (University of Texas Press, 2017).

gangs like “AVES” of Highland Park, “Big Hazard” of Boyle Heights, and “Mara 13” of the California state prison in Kern County,²⁸⁵ *Con Safos* suggested “Magoo” operated “con safos.”

The journal defined “con safos,” the words in its title, and the recurring symbol, , as an “experience in the development of the bato loco,” “a gesture of defiance,” the “rejection of the ‘American identity,’ and the beginning of a chicano (sic) literary genre.”²⁸⁶ Translated “with safety” or “with protection,” C/S evoked a tradition in Mexican car culture where priests blessed the vehicles of migrant workers before they drove across the United States border. No drivers with this blessing were ever alone, nor were graffiti writers who used this mark knowing they had associates capable of avenging a rival’s aggression. “Latino cultural politics,”²⁸⁷ by contrast to the cultural politics of suburban White drivers in Los Angeles, were suffused with an intimate sense of community and connection. Chicanos and Chicanas decorated their cars and drove the city streets “low and slow,” which allowed for richer looking relations.²⁸⁸ In a sense, they lived in a different city from Ruscha’s L.A. He selected the early morning of Saturday the 11th of June 1966 as his preferred time to photograph the length of Sunset because his deadpan style was better suited to the empty streets. White Sight focused entirely on form along a suburban strip. Neighboring drivers appearing in these shots were typically alone and rarely looked back.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ *Con Safos* (June 1970), 43. *Con Safos* (December 1971), 22.

²⁸⁶ “Editorial” in *Con Safos* (June 1968) and *Con Safos* (September 1968).

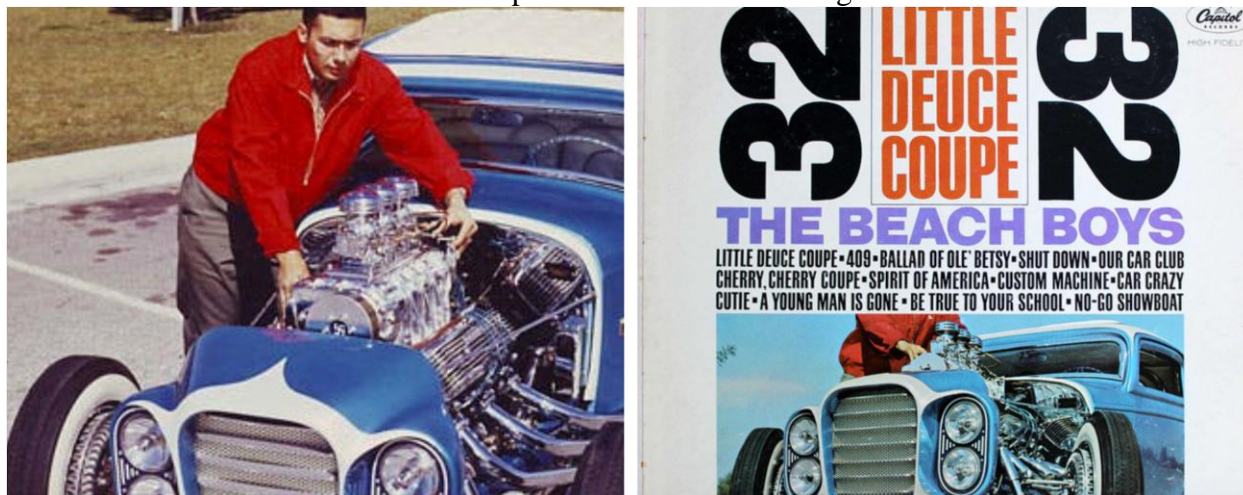
²⁸⁷ Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York University Press, 2008), 7-8 and 352-3n78.

²⁸⁸ Brenda Bright, “Remappings: Los Angeles Low Riders” in *Looking High and Low*, Brenda Bright and Liza Bakewell, eds. (University of Arizona Press, 1995). bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators” in bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (South End Press, 1992), 115-6.

²⁸⁹ Finding aid, “Edward Ruscha Photographs of Sunset Boulevard and Hollywood Boulevard, 1965-2010” *Getty Research Institute, Research Library*, Accession no. 2012.M.1.

Pt. 2: White Sound

Cars and Pop Music in 1960s Los Angeles



And she purrs like a kitten ‘till the lake pipes roar
Hot Rod Rog Christian and Brian Wilson, “Little Deuce Coupe,” 1963

As with Pop Art, new technological devices have changed how listeners hear music. In 1969, music theorist Murray Schafer coined “schizophonia” to describe how reproduced sound gets transposed from its point of origin. Telephones, radios, and films were part of an “Electric Revolution” that enabled the “complete portability of acoustic space. Any sonic environment can now become any other sonic environment.”²⁹⁰ In the 1960s, automobile interiors were the places where fans and casual listeners often experienced new Pop hits broadcast via radio to car audio equipment.²⁹¹ Like Pop Art, Pop songs contained a multitude of contradictory meanings. They created “audiotopias” where people divided by history played and shared in new hybrid styles.²⁹² The music industry recorded and sold these voices to suburban consumers hungering for an

²⁹⁰ R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (Knopf, 1977), 88-91.

²⁹¹ *Billboard* (1968) estimated auto listeners at 2-5 times as many as home listeners. *The Sounds of Social Change: Studies in Popular Culture*, R. Serge Denisoff and Richard A. Peterson, eds. (Rand McNally 1972), 293.

²⁹² Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (University of California Press, 2005), 23.

urban “rhetoric of class and street and grit.”²⁹³ Sounds of solidarity bonded marginalized groups who collectively defied racism and bigotry,²⁹⁴ but the musicians were arguably White nationalists who had forged a California Sound of their own in 1960s Los Angeles. This was propaganda, useful in times of war abroad and racial strife at home.²⁹⁵ Suburban White listeners habitually tuned into White Sound when playing broadcasts on car audio during the age of White Flight.

Listening to the radio in a car offered drivers a profoundly different means of engagement with music. Automobile interiors ceased to be so lonely for solo commuters who once heard little but the vroom of the engine or the whoosh of wind through the open window. Critics of radio, like the philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, condemned radio for its “soporific effect on social consciousness”²⁹⁶ especially if a worker listened alone instead of thinking critically or engaging with others. That said, this chapter shows 1960s Los Angeles was a setting where a tremendous amount of car radio listening involved couples sharing automobile interiors. While cruising highways or parked at the beach, listeners paid joint attention to music, sang along to the tune, discussed what they liked, and acted scenes from the lyrics. So many of the rock ‘n’ roll hits from this era had to do with cars and with dating because this was a principal appeal of teen life in the suburbs where successful musicians wrote their hits. What had been familiar for White fans in the area became part of the fantasy of heavy petting in a stopped car for those living

²⁹³ Simon Frith, “The Suburban Sensibility in British Rock and Pop,” in *Visions of Suburbia*, Roger Silverstone, ed. (Routledge, 1997).

²⁹⁴ Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2013).

²⁹⁵ “The war’s rhythm was a blend of rumbling engines, whirring chopper blades, and the deceptively benign pops and thuds of distant combat...And through it all, AFVN radio and soldier’s personal stereos blasted an epic rock-n-roll soundtrack.” Meredith H. Lair, *Armed with Abundance: Consumerism and Soldiering in the Vietnam War* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 195. For the politics of whiteness in Scandinavian metal, an even more obviously bigoted genre than the California Sound, see Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, “Saga’s Sorrow: Femininities of Despair in the Music of Radical White Nationalism,” *Ethnomusicology* 58, no. 3 (Fall 2014).

²⁹⁶ T.W. Adorno, “A Social Critique of Radio Music,” *The Kenyon Review* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1945).

across the country and around the world. Listeners also attained a power to turn on and to turn off voices with the turn of a dial, which was foundational to racial naïveté in a city where Whites could unsee scenes of injustice they did not want to see with the turn of the steering wheel.

Like *White Sight*, *White Sound* was a cultural production with Pop performers and fans remaking a multiracial city into a White-dominated geography. However, Pop forever retained hints of its recent roots in working-class urban communities of color and its very origins in the plantations of the South and the minstrelsy stages of the North. In the Los Angeles music industry, artists of color were often participants and listeners of color sometimes found ways to appreciate the hits. Quite a few were cruising around the historical bloc, to quote historian George Lipsitz. Ritchie Valens, the iconic 1950s Chicano rock ‘n’ roll star from suburban San Fernando Valley’s Pacoima, succeeded because of his following among Southern California’s “car-club cholos.”²⁹⁷ Lipsitz has stressed that this wave went on to crest in the 1960s when Chicano musicians wrote a hit instrumental song and named it “Whittier Boulevard” after the city’s eastside cruising strip. Fans watched this genre develop in venues like Legion Stadium in suburban San Gabriel Valley’s El Monte.²⁹⁸ Peak success came in 1965 when East Los Angeles’s Cannibal and the Headhunters joined the U.K.’s Beatles on their second U.S. tour.²⁹⁹ But I must note that this opportunity arose in the years after Cannibal had toured with the Beach Boys and the Rolling Stones. At Alabama’s Legion Field, these out-of-state White acts, plus a Chicano band, were welcome, but Black musicians had never yet performed at that football

²⁹⁷ George Lipsitz, “Cruising Around the Historic Bloc,” in George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 143

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 145-147; Matt Garcia, “‘Memories of El Monte’: Intercultural Dance Halls in Post-World War II Greater Los Angeles,” in *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth Century America*, Joe Austin and Michael Willard, eds. (New York University Press, 1998); Anthony Macías, “Bringing Music to the People: Race, Urban Culture, and Municipal Politics in Postwar Los Angeles,” *American Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (September 2004): 710-711.

²⁹⁹ Oscar Garza, “Land of a Thousand Dances: An R&B Fable,” *Popular Music* 24, no. 3 (October 2005): 429.

stadium with only all-White audiences in the segregationist city of Birmingham where an infamous terrorist bombing against the 16th Street Baptist Church had killed four Black girls in 1963.³⁰⁰

When visiting the South, the Beach Boys must have seemed like cultural ambassadors willing to sing Pop songs in a Black doo-wop style,³⁰¹ but their lyrics described a homeland that was still segregated. In postwar Southern California, Black people could neither swim at most beaches nor reside near racially exclusive beach cities.³⁰² An exception to this rule was the port city of Long Beach, which was actually where the Beach Boys, three brothers from suburban Hawthorne and their cousin from View Park, took the stage for the first time. Founder Brian Wilson's memoir recalled the Ritchie Valens Memorial Dance had "barely a white person in the place."³⁰³ Four years later, the Wilsons were headliners at Legion Field, but Ike and Tina Turner, who had been on that same Long Beach stage, had no access to truly nationwide touring. This was the social context critic Greil Marcus missed, a decade later, when attributing the band's appeal to being "full of life" and to "the energy and pride the Beach Boys found cruising the strip."³⁰⁴ The songs they wrote, mostly about car cultures and some while sitting in cars,

³⁰⁰ WVOK poster in Mike Love, "THROWBACK THURSDAY!," *Facebook*, 7 May 2015. The first major integrated event at Legion Field was a 1964 Billy Graham crusade. Black athletes did not take the field to play football until 1970, a noteworthy Alabama-USC game to which Black fans were not allowed to buy tickets. For the dynamics of venues with curated all- or mostly-white audiences, see Matthew Delmont, *The Nicest Kids in Town: American Bandstand, Rock 'n' Roll, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in 1950s Philadelphia* (University of California Press, 2012).

³⁰¹ Philip Lambert, "Brian Wilson's Harmonic Language," in *Good Vibrations: The Beach Boys in Critical Perspective*, Philip Lambert, ed. (University of Michigan Press, 2016), 66-67.

³⁰² Matthew Allan Ides, "Cruising for Community: Youth Culture and Politics in Los Angeles, 1910-1970," dissertation for the University of Michigan, 2009.

³⁰³ Brian Wilson with Todd Gold, *Wouldn't It Be Nice: My Own Story* (HarperCollins, 1991), 52-3. For the significance of ports for new sound formations, see Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution* (Verso, 2015), 35-66.

³⁰⁴ Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of American in Rock 'n' Roll Music* (E.P. Dutton, 1976), 120-121. "I hear them as fully realized music, naïve and profound, that will last as long as (maybe just white) people drive cars to work, school, and the beach, listen to recorded music, and live in detached single-family housing - or wish they could." Tom Smucker, *Why the Beach Boys Matter* (University of Texas Press, 2018), 5.

realistically echoed the sounds of charmed White life in the suburbs. All kinds of fans across the USA wanted to hear stories about this place where not all kinds of fans were allowed to be.

Look no further than the cover art for the Beach Boys' fourth album, *Little Deuce Coupe* (1963) to see how frightfully close this band got to the edge of an explicitly racist, White nationalism. Though obscured in the photograph featured on the album cover, a swastika was on that exposed V-8 engine's blower, which peaked over the 1932 Ford coupe's grille. Known to Southern Californian hot rodders as the "Silver Sapphire," this car and its bright white swastika had controversially made the cover of *Hot Rod Magazine* in 1961. Clarence "Chili" Catallo, a Long Beach College student, salvaged the used vehicle in Michigan and brought it to California for Barris to help him finish it at Kustom City.³⁰⁵ He was raised in Dearborn, a home to Henry Ford, and Catallo drove a '32 Ford, "the elder Ford's last mechanical triumph."³⁰⁶ As an Italian American, he had to have known about Ford Motor Company's historical relationship to the Axis Powers and their racial ideology. In the 1920s, the *Dearborn Independent* printed ninety-one weekly anti-Semitic rants under Ford's byline, and years later the Third Reich awarded him the Grand Cross of the German Eagle on the old robber baron's birthday in 1938.³⁰⁷ Two years later, Catallo was born locally to an immigrant family.³⁰⁸ For working-class White ethnics, especially those on the edge of whiteness, racist symbols have had a vivid appeal.

Detroit made automobiles, but the California Sound asserted Los Angeles and its White suburbs were the preeminent place for driving Fords and other cars. From 1962 to 1964, Beach Boys songs rattled off the names of one dream ride after another. They recorded "409" in 1962.

³⁰⁵ Dave Wallace, "Little Blue Coup," *Hot Rod*, 19 October 2012; Curt Catallo, "A Date With Dad's Deuce," *Autoweek*, 13 August 2007.

³⁰⁶ Charles E. Sorensen with Samuel T. Williamson, *My Forty Years with Ford* (Norton, 1956), 225.

³⁰⁷ Albert Lee, *Henry Ford and the Jews* (Stein and Day, 1980), 14 and 113.

³⁰⁸ U.S. Census, 1940, *Ancestry Library Edition*.

This ode to the 409-cubic-inch, big-block engine, which Chevrolet had introduced the previous year, began with a few seconds of this very engine revving. In rock ‘n’ roll, the car itself was like another instrument besides the drums or guitar. That Chevy belonged to songwriter Gary Usher, for the Beach Boys were hardly gearheads, so they hired radio personality Roger “Hot Rod Rog” Christian. The drag strip poet supplied them with the lyrics for “Little Deuce Coupe,” which referenced modifications like the “ported” engine, the “stroked” crank, and the roaring “lake pipes” on a so-called “deuce” ‘32 like Catallo’s.³⁰⁹ Never missing a chance to boost luxury cars, Christian also wrote about a Jaguar XKE in “Our Car Club” (1963), a Corvette Stingray in “Shut Down” (1963), and a Ford Thunderbird in “Fun Fun Fun” (1964).³¹⁰ The California Sound was replete with product placements at a time when the same deejays who curated - or wrote - these songs paired them with promotional jingles from the stations’ corporate sponsors.

The Beach Boys were not proficient in cars, but their songs resonated with a consumer’s mentality. The band’s father-manager Murray, a former musician who became a machinist, converted the suburban garage into his sons’ practice space. A decade later, rock critic John Mendelssohn coined the term “garage bands” in mockery of the ubiquitous rock amateurs from the California suburbs. The critic had grown up in Santa Monica and later stated the Beach Boys embodied a “white middle-class adolescence,” for their story began in the backseat where “two South Bay teen-age cousins...enjoyed singing Everly Brothers hits as they drove home together from youth nights at Angeles Mesa Presbyterian Church.”³¹¹ Song was not all that happened in those cars, for Brian Wilson recalled cruising Los Angeles with a girlfriend at his side in his ‘57

³⁰⁹ See annotations by mistersampo on the entry for “Little Deuce Coupe,” *Genius*, 2013.

³¹⁰ Benjamin Hunting, “8 Beach Boys car songs that actually mention a specific car,” *Hagerty*, 3 August 2018.

³¹¹ The earliest reference to “garage bands” was in a Mendelssohn review of the Faces in the March 1971 issue of *Rolling Stone*, Mike Flanagan, “When did they start calling it ‘garage’ rock?,” *Colorado Public Radio*, 22 May 2014. John Mendelssohn, “Summer Still Endless for Beach Boys,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 Dec 1980.

Ford Fairlane 500 Club Sedan during the evenings when the deejays played Pop. Her name was Judy Bowles, 14, and Wilson met her in the spring of 1961 while a first-year El Camino college student volunteering with her brother's Middle League baseball team. Their romance inspired "Surfer Girl" (1963) and "Drive In" (1963), the song where Wilson warned any teenage lovers at the drive-in theaters that the attendants looked for "fogged" windows, the giveaway sign of sex in the car. Also, parents expected the couple "to tell" the film's plot upon coming home.³¹²

Drive time, for the Beach Boys, was when they fell in love with the feel of White girls' bodies and the sound of Black men's voices. Autonomy and privacy inside the car freed Brian Wilson to defy moral constraints and legal prohibitions shaping life in the USA. Wilson, 21, seized the night and paid regular visits by car to a suburban Fairfax family home of his next girlfriend, Marilyn Rovell, 15, where he once came onto her sleeping younger sister, 13. Years of intensive psychotherapy led Wilson to this confession in his memoir, co-written with his therapist.³¹³ In the following passage, he admitted this was the period of his life when he violated a Black star's copyright. The idea for the first Beach Boys hit, "Surfin' U.S.A." (1962), came to Wilson while listening to Chuck Berry's "Sweet Little Sixteen" (1958) and Chubby Checker's "Twistin' U.S.A." (1962) on cruises with his girlfriend. In place of the cities, where Berry hailed Black working-class fans of rock 'n' roll dancing the twist, Wilson proposed a list of surf spots along the Pacific Ocean's rim. Bowles's kid brother provided the list, since Wilson was not a surfer.³¹⁴ Outside the culture industry's domain doo-wop melodies would be creative commons, but Berry had written the music. He was also in federal prison for violating the Mann Act for driving a Native girl, a child sex worker, from Ciudad Juarez into the USA and then over state

³¹² For a secondary source informed by an oral history taken from Bowles, see James B. Murphy, *Becoming the Beach Boys, 1961-1963* (McFarland & Company, 2015).

³¹³ Wilson, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*, 99-100.

³¹⁴ *Ibid*, 67 and 71.

lines to St. Louis. Sex with young girls in cars and on tour was central to rock 'n' roll for both men, who made no secret of it in the songs they wrote, but Wilson's whiteness shielded him from legal repercussions. That said, Berry's label sued and won full royalties for "Surfin' U.S.A."³¹⁵

Having robbed Berry at a distance, Wilson was more generous with another Berry: Jan of the Pop duo Jan & Dean. This group asked Wilson for the lyrics to "Surfin' U.S.A."³¹⁶ He instead gifted them the words to "Surf City" (1963), which became a hit song, the first for surf music, by charting #1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100.³¹⁷ This Wilson-Berry collaboration continued with a cycle of car songs, including "Drag City" (1963), a single printed with a Barris Corvette Asteroid on the picture sleeve.³¹⁸ DeeJay Hot Rod Rog wrote the liner notes, which jokingly instructed listeners to play the eponymous album "on a chrome reversed turntable driven by a full-blown turntable motor equipped with tuned headers." Apparently, the technical skills of hot rodding were transferable to audiophilia. The song "Drag Strip Girl" satirized gendered technicality by boasting of the perfect girlfriend, who had "the touch...to fix my clutch." Merely entertaining the possibility of a female gearhead, Jan & Dean derisively added, "When she adjusts my brakes / her chassis never shakes." To service a vehicle, for women and girls of the car culture, had just one possible meaning. The boy's machine was his to possess, to drive, or to fix. Driving rhymed with his sexuality, for he could drive his girlfriend's body like a car. Her role was to bring him that same satisfaction of a well-tuned vehicle rounding a bend without a shudder of regret.

³¹⁵ Chuck Berry, *Chuck Berry: The Autobiography* (Harmony Books, 1987), 199-204.

³¹⁶ Dean Torrence, *Surf City: The Jan and Dean Story* (SelectBooks, 2016).

³¹⁷ Ben Marcus and Steve Pezman, *Surfing: An Illustrated History of the Coolest Sport of All Time* (Voyageur Press, 2013), 92.

³¹⁸ "Bob Nordskog's 1963 Chevrolet," *Kustomrama*, 20 June 2020.

Shortly, a well-tuned group of Black women called The Ronettes next caught the Beach Boy's ear. Riding with his girlfriend in a "new aquamarine Grand Prix," Wilson heard "Be My Baby" (1963). "'This is great!" he exclaimed, "It's the best song I've ever heard!' ...I started slapping the steering wheel, it was so unbelievable." Then Wilson lamented, "Holy shit! I can't do that," but Marilyn Rovell reassured him, "Don't worry baby." Wilson approached the song's producer, a young White man named Phil Spector. This amateur sound engineer from Fairfax High School embraced the fuzzy sound of reverb in order to overcome the inadequacies of AM car radio and its cheap "mono" speakers. An army of session musicians Spector hired for studio recordings played an array of instruments. The result, the "teen tycoon" boasted on the Pierre Berton Show, was a "Wagnerian approach to popular music...it's a steady, large, overpowering flow of sound: you're not really quite sure what's doing it, but you can always hear a big chord behind whatever: behind the singer, behind the soloist."³¹⁹ He then tested the quality of this new song by "play[ing] the finished track through a speaker the size of a car or transistor radio - the way the kids would hear it."³²⁰ Wilson aped this "Wall of Sound" formula as he recorded "Don't Worry Baby" (1964), a love song about a girl helping to soothe a boy's nerves before a race.³²¹

Such anxieties eventually led Wilson to quit the stage soon after an unimpressive stage performance by the Beach Boys at *The T.A.M.I. Show* (1964). Elijah Wald has argued it was the Beatles, around 1967, who ruined rock 'n' roll by initiating a retreat from live performance into the studio where bands made highbrow concept albums.³²² Signs of these times to come were already there at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium during November 1964's *T.A.M.I. Show*

³¹⁹ Phil Spector on the Pierre Berton Show, *Voices from the Sixties: Twenty-two Views of a Revolutionary Decade* (Doubleday, 1967), 141.

³²⁰ Mick Brown, *Tearing Down the Wall of Sound: The Rise and Fall of Phil Spector* (Vintage, 2008), 118.

³²¹ Wilson, *Wouldn't It Be Nice*, 82.

³²² Elijah Wald, *How the Beatles Destroyed Rock 'n' Roll: An Alternative History of American Popular Music* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

concert. Shot and recorded as a documentary, this was to be the first feature-length rock 'n' roll concert film. Spector's own conductor, Jack Nitzsche, was billed as music director, and the Wall of Sound studio band performed in the pit while a lineup of famous singers took the stage with their instruments. The "Teenage Awards Music International" was formatted competitively, like a battle of the bands, which proceeded like the gentrification of rock 'n' roll. Chuck Berry, newly released from the penitentiary, opened the set by belting out his 1950s hits in his Black urban working-class vernacular. Then the Beach Boys, Gerry and the Pacemakers, and eventually the Rolling Stones hit the stage, as the show dramatized the progression of rock 'n' roll into a new transnational "rock" geography, which historian Jack Hamilton has called the "white Atlantic." Critics remember *The T.A.M.I. Show* for masterful live performances from Berry, Marvin Gaye, James Brown, and the Supremes, a slew of Black musicians with remarkable improvisational skills at playing the crowd, but the same critics were simultaneously starting to herald the studio, rather than the stage, and the album, rather than the hits, as rock's dynamic next horizon.³²³

This is what led the Beach Boys to Alabama's WVOK, "The Mighty 690." A late 1964 "Shower of Stars" concert for the radio station at the Birmingham Auditorium featured Jan & Dean with the Beach Boys, who returned with the Rolling Stones on 7 May 1965. Pop events there, from 1958 to 1973, were segregated, but Black-sounding bands got top billing.³²⁴ For the 1965 show, these included the soulful Righteous Brothers, two Whites from suburban Orange County. Spector discovered them but carefully kept their whiteness a secret.³²⁵ Ambiguity gained their first hit "You've Lost That Loving Feeling" (1964) a foothold with both White and Black

³²³ Jack Hamilton, *Just Around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination* (Harvard University Press, 2016).

³²⁴ Posters, "WVOK Shower of Stars-Advertisements," *WVOK Memories*, accessed 30 October 2020. <http://wvok-memories.tripod.com/id21.html>

³²⁵ Barney Hoskyns. *Waiting for the Sun: A Rock 'n' Roll History of Los Angeles* (Backbeat Books 1996), 97-98

radio deejays. The legacy of this trick has led this song to seize the record for the hit most played on radio in the world during the Twentieth Century.³²⁶ Furthermore, Spector tricked radio deejays by mislabeling the record's length as 3'05" when it was in fact forty seconds longer. Back then, stations played so many jingles and promotions that a song time-dilated by another 1/6th was going to make a strong positive impression on listeners. The color of the Righteous Brothers was later revealed, and Alabama posters prominently featured their two smiling faces. A year later, a *Life* magazine critic described the band's style as the "Blues Turned Blue-eyed," much like Ray Charles or Fats Domino's, but rather "sophisticated, in a white man's way."³²⁷

Pop songs from 1960s Los Angeles were useful for propagandists promoting myths about race, class, gender, and other intersecting valences of identity, but this aspiration was never more than a utopian project. The California Sound was a style that sounded like it came from any old garage. Despite lyrics written from and for a straight, male, White, and suburban youth culture, the making of these songs was never possible without all sort of thinly hidden work by artists of color. Barry White, a young Black Texan migrant to South Los Angeles, produced a cycle of garage bands who recorded their White sounds at suburban Downey Records.³²⁸ Meanwhile, a Black session drummer from the New Orleans jazz scene named Earl Palmer, who had set the beat for Ray Charles' "I Can't Stop Loving You," later did the same for "You've Lost That Loving Feeling" (1962). That *Life* review extolling the Righteous Brothers over Ray Charles in racial terms, came from a reviewer who obviously had no idea the same crew of musicians, the Wall of Sound's band, was the talent behind both hits. White rock 'n' roll's surf and hot rod cycles were contingent on this unionized, multiracial, and mixed-gender collective. Color neither

³²⁶ "BMI Announces Top 100 Songs of the Century," *BMI*, 13 December 1999.

³²⁷ Chris Welles, "The Blues Turned Blue-eyed," *Life*, 1 July 1966.

³²⁸ *It Came From The Garage! (Nuggets From Southern California)*, CD, 2007.

prefigured nor prevented producers from having Palmer drum on Jan & Dean's "Surf City" or "Drag City."³²⁹ But these hits arguably conveyed White nationalist messages and attracted a fandom among concert goers and radio listeners driving late Jim Crow suburbs across the U.S.A.

Jan Berry fully showcased his political ideology in "Universal Coward" (1965), a Pop reworking of the folk rock ballad "Universal Soldier" (1964). Buffy Sainte-Marie, a Native woman, had written the original, an early Vietnam Era anti-war song, which the British rocker Donovan covered and made into an international sensation.³³⁰ Jan Berry's reaction was typical of White men in Los Angeles from families active in the U.S. military or busy in the city's defense industry.³³¹ Berry's father William worked as a project manager for Hughes in the beachside Westchester suburb, and he was on board during the famous flight of the "Spruce Goose," a 1947 military prototype plane of record-setting size designed to airlift tanks over oceans.³³² Decades later, Jan Berry was 24 and enrolled at UCLA's medical school, which exempted him from the draft. In this capacity, Berry sang "Universal Coward," which a reviewer at Michigan State University called his "poorly written and morbidly conceived pro-war song." *The Paper* spelled out the lyrics for readers to see for themselves: "He's young, he's old, he's in between / And he's so very much confused. / He'll scrounge around and protest all night long. / He joins the pickets at Berkeley / And he burns up his draft card / And he's twisted into thinkin' fightin' is all wrong."³³³ This was the same mocking tone Berry developed for "Schlock Rod" (1963), a parody with backup vocals from the Beach Boys articulated in the voice of geeky, wannabe rodders.

³²⁹ Tony Scherman, *Backbeat: Earl Palmer's Story* (Da Capo Press, 1999), 176-177.

³³⁰ Jon Savage, *1966: The Year the Decade Exploded* (Faber & Faber, 2015), 85-86.

³³¹ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

³³² Obituary for William Berry, *Los Angeles Times*, 23 December 2004.

³³³ Martin Grossman, "The Sound of Protest Has Begun To Pay," *The Paper*, 20 January 1966.

Emcees for *The T.A.M.I. Show*, Jan & Dean loved the screen. They filmed a television pilot for ABC's *On the Run* (1966), a proto-reality show about the strenuous life hustling from touring to coursework. In Washington, D.C., Jan & Dean sang patriotic tunes like "Space and Time" at the National Air and Space Museum. Having playfully wiped a Gemini space capsule down like service station attendants, Jan & Dean informed viewers, "Life keeps moving at a rapid pace / Well if you want to keep up with the human race / you gotta have time and you gotta have space."³³⁴ The culture of speed also led them to compose a television-themed album, *Jan & Dean Meet Batman* (1966). They linked the high-powered Batmobile to Batman and Robin's outstanding work ethic, for the masked vigilante duo also lived a normal life by day and fought crime by night. This same "rich, full, exciting, free-wheeling, 48-hour-a-day existence" outside the frame eventually caught up with Jan Berry.³³⁵ One morning after working all night, he went to the draft board and learned he had lost his deferment after dropping his classes. Two hours later in Beverly Hills, he crashed his Stingray into a Japanese American gardener's parked pickup truck, woke after a coma with a debilitating brain injury, and never fully recovered.³³⁶

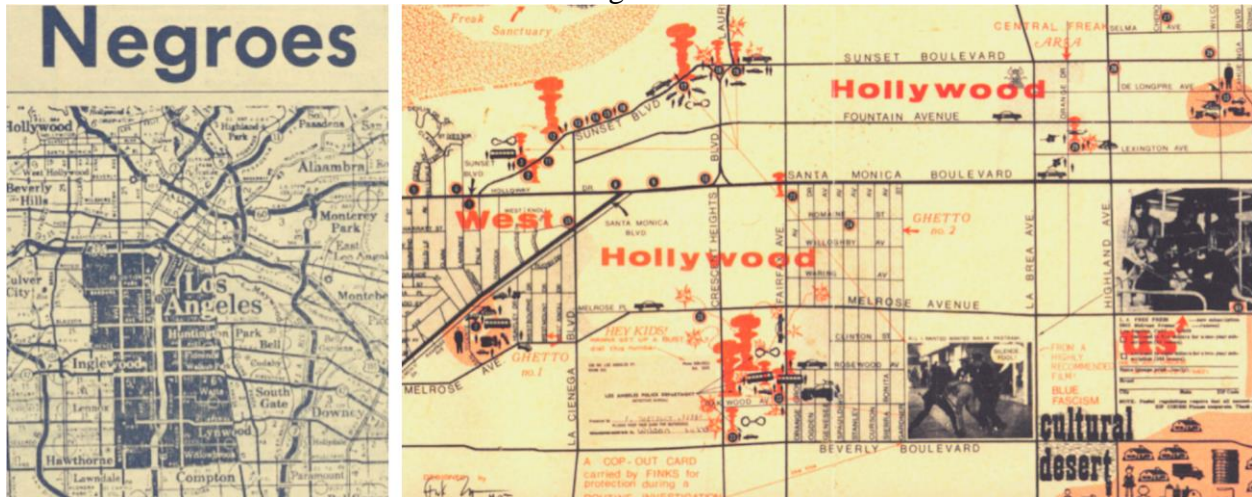
³³⁴ *On the Run*, 1966, *YouTube*, uploaded 20 September 2015.

³³⁵ Quotation from *On the Run*, 1966. Lynell George, *After/Image: Los Angeles Outside the Frame* (Angel City Press, 2018).

³³⁶ Mark A. Moore, *The Jan & Dean Record* (McFarland, Incorporated, 2016), 298-302.

Pt. 3: Thrown Stones

Cars and the Los Angeles Rebellion of 1965



“For days one could drive the Harbor Freeway and see the city on fire”
Joan Didion, “Santa Ana Winds,” 1967³³⁷

When protesters in working-class Black Watts and Willowbrook rose in rebellion in 1965, they attacked the city’s dominant culture by throwing stones at Whites in cars. The drivers included the police, the firefighters, the news media, the commuters, and the curious. Roadside businesses along commuter-oriented strips criss-crossing South Central Avenue were also vandalized or torched. Urban violence worked. Unlike in the postwar South, where hypervisible nonviolent tactics had provoked worldwide outcry, the police state in Los Angeles had a mastery of the art of hiding the city’s troubles in jails.³³⁸ Then on the night of the rebellion, a protester nailed County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn’s car with an object that broke the windshield. A shard of glass slashed the politician’s neck, and the race war for autonomy from police brutality finally became widely seeable and hearable outside South Los Angeles. For 6 days, authorities retaliated

³³⁷ Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1968).

³³⁸ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017). Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (University Press of Virginia, 1995).

against the crowds of looters and arsonists by shooting dozens, including two police killed in acts of accidental police-on-police friendly fire.³³⁹ When the fires stopped, the public money started to flow, but Whites were soon to elect Ronald Reagan, a man once too ideologically far right for formal politics, as California's governor.³⁴⁰ The rising touched Pop, for artists and musicians who had depended on automobiles as a comfortable means of sensing the city joined a chorus of experts complaining that it was driving that had made drivers blind and deaf to the city.

Reports from Watts cited a racial sensibilities gap as making this incident so difficult to predict, to prevent, and to put down. The State had former CIA Director John McCone, an engineer and defense contractor, head an official study. This commission report diagnosed Black participants with "insensate rage," a claim suggesting "rioters" had become so affected they did not feel pain or recognize the pain in others.³⁴¹ Commentators also focused on the failure to see the revolt coming. For this, they blamed the car. *The Nation's* Carey McWilliams found freeways had bypassed California's "forgotten slum." Novelist Thomas Pynchon said drivers got only a "panoramic sense of black impoverishment" from atop freeway interchanges, and novelist Ray Bradbury made a strident call to reduce the number of cars on the basis that "nobody ever saw Watts." Finally, critic Robert Kirsch added, "Many residents, when the riots broke out, had

³³⁹ Davis and Weiner, *Set the Night on Fire*, 211-212. Charles Davis, Jr., "Anatomy of a Riot," *L.A. Times*, 15 August 1965.

³⁴⁰ The Great Society's Office of Economic Opportunity contracted with UCLA psychology to conduct the Los Angeles Riot Study, which found 58% of Black locals expected the violence to lead to positive outcomes like greater government expenditures in Black Los Angeles. David O. Sears and T.M. Tomlinson, "Riot Ideology in Los Angeles: A Study of Negro Attitudes," *Social Science Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (December 1968), 485n1. Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power* (Public Affairs, 2003), 9. "Aside from the escalation in Vietnam, no occurrence that year did more to damage American race relations or to undermine the power of Johnsonian liberalism in the United States." James T. Patterson, *The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Transformed America* (Basic Books, 2012), 190.

³⁴¹ Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, *Violence in the City - An End or a Beginning?* (1965), 1. Mark M. Smith, *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 45.

to consult maps to find out where Watts and Willowbrook were. They found out soon enough. By freeway, Watts was minutes away and there was a sudden sense of vulnerability and fear.”³⁴²

In hindsight, the city’s White literary establishment claimed collective ignorance of Black Los Angeles’s plight, but plenty of portents had already appeared. Sex panic had made headlines in the press during the previous months. The *Times* had printed a map detailing where to find Black women working as street walkers. When White drivers solicited them, Black youths struck back. The sex district ran south on Western Avenue from the Santa Monica Freeway and along Adams Boulevard between Crenshaw Boulevard and Vermont Avenue. Cis-female pedestrians, including two teen sisters who were students walking to college, reported their experience of bids for paid sex. Cis-male drivers slowed, stopped, and made sudden U-turns while relentlessly catcalling. Teen boys in the area banded together to repulse the so-called johns, which led to one killing, one non-lethal stabbing, and one flash of a gun at two suspicious plainclothes officers sitting in an unmarked car. The newspaper warned readers to avoid the area, for “an explosive situation could be developing.”³⁴³ When the rising began the next August, participants were furious about another racially charged narrative of sexual violation. On the night of 1 July 1965, two officers arrested Black 22-year-old Beverly Tate during a traffic stop, and one took her into his squad car and raped her. As a consequence, Officer W.D. McCloud lost his job, but he faced no criminal charges. Tate bravely agreed to testify in early August, just before the rising, but then she was to die suddenly of unknown causes the following October.³⁴⁴

³⁴² Carey McWilliam, “Watts: The Forgotten Slum,” *The Nation*, 1965. Thomas Pynchon, “A Journey Into The Mind of Watts,” *New York Times Magazine*, 12 June 1966. Ray Bradbury, *Voices from the Sixties*, 4. Robert Kirsch, “Introduction,” in Jerry Cohen and William S. Murphy, *Burn, Baby, Burn!* (E.P. Dutton & Co, 1966), 8. For the epigraph to this section of the chapter, which also fits the pattern described in this paragraph, see Joan Didion, “The Santa Ana,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 26 August 1967.

³⁴³ Paul Coates, “Vice Casts its Shadow on West Adams District,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 April 1965. Check the Sentinel for more sources on this?

³⁴⁴ Mike Davis and Jon Weiner, *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (Verso, 2020), 214-215.

Rumors fueled the rising, which was an example of what cultural historian Nan Enstad has encouraged scholars to call “creative response” rather than mere “resistance.”³⁴⁵ The morning after the first long hot summer night of protest, Muslims began handing out leaflets reading “The Song is Ended...But the Melody Lingers On” and with graphics depicting a Klansman, first, and then a policeman, second, stomping on a Black man.³⁴⁶ The protesters chanted a slogan, “Burn, Baby, Burn!,” which came from a catchphrase local youths had taken to calling in and yelling on the “burn line” at Nathaniel “Magnificent” Montague’s Black-oriented KGFJ morning drive show.³⁴⁷ Even White-oriented KHJ’s “Boss Radio” had recently featured a rousing, politicized Black voice. Between rock ‘n’ roll hits, advertising jingles, and banter from deejay Hot Rod Rog, Los Angeles city councilperson Tom Bradley made a long statement on 29 April 1965 contesting lethal anti-Black LAPD violence. Objecting to a plan to transfer police oversight to the county level, Bradley countered, “We ought to keep our law enforcement agency close to the people” and then retold the story of a 55-year-old Black motorist named John Grudt. This working man had a hearing impairment, and when he commuted home one night at midnight “in a high crime area,” police shouted from the window of an unmarked car for him to stop. Grudt’s nonresponse registered as fleeing the scene, so they followed him and radioed a plainclothes cop at the next intersection. Shotgun in hand, he approached Grudt’s vehicle, which was stopped at a red light, and tapped the driver’s window with the weapon. The officers said Grudt jerked the car, and he was shot in his seat.³⁴⁸ Black drivers had been unable to go through

³⁴⁵ Nan Enstad, “On Grief and Complicity: Notes Toward a Visionary Cultural History,” in *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present & Future*, James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O’Malley, eds. (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 328.

³⁴⁶ Robert Conot, *Rivers of Blood*, 108.

³⁴⁷ Nathaniel Montague, *Burn, Baby, Burn!: The Autobiography of Magnificent Montague* (University of Illinois Press, 2003), 124.

³⁴⁸ “Roger Christian,” *Rock Radio Scrapbook*. “Grudt v. City of Los Angeles,” (California Supreme Court, 1970), *Findlaw*. Max Felker Kantor, “Liberal Law and Order: The Politics of Police Reform in Los Angeles,” *Journal of Urban History* 46, no. 5 (2020).

their own community without harassment, and for a few nights, Whites were going to learn how this treatment felt.

When the so-called “Watts Riots” rising of 1965 began, California Highway Patrol had pulled over two men, Marquette Frye and his brother Ronald, for drinking-driving.³⁴⁹ Tensions rose when Rena Frye, their mother, walked a half-block from their home to retrieve the car, the family’s gray-white ‘55 Buick. LAPD had arrived, a scuffle ensued, and police left the scene with the whole family in handcuffs. Marquette had a large gash from a knock with a nightstick. An angry crowd had gathered and began to pelt the squad cars and motorcycles. A pop bottle was reportedly the first projectile, and soon beer cans, stones, and other debris followed. Avalon Boulevard was “a nightmare alley of flying missiles,” including “hunks of asphalt and slabs of cement,” with which protesters damaged at least fifty vehicles on that first night alone. They pulled a few drivers out and beat them. The cars were overturned and set on fire. South Los Angeles composed a lucid, vengeful, and smoky message, which the rest of the city saw, heard, and smelled. For a few carnivalesque days, White car culture became touchable, but the crowd restrained itself and never outright killed a motorist or a cop. Not at all “insensate,” the protesters even improvised a communications system of gestures. Youths patrolled the perimeter of the protests and stopped motorists with a warning: “Turn your inside light on, Blood, so we can see who it is.”³⁵⁰ Pop musician Johnny Otis, a man born White but known for his radio show and his loving Black family, remembered instructions to hook his left hand out the car window and give the right-turn signal with three raised fingers. This gesture was to show he was no “Whitey.”³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ Note that sociologists like Joseph Gusfield tended to use this term, which I will explain in the next chapter.

³⁵⁰ Cohen and Murphy, 25-26, 67, 81, and 109. For the pop bottle, the first missile thrown at a police car, see Conot, *Rivers*, 29.

³⁵¹ Johnny Otis, *Listen to the Lambs* (W.W. Norton, 1968), 20.

A year after the rising's end, police misread such a visual cue on a car, which factored into the shooting of Leonard Deadwyler on 7 May 1966. That afternoon, a 25-year-old pregnant Black woman began experiencing abdominal pains. Deadwyler, her husband, borrowed a Buick so old it was "emitting smoke like a turn-of-the-century coal burner" and tied a bright white handkerchief to the radio antenna. In their native Georgia, this was "an accepted folk custom," explained journalist Robert Conot. "In Los Angeles it had no meaning whatever." Deadwyler then drove as fast as 60 miles an hour north on Avalon to the nearest hospital, ten miles away. Police gave chase, but the driver assumed they had given him an impromptu escort after seeing the white handkerchief. Deadwyler eventually stopped, an officer stuck his gun into the front passenger window, the car lurched, and the gun fired a fatal shot.³⁵² The District Attorney's office made the remarkable decision to televise the inquest into the circumstances of this killing. *Life* magazine columnist Shana Alexander tuned in for eight days of testimony, which she called "a civics lesson on homicide." In the end, a jury with just one Black member decided Deadwyler had died of mere "accidental homicide." His postmortem blood alcohol reading proved he was drinking-driving. His wife complained the inquest put her husband, not the shooter, on trial.³⁵³

Black Los Angeles responded with fury, activism, and art to this disappointing decision. After some stirrings of renewed revolt, several Black men with cars established the Community Alert Patrol (CAP) to provide security - in lieu of the police and even from the police - during festive events. The CAP drivers tied white handkerchiefs to their antennas and taped signs to their car doors reading "to protect and observe." This phrase sarcastically reworked LAPD's own new motto, recently added to squad car doors, which read, "to protect and serve." These proud

³⁵² Robert E. Conot, *Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness* (Bantam Books, 1967), 412-413. "1966 Throwback Report: Leonard Deadwyler Inquest," *YouTube*, 15 December 2018.

³⁵³ Shana Alexander, "The Feminine Eye: A Civics Lesson on Homicide," *Life*, 10 June 1966, 29.

words came of a vote among readers of the department's official magazine, *Beat*, in November 1963.³⁵⁴ CAP had drivers work in twos, so a witness was able to testify about any confrontations. Drivers were not to drink for a day beforehand or to carry a weapon. Operating for a year, CAP featured in SNCC's magazine, *The Movement*, which published an account of this community defense strategy.³⁵⁵ One reader was Huey Newton, of the post-colonial Black Panther Party in Oakland. He was inspired to start "policing the pigs," which is a program better known than CAP. However, the activists in Los Angeles innovated this motorist's strategy of cultural politics. One historian has compared CAP to "guerilla theater." Long after the rising, those driving these decorated "art cars" patrolled Watts and other Black neighborhoods as a shadow police force³⁵⁶

CAP's founders included Ron "Brother Crook" Wilkins, a man who customized cars like his '31 DeSoto. Coming up as a Slauson, the street gang of Black youth named for a major street, Brother Crook intimately knew how police had given the Black city no choice but to organize alternative security forces of its own. CAP did admirably at the 1966 Watts summer festival, and the parade's grand marshal, Sargent Shriver from the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), decided to fund the group. Subject to oversight from the federal government, which doled out continuing awards and thus had the power to cut funding in reaction to any infraction, CAP lost its radical potential.³⁵⁷ Oppositional Black car culture survived in clubs like the Western Avenue Street-Racing Association. They appeared in the *L.A. Times*-affiliated *West* magazine the next

³⁵⁴ *Beat* (December 1963).

³⁵⁵ Louis J. Gothard, "Organizer's Notebook: How to Organize a Community Alert Patrol," *The Movement* (February 1967), 11.

³⁵⁶ Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Duke University Press, 2010), 197.

³⁵⁷ Paul Weeks and Ray Rogers, "Fears Grow That Aid May Alter Alert Patrol," *L.A. Times*, 18 June 1967. Davis and Weiner, *Set the Night on Fire*, 269-271.

November. There, readers learned of a racer with the nom de guerre, “Stretch.” The 32-year-old took this name in memory of the years he had lost to a Mississippi prison after having killed the “white man who molested his sister.” The article reported he was driving a ‘62 Corvette and was dating a “redhead” named Linda, 22. The White journalist admitted to staring while she danced seductively to the car radio’s “transistorized rhythm and blues.” When betting on races, Stretch sometimes had Linda drive his ‘vette.³⁵⁸ In the 1960s, Black drivers mounted collective defense against anti-Black policing with their cars, and some flaunted the sexualization of the car.

While R&B played on car radio for a bold interracial couple, the transformation in race relations after the rising in Los Angeles took a more sinister turn in Pop culture. In August 1965, *Billboard*’s #1 hit was Sonny & Cher’s “I Got You Babe.” In the months to come, such hits included the Beatles’ “Yesterday” (October 1965) and Sergeant Barry Sadler’s “Ballad of the Green Berets” (March 1966).³⁵⁹ Ranging from apolitical to outright conservative, mainstream Pop did not address the racial freedom struggle at all. Tom Wilson, a Black producer at MGM Records who had famously signed Bob Dylan, finally heard something promising. One of the few responses to Watts in a Pop style was the song “Trouble Every Day” by a mixed-race band called the Mothers. Including a Chicano bassist, a Native drummer, and a songwriter of Arab and Sicilian descent named Frank Zappa, the Mothers was no suburban garage band.³⁶⁰ Zappa had seen the so-called “riots” on television, so he sang, “I’ve been checkin’ out the news / Until my eyeballs fail to see.” Despite disdain for television viewing, Zappa had nevertheless taken careful notes. In sarcastically giving a voice to the logics of media production, the song recorded for

³⁵⁸ Rob Ross, “Street Racing: A Squall Every Night,” *West*, 20 November 1966.

³⁵⁹ Joel Whitburn *Presents the Billboard Hot One Hundred Charts: The Sixties* (Record Research Incorporated, 1990).

³⁶⁰ Billy James, *Necessity Is - : The Early Years of Frank Zappa & the Mothers of Invention* (SAF Publishing, 2000), 23.

memory the tragedy of Lonnye Lee Cook, 47, a queer Black woman: “if another woman driver / Gets machine gunned from her seat / They’ll send some joker with a brownie / And you’ll see it all complete.” To clarify, those in this fight with machine guns were the National Guard, and “brownie” was the slang term for a camera commonplace in the making of television news.³⁶¹

A White man from the suburbs of Northern Virginia and Southern California, Zappa was unusually well-prepared to get a feeling for the rising in Los Angeles. His family moved around the country from one defense industry hub to another until settling in the High Desert near Edwards Air Force Base. According to a 1989 memoir, Zappa’s mixed-race rock ‘n’ roll band at Lancaster High School once nearly incited a race riot when local Antelope Valley tough white guys gathered threateningly after an integrated show. Black fans went to their cars, retrieved chains from the trunks, and stood in formation with Zappa’s band. Black car culture had saved Zappa, but he flippantly went for a “life in the slow lane.” The money other kids might have saved for purchase of a car went into Zappa’s record collection, which included the likes of the contemporary classical French composer Edgard Varèse. So car radio did not influence Zappa’s listening habits at all. Also uninterested in college, Zappa took a circuitous path to Hollywood. This included a stint along Route 66 in Rancho Cucamonga at a jerry-built studio, which authorities used eminent domain to seize for the sake of widening the highway. This was also where a detective had entrapped Zappa, who took a commission to record pornographic sounds. The experimental musician landed in a San Bernardino County jail. No blessed son of the beach suburbs, Zappa had few advantages and no backup plan while struggling into the L.A. scene.³⁶²

³⁶¹ Cohen and Murphy, *Burn, Baby, Burn!*, 223-227.

³⁶² Frank Zappa with Peter Ochiogrosso, *The Real Frank Zappa Book* (Poseiden, 1989). For more on vice and anti-pornography in Los Angeles, see Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right* (Columbia University Press, 2010) and Robert O. Self, “Sex in the City: The Politics of Sexual Liberalism in Los Angeles, 1963-79,” *Gender & History* 20, no. 2 (August 2008).

After signing, Zappa's band crafted an hourlong concept album called *Freak Out!* (1966). Nervous about the band's suggestive name, executives forced them to adopt "the Mothers of Invention," but their songs never ceased to provoke. In contrast to Spector's polished sound engineering and simple romantic lyrics, Zappa composed distorted sounds into songs with dispiriting, absurdist titles like "Who Are the Brain Police?" and "Nullis Pretii (No Commercial Potential)." The album came with a print insert labeled "FREAK OUT Hot Spots." Hot spots was the term police had used for areas of activity during the recent racial rising, and *Freak Out!*'s map resembled blacked-out newspaper depictions of the "curfew zone" that had appeared everywhere from *Los Angeles Free Press*, under the headline "The Negroes Have Voted," to the report by the McCone Commission. A tongue-in-cheek message for wannabe cool tourists, the map gave instructions about how to stay safe if caught in "police-terror situations." Symbols like squad cars, tanks, handcuffs, howitzers, and prison buses marked the West Hollywood sheriff's station at 720 N. San Vicente Boulevard and LAPD's Hollywood Police Station, sequestered at an intersection of off-strip residential streets. This humorous Pop guide also recommended hot spots for dinner or dancing, but Zappa's mock advertisements seemed intentionally out-of-date. Mushroom clouds hovered over freak-oriented nightclubs that the authorities had just busted.³⁶³

In 1968, the Mothers released their fourth album, a clear indication they had the ability all along to follow the Pop formula but chose instead to craft parodies. For *Cruising with Ruben and the Jets*, they facetiously encoded the Mothers into the album's cover art and pretended to be an as-yet-undiscovered band with a cloying doo-wop sound. The album opened with "Cheap Thrills," a celebration of physical intimacies "in the back of my car," sensations "up and down my spine," and spunk sprayed "all over the seat." Zappa was not the first to satirize mid-1960s

³⁶³ "FREAK OUT Hot Spots" map from *Freak Out!* album at wolf, "Frank Zappa Official Release #78," *kompaktkiste*, 21 June 2020. *Los Angeles Free Press*, 2, no. 34 (20 August 1965).

Pop style. The Chad Mitchell Trio had already approximated Beach Boys voices while singing “The Sound of Protest (Has Begun to Pay)” by the Leftist songwriter Fred Hellerman,³⁶⁴ but Zappa mocked driving itself. Cars had long been key accessories for suburban youth, who had acquired a right to the city that included sex in semipublic places. “Cheap Thrills” laughingly took a mic and held it to these escapades. Zappa had not stopped laughing decades later in his passage about jazz and Pop’s omnipresent “**II-V-I**” chords. “One of the most exciting things that ever happened in the world of ‘*white-person-music*,’” he laughed, “was when the Beach Boys used the progression **V-II** on ‘Little Deuce Coupe.’ An important step forward by going backward.”³⁶⁵ Rather than complex music with a progression of tension and resolution, the Beach Boys opted for simplicity, well suited to drive time, sounding like hitting the gas then the brakes.

Not to be completely marginalized, the Beach Boys crafted its own oblique response to South Los Angeles’s rising. At that moment, the crises of war in Vietnam and of racism in U.S. cities had finally politicized the band. Brian Wilson told the critic Jules Siegel about his dreams of engineering and composing a new racial musical tradition: “the white spiritual sound.”³⁶⁶ The hotly-anticipated Beach Boys album, *SMiLE*, was to feature songs like “Heroes and Villains,” a historical fiction with a mixed-race Spanish and Indian love interest right out of Southern California’s romantic *Ramona* myth. Then there was “Cabinessence,” a frontier tale of a Nineteenth-Century Chinese migrant laborer called “the grand coolie workin’ on the railroad.”³⁶⁷

³⁶⁴ Martin Grossman, “The Sound of Protest Has Begun To Pay,” *The Paper*, 20 January 1966.

³⁶⁵ Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 187.

³⁶⁶ Jules Siegel, “Goodbye Surfing Hello God,” [1967], *The Atavist Magazine* 8 (2011).

³⁶⁷ See annotations by Abraxas01 for “Cabin Essence,” *Genius*, 2013. For more on race, labor, nostalgia, and California in the Nineteenth Century, see Manu Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (University of California Press, 2019) and Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (University of California Press, 2006).



Colorblindness was out. Racism was in. For “Fire,” a bizarre, experimental track, Wilson ordered the session musicians to wear plastic firefighter helmets while playing abstract sounds that resembled a raging blaze and the sirens of fire trucks. The synchronicity of the recording with a nearby fire convinced Wilson, now increasingly experiencing paranoid schizophrenia, that he had acquired the ability to alter reality with compositions.³⁶⁸ Without specifically mentioning the previous year’s fiery protests, Wilson had made fire into one of the elemental building blocks of the “white spiritual sound.” Slave plantation society’s pyrophobia had made its way, after the Watts rising, into suburban housing tracts and Hollywood recording studios of Los Angeles. The deterioration of Wilson’s mental health, plus Siegel’s bizarre exposé complicated production. The label promptly canceled *SMiLE*, which became Pop’s lost White history of the U.S.

The Pop Artist Ruscha also took a sudden interest in fire. A 50-square-foot canvas, the largest of the artist’s entire career, debuted in 1968 as *Los Angeles County Museum on Fire* (LACMA). Founded in 1961, the city’s public cultural institution had weathered criticism from the beginning. In 1966, scandal arose when curators agreed to display “Backseat Dodge ‘38” and other sexually-explicit tableaux by a Pop sculptor named Edward Kienholz. Objecting to the image of a drunk couple having sex in a hot rod with a raccoon tale tied to the antenna, the County Board of Supervisors, led by Warren Dorn, required the museum to keep an armed guard posted next to the installation, to open the car door only for one hour-long increment per day, and never to allow more than one patron to look inside at a time.³⁶⁹ Pop Art fans reacted humorously with a bumper sticker reading “Dorn is a four-letter word.”³⁷⁰ After the protests of

³⁶⁸ For more on witchcraft in postwar California, see Erik Davis, *High Weirdness: Drugs, Esoterica, and Visionary Experience in the Seventies* (MIT Press, 2019).

³⁶⁹ Maurice Tuchman, *Edward Kienholz* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1966), 8. Michael G. Kammen, *Visual Shock: Art Controversies in American Culture* (Viking, 2006).

³⁷⁰ Plagens, “Los Angeles,” *Artforum*.

1965 and then this art controversy in 1966, critics asked Ruscha about his painting's politics. His reply was an exercise in what the biographer Alexandra Schwartz has called the "economy of denial." Race was incidental to the flames billowing from the museum's roof. The artist had claimed the idea predated Watts, for his earliest structure fire painting dated to 1964. Neither was the 1972 art book *Colored People* about race, according to Ruscha. After another decade, the artist finally confessed to the nature of his Pop-style visual pun. In an interview with a friendly critic, the artist acted out a minstrelsy routine and explained that the cactus  had reminded him of a blackface performer's white gloves .³⁷¹ The Okie still ran strongly in Ed Ruscha.

In the visual and musical cultures of Pop, puns were vehicles into racial discourse for White men like Ruscha and Wilson. Other Pop humorists of the car were less disordered and less denialist. Joseph Wambaugh, a police officer, wrote a "war novel" called *The New Centurions* (1970), and it won accolades from the *Times* critic Kirch.³⁷² The novelist lightly fictionalized stories from a life in LAPD. The department had rarely let personnel put their experiences into public before and threatened to censure Wambaugh for sharing this first-person account of how the Watts rising looked, sounded, and felt for officers inside the squad cars.³⁷³ The novelist revealed that during August 1965, police had patrolled Watts and Willowbrook in threes, always with a man sitting in the back ready to stick his shotgun out of the open window. Cops had brought the drive-by shooting to Los Angeles. In a passage, set in 1964, two officers drove the

³⁷¹ Dave Hickey, "Available Light" in *I Don't Want No Retrospective: The Works of Ed Ruscha* (Hudson Hills Press, 1982), 28. Edward Ruscha, *Colored People* (Edward Ruscha, 1972). Poster, theatre, "The Black and White Minstrel Show," paper, used by Tivoli Theatre, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, 1963-1964, *Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences*, 2020. Schwartz, *Ed Ruscha's Los Angeles*, 227-228. Another art historian has been willing to take Ruscha at his denialist word: "No that has nothing to do with it. Absolutely nothing to do with the destruction and people carrying guns around. No, it's visual." Whiting, *Pop L.A.*, 77.

³⁷² Robert Kirsch, "Novel Profiles War in the LAPD Foxholes," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 January 1971.

³⁷³ Jerry Cohen, "Officer-Author: A Police Story," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 November 1970. Though the first reports in the *Times* about this novel appeared in November 1970, a book review did not appear until a week after Wambaugh and LAPD had resolved their dispute. "Officer Who Wrote Novel Admonished, Chief Davis Says," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 January 1971.

“drunk wagon” filled with men arrested for public intoxication. The driver asked, “Mustn't be too comfortable back there...maybe I should drive slower?” His passenger retorted, “They can't feel anything.” He devised a nighttime drive-by at a lot on Central and 22nd Street where Black men gathered to drink. At the sight of police, drinkers dropped their bottles and scattered while the officer, himself a drunk, banged a fist on the van door in the manner of an Italian “huckster” he remembered from his childhood, and cried out, “N*g-gers, n*g-gers, n*ggers for sale!”³⁷⁴

³⁷⁴ Joseph Wambaugh, *The New Centurions* (Atlantic-Little Brown & Co., 1970), 313-314 and 296-300.



For a sensational image of the car's potential as an essential tool for racial bigots in the U.S.A., see Edward Kienholz's *Five Car Stud* (1969-1972). After near ruin at LACMA in 1966, he took this tableau to the border-adjacent West German city of Kassel. This place was the site of *documenta*, a recurring exhibition of contemporary art in styles that National Socialists had once exhibited as "degenerate" or "Jewish." Every half decade since 1955, antiracists invited world artists to come to the German city, which had to be rebuilt after Allied bombing flattened it during the war. At 1972's *documenta 5*, "The Interrogation of Reality," Kienholz reflected on the conceptual overlap between American car cultures and American whiteness.³⁷⁵ Whites in clown masks stormed a lovers' lane and were fixing to lynch a Black man they had found in a car with a White woman. The attackers held this screaming man in a supine position, had a rope tied to his ankle, and they were castrating him. A diverse array of cars, with headlights, on ringed the

³⁷⁵ Jeannine Tang, "Of Biennials and Biennialists: Venice, Documenta, Münster," *Theory, Culture, & Society* 24 (2007): 247-260. Masao Miyoshi, "Radical Art at *documenta X*," *New Left Review*, 1 March 1998.

“schauderhaften” scene and bathed the hidden history of lynching in a bright light.³⁷⁶ What visitors saw was a juxtaposition of modernist vehicles, the postwar affluent society’s most iconic manufactured product, with a pattern of racial violence White denialists have often dismissed as a premodern vestige of the long-lost past. This was a claim whiteness had sustained as soldiers established roadblocks around South Los Angeles and police drove around massacring protesters in 1965 Los Angeles, then in 1966 Chicago, and finally in 1967 in 23 cities, when at least 83 died in the nationwide protests.³⁷⁷ Kienholz went to Germany and used Pop Art to tell the truth.

In both visual and musical Pop, the car was an omnipresent culture machine driving even as it denied legacies of racial violence in 1960s Los Angeles. Pop artists and musicians were typically from White suburban worlds and made entertainment for patrons and fans who resided in White suburban worlds. Albums like “Little Deuce Coupe” and art books like “Every Building on Sunset Strip” were explicit celebrations of drive time, those privileged moments of moving freely and flexibly by car in and between urban and suburban enclaves. These stories contained various messages, but their sexual and racial politics rank highest in significance among them. Pop in the car formed the senses of life in Los Angeles that I call White Sight and White Sound, and these sensibilities helped maintain apartheid despite the civil rights movement. Even when Los Angeles’s peoples of color did drive, cars established what historian Paul Gilroy has called an “antisocial sociality.” Middle-class drivers of color often entered car cultures only to become distanced from transit-dependent communities of color. Left behind, Watts and Willowbrook felt

³⁷⁶ The German term *schauderhaften* invokes a feeling of needing to shudder and cling to someone. Dieter Westeker, *documenta-Dokumente 1955-1968* (George Wenderoth Verlag, 1972), 172.

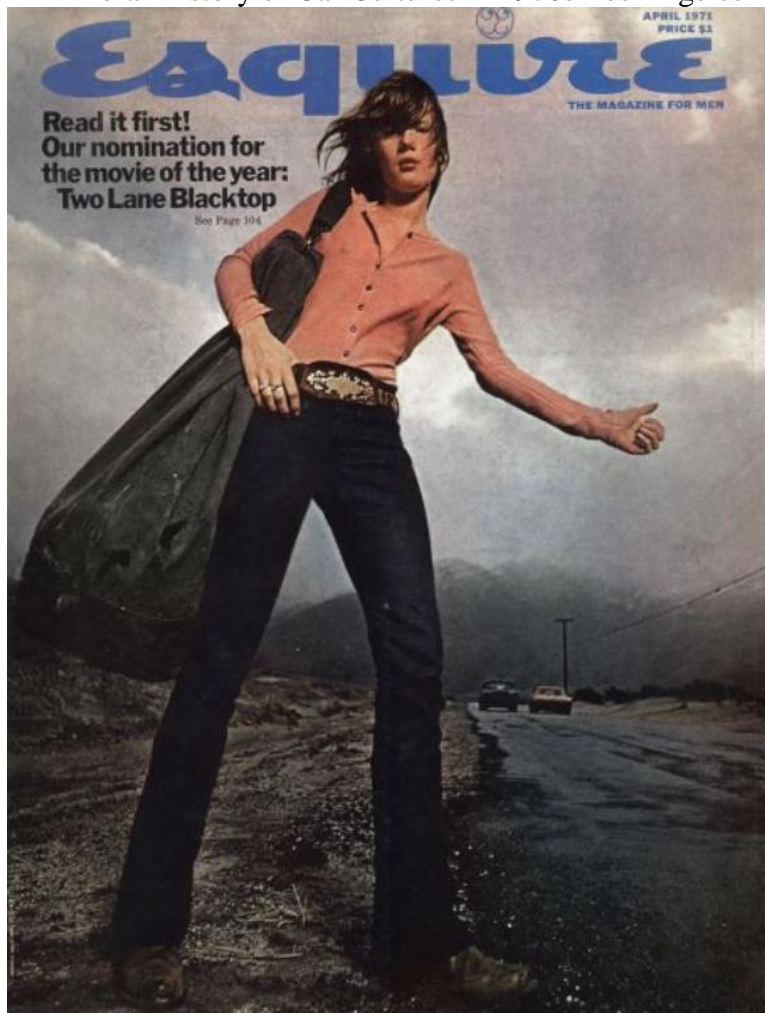
³⁷⁷ *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, Otto Kerner, chairman, 1967, downloaded from U.S. Department of Justice, 29 April 2021.

untouchable,³⁷⁸ so protesters reached out and touched the car by flinging rocks at many passing vehicles, except the ones with proud Black drivers holding up three fingers through the window.

³⁷⁸ Paul Gilroy, "Driving While Black," in *Car Cultures*, Daniel Miller, ed. (Berg, 2001), 100-102.

Ch. 3: High and Mighty

A Moral History of Car Cultures in 1970s Los Angeles



“All I see is a pile of De-troit shit.”
Dennis Wilson, *Two Lane Blacktop* (1971)

In April 1971, *Esquire* magazine declared *Two Lane Blacktop* “the movie of the year” before it even screened. Like the blockbuster *Easy Rider* (1969), a hippy road movie,³⁷⁹ *Two Lane Blacktop* promised another round of permissive rock ‘n’ roll cinema. In a ‘55 Chevy 150, Pop stars James Taylor’s “The Driver” and Dennis Wilson’s “The Mechanic” picked up a female


³⁷⁹ For more on *Easy Rider*, see Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock ‘n’ Roll Generation Saved Hollywood* (Simon & Schuster, 1999) and Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (The New Press, 2010), 189-190.

hitchhiker, actor Laurie Bird. She had sex with both men. An aging playboy in a GTO muscle car invited them all to race along historic Route 66. The film presented the men, true hot rodders alienated from a decadent age, in contrast to “GTO,” who drove a new vehicle equipped with a stereo playing Chuck Berry hits like “Maybelline” (1956). From the start, the two heroes stated their contempt for unaltered products from Detroit when insulting a Black man’s Dodge Charger in Los Angeles. This scene was racially complicated, for the setting, “Broadway Parking Lot on Crenshaw,”³⁸⁰ was in Leimert Park. This was a destination for the Black middle classes. LAPD rushed over to stop the illegal street racing. The Driver and the Mechanic, who was Black in the script’s first draft, fled for the American South. The next draft cast the Mechanic as White, for Dennis Wilson to play, and the young men proceeded to go South to make themselves.³⁸¹

The flight from restrictive morality is a predominant theme in the literature on the U.S. counterculture, but this narrative ignores the simultaneous “Jesus Revolution.” A movement of Christians who resembled the so-called “freaks” burst into visibility at the Tournament of Roses in 1971. From a touring car, Grand Marshal Billy Graham, a Protestant reverend famed for his great crusade in 1949 Los Angeles, rode past over one million spectators and noticed hip-looking Christians with copies of the Bible. In many cases, these “young people, with clenched fist and raised index finger lifted upward” were wearing long hair and “bell-bottoms.” “Spontaneously I returned that upward gesture and shouted to the crowds: ‘One Way - the Jesus Way!’” Graham later learned the local *Hollywood Free Paper*, an underground Christian newspaper, circulated in excess of one million copies per month. By summer, hippies of faith made the pages of *Look*,

³⁸⁰ *Esquire*, April 1971, 104.

³⁸¹ Sylvia Townsend, *Bumpy Road: The Making, Flop, and Revival of Two-Lane Blacktop* (Mississippi University Press, 2019), 5 and 11. Historian Bruce Schulman characterizes this countercultural world as having “a new code of personal behavior” that “had emerged to challenge the older values of politeness, decency, and moral tradition. This new ethic encouraged the free expression of liberated individuals and challenged traditional notions of restraint.” Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Da Capo Press, 2001), 300n22.

Life, and *Time*.³⁸² The last of these three publications illustrated how believers appropriated one of the counterculture's signature new media: bumper stickers. Suburban Christians who did not join a commune, or drive the country by bus evangelizing, plastered their vehicles with messages like , and the ancient Greek ichthys symbol on the bodies of their cars.³⁸³ Evangelical Christians had gained an ability to share the good news, visually, with their cars.

Another such juxtaposition was the union of Black Christian faith and Black power at Los Angeles' Wattstax festival of August 1972. A crowd of 75,000 people³⁸⁴ gathered at the Coliseum to laugh, to cry, to sing, to dance, and to shout for an all-star lineup of Stax Records soul, funk, and gospel musicians. Producer David L. Wolper, not yet famous for the television hit *Roots* (1977), shot the concert as a documentary film and peppered the final edit with socially realistic scenes of everyday life, humor, and talk in South Los Angeles. For this footage, taboo was no impediment. Comedian Richard Pryor candidly explained that "California's a weird state because they have laws for pedestrians...but they don't have laws for people at night when cops accidentally shoot people." He was not about to let the White filmmakers cut police-community relations into a progress narrative. However, the film was so much more than just a tragedy, for it jumped from working-class extras laughing about sex to slow-motion shots of Black men in their most sumptuous furs. One of their "pimp rides" was a Rolls Royce with vanity plates reading "FLAVOR."³⁸⁵ In no way were these words and images incompatible with Stax Records' choice

³⁸² Billy Graham, *The Jesus Generation* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 13-15. For an excellent passage on this "Third Great Awakening," which notes how the publishing house Harper and Row purchased Zondervan, see Schulman, *The Seventies*, 92-93.

³⁸³ "Heaven on Wheels," *Time*, 16 April 1973, 8.

³⁸⁴ Hours after the event, Richard Pryor estimated a hundred thousand came. The *Times* reported the event sold 75,000 tickets. Dorothy Townsend, "Plan for L.A. Rock Concert Left Hanging," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May 1974.

³⁸⁵ By the 1990s, this term evoked a man's style or attractiveness. In this case, "flavor" could have referenced an informal enterprise's service, e.g. the girls that a man pimped, or the goods, e.g. *flavorful* cocaine. See Geneva Smitherman, *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner* (Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 111 and Clarence Major, *Juba to Jive: The Dictionary of African-American Slang* (Penguin, 1994), 176 and 350.

of emcee, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, a civil rights veteran. The devout, Christian icon invited the nationalistic crowd to raise their closed fists and to chant, "I. Am. Somebody."

Despite these signs of communion between Christian faith and the legacies of the 1960s, a backlash brewed. Both preachers and politicians articulated new moralistic codes of behavior. Drivers heard these messages on their car radio stations, which played short sermons, some by the Reverend Steuart McBirnie of Glendale and others by a former governor of California. In 1975, Ronald Reagan joined a chorus of radio critics attacking permissive society. He warned listeners about dangers of a society where the next driver over might be high on marijuana. A majority of smokers apparently "admit[ted] to driving while high on pot" and believed that they drove better while intoxicated.³⁸⁶ Another moral panic followed when sensational reports about unaccompanied women and girls in danger swept the media. The Hillside Strangler of 1977 had graduated from femicides against street walkers, hitch hikers, and bus riders to female drivers and apartment dwellers. In this age of the looming Moral Majority, founded in 1979, dead girls and women who had walking the city's sidewalks, riding its buses, and driving cars by night became symptoms of the potential for moral bankruptcy in car cultures, for the killers had used a car to pick up the victims and to dump their bodies. Even the lead City Planner of Los Angeles, Calvin Hamilton, had lately spoken against car cultures in moralistic terms at a conference. "Like the rat, the automobile is not a necessary evil. It is just a transportation device to be used where needed, and eliminated where it destroys man's ability to be a better human being."³⁸⁷

³⁸⁶ "Marijuana," 29 May 1979, Reagan Library, 1980 Campaign Papers, b14, Radio Commentaries/Broadcasts, 1976 and 1979.

³⁸⁷ Frank Riley, "The Man Remaking Los Angeles," *Los Angeles*, February 1965, in Calvin Hamilton Papers, Huntington Library, Box 2, Folder 11.

Pt. 1: Air Waves

Cars and Talk Radio in 1970s Los Angeles



“Subjects were required to construct the optimum auto disaster victim by placing a replica of Reagan’s head on the unretouched photographs of crash victims.”

J.G. Ballard, “Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan” (1968)³⁸⁸

Ronald Reagan seized California’s governorship, and J.G. Ballard reacted with a short story in the style of a focus group study. Ballard’s fanciful linkage between Reagan’s face and car crash victims had its parallel, one year prior, in an analysis by the political scientist James Q. Wilson of Reagan Country for *Commentary*, a right-leaning magazine. The governor’s popularity in Southern California, where he won a huge majority, came of the suburban “style of life” in a landscape where voters worshipped “in white storefront” churches, went on the weekly “Sunday Afternoon Drive” as a family, and often grew up with a “sense of property” not simply based in homeownership but from earlier on as adolescent car owners.³⁸⁹ Political history must account for Protestant Christian radio and suburban car cultures as factors in Reagan’s rise to

³⁸⁸ J.G. Ballard, “Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan,” in *The Atrocity Exhibition* (Jonathan Cape, 1970).

³⁸⁹ James Q. Wilson, “A Guide to Reagan Country: The Political Culture of Southern California,” *Commentary* (May 1967).

power,³⁹⁰ for the future president was in Hollywood for five years between his terms in Sacramento and Washington. Broadcast to a coast-to-coast audience via car radio and during commuter hour, these exegetical “commentaries” for *Viewpoint with Ronald Reagan* were composed in the style of sermons. This pre-1987 form of “talk radio” was the bedrock of the formation of the New Right.³⁹¹ Drivers joined Reagan’s cult of personality after hearing him “in his own voice.”³⁹²

That voice provided a springboard for sensory historians interested in the role of sound in political culture. This beautiful instrument with such “labial dexterity” got Reagan his first job at Warner Bros, but then he had “to train himself to speak more slowly, lest his mouth wreath on camera.” Drive time talk radio gave Reagan his opportunity to get back to speed. According to biographer Edmund Morris, this tremendous power to soothe and to build trust with listeners did not translate into face-to-face encounters. On television and movie screens, Reagan looked agile, but an awkwardness and insensitivity marked his personal appearances. This was because he was sensory impaired. The future governor and president became a person with deafness due to an

³⁹⁰ For the two best, a political biography and a synthetic history, see Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power* (Public Affairs, 2003) and Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (Harper Perennial, 2008).

³⁹¹ For religion, the media and other enterprises, and the suburbs in U.S. rightwing politics of the Twentieth Century, see Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (Basic Books, 2015). Kim Philips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen’s Crusade Against the New Deal* (W.W. Norton, 2010). Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Harvard University Press, 2009). Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plainfolk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (W.W. Norton, 2011). Matthew D. Lassiter, *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton University Press, 2006). Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton University Press, 2003). Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin and the Great Depression* (Vintage Books, 1982). For two histories of talk radio, each taking the genre as a new invention of the late 1980s, see Brian Rosenwald, *Talk Radio’s America: How an Industry Took Over a Political Party That Took Over the United States* (Harvard University Press, 2019) and Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

³⁹² *Reagan, In His Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan That Reveal His Revolutionary Vision for America*, Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson, eds. (Touchstone, 2001) and *Reagan, In His Own Voice* (Simon & Schuster Audio, 2001). So-called psychohistory fell out of vogue during the 1980s. For a methodological model I have used, see two biographies by Professor Fawn M. Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* (W.W. Norton, 1974) and *Richard Nixon: The Shaping of his Character* (Harvard University Press, 1981).

industrial accident when the noise from a shoot-out on set exploded the eardrum on his right side. The hearing on the left had also been damaged, so Reagan struggled through conversations in loud rooms and often had to “furtively switch off his sound box. I could tell from a slight frown in his gaze that he was lip-reading.” This tremendous social and physical disadvantage did not prevent Reagan from succeeding.³⁹³ In fact, the powers of communication Reagan needed to get by with his hidden disability pushed him into car radio, an experimental medium for politics.

For drivers, envisioning an intimacy with Reagan and his wife Nancy was no stretch, as the car was central to their marriage. “They eat at Dave Chasen’s, they spend their evenings in the homes of friends, they drive along the coast and look at the sea and a lot of time they’re quiet.” The Hollywood gossip reporter concluded they were “a couple who have no vices.”³⁹⁴ To clarify, reading Reagan as a personality in the plainfolk style of a radio evangelist is no denial of his complexity, business dealings, or militarism. Reagan’s pre-political life included stints on the big screen as an actor, on the small screen as a host, with the military as a wartime propagandist, with the Screen Actors’ Guild as a labor leader, with General Electric as a brand ambassador, and with Barry Goldwater as a spokesperson. Hints of these other dimensions colored Reagan’s zealously anti-communist and unwaveringly pro-capitalist agenda. In October of 1965, not long before announcing a campaign for California governor, Reagan told the *Fresno Bee*, “It’s silly talking about how many years we will have to spend in the jungles of Vietnam when we could pave the whole country and put parking stripes on it and still be home by Christmas.”³⁹⁵ The inflammatory statement combined the pro-war rhetoric of “suburban warriors” in California’s defense industry with the solutions orientation of the State’s highway engineers.³⁹⁶

³⁹³ Edmund Morris, “The Unknowable: Ronald Reagan’s amazing, mysterious life,” *The New Yorker*, 20 June 2004.

³⁹⁴ Cannon, *Governor Reagan*, 77

³⁹⁵ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 22

³⁹⁶ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors* and Avila, *Folklore of the Freeway*.

Reagan learned a preacher's oratorical style through repeated exposure to evangelical Protestants. From boyhood to young adulthood, Reagan was steeped in the Disciples of Christ tradition of his prohibitionist mother, his girlfriend's father (Reverend Ben Cleaver, who taught the teenager to drive), and his alma mater (Eureka College).³⁹⁷ After a cross-country migration into Hollywood success, Reagan evinced few signs of engagement with a faith until a fateful meeting on 29 November 1965. Dr. W.S. McBirnie, a Glendale-based evangelical who hosted the "Voice of Americanism" radio show, was one among the conservative leaders from the Los Angeles area who Republican activist Henry Salvatori invited to the Reagan home in Pacific Palisades. They brainstormed a theme for the future governor's 1966 campaign, to be announced in December, and McBirnie posted a letter the very next day. An idea came to the preacher in his car "on the way home from your home." Recalling how "almost every successful candidate of any historic importance in modern times has offered a positive program, packaged in some kind of slogan or neat description: New Deal, Fair Deal, New Frontier, Great Society, New Order, etc.," McBirnie floated "The Creative Society."³⁹⁸ This became Reagan's choice of slogan, which he used while campaigning, in the body of his inaugural address, and as the title for a 1968 book.

McBirnie's consulting for the Reagan campaign was a secret, for the preacher had taken a number of controversial far-right positions. His Voice of Americanism program played on border blaster stations, unregulated and broadcasting from Tijuana.³⁹⁹ Listeners bankrolled the enterprise by ordering McBirnie-authored pamphlets with racially provocative titles. *Sensitivity*

³⁹⁷ Cannon, *Governor Reagan*, 14, 21, 24-5, and 28.

³⁹⁸ W.S. McBirnie letter, 30 Nov 65, "Dear Ronnie," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Gubernatorial Papers, 1966 Campaign, C31, f: "Creative Society."

³⁹⁹ For more on stations like XEMO, which one *Times* columnist found by accident while flipping through the channels on his car radio, see Paul Coates, "Patriots to the Right of Us..." *Los Angeles Times*, 18 April 1965.

Training: The Plot to Brainwash America, The Black Conspiracy, and Songs of Subversion each sampled passages from McBirnie's 15-minute radio sermons. A few weeks before the election, incumbent governor Pat Brown held a press conference on 12 October in Long Beach where he announced Reagan's association with McBirnie, an "extremist radio commentator." The preacher officially advised the Reagan campaign, authored its theme, and proved that the movie star and aspiring politician was "the captive of the radical right."⁴⁰⁰ The attack fizzled. *Herald-Examiner* columnist George Todt defended McBirnie as a "fine American patriot," and on KNBC television, Reagan admitted his debt to the preacher, who coined the phrase "Creative Society," but denied he was anything more than a volunteer and a friend.⁴⁰¹ Winning all but three counties and a majority including a million extra votes, Reagan crushed Brown. In the aftermath of the protests in Watts, California elected a new governor with the full knowledge of his commitment to melding whiteness and a monotheistic faith into politics.

At midnight on 2 January 1967, Governor Reagan gave the inaugural address where he articulated his vision of Creative Society as an alternative to the Democratic Party's Great Society. In the 1960s, a fascination with creativity was spreading in academia. A 1965 speech on "the creative imagination" was engineer Michael Polanyi's case for the conditions of "discovery" requiring "two moves: one deliberate, and the other spontaneous, the spontaneous move being evoked in ourselves by the action of our deliberate effort." Reagan's Creative Society required a rebalancing where structure (the "deliberate") had to give ground to agency (the "spontaneous"). In California, such a society was to foster a "partnership between the people and government"

⁴⁰⁰ Richard Bergholz, "'Extremist' Created Reagan's Campaign Plan, Brown Says," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 October 1966.

⁴⁰¹ "Ronald Reagan, Rev. McBirney and the Creative Society" (Tom Brokaw), KNBC-TV, Sixth Hour News, 14 October 1966, 6pm and George Todt, "A Collision Course," *Herald-Examiner*, 20 October 1966. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Gubernatorial Papers, 1966 Campaign, C31, f: "Creative Society"

where the latter took “the lead in mobilizing the full and voluntary resources of the people.”⁴⁰² Reagan elaborated at 1968’s Las Vegas convention of the National Sheriffs Association. A “boy who works for the money to buy a car and keep it in gasoline is much more likely to appreciate it and care for it than the youth whose car has been given to him and whose gas is purchased on his father’s credit card.” Reagan opined that an idle “slum boy” would not throw rocks at a factory, if labor markets were deregulated, and the child had the right to work for less than minimum wage.⁴⁰³ Building on a draft speech by McBirnie, the Governor also boosted “Orders of Merit” and awards culture, in lieu of rising wages, to incentivize hard work and virtuous behavior.⁴⁰⁴

Reagan’s two terms in Sacramento ended with a decision not to run for a third term, and he left to begin preparing a run for the Republican nomination in the U.S. presidential election of 1976. Two Reagan associates, Michael K. Deaver and Peter D. Hannaford, immediately founded a PR firm to manage the former governor’s schedule and to find him a job. Reagan received two offers. Actor Ephrem Zimbalist, Jr. was recording 3-minute radio essays on “famous figures in history,” and Producer Harry O’Connor asked Reagan to pre-record conservative commentaries of the same length for nationwide distribution. The other option was regular appearances with Eric Sevareid on CBS. Reagan chose radio. Deaver was surprised and recalled asking why not television, to which Reagan replied, “I’m going to do radio because they won’t tire of me on radio.” The future president, who was first called “the great communicator” in 1976,⁴⁰⁵ “knew

⁴⁰² Michael Polanyi, “Lecture 3: The Creative Imagination,” Wesleyan University, 31 October 1965, *Polanyi Society*, Web, 15, accessed 17 June 2019. Ronald Reagan, “The Creative Society,” in *The Creative Society* (Devin-Adair Company, 1968), 9.

⁴⁰³ Reagan, “Crime - 1968,” in *The Creative Society*, 25-27.

⁴⁰⁴ W.S. McBirnie, letter. W.S. McBirnie, “Speech for Mr. Reagan’s consideration (He used portions of it).” Ronald Reagan, “A brief statement on the theory of The Idea of the Creative Society (Return to W.S. McBirnie).” Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Gubernatorial Papers, 1966 Campaign, C31, f: “Creative Society.”

⁴⁰⁵ Ironically, this phrase came from an article proposing cliché catch phrases like “a man to be reckoned with” for Jimmy Carter and “the Hoosier Democrat” for Birch Baye. Russell Baker, “Wisdom of the Sages,” *New York Times*, 27 January 1976.

the power of his voice...and that television might be something that people would indeed tire of - would not take as seriously as if they heard him two and a half minutes a day five days a week during commute time.” O’Connor and Deaver each respectively estimated total audiences of 20 to 40 millions during the 6 P.M. broadcasts. Paid writers composed Reagan’s newspaper columns and speeches, but he drafted the radio commentaries himself and based them on his readings.⁴⁰⁶

Besides the months Reagan took off for his try at a presidential run in 1976, he diligently recorded fifteen shows per sitting every three weeks from 1975 to 1979. The 991 resulting episodes ranged in length from 150 to 200 seconds. Since Reagan read them at a pace of two hundred words per minute,⁴⁰⁷ I estimate he wrote as many as 600,000 words of prose in six years. Writing happened wherever Reagan went. He filled two handwritten pages per radio essay while sitting at a desk, in hotel rooms, on planes, and in the backseat of the station wagon. The driver, whose opinion biographer Lou Cannon claimed Reagan “valued...as much as the opinion of an expert,” was Willard “Barney” Barnett. Assigned to drive the governor, the Highway Patrolman was a lifelong bachelor whom Deaver & Hannaford hired to serve the governor.⁴⁰⁸ From the Reagan ranch, where Barnett worked as a hand, he drove Reagan to a studio in Hollywood. “Riding down the coast highway from Santa Barbara,” Reagan started one commentary, “yellow tablet on my lap (somebody else was driving), I started to write my letter to the future.” The City of Los Angeles asked him to submit a message for a sealed capsule to

⁴⁰⁶ *Reagan, In His Own Voice*, audiobook chapter 1.

⁴⁰⁷ I read typed manuscripts of the Reagan commentaries at the Reagan Library, 1980 Campaign Papers, b14, Radio Commentaries/Broadcasts, 1976 and 1979. The length in minutes and seconds was included with each item. I cross-checked these with the recordings in *Reagan, In His Own Voice* and also used them to compute the pace of Reagan’s delivery. For comparison, Reagan spoke about twice as quickly as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his slow, 100-word-per-minute fireside chats. This pacing was fast for politics yet still only half as quickly as 1930s radio news announcers. Lawrence W. Levine and Cornelia R. Levine, *The People and the President: America’s Conversation with FDR* (University of Michigan Press, 2002).

⁴⁰⁸ Cannon, 138-139 and 438.

open in 2076. “I found myself wondering if it would look the same a hundred years from now. Will there still be a coast highway? Will they still be traveling in automobiles?...or moving so fast the beauty of all this would be lost?”⁴⁰⁹ It was September 1976, and Reagan was back at work after the convention where he conceded the Republican nomination to the incumbent president, Gerald Ford.

Before Reagan declared, Ford tried to buy his loyalty with a cabinet position: Secretary of Transportation. The governor declined,⁴¹⁰ but transportation was still on his mind when he returned to his commentaries. In late 1976, Reagan jabbed transportation bureaucrats for their unpopular attempts at social engineering in California. He told listeners of a “zany” proposal by UMTA (Urban Mass Transportation Administration), to charge all drivers a fee for entering the City of Berkeley. After a history of disputes with university students and progressive voters, Reagan was primed to say that the city council had “taken leave of its senses” when it accepted the “rock-solid article of faith of all mass transit zealots...the notion that people should stop driving cars and ride buses.” Reagan presented himself as a rational loyalist to drivers, especially the ones hearing his voice on their car radios. He declared, “People don’t behave that way. Their travel patterns are as individual as they are, and they won’t fit into neatly compartmentalized schemes.”⁴¹¹ Returning to the transit question in January 1977, the longtime Los Angeles resident reminisced, “[t]he clang of the trolley car’s bell was a familiar sound until people abandoned public transportation for their own set of wheels. The automobile gave man one more

⁴⁰⁹ “Shaping the World for 100 Years to Come,” 1 September 1976, Reagan Library, 1980 Campaign Papers, b14, Radio Commentaries/Broadcasts, 1976 and 1979.

⁴¹⁰ Cannon, 398.

⁴¹¹ “Berkeley’s Street Tax,” 2 November 1976, Reagan Library, 1980 Campaign Papers, b14, Radio Commentaries/Broadcasts, 1976 and 1979.

freedom. The freedom to choose his own timetable and route of travel on a portal-to-portal basis.”⁴¹²

Another California transportation controversy moved the former governor to retell and to reinterpret a Bible story. Goliath was Governor Jerry Brown and Caltrans (California Department of Transportation). David was a Creative Society specialty. Pacific Legal Foundation, a “small, non-profit public interest law firm,” sued to abolish the Diamond Lanes, the leftmost two lanes from each set of five running East and West on the Santa Monica Freeway. State officials had reserved this space during rush hour for buses and carpools of three or more. This pilot project, an attempt at traffic reduction and pollution abatement, began in March of 1976, but a judge had canceled it in August⁴¹³ even after preliminary evidence showed an array of benefits. The new conditions led drivers to change their schedules, to establish carpools, and to make some space on the freeway for buses to carry riders who had also paid for that public infrastructure with tax money collected and properties lost to eminent domain.⁴¹⁴ “Citizen guerrillas splashed paint and scattered nails,” recounted Joan Didion, sounding bemused and approving.⁴¹⁵ Reagan added, “It seems that my successor doesn’t like automobiles or freeways,” laughed about “enterprising youths” who “stood at freeway entrances and offered themselves as instant carpools at one dollar a head,” and finished with a celebration of how “Goliath crawled back...to nurse his wounds.”⁴¹⁶

⁴¹² “Rapid Transit,” 19 January 1977, Reagan Library, 1980 Campaign Papers, b14, Radio Commentaries/Broadcasts, 1976 and 1979.

⁴¹³ “Diamond Lanes,” 2 November 1976, Reagan Library, 1980 Campaign Papers, b14, Radio Commentaries/Broadcasts, 1976 and 1979.

⁴¹⁴ Wachs et al, *A Century of Traffic Congestion*

⁴¹⁵ Joan Didion, “Bureaucrats” in *The White Album* (Simon & Schuster, 1979), 82.

⁴¹⁶ “Diamond Lanes,” 2 November 1976, Reagan Library, 1980 Campaign Papers, b14, Radio Commentaries/Broadcasts, 1976 and 1979.

These essays about driving were the work of a man who had not driven for years. At the ranch, President Reagan drove a Jeep Rambler, but he had fallen out of the habit of navigating public roads. This was according to daughter Patti Davis, whom the Secret Service offered to drive like they already drove her father when he became the nominee for the presidency.⁴¹⁷ Thus Reagan's thinking about driving in the radio essays came of his relationships with Barnett and with his listeners, the individual drivers tuning in every evening during rush hour. Reagan told them they ought to feel seen in 1978's "Looking Out a Window." In this case, the governor saw commuters not from within another car but rather from a hotel. "The streets below are twin ribbons of sparkling red and white. Tail lights on the cars moving away from my vantage point provide the red and the headlights of those coming towards me the white. It's logical to assume all or most are homeward bound after a day's work." Reagan did not miss this opportunity to speculate about bureaucrats one day trying to reassign every worker to housing closer to their workplaces. Then he seamlessly switched styles from dystopia to apocalypse with a vision of a traffic jam during the end times. "[E]very road, every street, and all the telephone lines would be jammed with people trying to reach someone to whom we wanted simply to say, 'I love you.'"⁴¹⁸

Using sentimental terms and a storytelling style, Reagan returned many times to the last days in an era when the USSR and the USA were still on the brink of nuclear war. For 1978's "The Suicide Lobby," Reagan reminisced about "[m]any years ago during the period called the 'cold war.'" He lamented a shift in attitudes from the fear of "the threat of subversion" to a time when "witch hunting" - the search for "Reds under the bed" - was "unfashionable." The liberals who had laughed cold warriors into the corner and lobbied for reductions in military preparation

⁴¹⁷ Patti Davis, *The Way I See It: An Autobiography* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1992), 250.

⁴¹⁸ "Looking Out a Window," 27 January 1978, *Reagan, In His Own Voice*, chapter 1.

were suicidal, according to Reagan. He named names.⁴¹⁹ Three months later, Daniel Ellsberg, Dr. Benjamin Spock, Sidney Lens, Barry Commoner, Women Strike for Peace, Mobilization for Survival, American Friends Service Committee, War Resisters League, and the Coalition for a New Foreign Policy wrote with a threat of opening a defamation lawsuit unless radio stations allowed them equal time for a rebuttal under the Federal Communications Commission's fairness doctrine. A broadcast narrated by actor and activist Ossie Davis hit the airwaves. Ironically, the response called attention to Reagan's message. He saved a letter from Charlotte Tochterman, a graduate of Washington State in communications, who decried the "anti-defense, anti-American tirade" and then asked for a paper copy of the "program that was so upsetting to the radicals."⁴²⁰

Foreign affairs only grew in significance for the radio essays during 1979. Oil worker strikes in Iran caused a global shortage before the Shah abdicated. Three days later, Reagan addressed the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries or OPEC cartel. The limits it set on global production were a threat to U.S. manufacturing and transportation. "The magic word is 'decontrol,'" Reagan averred. "[D]econtrol now and production of the gas available in our own land would literally break up the OPEC cartel." Like neoliberal economist Milton Friedman, who had recently served in the governor's brain trust of policy advisors, Reagan saw this crisis as an opportunity to boost a repeal of restraints on oil drilling.⁴²¹ Then nervous drivers remembered the lines at the gasoline stations in 1973 after Arab states in OPEC slowed the flow of oil in retaliation for U.S. support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War. They rushed the gasoline stations to

⁴¹⁹ "The Suicide Lobby," 13 March 1978, Reagan Library, 1980 Campaign Papers, b14, Radio Commentaries/Broadcasts, 1976 and 1979.

⁴²⁰ WMUU radio station (Unitarian) letter, 13 June 1978, and Charlotte Tochterman letter to Citizens for the Republic, 26 July 1978, Reagan Library, 1980 Campaign Papers, b17, "Hannaford/CA HQ - R. Reagan Radio Broadcast - Correspondence, 1976-1979 (2/2)." Washington State University yearbook, 1950, U.S. School Yearbooks, 1900-1999, *Ancestry*.

⁴²¹ "OPEC" 19 Jan 1979, Reagan Library, 1980 Campaign Papers, b14, Radio Commentaries/Broadcasts, 1976 and 1979. Cannon, *Governor Reagan*, 369.

top off in May. The panic buying prompted Reagan to record the “California Gasoline Shortage,” which he blamed on federal gasoline price controls.⁴²² Before Reagan declared his 1980 run for president, he alleged President Jimmy Carter’s foreign, economic, and ecological policies had unfairly hit suburban voters in the pocket at the pump.⁴²³ He was finally ready to win.

Reagan declared his candidacy on 13 November 1979, the day after he said goodbye in the broadcast of his final radio essay and told listeners to look for his announcement. This was not the first time the governor delayed a run until as late as possible, for campaign law dictated he had to quit these paid, serialized public appearances.⁴²⁴ Reagan’s earnings totaled \$466,000 a year, and roughly \$150,000 of that went to Deaver & Hannaford, the PR firm that handled the governor’s scheduling, employed his driver, wrote his speeches, and promoted his radio show. After the general election, Reagan selected a deputy chief of staff: Deaver. He promptly quit his firm, which announced plans for a name change. The next day, *Washington Post*’s Patrick E. Tyler exposed a number of conflicts of interest. During the months prior to the election, business leaders and officials from rightwing Guatemala, Taiwan, and Argentina had begun accounts with Deaver & Hannaford worth \$125,000, \$60,000, and \$25,000 per annum. One more client was Eugene McCarthy, a renowned liberal senator who stunned his constituents when he endorsed Reagan for 1980. The 3M conglomerate hired the firm to lobby California to replace all license plates with new ones made of \$500,000’s worth of company-manufactured reflective material.⁴²⁵

⁴²² “California Gas Shortage” 29 May 1979, 1980 Campaign Papers, b14, Radio Commentaries/Broadcasts, 1976 and 1979.

⁴²³ “California,” 2 October 1979, 1980 Campaign Papers, b14, Radio Commentaries/Broadcasts, 1976 and 1979. Schulman, 121.

⁴²⁴ “Miscellaneous and Goodbye,” 25 October 1979, 1980 Campaign Papers, b14, Radio Commentaries/Broadcasts, 1976 and 1979. Reagan waited until 4 January 1966 to declare for governor of California, so he was able to stay on the television show *Death Valley Days* as long as possible. Cannon, *Governor Reagan*, 141.

⁴²⁵ Patrick E. Tyler, “The Image It Polished Shines Brightly On Public Relations Firm,” *Washington Post*, 18 December 1980.

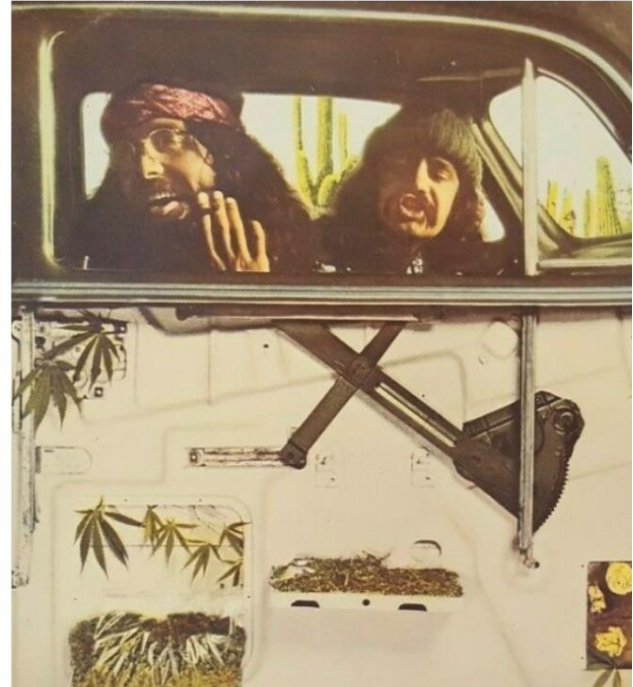
Ghosts from Reagan's rise to power shadowed him into the White House. In December 1982, McBirnie wrote a letter referencing his long friendship with Reagan, celebrating the recent coup d'état in Guatemala by evangelical Christian anti-Communist General Efraín Ríos Montt, and requesting more helicopters from the State Department. These were months when genocide against Indigenous Maya people in the country reached its peak lethality and brutality.⁴²⁶ Deaver spent a half decade working for Reagan before leaving and founding a new lobbyist firm. He so quickly amassed so many high-profile national and international clients that he hired a chauffeur to drive him in a Jaguar with a car phone, which all appeared on the cover of *Time* in 1986. The cover story's title asked, "Who's This Man Calling? Influence Peddling in Washington." The fall came as suddenly as the rise. After committing perjury, Deaver blamed his felonious lies on memory lapses associated with heavy alcohol use.⁴²⁷ Seven years into the presidency, Reagan had packed the FCC with neoliberal officials who repealed the fairness doctrine, the rule that had given the so-called Suicide Lobby free time to strike back. Democrats in Congress tried to pass legislation reinstating the fairness doctrine, but the president vetoed their law.

⁴²⁶ Correspondence about Guatemala, 17 December 1982, Reagan Library, WHORM CO060, #115961

⁴²⁷ *Time*, 3 March 1986. Jack Nelson, "Political Pals Desert Deaver As Woes Mount," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 August 1986.

Pt. 2: Burn Cruise

Cars and Substance Use in 1970s Los Angeles



“I was driving along Sunset Boulevard when I thought, ‘This is ridiculous. I should turn on the radio and see what’s happening.’ President Carter had conceded defeat a couple hours earlier; my father was already the newly elected president. I pulled off Sunset onto a side street and parking in front of a huge mansion, well lighted and marked with Security Patrol signs. In the dark space of my car, I took a joint out of my purse.”

Patti Davis, 4 November 1980, in *The Way I See It* (1992)⁴²⁸

The burn cruise Patti Davis of Topanga Canyon took to a Hollywood victory celebration for her father, Ronald Reagan, happened at the tail end of the era when public authorities became utterly convinced “drinking-driving” and other forms of intoxicated driving were the personal moral failure of drivers. In 1981, UCSD sociologist Joseph Gusfield fired back at this “culture of public problems” and called for attention to factors like transportation engineering, zoning, and alcohol sales.⁴²⁹ Before California’s 2016 vote to legalize recreational marijuana sales, cannabis

⁴²⁸ Patti Davis, *The Way I See It: An Autobiography* (Putnam, 1992), 248.

⁴²⁹ Joseph R. Gusfield, *The Culture of Public Problems: Drinking-Driving and the Symbolic Order* (University of Chicago Press, 1981).

users have denied THC posed much additional risk to life and limb on the road,⁴³⁰ but public health experts and historians have sought to prove how much suffering driver impairment really caused during the Twentieth Century.⁴³¹ The arrest of Marquette Frye for drinking-driving, the event that had precipitated 1965's racial uprising, illustrated how central the police surveillance of drivers for drug or alcohol impairment became in the criminalization of poor urban Black and Brown communities.⁴³² By the 1970s, rock comedy duo Cheech & Chong made a counterclaim when they portrayed intoxicated drivers less as moral failures than as a pair of holy fools.⁴³³

Substance use has long rested at the heart of sensory studies. At the same time that consciousness raising philosophers posited that these chemically-driven visionary experiences might prove beneficial, conservatives organized to constrain liberalism's licentious excesses. At first targeting teen car cultures, these voices innovated the phrase "the permissive society" for the sake of describing phenomena like "more and more young people having access to more and more autos in this permissive society of ours."⁴³⁴ The postwar prosperity had placed peoples of the U.S. in a position to experiment with alternatives to a bourgeois or a proletarian life that was so oriented to work or to religion. Workplace-or-faith-based admonitions against sexual and sensory excess waned, for hedonism had become an advertiser's dream driver of commerce and a propagandist's perfect retort to European socialism. This was the moment when cannabis culture exploded in California. The smell of pot growing or burning emanated from rural communities and whole urban neighborhoods. The car provided the perfect setting for users who

⁴³⁰ Martin A. Lee, *Smoke Signals: A Social History of Marijuana - Medical, Recreational, and Scientific* (Scribner, 2012), 380.

⁴³¹ Barron H. Lerner, *One for the Road: Drunk Driving since 1900* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

⁴³² Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (The New Press, 2010); Jeremy Packer, *Mobility Without Mayhem: Safety, Cars, and Citizenship* (Duke University Press, 2008).

⁴³³ Erik Davis, *High Weirdness: Drugs, Esoterica, and Visionary Experience in the Seventies* (MIT Press, 2019).

⁴³⁴ From an article in the *Berkshire Eagle*, 4 December 1956, *Oxford English Dictionary*.

had to keep their indulgence a closely guarded secret from parents, children, or authorities. One effect of all this smoking was a set of heightened sensations for those who got stoned. They experienced time dilation, increased appetite, and an awareness of hilariously weird possibilities. As drivers, they were sensory impaired, but the intoxication seemed qualitatively different from drinking-driving.

Ironically, Los Angeles long accommodated drinking-drivers, especially entertainment industry figures. Former singing cowboy and media entrepreneur Gene Autry proved the rule. During 1961, he was in the papers multiple times for incidents involving drinking-driving. In March, he was on Riverside Drive, drifted into oncoming traffic, and caused a head-on collision and injuries to a Glendale mother and her two young sons. The family sued the famed alcoholic for damages amounting to five million dollars, but that did not stop the multimillionaire media mogul.⁴³⁵ In May, authorities caught Autry back at it, and he was freed on \$263 in bail.⁴³⁶ Finally in November, a judge quietly suspended Autry's license and put him on a 30-day probation, but within three weeks, he had received another citation for driving a new station wagon that barely missed a maintenance crew in the San Fernando Valley.⁴³⁷ More typical of the special treatment available to some celebrities is an anecdote about TV actor and producer Jack Webb, beloved to the LAPD for *Dragnet*. Almost fifty years after working on the show's brief late 1960s revival, screenwriter Burt Prelutsky reported to *The Atlantic*, "Jack would often be stopped driving drunk, and when they found out it was him, one patrolman would get behind the wheel of his Cadillac and the other would follow behind in the patrol car back to his house."⁴³⁸

⁴³⁵ "Autry Faces \$5 Million Dollar Accident Suit," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 June 1961.

⁴³⁶ "Gene Autry free on bail, arrested for drunk driving," 1961, Valley Times Collection, Digital Collections of the Los Angeles Public Library.

⁴³⁷ "Autry Driving Trial Begins," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 March 1962.

⁴³⁸ Conor Friedersdorf, "The *Dragnet* Effect: How TV Has Obscured Police Brutality," *The Atlantic*, 12 June 2015. Even comedian Cheech Marin was the reputed beneficiary of this same treatment from the cops in Malibu where he

A 1968 study from the Department of Transportation (DOT) came as a blow to double standards for the Webbs, White drivers whom police ushered home, and the Fryes, Black drivers whom police stopped a block from home. The *Alcohol and Highway Safety Report* was the first comprehensive social and historical review of drinking-and-driving in the U.S. The authors claimed alcohol factored in two-thirds of nationwide crashes and led to 25,000 yearly deaths.⁴³⁹ California already had an infrastructure to police DWI (driving while intoxicated). This was a violation against the State Vehicle Code's number 502. Well after a renumbering in 1959, police parlance retained the terms "deuces" for DWIs and "deuce patrols" for the traffic cops tasked with hunting DWIs.⁴⁴⁰ These operations intensified once new legislation from Sacramento freed police to start using field sobriety testing against suspected drinking-drivers who had not yet crashed or committed a moving violation. Federal funding for research at universities and think tanks led to additional techniques for identifying DWIs on the road, training to secure evidence offenders were over the legal blood alcohol content (BAC) limit, and gadgetry to ensure judges and juries would agree. Even as scientists and police joined to eliminate drinking-driving, tropes in popular culture kept representing intoxicated drivers as harmless and even hilarious fools.

For a case study, see Richard "Cheech" Marin and Tommy Chong. In 1971, their comedy album *Cheech and Chong* got nationwide radio play. The voices they forged included "Dave," a hippy with some dope fleeing the cops, "Blind Melon Chitlin," a drunk blues singer, and "Pedro de Pacas," a marijuana-smoking lowrider. Marin first improvised this voice after coming home to Los Angeles with Chong from Vancouver where they had met. Upon arrival, the comedians were to perform in a Northridge bar called the Irma Hotel. They decided to introduce material

lived after achieving celebrity. Tommy Chong, *Cheech & Chong: The Unauthorized Autobiography* (Simon & Schuster, 2008), 212.

⁴³⁹ Lerner, *One for the Road*, 61-62.

⁴⁴⁰ Jan Klunder, "'Deuce Patrol' Strikes Fear Among Tipplers," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 January 1982.

suitable to the locals. Marin reluctantly agreed to play a Chicano after Chong told him to ignore his reservations about offending fellow Mexican Americans.⁴⁴¹ By the time Cheech & Chong recorded the bit for their album, Pedro was “cruisin’” and picked up a hitch-hiker. Chong got into the car and complimented its “dingle balls,” colorful homemade cloth decorations. Then Marin proudly introduced the car by name, “La Bamba,” before hitting the gas. After a few seconds of screeching tires and pleas from Chong to drive carefully, Marin offered him “some dope.” They each took a turn loudly inhaling. Chong noticed his driver had closed his eyes and run a red light, but Marin reassured the worried rider they would not attract attention at just five miles an hour.⁴⁴²

Years before Cheech & Chong released the film *Up in Smoke* (1978), the comedy duo had developed these not-yet cinematic roles, Pedro and Man, for stage, radio, and records. Their misadventures often involved a crisis in or around the car. In the first minutes after Pedro picked up Man on the duo’s debut album, Marin panicked at the sight of a cop. His quavering voice urged Chong not to “turn around, man. Just sit there and act natural.” The sirens came on, and Chong ate their whole stash of drugs to hide it. Too late, they realized the vehicle behind them was just an ambulance. The next album, 1972’s *Big Bambú*, included a bit, “The Continuing Adventures of Pedro de Pacas and Man,” which ended with an actual police encounter. Marin was pushing their broken-down vehicle to a gas station when he caught sight of a squad car and told Man to flag it. Always the naive hippy, Chong shouted, “Hey, can you pigs give us a push!?” Marin tried to shush him, but it was too late, for Chong happily reported the cops had

⁴⁴¹ Chong, *Cheech & Chong*, 95.

⁴⁴² “Cruisin’ with Pedro de Pacas,” *Cheech and Chong* (1971), *YouTube*, uploaded 28 January 2017, accessed 8 February 2021.

slowed and turned around.⁴⁴³ In *Los Cochinos* (1973), the duo pulled into a drive-in movie theater, and the sound of muffled yells reminded them a friend was stuck in the trunk. Over ten minutes of hijinks ensued before the bit concluded with the key to the trunk broken off in its lock.⁴⁴⁴

Cheech & Chong's holy fools routines had not originally been about the unusual racial pairing of a Mexican American and a Chinese Canadian. Chong's family owned the Vancouver Chinatown strip club, the Shanghai Junk, which is where they met. Besides burlesque, the stage acts included improvised skits and live music.⁴⁴⁵ Marin came into Canadian exile at the height of the Vietnam War. Distinct from the archetypal White, middle-class "draft-dodger," he was a child of Latino suburbanization.⁴⁴⁶ Marin's father was an LAPD officer who moved the family to the San Fernando Valley after finding a Black man stealing from the neighbor's house in South Los Angeles and shooting him dead. The son later turned in his draft card and quit Valley State College upon losing his deferment. In Canada, he tried out careers in pottery and rock 'n' roll criticism⁴⁴⁷ before meeting Chong, who had found success as a Motown songwriter.⁴⁴⁸ Together they invented the genre of rock comedy,⁴⁴⁹ which incorporated elements from song, sketch, and stand-up routines. The music industry was repeatedly the butt of Cheech & Chong jokes. Marin

⁴⁴³ "The Continuing Adventures of Pedro de Pacas and Man," *Big Bambú*, 1972, *YouTube*, uploaded 19 February 2017, accessed 8 February 2021.

⁴⁴⁴ "Pedro and Man at the Drive-in," *Los Cochinos*, 1973, *YouTube*, uploaded 28 January 2017, accessed 2 June 2021.

⁴⁴⁵ Chong, *Cheech & Chong*, 68-71.

⁴⁴⁶ Jerry Gonzalez, *In Search of the Mexican Beverly Hills: Latino Suburbanization in Postwar Los Angeles* (University of Texas Press, 2017).

⁴⁴⁷ Cheech Marin with John Hassan, *Cheech Is Not My Real Name But Don't Call Me Chong!* (Grand Central Publishing, 2017), 13-14.

⁴⁴⁸ Chong, *Cheech & Chong*, 11.

⁴⁴⁹ "Man, Is That Funny," *Time*, 25 February 1974.

gave mock White-accented voices to both deejay “Wink Dinkerson,” for AM “KRUD” radio, and “J.R.,” a stereotypically hip Hollywood record producer.⁴⁵⁰

The duo’s producer Lou Adler had worked with Jan and Dean and the Mamas & the Papas before discovering Cheech & Chong at a West Hollywood club. This was the show where Frank Zappa heckled the act for its slights against Chicanos. Adler offered to hire them to do an album⁴⁵¹ and claimed his childhood in Jewish Boyle Heights meant he could relate to humor from East Los Angeles. Marin and Chong made no attempt to correct this mistaken assumption about their origins.⁴⁵² Their self-titled debut did proceed with cover art showcasing them as a Latino and a person of Chinese heritage. Under the name “Chong” was a folk dragon called a Long (龙). Above the name “Cheech” was the eagle from the Mexican flag, but in its beak, it held a cartoon tequila worm wearing a sombrero in lieu of the snake from the Tenochtitlán myth. With each successive album, the cover art included more explicit references to cultures of substance use. *Big Bambú* looked like a pack of Bambú brand rolling papers and came with a massive sample sheet. Marin and Chong smiled through a car window on the cover of *Los Cochinos*, but purchasers opened the album to find an X-ray view revealing the places inside the door panel where drug smugglers hid marijuana.⁴⁵³ Such images were racially loaded, but that did not stop Chicano student organizers at University of San Diego from hiring Cheech & Chong to perform for 1973’s Cinco de Mayo alongside serious acts like Ruben and the Jets.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵⁰ “Wink Dinkerson,” *Cheech and Chong* (1971), *Youtube*, uploaded 12 September 2015, accessed 8 February 2021.

⁴⁵¹ Chong, *Cheech & Chong*, 116-117.

⁴⁵² Cheech Marin, *Cheech Is Not My Real Name*, 112.

⁴⁵³ Cheech & Chong, *Discogs*, accessed 2 June 2021.

⁴⁵⁴ “San Diego University to Hold Gran Fiesta,” *El Chicano* [Colton], 5 May 1973, *Hispanic American Newspapers, 1808-1980*.

To authorities, substance use and the car was no laughing matter. By 1968, the Glendale police began shooting films of intoxicated drivers interacting with officers for use as evidence in the courtroom. After sobering, defendants saw themselves slurring and staggering, they then often pled guilty rather than go to trial. Six million dollars in grants from the Alcohol Safety Action Program (ASAP) funded a special unit of sheriffs who expanded this same tactic into patrols out of San Dimas, Temple City, and the City of Industry. These dozen deputies worked a shift from 7 P.M. to 3 A.M. Whenever drivers noticed a suspected deuce, they activated their new dashboard cameras and waited for another deputy to arrive with a “hand-held videotape camera.” Audio and visual evidence eliminated judges’ or juries’ concerns that officers had misidentified a sober driver as intoxicated.⁴⁵⁵ In 1974, \$30,000 in ASAP funding equipped Los Angeles with its own filming capabilities. Motorcycle cops handled the deuce patrol, and they sent suspected DWIs to Parker Center by squad car. There, police interrogated drivers, who tended to admit to their intoxication on camera. For instance, one exclaimed, “I’m not under the influence of alcohol. I’m under the influence of Valium!” For less cooperative suspects, ASAP bought LAPD intoximeters (next generation breathalyzers) and a new mobile laboratory unit for drug testing urine and blood.⁴⁵⁶

Meanwhile at UCLA, psychologists with federal funding examined perception and DWI. Professor Herbert Moskowitz and his collaborators at the Southern California Research Institute (SCRI) acquired grants from the DOT, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Health Education and Welfare, National Institute of Mental Health, and National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. This money enabled SCRI to hire engineers from UCLA to bring the

⁴⁵⁵ Mike Ward, “Convictions Up As Drunk Drivers Face Videotape,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 December 1972.

⁴⁵⁶ Claudio Luther, “Police Use Videotape Camera to Identify Drunk Motorists,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 April 1974. For the opening image of this chapter’s part, a sheriff’s deputy with a video camera out of the Norwalk station, see Peyton Canary, “Videotape Helps Curb Drunk Drivers,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 January 1977.

latest computers for the analysis of perceptual data from student subjects in a driving simulator. These men rode in “a car mounted on a chassis dynamometer facing a screen on which was projected a film of a 31-mile drive.” They had the power to break or to accelerate, which either slowed or sped the film. Dosed with varying amounts of alcohol, marijuana, or a placebo, the subjects demonstrated their abilities. Alcohol impaired their visual search, so drinking-drivers got distracted by blinking lights and failed to notice pedestrians. Their regard tended to droop, so they ignored traffic signals more often than the control group. Marijuana impaired concentration, care, and judgement, so drivers tended to slow to lower speeds, but the studies also indicated marijuana use had little negative effect on motor control or readiness for critical events.⁴⁵⁷

These findings were sufficient grounds for LAPD to hire a student of Moskowitz’s, Dr. Marcelline Burns, to teach officers to evaluate DWIs for marijuana use. This psychology Ph.D. working for SCRI began the Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) program in 1980. An inaugural class of two sergeants and six officers finished their 3-month training and received certifications as DREs. By 1984, the program had expanded to include a total of 28. They worked in shifts at Parker Center where they awaited those arrested on suspicion of DWI. DOT commissioned a 1985 study of DRE efficacy. Researchers had DREs examine suspected DWIs, speculate which specific intoxicants they had used, and cross-check these records against blood tests. The results of these DRE-declared DWIs came back positive for at least one drug other than alcohol 94% of the time. The DRE also identified the specific drug in the blood with 79% accuracy.⁴⁵⁸ LAPD’s

⁴⁵⁷ Herbert Moskowitz, Kenneth Ziedman, and Satanand Sharma, “Visual Search Behavior while Viewing Driving Scenes under the Influence of Alcohol and Marihuana,” *Human Factors* 18, no. 5 (1976): 417-432. Herbert Moskowitz, “Marihuana and Driving,” *Accident Analysis & Prevention* 8 (1976): 21-26. Herbert Moskowitz, Slade Hulbert, and William H. McGlothlin, “Marihuana: Effects on Simulated Driving and Performance,” *Accident Analysis & Prevention* 8 (1976): 45-50.

⁴⁵⁸ Richard P. Compton, *Field Evaluation of Los Angeles Police Department Drug Detection Procedure* (U.S. Department of Transportation, February 1986), ii and 33.

pioneering approach to policing substance use and driving was the first in the world.⁴⁵⁹ This history marks a dramatic contrast to the comic representations of bumbling cops in the works of Cheech & Chong. Their classroom taunts against the character of a visiting sergeant named “Sergeant Stadanko” left the impression that police in Southern California were hardly competent to catch a pair of stoners on a burn cruise.⁴⁶⁰

In 1978, Cheech & Chong released *Up in Smoke*, a comedy about the day in the lives of Pedro and Man when the two first met. A poster for the film illustrated the stoner’s fantasy perfectly. A police officer had stopped them and gazed suspiciously through the driver’s window. A smoking joint was occluded from the cop’s sightline in Chong’s foregrounded hand, which was hanging from the passenger window for fans to see. Like in *Cheech and Chong*, Pedro drove a lowrider, but any viewer familiar with Los Angeles saw he was on Pacific Coast Highway in the elite colony of Malibu. That was where Marin settled after his great success in recording.⁴⁶¹ Even the *New Yorker*’s Pauline Kael, one of the preeminent tastemaking critics in the U.S., took an interest in what followed. “Some of the best scenes are of just the two of them in a car, having an incoherent rap, lighting a joint the size of a dynamite or a joint so teeny it has to be stuck on the end of a pin.”⁴⁶² Gone were the screeching tires and closed-eye reveries. The film illustrated Pedro and Man driving calmly, if ineptly, and steering clear of any pressing dangers. Cheech & Chong’s fantasy differed from the socially realist racial humor of standup’s

⁴⁵⁹ E.J.D. Ogden & H. Moskowitz, “Effects of Alcohol and Other Drugs on Driver Performance,” *Traffic Injury Prevention* 5, no. 3 (2004), 192-193.

⁴⁶⁰ “Sergeant Stadanko,” *Los Cochinos*, 1973, *Youtube*, uploaded 19 February 2017, accessed 10 February 2021.

⁴⁶¹ *Up In Smoke*, directed by Lou Adler (1978, Paramount Pictures). For the poster, see the film’s *imdb* Photo Gallery.

⁴⁶² Pauline Kael, “Furry Freaks,” *New Yorker*, 9 October 1978.

Richard Pryor, who joked from the stage in Long Beach that “police don’t kill cahs; they kill n*g-gahs.”⁴⁶³

The contrast between Cheech & Chong and Pryor hardly precluded mutual appreciation. The rock comics recalled receiving praise from Pryor for their stage show.⁴⁶⁴ Furthermore, *Up in Smoke* echoed a recent film comedy innovation from Pryor’s *Car Wash* (1976). As the Black prosperity gospel preacher Daddy Rich, Pryor went to the titular car wash in a gold stretch 1974 Lincoln bearing vanity plates. California had recently granted drivers the right to pay \$25 to personalize their plates.⁴⁶⁵ The first time this gimmick appeared in film was 1973’s *American Graffiti*, where one vehicle’s plate read THX 138 as a subtle nod to George Lucas’s previous film, *THX 1138* (1971). More blatant was Daddy Rich’s TITHE, an exhortation from a limousine for believers to keep giving cash to their churches.⁴⁶⁶ In 1978, Cheech & Chong marked the personalized plate as a fun celebration of sexual fantasy. The MUF DVR on Marin’s 1964 Impala Super Short evoked a heterosexual “macho” man’s enthusiasm for giving women cunnilingus. Pedro and Man then unwittingly drove north from Mexico in a van made entirely from “Fibre-weed” (fictional cannabis-based plastics). Its plates read YESCA. This was a Caló slang term that meant marijuana and might have also referenced the recent failed proposition campaign for “YES” on the California or “CA” Marijuana Initiative of 1972.⁴⁶⁷

With *Cheech & Chong’s Next Movie* (1980), the duo’s humor about Chicanos and their cars grew far more sophisticated. The opening credits of *Up in Smoke* had Pedro cleaning his 1964 Impala to the tune of the Long Beach band WAR’s “Low Rider” (1975). Marin’s character

⁴⁶³ *Richard Pryor: Live in Concert*, directed by Jeff Margolis (Elkins Entertainment, 1979).

⁴⁶⁴ Chong, *Cheech & Chong*, 173.

⁴⁶⁵ Art Seidenbaum, “Los Angeles Up for Sale,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 July 1971.

⁴⁶⁶ *American Graffiti*. *THX 1138*. *Car Wash*. For the history of license plate personalization, see “The History of the Department of Motor Vehicles,” *State of California Department of Motor Vehicles*, accessed 3 June 2021.

⁴⁶⁷ *Up In Smoke*, 1978.

now drove a movie crew van that he could convert into a characteristically Mexican American vehicle when driving from Hollywood into East Los Angeles. This entailed quick additions of aftermarket rims on the wheels, a chain steering wheel, and the removal of a magnetic sign to reveal the mural hidden underneath. To aficionados of folklore, especially cultural nationalists in the Mexican diaspora, the image was a familiar, sentimental link to the homeland. Popocatépetl, an Aztec warrior, held his deceased lover Iztaccíhuatl. This was an allegorical origin story from Nahuatl-speaking Mexica people about the volcanoes overlooking Mexico City's Valley of Mexico.⁴⁶⁸ *Next Movie* transcended parody when featuring a scene ripped from Marin's personal experience of anti-Mexican American prejudice. A White man driving a Ferrari assumed Marin's character Red was a valet in front of a restaurant, got out, and handed him the keys. Marin had recently actually been mistaken for a valet when he was a guest staying at a Hawaiian resort.⁴⁶⁹

Comics with an enthusiasm for sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll might have seemed vicious to Reagan listeners, but they too had a moral identity. No one's use of profanity, lewdness, or celebration of marijuana disqualified them from making calls for social justice in the struggle against police violence or racial profiling. The U.S. political establishment even helped to create this growing bloc in the first place through its "war on drugs," which the president declared in June 1971. A quarter-century later in 1994, advisor John Ehrlichman confessed that Richard Nixon "had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities." In short, these tactics helped "vilify them

⁴⁶⁸ Mariela Espinoza-León, "'Corazón de Lumbre, Alma de Nieve': Sentimentality and Nationalism through La Leyenda de Los Volcanes," Master's Thesis in Art History for University of Illinois at Chicago, 2020.

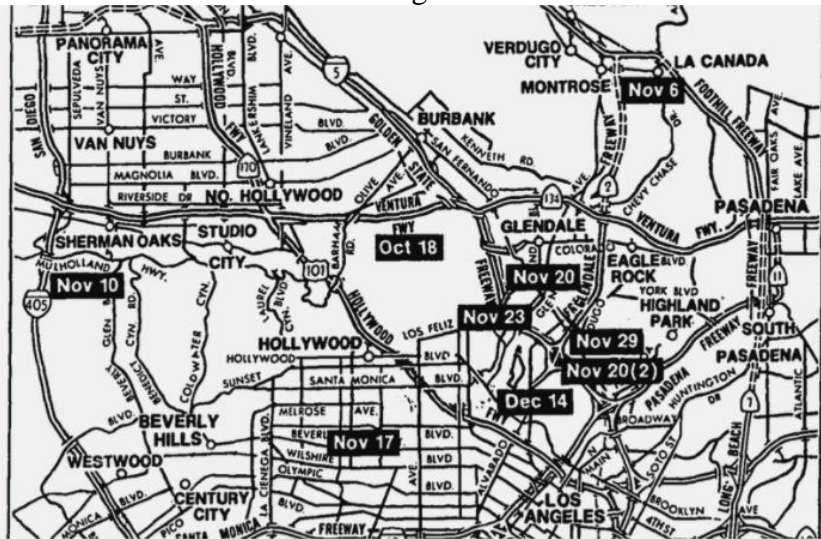
⁴⁶⁹ *Cheech & Chong's Next Movie*, directed by Tommy Chong (1980, Universal Pictures).

night after night on the evening news,”⁴⁷⁰ but with time, drug users grew into a critical mass. White and Black, Chicano and Chinese, some of them began the journey into “woke” identity politics after having passed around a joint, maybe in a car and maybe in multiracial company.

⁴⁷⁰ Dan Baum, “Legalize It All,” *Harper’s Weekly* (April 2016).

Pt. 3: Road Kill

Cars and Sex Crimes in 1970s Los Angeles



“SCUM will destroy all useless and harmful objects - cars, store windows, ‘Great Art,’”
Valerie Solanas, *The SCUM Manifesto* (1967), 72

In 1968, the psychology Ph.D. dropout Valerie Solanas went to assassinate Pop Artist Andy Warhol in New York City and severely wounded him. This gendered act of violence was in keeping with *The SCUM Manifesto*, Solanas’s declaration of one woman’s war against men’s culture. The Warhol shooting occurred during the “Women’s Liberation” movement, a moral upheaven in U.S. history. Among the many factors provoking Solanas and other feminists was the vulnerability of women in cities to sex crime. In 1976, a theorist of social movements named Diana Russell proposed the term “femicide, a new word underlining how more women are killed by men than men by women.”⁴⁷¹ Anti-rape and anti-pornography “carceral feminists” made

⁴⁷¹ The term made its earliest major appearance in reporting on an international conference of women called “Crimes Against Women” in Belgium. The term did not gain traction until the 1990s when Latin American feminists began to use the term to describe the roles of sex and gender in political violence south of the border. Philip Neuray, “Men Forbidden At Tribunal On Crimes Against Women,” *Indianapolis Star*, 9 March 1976. *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera*, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, ed. (University of Texas Press, 2010).

“strange bedfellows” with victim’s rights groups and censorship advocates.⁴⁷² In hindsight, scholars decried these relations but nevertheless have agreed “misogyny” pervaded 1970s U.S. popular culture.⁴⁷³ New technology - plus new uses of old machines like automobiles - enabled new modes of murder. Stories of these tragedies provided material for true crime writers.⁴⁷⁴ They made ethically complex choices about which sources to trust in retellings: psychologists or the police. At the time, anti-psychiatry was on the rise, and the writers tended to go with the cops.⁴⁷⁵

Some great sources for sensory history are the concrete, specific accounts of pain and pleasure in the records of policing and true crime. The public’s sudden fascination with sex crimes in the years after women’s liberation reflected widespread concern about the changing gender roles in contemporary life. Many who had grown up as good little church-going girls in the suburbs gravitated to a taste for urban life in the 1970s. Meanwhile, postwar boys and men had more access than any previous generation to a wide array of sexual media on the open market. The era of visual pleasure alone was ending for men no longer content just to look. They articulated a new sense of entitlement to touch. Feminist history has long posited touch as the

⁴⁷² Leslie Kern, *Feminist City* (Verso, 2020), 164. Nancy Whittier, “Rethinking Coalitions: Anti-Pornography Feminists, Conservatives, and Relationships between Collaborative Adversarial Movements,” *Social Problems* 61, no. 2 (2014): 175-193.

⁴⁷³ Robert O. Self, *All In The Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (Hill and Wang, 2012), 215. Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (Crown, 1991). Linda Williams, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and the ‘Frenzy of the Visible’* (University of California Press, 1989), 19-20. For the book that brought “misogyny” back into common usage, see Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (E.P. Dutton, 1974) and Nina Renata Aron, “What Does Misogyny Look Like?,” *New York Times*, 8 March 2019.

⁴⁷⁴ The true crime genre of nonfiction (and borderline fiction) has had an outsized influence in the literature of Los Angeles and the U.S.A. The cycle commenced after the federal declaration of a war on crime in 1965 with the huge success of 1966’s novelistic *In Cold Blood*. I mark the leap into historiography with 2003’s *The Devil in the White City*. Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (Random House, 1966) and Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair That Changed America* (Crown, 2003). For the most influential true crime literary works of Los Angeles, see Joan Didion, “How Can I Tell Them There’s Nothing Left?” (*Saturday Evening Post*, 1966) in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1968); Joseph Wambaugh, *The Onion Field* (Delacorte, 1973); Vincent Bugliosi, *Helter Skelter: The True Story of the Manson Murders* (W.W. Norton, 1974); Dominick Dunne, “Justice: A father’s account of the trial of his daughter’s killer,” *Vanity Fair* (March 1984); James Ellroy, *My Dark Places: An L.A. Crime Memoir* (Knopf, 1996); Jeffrey Toobin, *The Run of His Life: The People v. O.J. Simpson* (Simon & Schuster, 1996); Gary Webb, *Dark Alliance: The CIA, the Contras, and the Crack Cocaine Explosion* (Seven Stories Press, 1998).

⁴⁷⁵ “Curing the Therapeutic State: Thomas Szasz interviewed by Jacob Sullum,” *Reason* (July 2000).

sense most gendered feminine. Luce Irigaray has stressed the passivity of cis-female bodies in ocularcentric Western modernity, while claiming touch as a woman's domain.⁴⁷⁶ The horror of the 1970s wave of urban and suburban serial killers amounted to the way these men - and those romanticizing them - made claims for men to find bliss grounded in a growing variety of tactual forms. In this chapter's case study, two heterosexual rapists coerced women into to-date obscure forms of sexual behavior that many women's husbands and boyfriends had learned from porn.

Fascination with criminal thematics pervaded Southern California's cultural politics. Chris Burden of UC-Irvine's graduate school of art literally incorporated crimes into his performance pieces. From 1971 to 1974, the pioneering bodily performance artist had a friend shoot him in a Santa Ana gallery, he put a knife to a cis-female reporter's throat and floated the idea of having her "perform obscene acts" on live television, faked his death in the nighttime traffic along gallery row, and had his lawyer nail his crucified body to the roof of a Volkswagen in Venice.⁴⁷⁷ Just the third of these acts led to an arrest. Burden had broken a 1968 law against causing the false report of an emergency. He was lying still in the busy street, located right along gallery row in West Hollywood, with a tarp over his body and a flare burning. The art lovers who gathered watched as the sheriffs came to collect the body only to find Burden was alive. They charged him with faking an emergency. The ensuing trial concluded with a hung jury.⁴⁷⁸ These provocations seemed rooted in psychology, either the manipulation of the audiences or the mania of the artist himself. His endurance of pain was as masochistic as the "mortification of the flesh." Robert Horvitz found Burden not to be "an insensitive person, and I don't think it is going too far to say that his work reflects a profound intuition of the folly of taking humanistic (read: middle-

⁴⁷⁶ Constance Classen, "Engendering Perception: Gender Ideologies and Sensory Hierarchies in Western History," *Body & Society* 3, no. 2 (1997), 1.

⁴⁷⁷ *Catalog: Birth of an Art Capital, 1955-1985*, Catherine Grenier, ed. (Chronicle Books, 2007), 231, 242, and 261.

⁴⁷⁸ Peter Plagens, "He Got Shot - For His Art," *New York Times*, 2 September 1973.

class ‘cult of caution’) values as an absolute frame of reference.” The critic placed the artist in the style of what historian Arnold Toynbee called that century’s “rebarbarization.”⁴⁷⁹ The car became Burdon’s most useful vehicle for transporting himself and others into these times.

Though Burden’s body performances were “Great Art,” they shared much in common with the “porno chic” and “brutality chic” critics observed during these years. Leading a charge against both were feminist critics.⁴⁸⁰ In 1971, Barbara Burris called women a colonized people and their bodies an “open territory for exploitation” via “advertising, pornography, the underground press, literature, art, etc.”⁴⁸¹ In 1974, Robin Morgan assessed “pornography [a]s sexist propaganda, no more and no less” and posited a causal link between men’s media tastes and their actions: “*Pornography is the theory, and rape the practice.*”⁴⁸² A women’s movement to reduce or to eliminate sexual violence in the entertainment industry formed in Los Angeles. In the spring of 1976, adult classified newspaper advertising for a splatter film called *Snuff* teased the possibility this movie, “that could only be made in South America,” concluded with a real murder.⁴⁸³ At the Feminist Women’s Health Center, activists angrily discussed the ad and began coordinating pickets at cinemas from Westwood to East Los Angeles to the San Fernando Valley. Within a week, all showings of *Snuff* in Southern California were canceled, and the organizers stressed how this film had brought together an unusually age-and-race-diverse array

⁴⁷⁹ Robert Horvitz, “Chris Burden,” *Artforum* 14, no. 9 (May 1976): 24-31.


⁴⁸⁰ Judith Coburn, “S&M,” *New Times*, 4 February 1977 in Women Against Violence Against Women, collection 1850, UCLA Special Collections, box 8, folder 14.

⁴⁸¹ Barbara Burris, “The Fourth World Manifesto,” in *Radical Feminism*, Anne Koadt, Anita Rapone, and Ellen Levine, eds. (Quadrangle Books, 1973), 335.

⁴⁸² Robin Morgan, “Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape,” in Robin Morgan, *The Word of a Woman: Feminist Dispatches, 1968-1992* (W.W. Norton, 1992), 88.

⁴⁸³ *Los Angeles Times*, 16 March 1976.

of women at the pickets. By summer, WAVAW or Women Against Violence Against Women was official.⁴⁸⁴

WAVAW officially debuted to protest a billboard on Sunset Strip. This advertisement for the 1976 album *Black and Blue* featured a bound and bruised young woman in ripped lingerie posed next to the words, “I’m ‘Black and Blue’ from the Rolling Stones and I Love It!” Drivers slowed to see the raunchy sight, and WAVAW’s Julie London responded, “We carry in ourselves a deep fear of rape. When we would drive down Sunset Strip and see the myth about our lust for sexual abuse advertised, our fear and outrage was deepened.”⁴⁸⁵ An unidentified vandal spray painted the billboard with the words “This is a crime against! Women” - and the female sign with a raised fist in the circle  - on the day before WAVAW had a press conference planned at the site. Warner Communications, Inc. blamed WAVAW for the vandalism, which the group denied, but then justified “as an act of self defense.”⁴⁸⁶ The billboard came down, but Warner neither recalled the album nor stopped using images invoking sex crime in advertising for its records. WAVAW initiated a boycott encompassing protests, pamphleting, and a lecture circuit slideshow highlighting the visual references to rape and other forms of sexual violence in Warner media. In the three years before Warner relented and the boycott

⁴⁸⁴ Chronology of “Snuff” activism, 11 through 24 March, and Comments and miscellaneous strategies, n.d., Women Against Violence Against Women, Collection 1850, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA, Box 9, Folder 6.

⁴⁸⁵ This Julie London quote appears in several versions, but here I cite it in a student newspaper at the University of Washington. Charmaine Johannes, “Women protest ‘black and blue’ sexuality,” *Daily*, 30 March 1977. Women Against Violence Against Women, Collection 1850, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA, Box 16, Folder 23.

⁴⁸⁶ Julie London, “Images of Violence Against Women,” *Victimology* 2, no. 3-4 (1978): 510-524. Women Against Violence Against Women, Collection 1850, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA, Box 8, Folder 18.

ended,⁴⁸⁷ WAVAW collected media items, which brought the group to “the level of ‘art critic,’” according to London’s self-assessment.⁴⁸⁸

By December, 1977, authorities found the corpses of ten raped girls and women dumped on the side of the road in Los Angeles. This was the work of the Hillside Strangler, a serial killer or killers. WAVAW sprang into action and choreographed the performance piece, “In Mourning and In Rage.” Ten activists, one for each victim, donned black hoods at the Women’s Building feminist art center and got into the back of a hearse. Twenty-two carloads of women followed, each vehicle with two bumper stickers reading “Funeral” and “Stop Violence Against Women,” and the caravan went to City Hall and circled it twice. A sit-in at the steps proceeded. Into a microphone, each of the ten performers, standing seven feet tall with their headdresses,⁴⁸⁹ took a turn memorializing the 10 victims, the 388 Los Angeles women raped in that same period of time, the 4,033 Los Angeles women raped in the previous year, the area’s estimated half million victims of domestic abuse, the 1 / 4 women who survived child sexual abuse, and the hundreds the media depicted as victims of assault. WAVAW dissected the lurid newspaper and television portrayals of the killer. Activist Suzanne Lacy later condemned journalistic license, which was intimidating and “began to severely curtail [women’s] movement through the city.” In response, the county took the reward money for evidence leading to solving the crime and redirected it into free women’s self-defense classes, at a cost of \$25,000, in public recreation centers.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁷ Carolyn Bronstein, “No More *Black and Blue*: Women Against Violence Against Women and the Warner Communications Boycott, 1976-1979,” *Violence Against Women* 14, no. 4 (April 2008), 418-436.

⁴⁸⁸ Julia London, “Women Against Violence Against Women: Collaborating With Artists,” *Ariadne: A Social Art Network*, Web, accessed 13 May 2021.

⁴⁸⁹ WAVAW newsletter, no. 4 (March 1978), Women Against Violence Against Women, Collection 1850, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA, Box 8, Folder 17.

⁴⁹⁰ Suzanne Lacy, “In Mourning and In Rage, with Analysis Aforethought,” *IKON* (1978), in *Femicide: The Politics of Women Killing*, Jill Radforth and Diana H. Russell, eds. (Twayne Publishers, 1992). “In Mourning and In Rage,” *YouTube*, uploaded 24 November 2010, accessed 14 May 2021.

WAVAW gathered evidence of how men and boys' culture registered the killing spree. The collective's musical archive, including two singles inspired by the murders. The first was number 14 in the limited 200-pressing run of "(I'm the) Hillside Strangler" by The Child Molesters, who paired this provocative song with a cover of feminist icon Yoko Ono's "Don't Worry Kyoko" on the B-side. Each item was uniquely spattered with blood-red coloration and tagged with handwritten signatures: "cease to exist" with a "c/s" by "spod," "Miss Magie Mouth, where are you?" by "Rev," and "Get That Pink!" by "Bamboo." The song presented the fantasy of being the Hillside Strangler, whose song lyrics, alarmingly, hailed the women he hoped to "meet some night in town."⁴⁹¹ As opposed to sunshine Pop's suburbs, punk claimed the nighttime city for men and boys. Another punk act, The Hollywood Squares, recorded a single called "Hillside Strangler!" This song made the more generalized claim to being "a hillside strangler." The lyrics showcased a common trope in reports of femicide by beginning with the killer's background: "My friends abuse me, people excuse me / thought I was no good, thought I was a hood." This "Hillside Strangler" knew his logistics: "I find my victims, know where to pick 'em" and "never know what the night can bring / express myself with a simple piece of string."⁴⁹²

Years later, an exhaustive investigation, psychological review, and trial transcript - plus the books based on it - confirmed Ken Bianchi and Angelo Buono, the two cousins convicted as the Hillside Stranglers, were fans of both porno and Pop. In 1992, Lacy amended her article to add a footnote to psychologist Ted Schwartz, who interviewed Bianchi's mother about how the

⁴⁹¹ The Child Molesters, "(I'm the) Hillside Strangler," *Discogs*, accessed 14 May 2021. Women Against Violence Against Women, Collection 1850, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA, Box 8, Folder 4.

⁴⁹² The Hollywood Squares, "Hillside Strangler!," *Discogs*, accessed 14 May 2021. Women Against Violence Against Women, Collection 1850, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA, Box 8, Folder 6.

teen boy used to sneak *Playboy* into his room and invited friends over for viewings of hardcore movies on the family projector.⁴⁹³ Police searched Buono's house and found he kept his *Playboy* and *Penthouse* magazines filed in "two neat piles on the bottom shelf" of a piece of furniture in his den. Bianchi testified that Buono appropriated terms and phrases from entertainment during their killings. When planning to kill a sex worker named Yolanda Washington, Buono proposed "we snuff her." The release of the film *Snuff* was less than two years prior to this murder. A few weeks later, the cousins took turns using a Polaroid to photograph each other while raping 15-year-old Judith Miller. After they strangled her, Buono pronounced, "Only women bleed."⁴⁹⁴ This was the title of a 1975 rock 'n' roll hit by Alice Cooper. Ironically, the "explicitly feminist ballad" called attention to wife battering,⁴⁹⁵ but Buono must have misunderstood the lyrics.

Buono, 43, was a blue-collar small businessman, and Bianchi, 26, was a traveling con artist who stayed there briefly after transplanting to Washington. The house on a commercial strip of Colorado Boulevard where Buono lived was also his place of work, an auto upholstery shop. He proudly kept a lit Italian flag flying over the property and had a history of doing business with Frank Sinatra and other rich clients. The cousins often borrowed clients' cars. According to the Current Population Survey, automobile mechanics have ranked among the most male-dominated professions in the country's history. In 1975, 0% of U.S. workers in this category were women, as opposed to 3% of police, 31% of professors, and 85% of teachers.⁴⁹⁶ As a side gig, Buono also began offering customers access to women and girls he had entrapped into sex slavery. One incident involved two teens the cousins took to a box factory in Cudahy for a paid gang rape. The seven men there included the factory owners, City of Bell councilman Pete

⁴⁹³ Ted Schwartz, *The Hillside Strangler: A Murderer's Mind* (Doubleday, 1981), 147-148.

⁴⁹⁴ Darcy O'Brien, *Two of a Kind: The Hillside Stranglers* (New American Library, 1985), 8, 125, 21-22, and 25.

⁴⁹⁵ John Bream, "Alice Cooper Wins with Kid Stuff," *Minnesota Star*, 30 June 1975.

⁴⁹⁶ Barbara H. Wootton, "Gender differences in occupational employment," *Monthly Labor Review* (April 1997).

Werrlein, Chief Red Fertig of the Huntington Park Police Department, and Warren Schmucki, chief of staff to Supervisor Pete Schabarum. Once the men finished, Bianchi asked about the sticker of the Los Angeles County seal on Schmucki's car, who gratefully had one sent. This gave Bianchi free parking in public lots. The sticker also gave the car a government official's look, which assisted the cousins when they began impersonating police in the months to come.⁴⁹⁷

Carrying badges, one from LAPD and the other from the California Highway Patrol, the cousins began to detain sex workers for solicitation. After Bianchi's arrival, Buono told him to get his badge at a swap meet and to make a rectangular cut in his wallet for displaying it. The idea came from the story of Caryl Chessman, the 1940s' "Red Light Bandit," who had a red light installed in his vehicle to make it look like an unmarked police car. He turned it on at night, pulled drivers over, and robbed or raped them at gunpoint. For these kidnappings, Chessman was the last non-murderer executed in California history. This man was an idol to Buono who mimicked the technique to coerce sex workers into providing free sex. Having acquired flashlights and handcuffs, the cousins concocted a story about working out of a secret police substation. Before they killed a third woman, they followed her car to a street parking spot in Hollywood and stopped to say she had violated a traffic law. They cuffed her, sat her in the back, and used the back doors' child-lock function to make sure she did not escape. The fourth was waiting at a bus stop, and they reassured her that she was safe to catch a ride with them because they were Police Reserves officers. Bianchi had been doing ride-a-alongs with the police during the killings. Neither LAPD nor Glendale PD hired him, but they did not suspect him either.⁴⁹⁸

Wannabe cops, Buono and Bianchi shared with the police an emplacement in the Los Angeles area's car cultures, which informed their methodology of killing and dumping bodies.

⁴⁹⁷ O'Brien, *Two of a Kind*, 27, 163-164, and 116-117.

⁴⁹⁸ O'Brien, *Two of a Kind*, 75, 46, and 160.

Without racial privilege, the two White men would not have been as likely to get away with borrowing luxury cars, flashing badges, or traveling unmolested through suburbs to the hillsides and hilltops of the region. In Glendale, urban planners had created a killing field for them by strictly separating zones for working and for living. Buono's residency in the house next to his auto upholstery shop made him an exception in the age of suburbanization. During the night, the empty nextdoor shops and fast stream of traffic on the four-lane strip guaranteed privacy and anonymity. The women the cousins raped, injected with Windex, hooked to an electrical current, and strangled to death with the same rope Buono "used...for edging seat covers" might have all screamed, but the sound of traffic drowned them out and such roads were empty of pedestrians. To dump bodies next to Forest Lawn Cemetery, on a Golden State Freeway off ramp, in the San Gabriel Mountains, in Elysian Hills, and on Mt. Washington, the cousins drove by hundreds of suburban middle-class homes, but residents were confined to the interiors. Buono and Bianchi knew to drive quietly on these streets. When dumping Miller in La Crescenta, they kept the headlights off and the engine running when they stopped to pull her out of the trunk. They drove back down the hill with the doors open for fear the shutting sound would draw attention.⁴⁹⁹

Several factors greatly slowed police forces in their response to these serial killings. In the 1970s, the Los Angeles area had grown into a patchwork of cities and unincorporated county land. "[J]ust as the freeway system had made Los Angeles the bank robbery capital of the nation, the city of the quick getaway...the Stranglers were taking advantage of the freeways, covering far more territory than would have been possible in, say, New York or Boston." Without a means of communication between jurisdictions, the police of various cities and the county sheriffs failed at first to coordinate. The first two victims, Washington and Miller, were sex workers, and thus,

⁴⁹⁹ O'Brien, *Two of a Kind*, 8, 23, and 26-27.

their lives hardly mattered to police. One investigator intuited the killers were impersonating police, sheriffs, or patrolmen. A woman told him how two men pulled her over while driving home intoxicated from a night out. When one harassed her, she memorized his badge number, and sped off. This information led to two vice officers who had been on duty. They, like many other cops, had made the “pussy stop” because they got aroused “after an evening of watching prostitutes.”⁵⁰⁰ Though this was a deadend in the investigation, it was good material for *The Case of the Hillside Stranglers*, a 1989 television adaptation. At that time, the officers issued public statements disputing the story, but the pattern of police abusing their authority against solitary female drivers has been commonplace, ever more so in sprawling cities like Los Angeles.⁵⁰¹

In the winter of 1978, the killings suddenly stopped. The case only broke a year later when police in Washington State arrested Bianchi for a double homicide. Working as a security guard, he lured two young women to a lonely house and strangled them both. Bianchi was an autodidact who had taught himself a considerable amount of psychology while attempting to start a practice in Los Angeles. Under hypnosis, he brought forward an alter ego named Steve⁵⁰² who alluded to the Hillside Strangler killings. This initiated a contest between psychologists and police to decide whether Bianchi was authentically insane or an imposter. If the latter, he would not have been the first delusional person to make a false confession to involvement in this media sensation. A fame-seeking television actor named Ned York had smoked a lot of marijuana and PCP one night and convinced himself he killed at least one of these women. The police arrested him but were unable to follow his rambling. York was an Evangelical Christian driving a yellow Volkswagen with the bumper sticker, “Peace with Christ,” the license plate holder, “Read the

⁵⁰⁰ O’Brien, *Two of a Kind*, 178-179 and 184-185.

⁵⁰¹ The two officers self-identified in the press as Fred Clapp and Michael Thompson, Howard Rosenberg, “Compelling Portrait of Wiesenthal, *Los Angeles Times*, 21 April 1989.

⁵⁰² O’Brien, *Two of a Kind*, 138-139.

Bible,” and the vanity plate “RE 320.” This was a reference to an apocalyptic passage from the Bible, Revelation 3:20. This stunt was possibly intended to spread the Christian gospel.⁵⁰³

Bianchi’s confessions implicated Buono, whom police arrested. The prosecution found the evidence of Buono’s involvement was circumstantial. Bianchi’s testimony contradicted itself, and a jury might not buy it. Psychologists never quite achieved a consensus on his sanity. The prosecutor dropped the charges, but a judge decided to order the trial to proceed anyway. Bianchi testified for six straight months of what was to become the longest criminal trial in U.S. history to that point. The only to break California v. Buono’s record was to be the McMartin Preschool trial, which started in Los Angeles 1984. The 1981-to-1983 saga ended in a conviction and life sentence for Buono. He died in prison in 2002, never having admitted his guilt. The judge shared the trial’s records with his former college roommate, Darcy O’Brien, a professor of creative writing. Much of the material I have cited in this chapter is from the Bianchi confessions, which O’Brien used to write *Two of a Kind: The Hillside Stranglers* (1985). Numerous contemporaries attacked the credibility of this text. The publisher hired libel lawyers to re-edit the book one last time before it hit the presses after Buono’s defense attorneys and other unnamed figures threatened to sue for defamation. Dr. John Watkins, the first analyst to interview Bianchi and to identify him as “Steve,” was to go on William F. Buckley’s television show *Firing Line* to confront O’Brien about the liberties he took in order to fill in the narrative’s gaps.⁵⁰⁴

O’Brien retold the story of the Hillside Strangler femicides in vernacular WAVAW helped to popularize and to perfect. Melding a focus on gendered violence with acceptance of the

⁵⁰³ O’Brien, *Two of a Kind*, 173. For more on York, see “Ned York believes...,” NBC, 7 February 1978, *YouTube*, uploaded 13 April 2019, accessed 14 May 2021 and Donald Davenport, “The Hillside Strangler Nearly Killed My Christian Soap Opera,” *The Daily Beast*, 18 January 2019.

⁵⁰⁴ Anne C. Roark, “Libel Lawyers Wield Blue Pencils on Books,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 June 1986. “A Look at the Hillside Stranglers,” Darcy O’Brien with William F. Buckley, *Firing Line*, 12 November 1985, Hoover Institution, *YouTube*, uploaded 4 July 2019, accessed 12 May 2021.

police perspective on sex crime, O'Brien illustrated the power of carceral feminism to drive a discourse into action. The legacies of the Hillside Strangler affair appeared in newspaper print, punk rock, performance art, psychology, true crime, narrative television, documentary film, and academic history. I sincerely doubt the conditions of possibility for writing this chapter would have existed had the killers murdered only sex workers, bus riders, and/or hitch-hikers. Once when violence began affecting White women alone in their cars did an anti-violence apparatus kick into gear. This suburban region could not abide such a disruption to women's auto-mobility. A similar cycle of murder was meanwhile occurring in Orange County, 1974 to 1983. The Freeway Killer committed an estimated 58 to 146 murder-rapes in those years. Three times, in 1977, 1980, and 1983, police pinned the blame on a suspect when they caught Patrick Kearney, William Bonin, and Randy Kraft. Each of these men was Gay and had been picking up hitch hikers, sex workers, and men cruising the roads for sex with other men. Police did not do enough to stop femicides, but androicide was Orange County's quiet epidemic.



In 1987, the short career of millionaire Christian televangelists Tammy Faye and Jim Bakker ended in scandal and divorce. Their *The PTL Club* (1974-1987) had broadcast from South Carolina to millions of viewers. Their theme park and Christian resort, Heritage USA, was to close in 1989. These setbacks for the couple followed the scandalous revelation Bakker had sexually assaulted Jessica Hahn, his secretary, and then purchased her silence. More evidence of the misallocation of church funds came to light when journalists found the Bakkers had also purchased numerous homes across the U.S.A. In Palm Springs, they owned a mansion, and in the *Desert Sun* image above, you can see Tammy Faye's 1984 powder blue Mercedes Benz 380 sl convertible.⁵⁰⁵ Bids for the hyped vehicle did not reach the price the owner wanted for it, but he eventually found the right buyer at an auction in North Hollywood. William Yacobozzi, an attorney from Newport Beach, bought the car, complete with the *Playboy* where Hahn gave an interview about the scandal and a Bakker sermon "all cued up in the cassette player," for \$43,000

⁵⁰⁵ "Buyers in Driver's Seat at Exotic Cars Sale," *Desert Sun*, 12 October 1987.

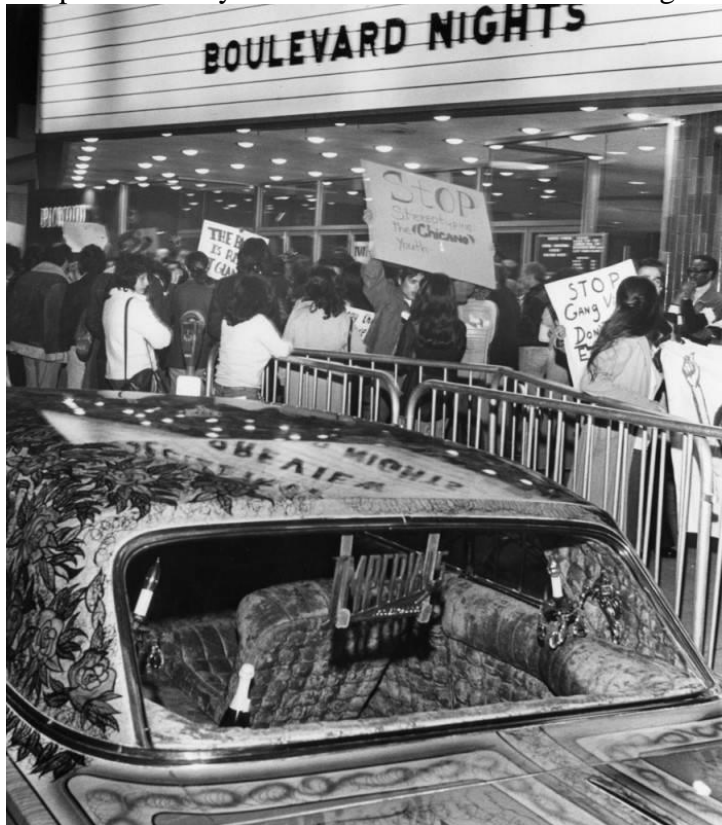
and gave it to his Catholic wife Gabrielle. She reconsecrated the convertible by hanging “her rosary from the rear-view mirror, ‘to give it a fresh blessing.’”⁵⁰⁶

This chapter considered the moral quandaries of everyday life in the car cultures of 1970s Los Angeles. Like Joan Didion stated in her 1970 novel *Play It As It Lays*, “the freeway system...is the only secular communion Los Angeles has.” For her heroine Maria, music on car radio was central to the worship of driving while driving. In fact, the best example of religious experience in cars was the time drivers spent listening to the sermons of radio preachers and the homilies of Ronald Reagan, a preachy politician. Not all drivers were so inclined. Others let their freak flag fly from the car by inscribing vehicles with visual signs of an enthusiasm for immoral or permissive society. Such sacreligious iconography risked drawing the glare of authorities, but drivers like Cheech Marin and Tommy Chong enjoyed the chance to thumb their noses publicly and defiantly from amidst the stream of traffic. Finally, the car proved a dangerously powerful tool for carceral and criminal purposes. Men especially gained new powers to make not simply women but any feminized subject walking the streets, riding the buses, or hitching rides lose their right to the city to feelings of precarity and insecurity. Officials and activists both were sensitive to what Los Angeles lost to these conditions and worked hard to rectify the problem.

⁵⁰⁶ Patt Morrison, “Only in L.A.: People and Events,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 December 1987.

Ch. 4: Streets and Aves

A Spatial History of Car Cultures in 1980s Los Angeles



“This is our ‘American Graffiti’”
Imperials car club member, *Los Angeles Times* (1979)

Warner Bros. vacillated in its characterizations of *Boulevard Nights* during the months leading to the film’s March 1979 release. At first, this story of Chicano brotherhood in East Los Angeles seemed like another movie in the gang cycle. Screenwriter Desmond Nakano, a sansei UCLA undergraduate who had written the script for Professor Paul Schrader’s class, said he was inspired by *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, and “months” of research on the “streets” with “real hardcore gang members.” Nakano bragged to the *Los Angeles Times* that he made the cut for Schrader’s course by writing a short essay about “the urban alienated n*gger” and then won the

university's Sam Goldwyn Prize for his gangster narrative draft.⁵⁰⁷ This caught the attention of a team that had been making a documentary about everyday Chicano life in East Los Angeles. But producer Bill Benenson stressed differences between car clubs like the Imperials and gangs. The club members were "winners because they can afford a car and can fix it up. The clubs are really more social organizations." As a foil to the Imperials, Chicano gangs remained in the script. The producers then even hired a "gang consultant," Ayudate Community Center's Billy Cardenas, who was later to serve as the "gang coordinator" on another film, *Blood In Blood Out* (1993).⁵⁰⁸

The contradictions of *Boulevard Nights* are on display in the image above. The date was 21 March 1979 at Los Angeles's Picwood Theater in Westwood. Parked in the foreground was the Gypsy Rose, the classic ranfla from chapter 1, featured in the film and there for the showing. With this machine as evidence, the producers asserted *Boulevard Nights* as the Chicano answer to *American Graffiti* (1973), director George Lucas's nostalgic 1962 story of hot rodders in small towns of California's Central Valley. Standing in the background were protesters. Signs told Hollywood to stop romanticizing gang violence and stereotyping youth of color.⁵⁰⁹ Activist organizations, including the Chicano Cinema Center, Coalition of Chicano Community Workers, Mexicano-Latino Anti-Defamation League, and a student group called M.E.Ch.A., rallied against the film.⁵¹⁰ The press drummed up anxiety about the possibility *Boulevard Nights* would incite violence like *The Warriors* had done before. When that gang movie debuted, multiple killings occurred. One was at a Palm Springs drive-in and another in Ontario.⁵¹¹ But *Boulevard Nights*

⁵⁰⁷ Sansei means the next, younger generation of Japanese Americans after nisei. Patricia Goldstone, "The Big Break," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 August 1978.

⁵⁰⁸ Gregg Kilday, "Film Clips," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 October 1978. *Boulevard Nights*, directed by Michael Pressman (1979: Warner Brothers). *Blood In Blood Out*, directed by Taylor Hackford (1993: Buena Vista).

⁵⁰⁹ *Boulevard Nights* premier protest, 1979, Los Angeles Herald Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library. *American Graffiti*, directed by George Lucas (1973: Universal Pictures).

⁵¹⁰ *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 24 March 1979.

⁵¹¹ *Los Angeles Times*, 26 February 1979.

opened to great box office success. In San Francisco, an attack at the Alhambra Theater prompted Mayor Dianne Feinstein to cancel any showings in the city, but she won one of the film's producers the *Los Angeles Times* as a platform for writing in the film's defense.⁵¹²

Two days after the demonstration at Picwood, Los Angeles County Sheriffs commenced an attack on the Whittier Boulevard cruising scene featured in *Boulevard Nights*. The film gave authorities an excuse for a crackdown, according to journalist Roberto Rodríguez. He was there documenting the incident until sheriffs seized his camera, beat him, and arrested him along with 537 others. Five months later, the County began regularly erecting barricades after sundown and closing the strip from Atlantic to Eastern to nighttime weekend Chicano cruising or lowriding. Rodríguez worked for *Lowrider*, a magazine about the “lowriding lifestyle” that was “aimed at the streets, the heart and soul of the varrios” or the neighborhoods. In four years on staff, Rodríguez met, photographed, and interviewed Latinx people from more California varrios than he was able to count, and then he ventured a guess that about 2000 of these so-called homeboys died violently from 1977 to 1981. The turf wars were symptomatic of a change in the relationship between space and identity in the 1980s. Cruising destinations were a “magnet” drawing together rising numbers of Chicano men and boys from far-distant varrios. Many who shot or stabbed one another might never otherwise have met, or at least not have come into so much recurring contact, without the rise of a Mexican American car culture.⁵¹³

For Chicanos, city life's centerplace shifted from places of religious, commercial, or civic importance like Placita Olvera, the Broadway markets, or City Hall to a pop-up commons on the

⁵¹² Tony Bill, *Los Angeles Times*, 30 March 1979.

⁵¹³ All this material is from the book Rodríguez wrote on the matter, which unfortunately, is not paginated. Roberto Rodríguez, *Assault with a Deadly Weapon: About an Incident in E.L.A. and the Closing of Whittier Boulevard* (Libraria Latinoamericana, 1984). For how the car “facilitates interbarrio ‘warfare,’” see James Diego Vigil, *Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California* (University of Texas Press, 1988), 132-133.

unincorporated county land beyond Los Angeles's city limits. A temporary autonomous zone⁵¹⁴ on Whittier had its equivalent for other groups who carved commons from pockets and fringes of the massive complexity of the metropolitan region. No one observed this phenomenon so well as Claritas, an advertising agency which identified lifestyle groupings. Their maps divided the city into seven types of land, including both East and South L.A. as the "Urban Melting Pot," where poor consumers preferred affordable "used and compact cars." On "The Outer Fringe" (Sylmar, Pomona, Garden Grove, etc.), lower-middle-class consumers "are devoted to outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, and camping" and "buy American cars, sport, and utility vehicles." This chapter takes maps and tours as exhibitions of the process of spatial identification for all sorts of people residing in 1980s Los Angeles. Meanwhile, mobile micro-entrepreneurs, like immigrant street vendors with food trucks, hawked cheap eats to workers and drivers who looked high and low for exotic cuisine. Since much of the city remained unregulated and relatively lawless, growing numbers of drivers took to driving with firearms within an arm's reach inside their cars.

⁵¹⁴ Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone* (Autonomedia, 1991).

Pt. 1: Star Maps

Cars and Critical Driving in 1980s Los Angeles



“Two names changed Hollywood - Sharon Tate and Charles Manson. Manson’s followers’ brutal murder of Tate and her friends shocked the community. Personalities became anxious to hide their real home addresses.”
William J. Warren, “Maps of the Stars Homes” (2010)⁵¹⁵

Starting in the 1930s, entertainment industry luminaries, the “stars,” made their location on the map into signs of celebrity. Then after the Tate-LaBianca murders of 1969, stars began a sustained retreat behind closed gates with security systems. Drivers who once toured the city looking for celebrities redirected their “car-voyages of exploration,” to quote geographer Edward Soja. Instead of star gazing, they sought “genuine neighborhoods,” and the Los Angeles traffic department initiated an “identification program” to help. The city officially designated 433

⁵¹⁵ William J. Warren, “Maps of the Stars Homes,” in Glen Creason, *Los Angeles in Maps* (Rizzoli, 2010), 151.

named places with street signs demarcating the boundaries between any one area and the next.⁵¹⁶ The power of place was - and still is - “alive in Los Angeles.”⁵¹⁷ This assertion clashes with any view of Southern California’s decentralized cityscape as illegible, hopelessly “fragmented,” or the locus of a creeping “destruction of place in American life.”⁵¹⁸ Debunkers wondered whether this sense of placelessness came from the transnational observers having only seen the city by car (or on the TV).⁵¹⁹ Neither side mentioned how 1980s drivers kept street atlases like *Thomas Guide* in their cars and used them to cultivate a skill for navigating space. Car-bound urbanists perfected a cartographical and autoethnographic practice, which I call *critical driving*.⁵²⁰

Sense of place has emerged as a discourse in the aftermath of admonitions against just visiting, moving too quickly, or using new technology. Instead, those with a claim to knowledge about geography have to have learned it through extended residency, slowing down, and getting an unmediated feel for it on every level. Car cultures were traditionally anathema to this process. Driving rapidly through a landscape might have shown the drivers its look but not its sounds, smells, textures, or tastes. The same goes for urban districts or routes that a commuter saw daily

⁵¹⁶ Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (Verso, 1989), 245-246.

⁵¹⁷ Mike the PoeT, *I Am Alive in Los Angeles!* (iUniverse, Inc, 2006).

⁵¹⁸ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (MIT Press, 1960); Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*; Leach, *Country of Exiles*.

⁵¹⁹ “Had [continental critical theorists and the like] spent as much time reading the region’s history as they did staring out car windows and watching TV, they would have found theme parks and drive-by shootings, rogue cops and actor politicians, amnesia and fluidly changing identities, were nothing new.” Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West* (Penguin, 2003), 248.

⁵²⁰ The first popular guides to Los Angeles were pocket-sized maps available from real estate agencies, through the Automobile Club of Southern California, and at the region’s gasoline stations. After the Second World War, once Los Angeles emerged as an arts and architecture destination, critics responded with three fantastic cultural guides: David Gebhard and Robert Winter, *A Guide to Architecture in Southern California* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1965), Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (Harper & Row, 1971), and Richard Alleman, *The Movie Lover’s Guide to Hollywood*, 1st edition (Harper & Row, 1985). For some examples of critical urban touring, see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (Verso, 1990). Laura Pulido, Laura Barraclough, and Wendy Cheng, *A People’s Guide to Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2012). Mike Sonksen, *Letters to My City: Poetry and Essays* (The Accomplices, 2019). Elaine Lewinnek, Gustavo Arellano, and Thuy Vo Dang, *A People’s Guide to Orange County* (University of California Press, forthcoming).

but rarely stopped long enough to get to know. Furthermore, cars impoverished the sense of place for pedestrians, who risked life, limb, and lung by walking streets they shared with cars or angered drivers by threatening to stop or to slow the efficient flow of traffic. These truths about the car as detrimental to sense of place were never more than partial. This dissertation has shown the car became a platform for an authentically sensuous life, and through mapping and touring, driving grew into an educational and even transformative act during the 1980s. Critical driving practices often emerged from consumerist circumstances, and sometimes this behavior devolved into celebration, but no one can deny the car's use as a tool for living richly polysensory lives.

The conventional architecture critic's way to engage with urban life and urbane culture has been by foot.⁵²¹ Los Angeles broke the mold when historian Reyner Banham produced *Reyner Banham Loves Los Angeles* (1972), a BBC television special where he drove an automobile with an 8-track tape deck fancifully playing a woman's voice giving a "Baeda-Kar" tour. This was a reference to the popular Baedeker travel guides to European cities.⁵²² All joking aside, the legibility of Los Angeles for both pedestrians and drivers had been a serious subject of debate since 1960. For *The Image of the City*, MIT urban design professor Kevin Lynch asked people from U.S. cities to draw maps of their respective downtown areas. The mental maps of Los Angeles that resulted were sparse. Lynch speculated the 25 office workers his study approached might have had competence for describing the city at a larger scale, for they were more familiar with driving the freeways rather than walking the core.⁵²³ UCLA planners designed a follow-up, which confirmed Lynch's hypothesis for the average residents of

⁵²¹ This is how both Walter Benjamin's flaneurs did it.

⁵²² Jerrold Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers' Project* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 49-52.

⁵²³ Lynch, *Image of the City*, 94.

Westwood, Northridge, and South Los Angeles (“Avalon”). Less familiar with the wider city, as seen from cars, were those in more insular and transit-dependent Fairfax and Boyle Heights.⁵²⁴

The mental maps associated with the five places listed above were clear markers of social positionality. Northridge stood for middle-class suburban whiteness. Westwood was where rich and cosmopolitan UCLA faculty and their students lived. “Avalon” was home to Black residents of public housing projects like Avalon Gardens (Avalon Boulevard and 88th Street). At these three farthest locations from City Hall (28, 15, and 10 miles), respondents tended to travel for longer distances regularly and thus became habituated to the expansive geography of Los Angeles and its massively sprawling metropolitan area. All three groups knew how to find Hollywood, Pasadena, and Watts. Freeways featured prominently in the White-coded maps, less so in the Black-coded map, which included Imperial Highway and Wilshire. This street was where the #83 buses carried domestic workers to Beverly Hills. The composites from Fairfax and Boyle Heights showed people there had narrower horizons, for their maps featured fewer landmarks, districts, or routes beyond the immediate locality. Fairfax’s Jewish Americans saw the Santa Monica Freeway as a southern boundary of their part of Los Angeles, and they did not note where it led in either direction. Boyle Heights’ Mexican Americans highlighted three streets, Brooklyn Avenue, 1st Street, and 6th Street, as respectively leading to Union Station, to Broadway’s Latinx-oriented shopping district, and to the city’s interurban Bus Depot.⁵²⁵

In 1980, David Hockney echoed these studies when he painted colorful mental maps of Los Angeles, as he knew the city from his daily commute. A renowned British expatriate Pop artist, Hockney lived in a house in the affluent Hollywood Hills. The 1980 paintings, *Nichols Canyon Road* and *Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio*, were two works “from memory”

⁵²⁴ *Visual Environment of Los Angeles*, (City of Los Angeles, 1971).

⁵²⁵ *Visual Environment of Los Angeles*.

intended to capture a sense of driving. Interviewer Lawrence Weschler added, “In *Mulholland Drive*, ‘drive’ is a verb.”⁵²⁶ Driving became an art in the hands of visualists like Hockney. Instead of going back and forth on the same route every day, he plotted two: one for the way home and the other for the way to work. The birds-eye view up Nichols Canyon from its intersection with Hollywood Boulevard approximated what Hockney saw as he took the quick, more direct way home from West Hollywood. The hilltop view down Mulholland’s twists and turns shows a roundabout drive along a ridge. Hockney consciously chose the scenic route. To supplement a sketchy memory of the Valley, northern flatlands, he then copied images from a *Thomas Guide* street atlas. Notice the white grid with streets oriented to the cardinal directions in the northwest. That is the City of Los Angeles’s streetscape. Orange-colored, like in the atlas, is Burbank with its streets grid cocked 45 degrees off just like a typical prerevolutionary Spanish colonial city.⁵²⁷

Hockney’s copyright infringement against the *Thomas Guide* was ironic given his home on Montcalm Avenue was about a block away from a so-called “trap street,” which the street atlas publisher used to prove cases of plagiarism. Cartographers established this method of surveying physical territory realistically, then adding fictional items, because reproductions in a competitor’s work then served as proof of the theft. *Thomas Guide* street atlases feature several of these streets. In 1981, company vice president Barry Elias informed *Los Angeles Times* of the “Spanish-sounding” La Taza, a street name with an aura of tasseographical mystery mixed with

⁵²⁶ These observations were from notes taken during a 1987 conversation between the artist and the critic. Lawrence Weschler, *True to Life: Twenty-five Years of Conversations with David Hockney* (University of California Press, 2008), 64-65.

⁵²⁷ For more on the varying grids of the Los Angeles area, see D.J. Waldie, “L.A.’s Crooked Heart,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 October 2010.

settler colonialism.⁵²⁸ The one near Hockney was a driveway off Pyramid Place labeled “Rue de Vallée.” The name was the brainchild of an aging star from Hollywood’s Golden Age, the first Pop crooner Rudy Vallee. He lived on Pyramid and staged a nostalgic return to the days of star maps and fans driving into the hills to find celebrities. Vallee kept a street sign with this variation on his name and a curb illegally painted, “No parking RVPD,” which stood for the Rudy Vallee Police Department. He asked the traffic department for an official street name change, but the city denied him.⁵²⁹ *Thomas Guide* added the informal name as a favor doubling as a trap street.⁵³⁰ This particular anomaly did not register in Hockney’s *Mulholland Drive*, of course, for the artist had not painted the names of any streets in his canvases.

Another California artist who mapped daily life through art was Robert Irwin. For such a minimalist, he gave an awfully thickly textured testimony to Weschler, whom he took critical driving in the early 1980s. By comparison, Vallee’s directions and Hockney’s commutes were little more than conspicuous consumption. Weschler and Irwin had been sitting and eating at a Westwood falafel stand when he shared how driving had made him feel “waves of well-being. Just tingling. It’s like I really knew who I was, who I am.” Irwin continued, “that’s who I am: that’s my pleasure and that’s my place in life. To ride around in a car in Los Angeles has become like one of my great pleasures.” Breaking the mold of the institutional style of oral history collection, Weschler asked for a driving tour of Irwin’s “old haunts.”⁵³¹ A close reading indicates Irwin was driving while he contemplated and articulated the thoughts Weschler composed into a

⁵²⁸ Steve Harvey, “Street Map Firm, Bullish on Growth, Includes a Few Bum Steers,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 March 1981.

⁵²⁹ This story was frontpage news in the *Times*. Richard West, “Rue de Vallee Request Hits Roadblock on the Way to Council,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 July 1971. Two days later, the newspaper reported Mayor Sam Yorty, a staunch conservative and friend to the pioneering pop singer and loyal Republican, had suggested the name change in the first place. Richard West, “Vallee Says Street Name Yorty’s Idea,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 July 1971.

⁵³⁰ “Rue de Vallee Is on the Map,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 January 1972.

⁵³¹ Lawrence Weschler, *Seeing Is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees: A Life of Contemporary Artist Robert Irwin* (University of California Press, 1982), 4-5.

roughly 200-page book. Driving factored into an essay for a Whitney Museum show where Irwin referred twice to being in a car. Part way along “a sixfold progression from perception through conception,” Irwin described how the “mind isolates zones of focus: this splash, that tree, that horizon, this car, and so forth.” This passage ends far from “overbrimming synesthesia of undifferentiated sensations” at the unfree stage of “*formalized*” directives which force people to “shuttle ourselves through a world of nine-to-five jobs, daylight savings time, thermostatic controls, and so forth.”⁵³²

These critical driving tours were collaborations between Irwin the speaker-driver and Weschler the listener-passenger. As an adult, driving was already part of Irwin’s art practice. He remembered the “times I’d set out in the morning and spend two or three weeks driving all day long, tracing a lead down, trying to find someone willing to undertake a particular kind of work.” Car trips “from back alleys in Saugus to industrial parks in Orange County” led to the discovery of “an old metal shop in downtown L.A.” where the workers were trained in shaping fenders. One of them took a commission to build the metal disks Irwin famously suspended in galleries and museums from 1967 to 1969.⁵³³ Furthermore, Weschler was in Irwin’s 1973 Cadillac Coupe DeVille when he learned the artist’s passion for this kind of work dated to his teen years as a hot rodder in Southwest Los Angeles. No pictorial map appeared in the book, but the prose contained directions for how to use one to find this area: “(If you were to draw a line between the Hollywood Park Race Track to the south and the present site of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to the north, Leimert Park, one of the main staging grounds of Bob’s youth, would constitute the midpoint.)” Soon thereafter, Irwin drove Weschler to “Verdun, the street on

⁵³² Ibid, 180-181. From Irwin’s essay title, “The Process of a Compounded Abstraction,” you can see how much more fluid the artist’s speaking style was compared to his writing style.

⁵³³ Lawrence Weschler, *Robert Irwin*, 102.

which I lived in high school, and this here was my house - 6221.”⁵³⁴ That address was .6 miles due east of the Ladera Heights house where Jim’s family lived in *Rebel Without a Cause*.

During these driving tours, the artist interacted with critics he took into his car. “[I]n the middle of the Ferus period” (before 1966), the artist hosted a visiting Marxist from New York. He was “one of the head honchos,” presumably among the “*Artforum* types” (which moved to New York in 1967). He preferred “pot-making and weaving,” which Irwin called “historical arts,” to Los Angeles “folk art”: hot rods and motorcycles. Irwin found a San Fernando Valley address in the newspaper classified ads and drove the critic there. For sale was a suburban teen’s “absolute cherry” deuce coupe, but Irwin’s eye turned to an “absolutely dismantled” ‘29 roadster. The chance to learn about the seller’s intricate work and aesthetic choices was lost to the guest, a critic who had “no awareness, no sensitivity, no involvement. So he simply denied it...Which we argued about a little on the way back over the Sepulveda pass.” Irwin got so frustrated that he “just stopped the car and made him get out. I just flat left him there by the road, man, and just drove off. Said, ‘See you later, Max.’”⁵³⁵ Weschler published this passage as a *New Yorker* article, so readers in the critic’s art establishment surely recognized editor Max Kozloff of *Artforum*. In 1967, he had written Irwin an ambivalent *Artforum* review, and then in 1975, a Kozloff essay implicitly condemned commercialization in the Light and Space movement Irwin had helped found.⁵³⁶ A rebuttal to Kozloff, Weschler’s *Seeing Is Forgetting the*

⁵³⁴ Ibid, 6-9.

⁵³⁵ Lawrence Weschler, *Robert Irwin*, 17-18.

⁵³⁶ Lawrence Weschler, “Profiles: Taking Art to Point Zero I,” *New Yorker*, 8 March 1982, 48-95 and Lawrence Weschler, “Profiles: Taking Art to Point Zero II,” *New Yorker*, 15 March 1982, 52-105. The January 1967 *Artforum* review of Irwin at the Pace Gallery featured this spatialized dig: “The tinting salmons and azures (so redolent of California), he uses on a pulverized scale...” Kozloff attacked eight years later with “Painting and Anti-Painting: A Family Quarrel” (September 1975). Now the magazine’s new executive editor, he dismissed “Conceptual artists” as “lepers” and concluded they had “subverted vehicles that have long been tooled up by popular culture...given the choice of orbiting around the entertainment or knowledge industries as little-practiced and underfinanced acolytes of them, or of spearheading the art world with sophisticated anomalies, their course was clear.” *Looking Critically: 21 Years of Artforum Magazine*, Amy Baker Sandback, ed. (UMI Research Press, 1984), 281, 337, and 180-181.

Name of the Thing One Sees (1982) constituted Irwin's late stage apologia for kicking this snob out of his car.

That same year, philosopher Marshall Berman published a foretaste of critical driving through the ruins of his childhood home, New York's Bronx borough. Berman lamented the high-speed, concrete-walled road that cut a swath through his old neighborhood, but a project in Los Angeles inspired him to dream optimistically of a cultural fix for "the expressway world." "The Bronx Mural" was to imitate Judith Baca's federally-funded project called the "Great Wall of Los Angeles." Echoing the progressive cultural politics of the New Deal's Works Progress Administration, "the historical mural" was revived with the support of 1973's Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. To paint the neighborhood's diverse history onto the walls of the Cross-Bronx Expressway was to make commuting into "a rich and strange experience."⁵³⁷ New York never acted on Berman's proposal, but Los Angeles did. Alonzo Davis, the founder of the Black-oriented Brockman Gallery in Leimert Park, had already sponsored a new style of mural. Unlike the walk-up murals of the Mexican and Chicano traditions, these drive-by murals lined "little thoroughfares, so you could really only take in so much at a time. They became quick messages...I call them a color bath. It's like driving through a color bath." In anticipation of the 1984 Olympic Games, Davis pitched a total of ten along the Harbor and Hollywood Freeways to the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee. CETA had lapsed, so Davis relied on private, rather than public, fundraising to keep his consulting agency in the black. Brockman Productions collected \$30,000 for managing the project and LAOOC paid \$17,000 each, \$5000 payable after

⁵³⁷ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, 341-343.

the event's closing ceremony, to Baca and two other Mexican American artists, to Davis and two other Black American artists, and to four Whites.⁵³⁸



Glenna Boltuch of CityWide Murals Program



Alonzo Davis of Brockman Productions

⁵³⁸ *African-American Artists of Los Angeles: Alonzo Davis*, Karen Anne Mason, interviewer (Oral History Program at UCLA, 1994), 263-276. That \$17,000 was equivalent to the per capita gross domestic product in the USA at the time. These numbers are from the contracts LAOOC signed with Brockman Productions and each of the ten artists. Cultural Contracts, Harry Usher Collection, L.A. 84 Sports Library. For the source of these images of the freeway murals, see the Leonelli Collection at The Claremont Colleges Digital Library.



Willie Herrón of the Asco collective



Frank Romero of the Los Four collective



Terry Schoonhoven of the Los Angeles Fine Arts Squad



Roderick Sykes of St. Elmo Village



John Wehrle formerly of the Vietnam Combat Artists Program



Richard Wyatt formerly of the Watts Towers Art Center⁵³⁹

Though the racial diversity of this murals program was laudable, it fell short of fostering spatial and sexual representation. The contact information artists listed on their contracts shows the limited range of Los Angeles participating in this program. If you were to draw a 20-mile east-by-northeast line between Baca's Venice Beach and Herrón's suburban home in Alhambra, all but one of the artists was on that corridor of beaches and hills.⁵⁴⁰ Meanwhile, only two of the ten artists were women. Their work was undoubtedly a strong correction to the phallogentrism of athleticism and automobility; however, more gender-inclusive critical driving was possible. In 1983, during the run-up to an expected windfall in funding from the LAOOC, the feminist architecture historian Dolores Hayden founded The Power of Place. She hired Carolyn Flynn and Gail Dubrow to be her research assistants, and they designed a "walking/driving tour" based on a series of short trips through Los Angeles. Unlike a typical urban history walking tour, like the nationalist Boston Freedom Trail, the folded map Hayden published explained how to navigate over a hundred years of local, bottom-up history with a focus on Indigenous peoples, women of

⁵³⁹ Images by Elisa Leonelli, 1984, Special Collections, Claremont Colleges Library.

⁵⁴⁰ John O. Wehrle, of El Cerrito in Northern California's East Bay, was the sole exception to this geographical pattern. Cultural Contracts, Harry Usher Collection, L.A. 84 Sports Library.

all colors, immigrants, and labor. Though this work staged a successful feminist intervention, narrow spatial politics also framed Hayden's view. A UCLA professor based in Laurel Canyon, she lived far from the world of working people and closer to that of her project's benefactor, Ronald Lushing, the financial planner who paid for *The Power of Place* to get off the ground.⁵⁴¹

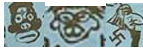
At the same time, MTV got into the game of critical driving. Broadcasting commenced in 1981, and cars suddenly roared back into Pop music, as driving was so well suited as a subject in music videos. The Texan rock 'n' roll band ZZ Top shot the *Eliminator*, the album's titular cherry-red hot rod, at a California high desert gas station in "Gimme All Your Lovin'" (1983). A beleaguered-looking full service station attendant, a worker, saw this dream vehicle drive up and stop. A fantasy trio of recent *Playboy* centerfold models disembarked. They invited him on board.⁵⁴² By 1989, the same pattern of sexual politics recurred in a video by hip hop artist LL Cool J's "Going Back to Cali." Driving a convertible along Venice Beach's coolest streets, like Speedway Avenue, another trio of models danced. Just as he mentioned that "the top is down on the black Corvette," the music video cut to a closeup of an anonymous woman's breasts heaving and spilling out of a black tube top.⁵⁴³ Had critical driving given way to celebratory driving? To read these videos against the grain is to notice a lack of new model cars or imports. Both film productions selected classic U.S.-made vehicles: a '33 Ford Coupe and a '69 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray C3. Buffalo Motor Cars in Paramount made ZZ Top's '33, and LL Cool J rapped lyrics

⁵⁴¹ Dolores Hayden, Gail Dubrow, and Carolyn Flynn, *The Power of Place: Los Angeles, 198-*, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA. When this nonprofit and its fold-out "'You'll know Los Angeles,' residents told me, 'after five years or one hundred thousand miles on your car, whichever comes first.'" Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (MIT Press, 1997), xi.

⁵⁴² "Gimme All Your Lovin'," *Youtube*, 1 July 2013, accessed 28 June 2021.

⁵⁴³ "Going Back to Cali," *Youtube*, 16 June 2009, accessed 28 June 2021. For the artist's autobiography, see L.L. Cool J with Karen Hunter, *I Make My Own Rules* (St. Martin's Press, 1997).

urging listeners to patronize the micro-entrepreneurial mechanics and merchandisers who sold and installed such luxuries as “Daytons” (wire rims) and “Nardi” steering wheels.⁵⁴⁴

However sexually provocative, these last two driving tours had nothing on immigrant artist Manuel Ocampo’s art. Before moving to the USA from the Philippines, Ocampo admitted, “I thought I was white,” because he grew up in a Manila-based “upper-middle-class family.” He became disabused after he arrived with a fraudulent visa, went into low-wage work, and noticed how native English speakers used “pidgin” and “hand gestures” to communicate with him.⁵⁴⁵ Furthermore, Los Angeles in the late 1980s was “a site of shifting frontiers and of a third-world eclecticism on a rampage.”⁵⁴⁶ This was how the critic Kevin Power assessed the city’s influence on Ocampo, whose first works were nightmarish 1987 maps he copied from the *Thomas Guide* street atlas. One was a small-scale view of the Los Angeles basin noting neighborhoods like Hollywood, landmarks like Dodger Stadium, and freeways like Interstate-10. All Ocampo added to this scene were a large cross north of Bel Air and red splotches resembling gunshot wounds in places like Inglewood and South Central Los Angeles. The next map was a larger-scale view of downtown with north and south inverted. Ocampo kept the black blocks signifying buildings like City Hall and labels for streets like Broadway and “Boyd St.” To this *terra periculosa*, the artist added 3 racial caricatures , 4 transposed place names (Manila, T.J., Beirut, and

⁵⁴⁴ *Internet Movie Cars Database*, accessed 28 June 2021. “Ron Jones Memorial,” *Hot Rod*, 1 July 2009, accessed 28 June 2021. “Going Back to Cali” annotations by fujikochan on *Genius*, accessed 27 June 2021. For the long-term background to working-class Black refusals of thriftiness and unrepressed movement into “a culture of freedom,” see Thaddeus Russell, “Citizenship and the Problem of Desire in the Postwar Labor and Civil Rights Movements,” in *The Columbia History of Post-World War II America*, Mark C. Carnes, ed. (Columbia University Press, 2007), 388-392.

⁵⁴⁵ Manuel Ocampo interviewed by Daniel J. Martinez, “Death in the Afternoon: A Dialogue in Seville,” in *Manuel Ocampo: Heridas de la Lengua*, Pilar Perez, ed. (Smart Art Press, 1997), 62.

⁵⁴⁶ Kevin Power, “Rough Gatherings at the Edge of the Mind,” in *Manuel Ocampo*, 30.

Watts), 9 swastikas, 10 slurs (K*kes, D*kes, F*gs, Ch*nks, N*ps, G*gus, N*ggers, W*t Backs, B*aners, and KKK), and a *hic sunt dracones* for a multiculturalist city: “White Power Now!!”⁵⁴⁷

Ocampo was not alone in his anxiety over race and racism, gender and homophobia, and faith and persecution. “There are no manuals,” began journalist Lynell George. “If Thomas Brothers commissioned a clear map of the territory, retail-outlets - the country and the world over - would struggle to keep it on the racks.” A Black woman working for a historically White supremacist newspaper in 1994, George was imagining a future when fewer would blindly “wander through this maze - foggy as it is forbidding,” the maze of identity politics. Her brilliant article proceeded to provide directions for frank conversations about race by showing readers how to do so in intimate and spatial terms. Byron Bonner, Black, remembered having to sneak *through a window into the bedroom* of a White childhood friend with racist parents. Janet Fitch, White, confessed to the childhood mistake of asking a Black bunkmate to play “the slave” in a game of make believe *at camp*.⁵⁴⁸ Scholar-activists in the 1980s L.A. school of urban geography had urged locals to use their knowledge of the city’s spatial complexity as a roadmap for such challenging topics like race, class, and gender. George’s interviewing helped her subjects stress *where* interracial relationships formed and racial conflicts arose. This is precisely how Fredric

⁵⁴⁷ Manuel Ocampo, back cover and 25. The two oil paintings are called *Untitled (Map of Los Angeles)* and *Untitled (Ethnic Map of Los Angeles)*. For excellent histories of cartography and the power of geographical ignorance as a force in early modern history, see Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous & Atlantic Slaveries in New France* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), Paul W. Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713-1763* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), Toby Lester, *The Fourth Part of the World: An Astonishing Epic of Global Discovery, Imperial Ambition, and the Birth of America* (Free Press, 2009), and James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (W.W. Norton, 1999).

⁵⁴⁸ Lynell George, “Is Too Much Left Unsaid in Discussions of Race?,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 January 1994. Fitch reminded aspiring racial liberals, “You have more in common with people who are in the same neighborhood as you. To go down to Martin Luther King and Vermont and essay: ‘Here I am, I want to be friends with you!...is a joke.’”

Jameson learned to address inequality in Los Angeles, an open-air laboratory where he found Lynch's "cognitive mapping" and retooled it as a "code word for 'class consciousness.'"⁵⁴⁹

Jameson's reading of the Bonaventure Hotel as a useful symbol for late stage capitalism and postmodern cultural politics has become a punching bag in postcolonial studies. Enda Duffy noticed how Jameson photographed the hotel from the vantage point of his moving car on a Los Angeles freeway; therefore, his work was more that of a "traffic cop" than a "cartographer."⁵⁵⁰ Duffy has thus alleged whiteness and the bourgeois state will be the only authentic beneficiaries of critical driving. Indeed, *Thomas Guide's* parent company collaborated with police forces in 1990s California by helping them develop mapping software for use in squad cars and in helicopters while pursuing suspects.⁵⁵¹ Meanwhile, geographer Ananya Roy has asked whether teaching "poor African Americans and Latinos...cognitive mapping simply narrates a claustrophobic urban space" outside of which they feel like spatial trespassers. Roy alleged that Jameson has prescribed "an itinerary that winds its way through penetrable city space" and thus marked the critic himself as the real trespasser.⁵⁵² On the other hand, Painter Ramiro Gomez and novelist Paul Beatty show what has become possible for artists of color who have dared to use

⁵⁴⁹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 417-418. The L.A. school is not yet history, but its early years are well recounted in Edward W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010). For an example of how Jameson activated class consciousness through the use of space, consider his passage on the Santa Monica house on Twenty-second Street and Washington Avenue that architect Frank Gehry designed for his family and the family's domestic worker. "[T]he house *alludes* to its own position in Santa Monica...If, however, one feels that the city space of the 1980s has for all kinds of multiple and overdetermined reasons lost that particular materiality and placeness or situatedness - that is, we no longer feel Santa Monica in this way as a place whose sites stand in determinate relations to the beach or the freeway and so forth - then such exegesis will come to seem misguided or irrelevant. Not wrong, necessarily, for these structures may be the remnants of an older modernist language subsumed and virtually canceled by the new one, yet persisting feebly and in a pinch decryptable by a bright and stubborn, backward-looking reader and critic" (108-119).

⁵⁵⁰ Enda Duffy, *The Speed Handbook: Velocity, Pleasure, Modernism* (Duke University Press, 2009), 30.

⁵⁵¹ Paul Elias, "Nowhere to Run: High-Tech Computers, Devices Help Police Track Down Suspects," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 July 1995.

⁵⁵² Ananya Roy, "Transnational Trespassings: The Geopolitics of Urban Informality," in *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia*, Ananya Roy and Nezar Alsayyad, eds. (Lexington Books, 2004), 311-312.

the cognitive mapping Los Angeles as a creative response in a manner evocative of Jameson's. Gomez made a career of taking Hockney paintings and copying them with under-recognized Latinx workers painted into the foreground.⁵⁵³ In *The Sellout* (2015), Beatty wrote about a character taking a "Dodger-blue" marker to an old *Thomas Guide* and just boldly drawing in Dickens, a fictive African American community, on a blank space on the street atlas.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵³ Lawrence Weschler, "Ramiro Gomez's Domestic Disturbances," *New York Times Magazine*, 14 August 2015.

⁵⁵⁴ Paul Beatty, *The Sellout: A Novel* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015).

Pt.2: Roach Coach

Cars and Street Vending in 1980s Los Angeles



“Chef Carlos Salgado’s Taco Maria in Costa Mesa began as a food truck”
“Jonathan Gold’s 101 Best Restaurants,” *Los Angeles Times* (2015)

Celebrations of food trucks became a cliché during the age of neoliberalism. No one in Los Angeles history played a more central role in cheering on this business model than the late Jonathan Gold, a Pulitzer-winning food critic. He was hot on the heels of neoliberal economists, who blazed a trail for a middle-to-upper-class “foodie” movement in U.S. cities. Hernando de Soto, the founder of Institute for Liberty and Democracy, articulated a case for deregulation and the privatization of public property in 1987 as the best way to activate the “dead capital” in poor urban slums. To de Soto, “street invasions” by Lima’s vendors deserved praise and legitimation. They were on “the other path” in an inexorable “march toward markets.”⁵⁵⁵ Such romanticizing

⁵⁵⁵ Hernando de Soto, *The Other Path: The Economic Answer to Terrorism* (Basic Books, 1986), 65 and 91.

and exoticizing of working-class micro enterprise has informed observations of diversity in Los Angeles as “magical urbanism.”⁵⁵⁶ In food studies, scholars have identified urban street vending as the means of preserving immigrant traditions and a vehicle for forging new transnational hybridities.⁵⁵⁷ Critics also detect in flavor fads a weapon the strong used to maintain empires and to exert control over urban peoples.⁵⁵⁸ The paragraphs to come stress food as a weapon of the vendors who asserted “food sovereignty” and fostered “professionalism from the ground up.”⁵⁵⁹

For sensory historians, the flavor of a city is the result of where it is located and how it is linked to other parts of the region and the world. A legacy of White homogeneity in the suburbs of Los Angeles and other U.S. cities was the McDonaldization of local cuisine into standardized, predictable fast food. Drivers traveling the freeways by car cared mostly that what they ate was filling and did not make them or their passengers sick. When the demographics of Los Angeles shifted dramatically in the years after the war, the civil rights movement, and immigration reform in 1965, the city’s palette changed. Drivers who once chose from fast food and diners on the highways - and the row of fine dining establishments along La Cienega - started to notice the proliferation of alternatives, especially in the city’s immigrant enclaves. Mexican, Cuban, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Indian, Ethiopian, Armenian, and a plethora of other

⁵⁵⁶ Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US City* (Verso, 2000) and A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, “Latino Landscapes: Postwar Cities and the Transnational Origins of a New Urban America,” *Journal of American History* 101 (2014).

⁵⁵⁷ Donna Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food in the Making of Americans* (Harvard University Press, 1998), Paula E. Morton, *Tortillas: A Cultural History* (University of New Mexico Press, 2014), Gustavo Arellano, *Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America* (Scribner, 2012), and Jeffrey Pilcher, *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵⁵⁸ Mark Padoongpatt, *Flavors of Empire: Food and the Making of Thai America* (University of California Press, 2017) and Robert Lemon, *The Taco Truck: How Mexican Street Food Is Transforming the American City* (University of Illinois Press, 2019).

⁵⁵⁹ Rufina Juárez, “Indigenous Women in the Food Sovereignty Movement: Lessons from the South Central Farm,” in *Mexican-Origin Foods, Foodways, and Social Movements: Decolonial Perspectives*, Devon Peña, Luz Calvo, Pancho McFarland, eds. (University of Arkansas Press, 2017). *Latin@s’ Presence in the Food Industry: Changing How We Think About Food*, Meredith E. Abarca and Consuelo Carr Salas, eds. (University of Arkansas Press, 2016), xxvi.

cuisines each found its foothold in a city with a mosaic of peoples hungry for more spiciness, for imported fruits, for fish served raw, and for smaller plates of food. To pursue these options, consumers relied on driving their cars across town, and some entrepreneurs served their fare from delicious-smelling trucks equipped with kitchens. The meals were significant for workers who fueled hard labor with cheap food when working in prohibitively expensive neighborhoods.

Before gourmet food trucks and taco trucks, vehicles serving hot lunches to workers on ranches, on movie shoots, and at construction sites were chuckwagons, catering trucks, and roach coaches.⁵⁶⁰ The history of mobile food service was older even than tacos, which became popular in 1920s Mexico City. Only when Mexican immigrant entrepreneur Raul Martinez, Sr. founded King Taco in 1974 did he retool a used ice cream and park this first-ever taco truck in East Los Angeles. The soft tacos, a Mexico City offering unlike Mitlá's tacos, sold well late at night after bars emptied at the state-mandated closing hour.⁵⁶¹ King Taco's revenues grew quickly, so Martinez was able to acquire a building in Cypress Park, the first of his several restaurants.⁵⁶² This success story did not go unnoticed. More operators, mostly Latinos, began outfitting trucks as moveable kitchens and parking them in areas and at times where and when consumers wanted cheap, hot meals. For bachelors working multiple jobs far from family and sharing a bare-bones, apartment kitchen with multiple roommates, trucks provided an otherwise inaccessible taste of the home country.⁵⁶³ By 1981, the term "roach coach" showed up in the city's White-oriented press. Ironically, this was the term the author used to describe a steak-and-lobster-serving

⁵⁶⁰ For an early mention of the "catering truck," see John Pastier, "L.A. Has Unrealized Potential for Street Eating Facilities," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 July 1971.

⁵⁶¹ Arellano, *Taco USA*, 163-164.

⁵⁶² Jessica Perez, "Founder of King Taco restaurants dies at 71," *Boyle Heights Beat*, 5 December 2013.

⁵⁶³ George J. Sánchez, *Boyle Heights: How a Los Angeles Neighborhood Became the Future of American Democracy* (University of California Press, 2021), 217-218.

Hollywood catering company.⁵⁶⁴ Since film industry workers had been familiarized with eating out of vehicles for generations, they ranked early among those who embraced taco trucks.

Taco trucks became prevalent in Los Angeles during the 1980s, and the earliest signs of this trend first appeared not in the *Times* but rather in the classified section of *La Opinión*, a local Spanish-language newspaper. In 1980, sellers placed the earliest of these advertisements rather haphazardly in two different sections: “Ventas autos” and “Ventas varios.” This small business community had also not yet decided on a standard term for these vehicles or what kind of enterprise they constituted. “Camión de tacos,” “Camión para tacos,” “Camión lonchero,” “Truck de comida caliente,” and “‘Truck’ de tacos” each made at least one appearance in ads from November 1980. By 1987, the adjectives “lonchero” or “lonchera” had become standard, but the texts included clarification: “‘79 Chevy camión lonchero ‘Hot food truck.’” Now these vehicles were listed for sale as business opportunities. The cost ranged from \$5000 to \$10,000 in 1980, at a time when sellers were asking \$23,000 for a Lynwood hamburger stand and \$5000 for a restaurant at 92nd Street and Alameda. Higher taco truck prices in 1989 ranged from \$8000 for a 15-year-old Dodge to \$15,500 for a 12-year-old Chevy. Multiple others from 1989 listed a taco truck for rent, and one noted, “Dueño puede ayudar a financiar” buying his \$10,900 vehicle.⁵⁶⁵

With time, *La Opinión*’s classified advertising for loncheras included more specific details. The first listings included city licensing numbers, but in November 1980, they did not yet mention the make of the trucks and only one ad featured the model year. By the late 1980s, the trade had formalized, for a dealership called the G.Q. Catering Truck Sales offered both used and

⁵⁶⁴ Gary Jarlson, *Los Angeles Times*, 2/20/81

⁵⁶⁵ *La Opinión* on microfilm, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA. The taco truck listings for November 1980 were from 1, 12, 20, 27, and 28 November. The Alameda restaurant for sale appeared on 10 November and the one in Lynwood on 20 November. The translation to “Hot lunch truck” was on 30 December 1987. The ‘74 Dodge and the ‘77 Chevy were listed on 6 and 8 January 1989. For the rental and financing help, see 12 and 14 January 1989.

new vehicles. Chevy predominated. Sellers became increasingly specific about the geography and the temporality of their operations. Just one of the 1980 listings promised a “lugar para estacionamiento,” but 1989’s trucks came with a set itinerary, “Ruta establecida,” flexibility, “Con o sin estacionamiento,” and expected sales, “Se venden \$200 diarios. Más se vende viernes y sábado.” This information indicated new taco truck owner-operators purchased autonomy with their vehicle. The purchase gave entrepreneurs a right to decide whether to claim a pre-existing route or to design a new one better suited to their geography, to their schedule, or to patterns of consumption. A list of tools inside a truck showed owner-operators were professionals with the skills to navigate not just the city but also an in-car kitchen with “5 refrigeradores, parrillas, horno, 3 máquinas de café, mesa vaporera, freidora de papas, [and a] bar de ensalada.”⁵⁶⁶

The many appliances in a lonchera were signs of a new hybrid cuisine mixing Mexican, Americana, and world food traditions. Whoever bought this “‘82 camion lonchero” was going to grill meats, to boil coffee, to fry French fries, and to serve fresh vegetables. Tacos de Esther, a lonchera, provided a perfect example of this eclecticism. Photographer William Reagh had documented everyday life in Los Angeles since the 1960s, and in 1985, he shot Esther’s parked on Broadway in downtown. This lonchera offered hamburgers, cold sandwiches, and yogurt, but huge painted letters read “tengo al pastor y carne asada,” the restaurant’s two principle delights.⁵⁶⁷ These taco meats were legacies of Lebanese migrants relocating to Mexico City. Accomplished sidewalk vendors, Lebanese Mexicans had filled tortillas with meat, conventionally lamb and beef among Muslims or pork among Maronites. “Shawarma” was the

⁵⁶⁶ *La Opinión*. G.Q. Catering Truck Sales appeared on 31 December 1987. The daily sales of \$200, the established route, the list of kitchen appliances, and the flexible route were mentioned on 6, 8, 9, and 14 January 1989.

⁵⁶⁷ “Food vending truck,” William Reagh, 1985, Los Angeles Photographers Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

name for this manner of grilling sliced meat.⁵⁶⁸ Raul Martinez, a chilango, served these very meats at King Taco, so the cuisine of Mexico City became the norm in Los Angeles food trucks. However, the scene began to diversify by the time the *Times* published an article on the taco trucks in 1987. Robert Gabriel took a photograph of a truck called “Laguneros” and named for the northern Mexican region surrounding Torreón.⁵⁶⁹ The article also noted a few trucks served Vietnamese and Armenian.⁵⁷⁰

Traces of a public regulatory apparatus targeting loncheras appeared in both the *La Opinión* advertisements and photographs of the vehicles. The licencia de salubridad was one classified ad’s term for strings of numbers and letters authorities granted each enterprise that had passed inspection. In 1980, the newspaper had entries for two loncheras: “(T52873)” and “(83892P).” These codes were suspiciously inconsistent. Licensing became standardized and more professional by 1989, when the same number-letter-five-letter string appeared in almost every ad.⁵⁷¹ Loncheras also displayed an address on each vehicle. For Tacos de Esther, this home base was at 4544 San Fernando Road in Glendale and Laguneros listed a more mysterious “6052 Maywood Ave, H.P.C.”⁵⁷² The minimalist three-letter rendition of the City of Huntington Park seemed deliberate. To this day, hundreds of operators still pay rent to park their vehicles there during the off-work hours. This distribution center was just east of Vernon, conveniently close to Farmer John and other such meat packing plants. Also near is King Taco’s distribution center,

⁵⁶⁸ Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the City: Mexico City at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 402-404.

⁵⁶⁹ “Taco catering truck,” Robert Gabriel photograph, 1987, Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

⁵⁷⁰ Jesus Sanchez, “Taco Trucks Put Aspiring Immigrants on Wheels,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 Nov 1987. For how trucks reference Mexican regions with naming and design practices, see Gustavo Leclerc, “The Production of Architectural Hybridities in Los Angeles,” 112-113, dissertation for UCLA Architecture and Urban Design, 2017.

⁵⁷¹ *La Opinión*. For “licencia de salubridad,” see 14 January 1989. For the page with two ads featuring inconsistently coded strings of letters and numbers, see 28 November 1980.

⁵⁷² Reagh, 1985 and Gabriel, 1987.

less than two miles to the north at 3400 East Pico Boulevard in Los Angeles's Boyle Heights. I visited these industrially-zoned places, gawked at parked loncheras until security guards forced me to leave, and shuddered at the odor of so much spoiled meat from so many dead animals.⁵⁷³

Of the hundreds of loncheras that have operated in Los Angeles, many were based in lesser-regulated industrial suburbs beyond the city's limits. Martinez called this trade's newest arrivals "pirates" who cream skimmed diners away from restaurants that formally paid rent to a landlord or property taxes to the government. King Taco's founder had rejected the business model where he got his start. Nevertheless, an estimated 200 to 500 loncheras were in business in 1987, according to the *Times*' Jesus Sanchez, who counted thirty east of Downtown. The wide range for his guess was surprising since the journalist had interviewed a county health official. Alfonso Medina, "food sanitarian," recommended looking for loncheras "in Van Nuys, Pacoima, Florence, Huntington Park, Wilmington and anywhere down Brooklyn Avenue (in East Los Angeles)." A phenomenon specific to Los Angeles, loncheras gravitated to the working-class, industrial, and mostly Latinx areas of the city. They were "[u]nheard of in Mexico and other Latin American countries," for in the U.S., "immigrant groups" had assimilated to "a society that prizes the automobile and mobility."⁵⁷⁴ Los Angeles, with its long distances, strict zoning, and narrow sidewalks, had pushed industry into the sprawl where immigrant workers followed. Rising and ebbing demand in these industrialized food deserts attracted entrepreneurs.

By 1990, loncheras emerged as a major point of political contention. The *Times* found people complaining about the trade in Brentwood and in Cypress Park. Resident Nancy Real

⁵⁷³ My mind goes to a thought exercise about the sheer number of chicken bones left over from the anthropocene that some equivalent of archaeologists and geologists would find from our times in a deep layer of the earth in thousands or even millions of earth-rotations. Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet* (University of California Press, 2017), 3-5.

⁵⁷⁴ Sanchez, "Taco Trucks Put Aspiring Immigrants on Wheels."

resented the trucks lining off of Sunset Boulevard along Kenter Avenue, the spine of a ritzy neighborhood employing hundreds of gardeners, housekeepers, and nannies but without places for them to find an affordable hot lunch. Councilwoman Gloria Molina remembered a time she told a driver at Figueroa Street and Avenue 43 to move, and then in retaliation, someone threw a bottle at her. Council drafted an ordinance banning catering trucks from stopping in residential zones for longer than thirty minutes or commercial zones for longer than an hour. The catering truck industry reacted with a protest. Three hundred owner-operators formed a collective, the Catering Truck Owners' Association, and dispatched fifty trucks in a caravan to City Hall. Drivers and their families spent the day circling the building, honking, marching, and waving placards reading the slogans: "Discrimination Against Hispanics" and "Do Not Violate Our Civil Rights."⁵⁷⁵ A year and a half later, Mayor Bradley vetoed the ordinance, but he only mentioned the catering-truck-dependent film industry in the comments justifying his decision.⁵⁷⁶

The food truck fight above occurred in a climate of long-standing class conflict within the Latinx communities of Los Angeles. Molina, a Latina Democrat who participated in the Chicano Moratorium, evoked a rhetoric of bottom-up struggle when advocating government oversight against truck owners who exploited the commons. "Let's get those that have been abusing a privilege they've had for a long time," she cried.⁵⁷⁷ Artist and poet Harry Gamboa, Jr., a founding member of the radical Chicano multi-media art collective called Asco (disgust), came from Molina's generation. By 1989, Gamboa criticized university-educated commercial artists who cared about "obvious symbols of material identification, i.e., low-rider automobiles,

⁵⁷⁵ Dean Murphy, "City Council May Curb Catering Trucks," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 January 1990.

⁵⁷⁶ John H. Lee, "Bradley Vetoes Limitations on Catering Truck Parking," *Los Angeles Times*, 27 July 1991.

⁵⁷⁷ Dean Murphy, "City Council May Curb Catering Trucks," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 January 1990.

tortillas, tattoos, traditional ceremonies, and modified graffiti.”⁵⁷⁸ Loncheras easily could have made this list of White-facing, comfortably multicultural “Chicano” urban pleasures. Instead, Gamboa questioned the origins of the meat in “I Don’t Buy My Tacos from Trucks Parked Too Close to Sex Change Clinics” (1988). “So it’s time to drive / To the nearest corner / A stranger takes your order / A stranger cooks for you...You drive to the limit gnawing at / Your own ignorance / Feeling blessed / That you won’t go away / Hungry.”⁵⁷⁹ The poem was a study of alienated labor.

Food writers took no cues from Gamboa or Molina. From 1989 to 1991, *Los Angeles Times* restaurant reviewers clamored to demonstrate an authentic love for taco trucks. In 1989, Michelle Huneven proposed “the taco-truck test” and listed restaurants that passed. Sometimes when on the way home content from a meal she was to review, she cruised by her neighborhood lonchera and did not “even notice.” At “other times, I gaze at it with yearning and frustration and think *why why why* did I drive all those miles and waste all that time and money to consume those awful calories when *I would have been so much happier eating at the taco truck?*”⁵⁸⁰ Ironically, Huneven did not include a single identifying word about this lonchera’s location, whether it served a particular regional cuisine, or who worked there. These details did finally appear in a catering truck review, but of course, this vehicle served Italian instead of Mexican. Los Angeles already boasted “4,000 Mobile Food Preparation Vehicles,” but none of them deserved such a distinction. Four Wheel Cafe’s founders, White women from the film industry,

⁵⁷⁸ Harry Gamboa, Jr., “Serpents in the City of Angels,” 1989 in Harry Gamboa, Jr., *Urban Exile*, Chon A. Noriega, ed. (University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 67.

⁵⁷⁹ Gamboa, “I Don’t Buy My Tacos from Trucks Parked Too Close to Sex Change Clinics,” 1988 in *Urban Exile*, 509-510. These are my favorite lines of the poem: “So it’s time to drive / To the nearest corner / A stranger takes your order / A stranger cooks for you...You drive to the limit gnawing at / Your own ignorance / Feeling blessed / That you won’t go away / Hungry.”

⁵⁸⁰ Michelle Huneven, “A Passel of Personal Picks that Passed the Taco-Truck Test,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 May 1989. For the same trope, one year later, see Ruth Reichl, “Drinks and (a Cheaper) Dinner,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 October 1990.

laughed at “roach coach.” Four Wheel Cafe was a “gourmet hot truck.” That said, the researchers had “sampled meals from a number of *mariscos* trucks” before hiring Alan Sonneman to paint a “fresco” on theirs and plotting a route targeting the “‘creative’ industries” of Los Angeles.⁵⁸¹

Connoisseurship for ethnic cuisine from Southern California’s food trucks and strip malls reached its apogee in “Counter Intelligence,” a column by Jonathan Gold. A UCLA-trained undergraduate student in urban geography, Gold’s journey into food writing began during his years as the anomalous White bus rider commuting to an editing job in Downtown from the Beverly Hills home where he still lived with his parents. Gold decided to start a project, his “only clearly articulated ambition.” That was to eat at all restaurants along Pico starting with a certain “*taqueria*” at the boulevard’s terminus (as of 1990, the writer sounded unaware Pico only briefly ended in downtown, then resumed its course as East Pico across the river, which was where King Taco’s headquarters were located). Gold’s plan led him to a stretch of Pico between the Harbor Freeway and Vermont where “Guatemalans and Salvadoreños” were forging a new landscape of consumption. From “grocery-store parking lots...from street-corner pushcarts,” and from “a small Nicaraguan restaurant called El Nica,”⁵⁸² Gold bought, he learned, and eventually, he learned how to teach hesitant readers to go buy there too. By 1991, these skills translated into a print review for El Taurino, a truck “advertised incessantly on the Spanish-language *futbol* broadcasts,” as part of a co-authored *Times* feature listing the spiciest dining in Los Angeles.⁵⁸³

It is tempting to wonder whether Gold’s bus riding made him into such an accomplished writer about working-class oriented foods in the immigrant enclaves of Los Angeles. However, “Counter Intelligence” set the tone for food writing in Los Angeles, which has hardly had a thing

⁵⁸¹ L.N. Halliburton, “Four Wheel Cafe: Movable Feast for Westside,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 September 1990.


⁵⁸² Jonathan Gold, “Counter Intelligence: A World in a Banana Leaf,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 July 1990. For more on Gold’s early life, see Joe Mozingo, “Two Gold Standards,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 November 2008.

⁵⁸³ “Our Hall of Flame,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 May 1991.

to say about the slaughter of animals, the public health implications of foodie culture, or the labor conditions in these small business establishments. Food critics reserved their criticisms for meals that tasted badly. The only section of the *Times* to report the experiences of workers, however obliquely, was the crime beat. In 1991, unknown killers ambushed Tacos Tlaquepaque, which operated in North Hollywood at the intersection of Lankershim Boulevard and Vanowen Street. That night, owner-operator Ismael Cervantes, 43, and four employees died. The newspaper presented Cervantes as emblematic of the “Immigrant’s American Dream,” but details about the workers hinted at another story. They were Francisco Gasca, 31, Heriberto Sandoval, 19, Jesus Sandoval, 16, and Ismael Cervantes, Jr., 13. Late on a Saturday night during the school year, the younger Cervantes, a middle-school student, was spending the weekend with his father.⁵⁸⁴ The lack of regulation has made loncheras into a necessary sanctuary for undocumented immigrant consumers even as the trade has become the site of unfree and unpaid labor by minors too young even to consent to signing a contract.

To see how socially realistic narratives of precariousness, abuse, and enslavement get subsumed into community, or the neoliberal romance of grassroots enterprise, consider James Rojas. An MIT-trained urban planner, Rojas made a splash with “The Latino Use of Urban Space in East Los Angeles” (1993). Here he reiterated a trend Gamboa noticed of “university-educated” Chicanos seeing themselves more in consumer experiences and material possessions than in acts of political struggle. Thus the four major case studies in the Rojas account of “Latino urbanism” were the low rider, mural painting, the yards of suburban houses, and street vending. “Latino residents seem to spring forth from the asphalt,” gushed the author about the “popular”

⁵⁸⁴ John Johnson and Julio Moran, “Brutal Bloodbath Ends Immigrant’s American Dream,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 December 1991. Television news picked up the rumor that this was a drug-related “Mexican Mafia” slaying. Michael Connelly, “3 Not Charged After Arrests in Killing of Catering Truck Workers,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 June 1992.

vendors who “attract crowds where they go.” The market was the measure of success for Latinos who used “[m]ovable objects or props...to control the outdoor space by giving them flexibility or freedom over their environment.” A diagram  showed the arrangement of objects, including a parked “Pick-up truck” holding “Items Ceramics [and] Mexican cookies.” Positioned on the open tailgate, facing the sidewalk, was a dark black circle labeled “Woman sits here.”⁵⁸⁵ Under neoliberal eyes, the female vendor appeared to be an autonomous, self-employed survival worker, but she was also a worker, mostly alone outdoors in the sun, likely earning less than minimum wage, and possibly beyond the reach of bathroom facilities with hot, potable water.

Much of the literature on street vendors and food sovereignty after Hernando de Soto has come from the best intentions. The illegality of micro-enterprise in Los Angeles and other world cities has often been grounded in anxieties about race and sex. A public park that is enclosed via bourgeois regulations to hot or cold food and drink carts hardly deserves the adjective public. That said, these positions lead to dangerous logical outcomes. We cannot determine the line between micro-enterprises and meso- or macro-enterprises. Once street vendors claim spots on public land, what is to stop them from turning and selling this newfound privilege to a larger corporate entity? Furthermore, the practices of some of the smallest vendors are not acceptable if they involve mistreating vulnerable workers, endangering consumers, or putting established businesses at risk of closure. Sit-down restaurants have every right to push loncheras as far away as possible from their locations. Companies paying union or minimum wages should not have to compete with enterprises employing unfree or undocumented labor at far lower rates. Though a fascinating part of car cultures, 1980s loncheras were symptoms of neoliberal hegemony.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁵ James Rojas, “The Latino Use of Urban Space in East Los Angeles,” *Urban Latino Cultures: La Vida Latina en L.A.*, Gustavo Leclerc, Raul Villa, and Michael J. Dear, eds. (Sage Publications, 1999), 131-132.

⁵⁸⁶ Peter Sebastian Chesney, “Return of the Jitneys: Transportation Neoliberals Never Waste a Good Crisis,” *Critical Planning* (2021). For the forthcoming paper in full, see Appendix A, where I address a parallel case study.

Pt. 3: Drive-By

Cars and Gun Violence in 1980s Los Angeles



“Outside the South Central area,
Few cared about the the violence,
Because it didn’t affect them.”

Voice of Tom Brokaw in Ice Cube’s “The Drive-By” (1990)⁵⁸⁷

Newsman Tom Brokaw reported how few saw Black urban violence as a harbinger of an impending crisis in Los Angeles. Ice Cube sampled Brokaw’s voice on the album *Amerikkka’s Most Wanted* (1990). This ironic usage in an audio vérité of a drive-by shooting was part of “ghettocentric” identity politics. Robin D.G. Kelley, a history critic, never found such songs realistic. Instead, he experienced their “sonic force” in an automobilized “war of position...a convertible Impala or a Suzuki pulling up alongside a ‘black and white,’ pumping the revenge fantasy segment of Ice Cube’s ‘The Wrong N*gga to F-----Wit’ which promises to break Chief

In neoliberal economics, geography, and historiography, jitneys were as useful as taco trucks in the making of a 1980s multicultural discourse favoring deregulation through the romanticization of subaltern precariousness.

⁵⁸⁷ Ice Cube, “The Drive-By,” *YouTube*, uploaded 27 June 2012, accessed 4 September 2021.

Darryl Gates's 'spine like a jelly fish.'"⁵⁸⁸ Music has played in struggles for racial justice in U.S. social movements, including among rebels cruising the counter hegemonic bloc.⁵⁸⁹ Music also strengthened the interracial relationships empowering Black, Filipino, Brown, Samoan, etc. communities.⁵⁹⁰ Car cultures and the music playing on car audio has also helped fuel bitter feelings for so many poor people forced to survive on this fortress city's "suburban streets," which are "less amenable to shared experiences."⁵⁹¹ "America's long war," an equal-parts domestic and international conflict encapsulating Vietnam and Watts, was still on, and drivers kept guns in cars as part of a "dynamic of fabricating difference through sanctioned violence."⁵⁹²

Sensory historians notice the way shooting a gun is part of a series of steps going back seconds, minutes, hours, days, years, and sometimes generations. If the shooter just stepped out from a car armed or fired through the window of a vehicle, then they had made the choice to store a weapon inside that vehicle. If a shooter previously had their hands gripping the steering wheel of a car while rushing to a crime scene, then that muscle tension remained present in their bodies when they clenched the finger that pulled the trigger. Wherever both car cultures and gun cultures have coexisted, habits of sensing from the latter have bled into the former and vice versa. In the privacy of cars, gun owners secured the power to conceal weapons and to carry them into a wider range of territory than without cars. In the 1980s, the art of surreptitiously

⁵⁸⁸ Robin D.G. Kelley, "Kickin' Reality, Kickin' Ballistics," in Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (The Free Press, 1994), 206. For "ghettocentric" and "audio-verité," see 209 and 218.

⁵⁸⁹ George Lipsitz, "Cruising Around the Historic Bloc: Postmodernism and Music in East Los Angeles," in George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

⁵⁹⁰ Gaye Theresa Johnson, *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity: Music, Race, and Spatial Entitlement in Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2013). Priscilla Leiva, "'Just Win, Baby!': The Raider Nation and Second Chances for Black and Brown L.A." and Josh Kun, "What is an MC If He Can't Rap to Banda? Making Music in Nuevo L.A.," in *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition*, Josh Kun and Laura Pulido, eds. (University of California Press, 2014). Felicia Angeja Viator, *To Live and Defy in L.A.: How Gangsta Rap Changed America* (Harvard University Press, 2020).

⁵⁹¹ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (Verso, 1990). Ed Morales, *Latinx: The New Force in American Politics and Culture* (Verso, 2018), 248.

⁵⁹² Nikhil Pal Singh, *Race and America's Long War* (University of California Press, 2017), 189.

firing these weapons from a car at speed - or from cars that briefly slowed or stopped - captured the popular imagination. The police, the press, and producers of film, television, and music recurrently turned public attention to these drive-by shootings. Though this coverage typically villainized real-life shooters, fictive narratives tended to represent them as brave anti-heroes worth emulating for those seeking power in communities where opportunities for acquiring status were scarce. Drive-by battles became increasingly central to both the drug wars among so-called street gangs and the making of a police state overseeing racialized spaces of the city.

While this essay is about drive-by shootings, a subject of media-fueled moral panic about young men of color in urban gangs, the cartoons serve as a reminder that the primary way where guns and driving came together was in the hands of officers as they arrived in squad cars and on motorcycles. Paul Conrad, late-Twentieth-Century cartoonist for the *Times*, stressed how mobility was a defining feature of both the killer cop and at police shooting scenes. For so many whom officers killed, the last thing they ever saw was not merely the gun barrel but also a heavy black leather jacket and that white helmet motorcycle cops wore.⁵⁹³ As police rushed over to kill a person like Eula Love - not “Eulia” the way Conrad misspelled the name -⁵⁹⁴ they stopped the vehicle and approached her driveway, which is pictured in the image above. Having come with lights flashing and sirens ringing, they were trained to drive at the maximum possible speed, to weave through automobile traffic, and to risk collisions. In 1991, anonymous cops told journalist Marc Cooper of the *Village Voice* that such circumstances made their fellows become vengeful and act out strong emotions after a fast-paced pursuit. Regarding the brutal beating of motorist Rodney King, they opined, “You chase a guy at high speeds in the night like that, it’s like

⁵⁹³ *Drawn and Quartered: The Best Political Cartoons* (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1985), 97 and 126.

⁵⁹⁴ For a thorough account of the killing and the process that exonerated the cops who killed Eula Love, see Max Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 126-129.

someone has a gun to your head.” Even if the gun’s chamber had been empty all along, “You’re still going to beat the shit out of him anyway because he scared you to death.”⁵⁹⁵

Police science scholars had already begun to notice the negative impacts of automobility in policing. In 1982, the now-notorious *Atlantic Monthly* article “Broken Windows Policing: The Police and Neighborhood” had shown driving exacerbated spatial distancing between officers and the communities they patrolled. What remains controversial about this essay by George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson was the recommendation for cities to hire more police and to train them to execute the law more dogmatically. A focus on quality-of-life infractions like the titular vandalism inspired reforms in cities like New York that led to more illegal racial profiling and the use of the constitutionally-debated “stop-and-frisk” policy. However, another less-noticed passage raised doubts about motorized policing. The authors observed measurable advantages for beat-walking cops, who remained more alert to their surroundings. Able to stand eye to eye with members of the community, they used body language more fluently and sometimes anonymously drew the occasional source “aside for a private chat.” On the other hand, the motor cop was stuck sitting inside a car, behind the “door and the window,” which created “a barrier.” Anyone who tried to approach “a marked patrol car” revealed him- or herself to be a “fink.”⁵⁹⁶ These findings clashed with institutional and cultural traditions of motor policing in Los Angeles, but 5 years later, Wilson came to UCLA as a professor and pitched broken-windows policing to LAPD.

Wilson’s reforms were a tough sell for a department that pitched itself through popular culture as a great place to work for those who wanted to drive one of the best cities to drive in the USA. From 1968 to 1975, Jack Webb’s NBC show *Adam-12* followed the titular squad car

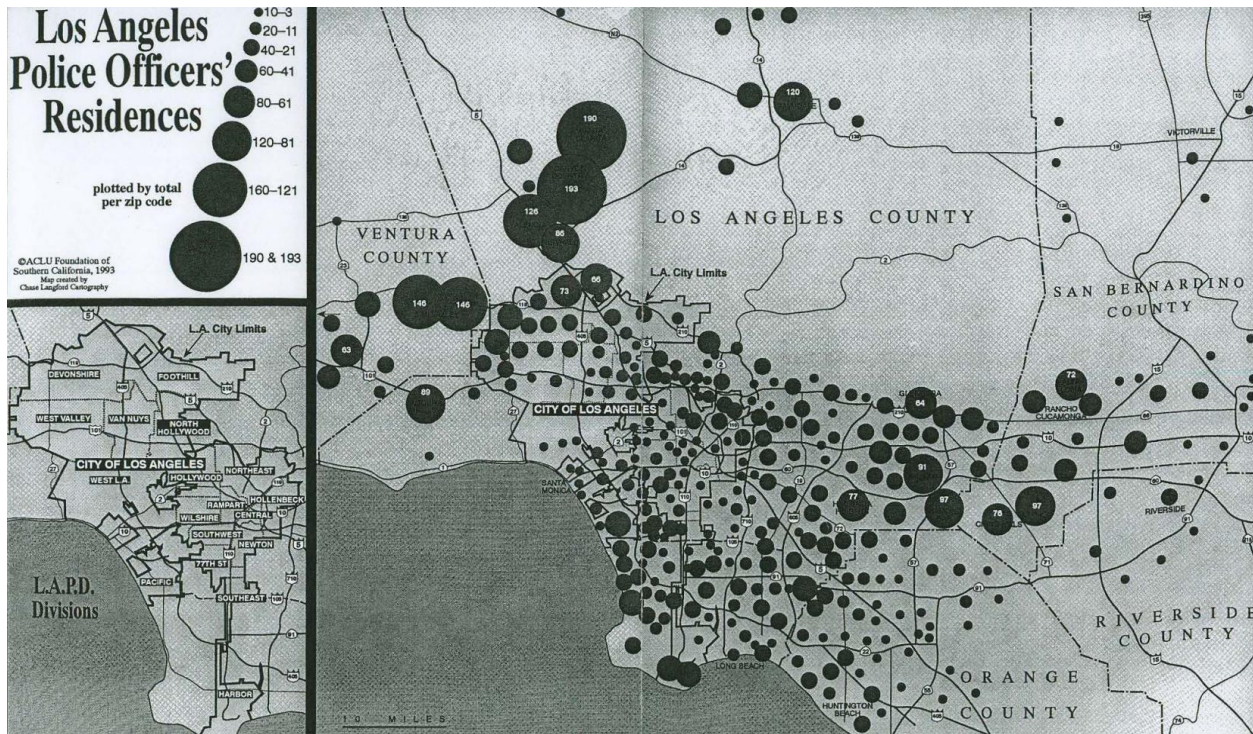
⁵⁹⁵ Marc Cooper, “The Roots of the Conflict in L.A.: The Real Story,” in *Inside the L.A. Riots: What really happened - and why it will happen again*, (Institute for Alternative Journalism, 1992), 16-17.

⁵⁹⁶ George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson, “Broken Windows Policing: The Police and Neighborhood Safety,” *Atlantic Monthly* (1982) in James Q. Wilson, *Thinking About Crime*, revised edition (Basic Books, 2013), 70-71.

through a day of patrolling. From 1973 to 1988, cop-turned-novelist-turned-producer Joseph Wambaugh's *Police Story* franchise showcased the promise of upward mobility on the force. A 47-year-old deputy chief drove a Cadillac DeVille in autumn maple firemist, equipped with a car phone, and lived in Palos Verdes.⁵⁹⁷ In fact, LAPD officers did settle far afield, according to a study of police residency patterns by the ACLU after the Rising of 1992. Exurban cops clustered across the Los Angeles city and county limits in Antelope Valley, Simi Valley, and Chino, which were White enclaves accessible via SR 14, SR 118, and SR 60. With a job that involved so much time on patrol in a squad car or on a motorcycle, cops were habituated to super commuting and had the privilege of driving one of the department's 2573 sedans, which included 1648 unmarked cars, home at night. The ACLU declared LAPD an informal "operato[r] of a large long-distance commute fleet." An effect of subsidizing remoteness was to give the police traits of "an army of occupation organized along paramilitary lines," according to a 1967 study by Wilson.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁷ Mark Rodgers, "Police Story II" script, page 1, UCLA Special Collections, #74, Box T-82, "Television Scripts" - "Movies Made for TV and Mini-series." *The Freeway Killings* (1987), *YouTube*, 20 March 2017, accessed 2 July 2021.

⁵⁹⁸ *From the Outside In: Residency Patterns Within the Los Angeles Police Department* (American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, 1994), iii, 1, and inside back cover. Historian Max Felker-Kantor was incredibly generous to share a PDF of this source with me.



The outcomes of Los Angeles’s lack of community policing were narrativized in the TV movie, *Police Story II* (1987). The showing bored critics at the *Times* and *Variety* but ranked tenth for U.S. viewership during that week, according to a Nielsen estimate. That Sunday from 8 to 11 P.M., an adult-oriented time slot, 15 million viewers across the USA saw a reinterpretation of the lurid Hillside Strangler case.⁵⁹⁹ Set in a city’s “lower-middle-class blue-collar” foothills, the screenplay had two White men take a Ford Crown Victoria, paint it black, and outfit it with a special antenna for a police scanner. Impersonating vice officers, they arrested, raped, murdered, and dumped sex workers on the sides of the freeways. To the rescue came the police, who never discounted the possibility that fellow officers were the perpetrators. One subplot involved a red herring: two cops who were actually planning a killing.⁶⁰⁰ By the film’s end, justice prevailed,

⁵⁹⁹ Bill Steigerwald, “Three New Shows: 2 Up and 1 Down,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 May 1987; *Variety* 327, is. 3, 13 May 1987; *Los Angeles Times*, 6 May 1987, page 7.

⁶⁰⁰ Rodgers, *Police Story*, 17. *The Freeway Killings* (1987), YouTube, 20 March 2017, accessed 2 July 2021. The film switching from a screenplay with all Fords to a movie with all vehicles from General Motors is a perfect illustration of critic Roger Ebert’s “Law of Movie Brand Loyalty,” which cites “product placement” as the reason why “all characters in a movie, no matter how heterogenous or geographically dispersed, drink one brand of beer,

but the story left a bitter aftertaste. From Bianchi and Buono to *Police Story II*, storytelling made it clear cops had an enormous power to abuse vulnerable populations anonymously in a sprawling city with a massive force of over 7000 officers, 83% of whom resided outside the city limits.⁶⁰¹ With the moral authority of police in question, especially given histories of police brutality, more drivers in Los Angeles took on personal defense and brought guns into their cars.

Weeks after *Police Story II: The Freeway Killings* aired on 3 May, a “freeway shootings” wave dominated headlines in Los Angeles. At 9:45 P.M. on a Saturday, Rick Lane Bynum, 24, was in the front seat, his son in the back, while his 18-year-old girlfriend drove south on I-5. A speeding “tailgater” in a Toyota Corolla “flashed his lights at her” to make way, but this was not possible. The impatient driver proceeded to pull up, to point a gun out his window, and to kill Bynum with a .38-caliber handgun.⁶⁰² “We are beginning to sense the sound of gunfire rising above the roar of the freeways,” opened columnist Van Gordon Sauter, who advised readers to practice “*defensive driving*.”⁶⁰³ In two more months, three more had been killed and 12 injured in this manner in Los Angeles County. California Highway Patrol thrived on the panic, for the governor, George Deukmejian, got the legislature to pass a bill funding 150 patrol officers.⁶⁰⁴ Of course, that law meant 150 more guns were also on the State’s highways. Also capitalizing on the cause célèbre were Venice Beach sidewalk vendors who sold “bullet-riddled T-shirts,” as charity, they claimed for the victims’ families.⁶⁰⁵ A year later, CHP announced 2,218 “instances

use one brand of sporting equipment, drive cars produced by one company, etc.” *TVTropes.org*, accessed 2 July 2021.

⁶⁰¹ “From The Outside In,” 2.

⁶⁰² Steve Emmons and Jill Stewart, “Freeway Tailgater Shoots and Kills Man in Slow Car,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 June 1987.

⁶⁰³ Van Gordon Sauter, “No Shelter From Freeway Violence,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 June 1987.

⁶⁰⁴ Jerry Gillam, “Bill to Hire 150 CHP Officers Zips Through Assembly,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 September 1987.

⁶⁰⁵ Alan Citron, “Merchants of Venice Win Right to Hawk Wares,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 September 1987.


of freeway violence” in the past 12 months, and District Attorney Ira Reiner opined, “This sort of cowboy mentality doesn’t belong anywhere. God knows, it doesn’t belong on the freeway.”⁶⁰⁶

A “cowboy mentality” in freeway gun violence harkened back to the frontier, a process by which White settlers took control of the West by massacring American Indians, dispossessing landed Californios, and lynching Chinese traders. The Nineteenth-Century city’s history as a murder capital echoed in the car cultures of the present day. To medical experts, history was incidental, for they blamed freeway shootings on the minds and manners of drivers. UC-Irvine, UCLA, and Syracuse’s Center for Research on Aggression psychology professors proposed a diagnosis for drivers who gave other drivers the “one-finger salute” - or shot them. To Dr. Raymond W. Novaco, personal time lost to traffic congestion “brings out Mr. Hyde,” so the public needed to build more freeways. Dr. Albert Mehrabian explained, “a car is incredibly important territory. You’re the master; you’re on your turf.” Dr. Arnold Goldstein saw parallels between “displayed violence” and rising tension on the road.⁶⁰⁷ Another expert who spoke on driving and cars with a sense of the conflict for finite space was the Automobile Club engineer David Grayson. “We clearly have an influx of people who didn’t grow up here...but whether from Italy or France or Korea...they have one thing in common: They don’t have the depth of experience of growing up with freeways.” A White Nationalist, Grayson did not deny the racism of drivers who felt entitled to exclude immigrants from driving space. The *Times* editorialized that new immigrants seemed to have learned in the “screech-and-batter schools of driving.”⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁶ Terry Pristin, “Postscript,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 July 1988.

⁶⁰⁷ Lonn Johnston, “Stress on Freeways Sparks ‘War Out There,’” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 July 1987.

⁶⁰⁸ Paul Dean, “The End of Civility,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 August 1988. Search terms that helped bring this source to my attention were found in Stephanie Buck, “Road rage was invented 30 years ago this summer in LA, when gunplay came to the freeways,” *Timeline*, 6 July 2017, accessed 2 July 2021.

While psychology excused White road rage as a curable vice,⁶⁰⁹ pathology predominated in discourse about gangs and drive-by shootings.⁶¹⁰ A July 1977 article entitled “Gang Cancer Spreads Out From Inner City: Police Estimate 5,000 to 7,000 Youths Infected in Bay Area,” contained the first reference to a drive-by shooting in the *Times*. Interviewee Doug Lynn was a county sheriff based in Lennox who explained, “We get our share, but don’t have nearly as many ‘drive-bys’ and random shootings as they do in East Los Angeles.”⁶¹¹ The only possible place where people capable of introducing these gang war tactics was Mexican American East Los Angeles. The anti-crime bias of the *Times*’s Centinela-South Bay edition came as no surprise in a publication pitched at another one of those LAPD clusters on the residency map above. Sheriffs probably also cycled between assignments in unincorporated Lennox and East Los Angeles. A familiarity on the part of these readers thus aided the flow of police slang to broader publics. This article additionally explained how to read graffiti, like the placard . The 13th letter is “M,” which the journalist and his editors reduced to standing for “Marijuana.” In fact “Trece” was a sign of affinity with the prison-based Mexican Mafia, also known as the Sureños. An elaborate front-page picture collage also included a lowrider and a caption pandering to the cops by making a call for racial profiling: “Burglaries dropped in one area when such cars were regularly stopped and searched.”⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁹ For a cringeworthy spiritual-racial cure to traffic-induced stress, see Kevin Berger and Todd Berger, *Zen Driving: Be a Buddha Behind the Wheel of Your Automobile* (Ballantine, 1988).

⁶¹⁰ LAPD and LASD shared data on gang killings and drive-by shootings with researchers who published in a top flight U.S. medical journal. They used the term “epidemic” to describe homicide rates in Los Angeles County. During the 15 years following 1979, the statistics indicate 7288 people died in gang killings and just over a quarter of them died in drive-by shootings. This tactic extinguished 1408 lives. H.R. Hutson et al, “The epidemic of gang-related homicides in Los Angeles County from 1979 through 1994,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 274, no. 13 (4 October 1995): 1031-1036.

⁶¹¹ For a brilliant account of police and the history of ideas, see Christopher P. Wilson, *Cop Knowledge: Police Power and Cultural Narrative in Twentieth-Century America* (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁶¹² Jerry Ruhlow, “Gang Cancer Spreads Out From Inner City: Police Estimate 5,000 to 7,000 Youths Infected in Bay Area,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 July 1977. Deputy Lynn is quoted, without acknowledgment of his profession, as the earliest of three sample phrases under the online *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition of “drive-by.” For a

Though the police-press complex coined the term, a reading of California newspapers indicates the drive-by shooting had no essential relationship with a place or with a people. Days apart, the term appeared in a *Times* article about “Watts, 15 years later,” and a *San Bernardino Sun* piece on the gangs of the Inland Empire. To journalist Mike Terry, gang violence was an enigma. He repeatedly put it in the context of Anglo American history: Hatfields vs. McCoys, and White ethnic organized crime, the Cosa Nostra. Thus the roadside wounding of a Black teen was “a mafia-style drive-by shooting.”⁶¹³ Over in Colton and Redlands, teens spoke to the *Sun*, and one explained that a drive-by shooting was “real easy...All you do is cruise by and shoot and then get rid of the gun.” They did not have to worry about witnesses seeing the license plate or cops finding the gun, for both were typically stolen.⁶¹⁴ A year later, a drive-by shooting first appeared in the Black-oriented *Los Angeles Sentinel*, where it was framed in interracial terms. From a sedan with “several male Latinos,” a shotgun blast killed a 13-year-old Black boy and wounded three of his friends.⁶¹⁵ On the other hand, Latinx-oriented *La Opinión* reported such killings awkwardly, for “drive-by” was untranslatable into Spanish. “Balazos lanzados desde un auto en movimiento produjeron la muerte de un hombre,” began an article as late as 1989.⁶¹⁶

Regardless of whether drive-by shootings harkened back to Italian America during prohibition times, the coinage of this term and popularization of this practice became ideological grounds for “building a martial state.” From 1984 to 1990, the size of LAPD grew from 6900 to

glossary of graffiti-writer terms and symbols, see Stefano Bloch, *Going All City: Struggle and Survival in LA's Graffiti Subculture* (University of Chicago Press, 2019), 187-191.

⁶¹³ Mike Terry, “Watts Gangs: Urban Versions of Hatfields, McCoys,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 August 1980.

⁶¹⁴ Rosemary McClure, *San Bernardino Sun*, 7 September 1980. Ethnographer James Diego Vigil interviewed members of Mexican American gangs along a corridor stretching from Boyle Heights to Ontario, and most of the stories he retold about drive-by shootings happened in the Inland Empire. Vigil, *Barrio Gangs*, 132-135.

⁶¹⁵ “Police Blotter,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 17 December 1981.

⁶¹⁶ “Pandilleros asesinan a dos personas en barrios de LA,” *La Opinión*, 8 January 1989. The Spanish language *Wikipedia* entry for “drive-by shooting” begins, “El *drive-by* es una forma corta de referirse al término inglés *drive-by shooting*...,” accessed 3 July 2021.

8414, over 20%, and according to historian Max Felker-Kantor, policing the city intensified in a “spatially selective manner.” Again and again, officers targeted urban warfare at racialized parts of the city by designing “operations” with ominous names like “Hammer,” “Knockdown,” and “Cul-de-Sac.” These evoked the secretive codes military forces used while planning D-day (Operation Overlord), a coup d’état in Iran (Operation Ajax), a roundup of Mexican migrant workers in the Southwest (Operation Wetback), and the aerial annihilation of 20,000 Vietnamese (Operation Rolling Thunder). The significant numbers of U.S. veterans, including Chief Daryl Gates himself, infused LAPD with a warrior’s mentality. With drive-by shootings, police forces in the Los Angeles area made their case for buying military hardware, like helicopters used in Operation Hammer’s sweeps for gangsters and the networked, in-car computers officers used to plug arrestee’s addresses into a centralized database.⁶¹⁷ These efforts were preventative. Having searched vehicles, impounded cars for unpaid tickets, and even erected barriers to disrupt free-flowing traffic through neighborhoods with a history of automobilized gun violence, Sgt. Rey Avalos rapped at the *Times*, “We’re taking their wheels and putting them on their heels.”⁶¹⁸

The culture industry, prioritizing the box office, shot socially realistic scenes drive-by shootings like the one at the opening of *Colors* (1988). The shooter’s role went to the actor Don Cheadle who has gone on and repeatedly played cops and soldiers.⁶¹⁹ He was not the only Black collaborator on this piece of pro-LAPD propaganda, complete with the two protagonists as officers in the anti-gang specialist unit called C.R.A.S.H. (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums). The titular song was the work of Ice-T, a hip hop star and graduate of Crenshaw High School in middle-class West Los Angeles. The quintessential “studio gangsta,” his titular

⁶¹⁷ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*. For the irony of LAPD erecting in-city barricades, like LASD along Whittier Boulevard back in 1979, weeks away from the fall of the Berlin Wall, see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, 277.

⁶¹⁸ John Johnson, “Night of the Hammer,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 July 1989.

⁶¹⁹ *Colors*, directed by Dennis Hopper (Orion Pictures, 1988).

“Colors” featured two narratives layered into one song. Like a split personality, Ice-T rapped praise at gangstas but subvocalized advice not to join a gang in silences between the stanzas.⁶²⁰ *Colors*, “Colors,” and so much more of the hip hop subculture urged fans to think of the gangsta not as a literal gangster but rather as a consumer in a gangsta fandom grounded in the purchase of music, high-end listening devices, streetwear, haircuts, and luxury vehicles. One unintended consequence of all this product placement was all the publicity specific gun manufacturers like Israel Military Industries got for the Uzi, the signature weapon of Zionist aggression against the stateless Palestinian territories and refugees executed “gangland style” in Sabra and Shatila.⁶²¹

When policing and advertising helped invent the specter of drive-by shootings in Los Angeles, the conditions arose where urban people of color had skilled and accumulated the weaponry needed for genuine community defense. This outcome was apparent in images by the photographer Robert Morrow, who did a ridealong with Marxist tour guide Mike Davis. He wrote *City of Quartz* and showcased Morrow’s shot of a literal note from the underground. Found in Downtown’s abandoned Belmont Tunnel, a former rail line for streetcars, the mural’s message was frightening to the city’s political establishment. Out of a white van reached the arm of an anonymous Black man holding a blazing handgun. Drive-by shootings, formerly isolated and occasional incidents, had become international news.⁶²² Now a generation of gangsters were collecting high-capacity machine guns, and some were starting to fire them from moving cars and vans. Locals came to resent the mixing of car cultures and gun cultures that had transformed their space into a firing range and themselves into target practice. Black civil rights veterans laid blame on youth, drug profiteers, entertainment industry executives, and unresponsive policing

⁶²⁰ “Ice T - Colors,” *YouTube*, uploaded 15 April 2010, accessed 2 September 2021.

⁶²¹ “Uzi Lore,” *Vector Arms*, uploaded 18 July 2003, accessed via The Wayback Machine 2 September 2021. Robert Fisk, “The Forgotten Massacre,” *The Independent*, 15 September 2012.

⁶²² Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, 268 and 273.

and lobbied cops to get tougher. Even the city's first Black mayor, Tom Bradley, had "embraced the war on crime" for the sake of "peaceful pluralism" since winning election in 1973.⁶²³

Artists' claims that they were "street reporters" documenting "reality" did not convince, but hip hop did realistically forecast a range of possibilities. The spaces where gangs fought for monopoly control over the crack trade were not yet war zones, and neither was it an invasion when the cops hammered Black youth. But hip hop's hyperbolic descriptions of the present were nevertheless reasonable prognoses for the city's collective future. If the federal government did not deescalate its war on drugs, South L.A. and California's prison system were full of expert insurgents in the making who had mastered the drive-by shooting. If police did not let up their blows against communities of color, the gangs were going to quit their disputes with each other and channel that energy into rebellion. Besides revenge fantasies, these songs mapped out an urban guide for how to survive and how to succeed in the Age of Reagan.⁶²⁴ Contradiction found a voice in Boo-Yaa T.R.I.B.E., six Samoan American brothers straight out of Carson. Their music captured a "slow-groove slice of life and death in Los Angeles." To live, the crew not only performed but also diversified its offerings by incorporating another business called Godfather & Sons. The armed security guards and limousine drivers firm dispatched huge men from the martial-arts-enthusiastic Samoan American enclave in the South Bay. The hip hop scene, oftentimes feuding and flush with cash, fostered a demand for driver-bodyguards, and the *Times*, forever a friend to free enterprise, appreciatively called this "rap capitalism."⁶²⁵

Drive-by shootings had had uses for pro-police and pro-gangsta propagandists, but a counter-narrative formed proposing a third way forward without so many cars or so many guns.

⁶²³ Felker-Kantor, *Policing Los Angeles*, 86.

⁶²⁴ For a model analysis of the contributions of bottom-up enterprise and urban informality to the rise of gangsta rap in 1980s Los Angeles, see Felicia Viator, *To Live and Defy in L.A.*, 118-120.

⁶²⁵ Patrick Goldstein, "Need a Limo? Need a Lug? Call the Boo-Yaa Brothers," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 April 1990.

For *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, playwright Anna Deavere Smith interviewed Michael Zinzun of the Coalition Against Police Abuse, he spoke of going into the night in 1986 in his pajamas to disrupt a police beating of a Black man at the Community Arms on Orange Grove Boulevard. An officer hit Zinzun in the eye with a flashlight. Half blinded, Zinzun sued the Pasadena PD and won a million dollars. He told Smith, “that’s why / I am able to be here every day, / because that money’s bein’ used to further the struggle. / I ain’t got no big Cadillac, / I ain’t got no gold...”⁶²⁶ Meanwhile, Ice-T the “King of the Killing Fields” had grown his fortune. *Colors*’ collaborator took *Vox* on a tour through his Hollywood Hills mansion. In the driveway, three Porsches were parked. Ice-T announced his role in another police film, *New Jack City*, this time playing a cop. He also bragged about the time he took a bullet in a drive-by shooting. The rapper had never told this story before and never retold it. If a lie, it was a lie that represented drive-by shootings as the authenticity Ice Cube lacked.⁶²⁷ The significance of drive-by shootings on hip hop’s landscape continued to rise, and in 1996 and 1997, two artists with a political following, Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls, died in such shootings on the streets of Las Vegas and Los Angeles. This was the legacy of relentless pitches for status symbols like expensive, powerful guns to store in cars.

⁶²⁶ Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (Anchor Books, 1994), 20. Danny Pollock, *Pasadena Star-News*, 21 March 1991.

⁶²⁷ “King of the Killing Fields,” *Vox*, 1 August 1991.



This image dotted the freeways of Southern California near the U.S.-Mexico border. The designer John Hood drew it in 1990 as part of a push to save the lives of migrants walking north from Mexico into the country. Regarding the silhouette, the CALTRANS artist stated, “When you are looking through headlights, that is what you see.” In years since, this imagery became fodder for the culture wars over immigration. Since Hood had participated as a soldier in the war in Vietnam, he drew upon his memories of watching families away from the villages his unit had attacked. He also remembered stories from his Navajo or Diné parents, for they kept alive the memory of the U.S. soldiers who drove them onto the reservation.⁶²⁸ Hood had drawn attention to the deadly infrastructure of nationalist containment. Fencing and patrols pushed migrants to

⁶²⁸ Roy Cook, “John Hood,” *American Indian Source*, n.d., accessed 2 September 2021.

try their luck in freeway crossings. Meanwhile, xenophobes from throughout California had recently anointed themselves vigilante participants in the border patrol and started caravanning in cars to the border. They called their movement “Light Up the Border” because they faced their cars south and turned on their headlights. At night, the brightness supposedly disrupted migrants making attempts across the border. Former San Diego Mayor Roger Hedgecock, who hosted a long-form talk radio show, endorsed this radical nativist movement and gave it free publicity.⁶²⁹ Car headlights gave drivers both the power to protect and the power to destroy migrant lives.

Attention to sensory experiences in 1980s Southern California illustrates the significant limits to the power of local authorities. Without denying the fact of extreme police violence, this last chapter asserts the growing potential for pushback against policing on the part of activists, musicians, music lovers, and gang members, especially ones with cars. Without denying the massive expansion of wealth for less-regulated corporate interests, this chapter finds the informal entrepreneurial environment to have been tremendously liberating for entrepreneurs of color and for their customers. Without denying some failures of mapping to represent Los Angeles in its multicultural complexity, this chapter represents driving as foundational for radical thinking and creatively resistant politics. Cars were central to the invention of new modes of contesting the state, the rich, and the cultural elites. Though many poor people endured marginalization due to their lack of access to wheels, others got a whip that they got to use to know the city, to become self-employed in informal economies, and to cruise the streets looking for a fight. In the 1980s, car cultures helped set the stage for a massive anti-police uprising in 1992, an assertive labor movement, and a school of critical urban theorists that has never ceased to contest inequality and social injustice. Like Zinzun, we won’t stop because we can’t be bought...with a Cadillac.

⁶²⁹ Kevan Malone, “Trump’s border wall belongs to Biden now,” *Washington Post*, 11 April 2021.

[beginning of the conclusion]

Drive Time

The Ecstasy of the Machine



Wasted the evening with Nat.
He gave me a driving lesson
and then I accompanied him
and pretended to enjoy a Technicolor blood-and-thunder movie.
Susan Sontag, letter, 1948⁶³⁰

Even Susan Sontag, the great gifted genius, once learned to drive. Her stepfather Nat was her teacher, and the 15-year-old diared that she had “wasted” the evening on driving and movie viewing. Having come to Southern California in 1946 and left in 1949 to become an influential East Coast critic, Sontag never acclimated to the synesthetic city. Two of the central pleasures of

⁶³⁰ *Dear Los Angeles: The City in Diaries and Letters, 1542 to 2018*, David Kipen, ed. (Modern Library, 2018), 311.

Los Angeles were its cultures of cinema and the car. These experiences gave fans the sensations of movement, one in fantasy and the other in fact. On the screen, the rich red color of blood and those frightful cracks of thunder, a byproduct of pain and a harbinger of danger, engendered the viewer's pleasure. In the streets, the ability to drive entailed another inversion. Drivers had to put a huge amount of energy into learning to operate these machines and then into focusing on this activity for a couple hours a day for the rest of their lives. But the same drivers, once habituated to driving, swore they loved their confinement inside these automobiles. In car cultures, pleasure was the order of the day for the many who won time away from work and home obligations, even though this pleasure always threatened to turn suddenly into pain, with the crunching of bone during a crash or the flutter of nerves at the sound of sirens. Those risks were not enough to diminish the joy of driving for almost all Southern Californians after the Second World War.

“Drive Time” has urged readers to assume the sensibility of the drivers who participated in the love affair with cars. Such an attachment to these vehicles should not sound like the denial of structural forces that determined mass adoption of driving. City, state, and federal government officials planned Los Angeles to serve the free, fast circulation of automobile traffic. Companies designed, manufactured, and sold an excess of automobiles that consumers bought because they enabled a convenient life in the city, the suburbs, and the hinterlands. Neither of these readings of structure and agency negates the significance of pleasure. Critic Fredric Jameson has called this feeling “the consent of life in the body.” I extrapolate from Jameson that car cultures were the consent of people inside automobiles. Planning and the profit incentive had forced so many to drive, so why wouldn't they demand in return “the right to a specific pleasure” or an “ecstasy of the machine”? Superficial, apolitical, and complacent, car cultures were also at times “able to

stand as a figure for the transformation of social relations as a whole.”⁶³¹ The chapters above show car cultures established a platform for freer sexual expression, for subaltern empowerment, for a less moralistic society, and for strongly intertwined networks in the metropolitan region.

I cannot agree with Sontag that “Drive Time” has been time wasted. Learning how to use the car ranks as one of the most significant and vividly memorable moments of my adolescence. The first car I drove was my great-grandmother’s ‘55 Chevy pickup, almost a half-century old, which she had used to haul her trailer to Owens Valley. That old two-door truck had lost its last flecks of paint, but the engine still worked well enough to get it over the speed limit on old 395 outside Aberdeen. Looking back, I’m not surprised that Cecilia had maintained that vehicle so well. Her husband, a stepfather to her son, had worked as a full service attendant at a Richfield Oil station in Glendale. In that location, their son met my grandmother when he serviced her father’s car. Bob relied on such ritualized settings to live a productive life in community with others, for he was a person with nearly total deafness in a hearing culture. Cecilia gave birth to him, a hearing baby, when she was 14. This was before car seats and seat belts, and this teen mom was holding her baby when she dropped him from a moving vehicle. The collision with the pavement damaged his hearing, totally on the left side, and he never got used to hearing aids nor did he learn sign language. In that smart uniform, he impressed my grandmother.

They raised my dad to become a college-educated professional, but my grandfather never taught him or me his engineering skills because of the communications gap. My dad and I only learned to use cars and left fixing them to hired auto mechanics. Driving was no less meaningful a form of engagement with automobiles than working on them, I must stress. The first time I drove in Southern California, my dad brought me to the empty parking lot at the Rose Bowl, and

⁶³¹ Fredric Jameson, “Pleasure: A Political Issue,” in *Formations of Pleasure* (Routledge, 1983), 1-14.

we kept practicing parking his car between the white stripes until I knew the dimensions of the vehicle's body about as well as I knew my own body. In driving school, I told my instructor I had already learned to drive, so he tested my assertion by having me drive a windy mountain road called Chevy Chase. The result was failure. The confidence I had in my driving ability did not match the challenge of this setting, and the instructor set me straight. Soon enough, I had improved, but I wish the lesson in humility had stuck. Pride has repeatedly come before the fall throughout my relationship with the car, which has been a cycle of danger to myself and others. In this, I am emblematic of my identity group: White sons of the middle-class suburbs in Los Angeles have treated the area's streets not all that differently from how young nobles on their steeds treated the fields of farmers when they used to tear through them during a fox hunt.

My first car was a Volvo, a hand-me-down from my dad's business mentor to him then to me. The brand billed itself as one of the safest available, and that message translated to me as a sign I could get away with driving dangerously. A traffic cop gave me a ticket on Interstate-210. He clocked me at 90 miles an hour. Still under 18, I had a provisional license, so I had to appear before a Pasadena juvenile court. My dad and I went together, and we waited and watched in the back while the judge spoke to another father-son duo. The son, a little younger than me, had been shooting a basketball at an empty private elementary school's hoop, on the weekend, and police had cited him for trespassing. The judge scolded the kid about the sanctity of private property and fined him \$400. His father stood and said he took time off work, a \$200 loss, to be there with his boy, and asked the judge to reduce the fine by that amount. The judge refused, and the man teared up. I was nervous, for this judge seemed like a hardass. When my turn came, he yelled at me for endangering my life, suspended my license for a month, and fined me a dollar for every mile per hour I was driving. My dad and I were stunned. In the car on the way home, he told me

to think about what just happened. Only then did I realize how absurd it was that we were paying less than a quarter, for far more dangerous behavior, what the other family had to pay. They were Black. The judge was a racist. The law he swore to uphold was designed to preserve bodies like mine, to protect property like the school's, and to extract value from Black working families.

A half-decade later, I was back after four car-free years at college in New York. While there, I purchased a used racing bike, got way into zipping around campus, and brought it home. That summer, I worked as a door-to-door canvasser for the Democratic Party, and it was 2008. Excitement about Barack Obama had our office buzzing. We worked hard and played hard. One night, my coworkers invited me to the bars to celebrate a big day of fundraising. The few blocks between me and my apartment seemed a safe enough ride, but the others decided to drive alongside me. I can remember one of them laughingly shouting through the open window when I hit a trash can and flipped over the handlebars. After the crash, they scraped me off the road and drove me the next few blocks home. The next morning, I woke up in my apartment alone and unable to hear well, to see clearly, or to get up. The doctors later found I had broken my skull, shattered my left cochlea, and suffered a concussion. Transportation planning and commercial nightlife have never been rationalized into coherence in the Los Angeles area, so I did not blame either friend. Within a few weeks, I managed to get started teaching middle- and high-school history as the academic year began. It took me years to make sense of the severity of my crash.

That said, I did find myself back in a car and in the bar scene with one of those friends a few months later. That night, he promised to be the designated driver. On the road after the show, he confessed he had been taking shots and told me he was going to teach me a lesson in how to drive drunk. Minutes later, we were topping 100 miles an hour on the Pasadena Freeway. He took a pit stop past the end of the freeway, and a housing insecure Black woman was sleeping

in the corner he had picked. She screamed. When we got back in the car, he rolled the window down, laughed, and yelled that he'd pissed in her face. White elitism was articulated through its car culture that night. That friendship ended, but I can't claim I was any holier. More months passed, and I found myself driving the same freeway in the opposite direction. A friend's rock 'n' roll band was playing the Sunset Strip, and I was rushing off to see it and to drink. Though the night was rainy, I had no plan for getting home other than to drive drunk. On the way, I hit a tight curve and lost control of my car. It spun around, slammed into another car at the on-ramp, and spun again. I was uninjured, but I rushed to the other car and found a smoking ruin. The driver crawled out. We hugged, but then he collapsed. A week later, he called to inform me he was still in the hospital and had lost his spleen. After this pain I caused, my insurance company paid the other guy off and also sent me a check. Such suffering is designed into capitalism.

Another half-decade passed before I broke free from this paradigm. My workplace was an independent commuter school in the White Flight suburb of La Canada Flintridge, so I needed a different job if I wanted to get free of automobile dependency. Ph.D. work at the UCLA history department made this transformation possible. After I was admitted, I remained in Northeast Los Angeles. I daily took the Gold Line to Union Station, transferred twice before exiting the train at Culver City, and then rode up the hill to campus on my bike. Taking showers into account, my roundtrip commute took over three hours a day. Fatigue, ache, hunger, and so many lost hours nearly prevented me from being able to stay in the program. For me, especially as an admit who had never gotten his master's beforehand, the workload was demanding and my days were shorter. Plus I was half deaf. I accepted these disadvantages in order to avoid freeways and driving. I opted to study with Dr. Eric Avila, the preeminent U.S. scholarly critic of freeways and racism. Unless folks like us figured out a way to live in this sprawling city without a car, no one

was going to repurpose all that lost urban space to better uses like housing and manufacturing. I wanted to prove it was possible to succeed as a scholar while biking L.A. and riding Metro.

On the bike, on the train, on the bus, and on the streets, my consciousness changed. The city that I thought I knew by sight proved much more complex when I heard music emanating from busker's speaker systems instead of my car audio, when I smelled the bus fumes instead of my air conditioning, when I tasted tortas from a truck instead of my lunch I bought from a supermarket, and when I touched public surfaces all along the way instead of just at the end points of my journey. No longer fighting traffic or seeking quick shortcuts, I found a reserve of quality time for thinking. Such seemingly loud and distracting settings were where I did much of my coursework. Turning a deaf ear, I often stood with a book-length history in one hand and a pen in the other. You can find crooked underlining in some of my favorite texts. Then when I looked up from reading, I rarely felt alone, for these vehicles and transit stops typically had more people, also reading their tablets and smartphones, than I saw in UCLA libraries (outside finals week). For all the time I put into learning the cultural history of transportation from archives, on VPN-accessible campus databases, and with university professors, biking and transit ridership did more to transform my thinking about city life during my graduate education.

My dissertation might have been about the cultures of biking, busing, and other networks beyond automobility if those had been my stories to tell. But anti-gentrification sentiment made such projects seem like the work of a latter-day Columbus. Who is as tedious as White scholars thinking they have discovered a way of life known to countless other people? Among those who have already made art from bus riding, consider Marisela Norte. Oftentimes I found something new to say about riding the Metro only to realize Norte, decades ago, had already managed to fit that insight into a few paragraphs or a lyrical phrase. As an outsider to car cultures, the dominant,

normative experience of mobility in Los Angeles, she helped me retain my bus rider sensibility as I turned my attention back to where I was from. How was I supposed to know McDonald's was worth studying until I read Norte's joking prophecy about Carnitas Michoacan in East Los Angeles and its towering sign reading "Over 5 Zillion Sold"? The street atlas never seemed so central to my version of the city until Norte equated her "No. 18 bus" with my "Thomas Brothers Guide (Orange County pages included) tucked underneath the seat of your car."⁶³² The bus poet laureate had identified the props I needed for staging an intervention in the study of car cultures.

My dissertation posits polysensorial pleasure formations as a fuel that kept powering the ubiquity of driving and its splintering into diverse car cultures during the decades after the Second World War. If being there, in a car, plus being places accessible via car, had not felt so good, the motorist monoculture might have waned earlier. Such pleasures were persuasive for drivers and passengers, rich and poor, cis-male and cis-female, Whites and persons of color, the ethical and the evil, locals and visitors, and the young and the old. Pain had no such impact. Even after rubbernecking to see the aftermath of a crash or hearing tell of police brutality after a traffic stop, the overwhelming majority of car owners kept driving unless they had lost their vehicle to the impound, their license to a judge's discretion, or their bodily capacity to drive. This category of non-driver is a key figure in sensory history. From Aldous Huxley to Michael Zinzun, people with blindness were common among those relatively armored against the seductions of car cultures. While some who were unable to see found other sensory joys in the car, sensory history forces scholars to stop assuming mass pleasure had nothing to do with topics like automobility in cities.⁶³³ Huxley had long ridden through Los Angeles by car, but he fell in transcendent love

⁶³² Marisela Norte, "Best MTA Bus Line: The Number 18, yes, let's take a trip down Whittier Boulevard," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (September 2004), 509 and 507.

⁶³³ The most committed denialist of the so-called "love affair thesis" is Christopher Wells. His environmental history was magnificent, but it bordered on determinism and pure rational choice theory. In this conclusion, I

with driving when doing it while hallucinating. Sensuousness alone was enough to hook drivers with a normative range of unimpaired sensory capacities into a lifetime of drive time.

composed an autoethnography akin to Wells' account of driving when and where it was convenient and then not driving when and where it was inconvenient. In my life, car cultures have been costly and harmful for me and for others near to me. In sum, "Drive Time" is about the love/hate relationship between drivers and the cars, which bring them such pleasure. Wells, *Car Country*, xix-xxvi.

APPENDIX A

Article to be published with *Critical Planning*, 2021

The Return of the Jitneys: Transportation Neoliberals Never Waste A Good Crisis

Abstract: This is a history of jitneys from the Gilded Age streets until their return to discourse among post-1970s transportation neoliberals. Transportation neoliberals were an intellectual set including professors, policymakers, consultants, and con men. They discovered the history of jitneys, which Southern Californians invented during a wartime slump in global commerce in the year 1914. Abolished in the U.S., jitneys remained in operation in crisis-prone world cities like Manila and Harare. Selective memories of jitneys in an age of austere state budgets contributed to the trade's return as a cheap, unregulated alternative to public transit. History was the tool that led jitneys, in the guise of Lyft and Uber, back into U.S. streets after 2007-2008's financial crisis.



Typical Los Angeles Jitney

“It is doubtful that Uber stems from neo-liberal ideology.”

Michael Storper, “The Neo-liberal City as Idea and Reality” (2016)⁶³⁴

In the 1970s, neoliberal thinkers reported on informal rideshare economies functioning all over the world and also unearthed a history of an informal rideshare economy that briefly existed in Los Angeles during World War I. Economic crises, first in 1914 and then in the postcolonial period of Philippines history, created social conditions where driver-entrepreneurs with access to

⁶³⁴ Michael Storper, “The neo-liberal city as idea and reality,” *Territory, Politics, Governance* 4, no. 2 (2016), 26. Image: W.E. Dunn, “The Application of Established Legal Principles to the Jitney,” *Electric Railway Journal* (Annual Convention Issue 1915), 504.

vehicles but without steady employment converted cars, trucks, and jeeps into so-called “jitneys” or “jeepneys.” These unlicensed buses did not have set schedules or routes but rather plied busy streets, always looking for more riders, and dropped them off at requested destinations. As you can see from the image above, drivers in Los Angeles typically took many fares at once. The passengers even perched on the running boards or hung from the doors of vehicles with seats for only five. Cities like Los Angeles soon banned jitneys, but they survived in informal enclaves. A century later, during the Great Financial Crisis, jitneys returned to California’s city streets.

Michael Storper, a professor in UCLA’s school of urban and regional planning, cited Uber in an influential rebuttal to what he has called “the critical neo-liberalism literature.” Such scholarship ranges from geography by David Harvey to history by Philip Mirowski. To Storper, critics of neoliberalism in post-1960s cities have been “imprecise and over-reaching” in their confusion of liberalism’s confidence in markets with “laissez-faire doctrine or plutocratic authoritarianism.” Thus neoliberalism, as construed by its critics, is unlikely to be the relevant framework for making sense of Uber or Lyft, which neoliberals might “subsequently” justify, but which likely “emerge[d] as a pragmatic response to the possibilities of reducing transaction costs and increasing capital utilization that are offered by new technologies.”⁶³⁵ Though Storper rightly urges caution against totalizing theories of neoliberalism, his rebuttal denies the possibility of a long, local, and documented relationship between neoliberal ideology and informal transit that predates the founding of Uber and Lyft. In fact, neoliberal professors at University of California educated two of rideshare’s founders, Uber’s Travis Kalanick (UCLA engineering) and Lyft’s Logan Green (UCSB business economics). Setting aside Kalanick, an

⁶³⁵ Storper, “The neo-liberal city,” 37-38 and 26-27.

Ayn Rand fan,⁶³⁶ this paper tracks the genealogy from transportation neoliberals explicitly to Green and his Lyft startup.

The thinking leading to Lyft dates to a 1972 article in *Reason*. To prove the link, I hold myself to Storper's standards for a better critical neoliberalism literature. To those opposed to neoliberal ideology, a neoliberal is a member of a policymaking and intellectual set advocating cuts to public services, sales of public assets, transfers of public responsibilities to private entities, and a mentality valuing information processed in markets over disciplinary knowledge, inherited ideas, or even basic ethics.⁶³⁷ Neoliberal transportation policies include the obvious, e.g. governments selling freeways - or some of their lanes - for conversion into toll road facilities, and the less obvious, e.g. urban light rail networks plotted to draw investment and consumers into gentrifying neighborhoods.⁶³⁸ Similar thinking is at work in any enthusiasm for the jitney after years of mounting skepticism about government services like public transportation. Neoliberals call for competition, *to the death*, between public options and for-profit alternatives and thus put transit-dependent people at risk of losing their mobility rights.⁶³⁹ Jitney boosters have stressed how micro-entrepreneurs, in both 1914 Los Angeles and late 1940s Manila, easily got access to the materials and skills needed to become drivers, but transportation neoliberals have rarely differentiated between small owner-operators vs. startups-cum-industrial-titans, which have too easy access to venture capital. Storper has requested evidence of plans

⁶³⁶ Carl Franzen, "Republicans and Democrats are fighting over who loves Uber more," *The Verge*, 25 August 2014. Kalanick dropped out of UCLA in 1998. His memories of the undergraduate experience and advice for students are indicative of a neoliberal approach to education. He has bragged of having worked 40 hours a week while a student and praised the engineering department for letting students "learn without being in class...This allowed great flexibility with my extreme entrepreneurial and academic workload." Phil Hampton, "Q&A with Travis Kalanick," *UCLA Newsroom*, 9 October 2015.

⁶³⁷ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005). See commandment number 12 in Philip Mirowski, "The Thirteen Commandments of Neoliberalism," *The Utopian*, 19 June 2013.

⁶³⁸ Kristian Olesen, "Infrastructure Imaginaries: The Politics of Light Rail Projects in the Age of Neoliberalism," *Urban Studies* 57, no. 9 (2020): 1811-1826.

⁶³⁹ Adrian Moore, "Private Transportation and Competition," *Reason*, 18 May 2004.

leading to transportation deregulation, “i.e. that such policies really are designed and intended to enhance [negative social outcomes] and are not unintended effects of a complex and pragmatic political process.”⁶⁴⁰ By writing a history of jitneys and showing how neoliberal thinkers selectively pulled simplistic lessons from complex historical narratives, I illustrate how Uber and Lyft did - and do - stem from neoliberal ideas, which justify malicious, sometimes criminal, strategies of privatization.

⁶⁴⁰ Storper, “The neo-liberal city,” 18-19.

Jitney and Anarchy:
The Anarchists Who Seized the Means of Transportation in 1910s Los Angeles



“Don’t talk to the driver.
Don’t crowd into a seat beside men.
Don’t sit on the door.
Don’t converse with men passengers.
Don’t sit on anyone’s lap.”

Miss Marvel Spencer, *Los Angeles Herald*, 24 May 1915⁶⁴¹

Miss Marvel Spencer’s etiquette for riding in jitneys appeared in the *Los Angeles Herald*, a local worker-oriented newspaper of the era. These admonitions surely gave female readers second thoughts about the jitneys. Spencer warned women and girls to beware of sexual anarchy in these vehicles with male drivers and male riders. That said, she told female *Herald* readers not to be too proud to get on board jitneys. For that mentality, see the scandalized reporting against the jitney trade in capitalism’s pet paper: the *Los Angeles Times*. It always took the side of the railroads, including during debates about the propriety of jitneys. These streetcar monopolies operated on a for-profit basis with guarantees from the city against competitors. To invest in rail was to count on a regulatory apparatus that marked any transportation alternative as illegal. However, streetcar networks hardly served the city equitably. Motorman jobs were few, and fares for long trips to the suburbs were identical to those for short trips within the city. When

⁶⁴¹ “Girl Draws Code of Jitney Etiquette for Bus Patrons,” *L.A. Herald*, 24 May 1915.

World War I began in 1914, a world trade slump began. The recession threw many Los Angeles men, including new car owners, out of work. Conditions were perfect for them to retool their personal vehicles into jitneys, which offered superior service to streetcars but for the same fare.⁶⁴²

That fare was five cents, an amount which inspired the name “jitney” for these unlicensed cabs and buses. Before signifying a mode of transportation, jitney was a slang term for coins used in Francophile and frontier gambling cultures. Poker players threw (*ont jeté*) small bets of five cents into the pot. Gambling already operated beyond the boundaries of polite or moralistic society, so the jitney entered criminal vernacular as a common word for a coin worth five cents. *A Vocabulary of Criminal Slang* (1914) referenced the term twice. As a noun, it was “General currency...Used variously to signify an extremity in finance. Example: ‘Break away; he hasn’t got a jitney.’” In the definition for an anti-Italian slur, the book added, “You couldn’t find a jitney with a search warrant in this bunch of wops.” Both criminal insiders and police referenced jitneys in description of people too poor to be worth robbing or to be worth investigating.⁶⁴³ The tropological shift in meaning of jitney from a term for a pittance of money to a vehicle charging a pittance of money showed how socially marginalized the earliest drivers and riders of these machines had been.⁶⁴⁴ Relying on informal or gray market activities for survival, they knew their

⁶⁴² This is the standard story of the jitneys from the following histories of the automobile in Los Angeles. Scott L. Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of the Modern City* (University of California Press, 1987), 49-51, Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City* (Columbia University Press, 1994), 194-197, Peter D. Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City* (MIT Press, 2008), 151, and James Nicholas Stroup, “Jitneys, Buses, and Public Transportation in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles,” dissertation completed for the department of history, University of California, Riverside, 2015.

⁶⁴³ Louis E. Jackson and C.R. Hellyer, *A Vocabulary of Criminal Slang: With Some Examples of Common Usages* (Portland City Detective Department, 1914), 50 and 88.

⁶⁴⁴ Hayden White, “The Problem of Style in Realistic Representation: Marx and Flaubert” (1979) in Hayden White, *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957-2007*, Robert Doran, ed. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 173.

position was at the bottom of an urban society on the Pacific Rim and in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands. The trade crisis in this gateway city could thoroughly proletarianize a car owner.

The first jitney operators to receive attention in the *Times* were based in the port city of Long Beach, twenty miles south of Los Angeles. Operations began in September, about a month after the first shots of the Great War reduced the volume of sea commerce. In so little time, a rail line in the area had already closed after passengers abandoned it for the jitneys.⁶⁴⁵ Jitney literature has predominantly assumed the perspectives of capital, consumers, or city planners in discourse about whether this trade was a threat or beneficial. Lost in each of these frameworks is the worker who chose temporary self-employment. They risked injury on the job, wear and tear to their machines, and threats of litigation from both capitalists and consumers. Jitney drivers also had the right to exit this business at will, to set their own hours, and to decide which riders or which neighborhoods to serve. As workers without bosses, jitney drivers entered a way of life growing popular of late with anarchists like the local Magónistas or the Wobblies (International Workers of the World).⁶⁴⁶ Each played a robust role in prewar Southern California. In fact, jitney drivers organized syndicates of their own, like the 700-strong Auto Buss Owners' and Operators' Association, a union which was headquartered in historical Skid Row at 225 East 6th Street.⁶⁴⁷

Self-employment had a great attraction for workers in Los Angeles, which is clear from literature they read and songs they wrote and sang. After years of exile in many places along the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, Ricardo Flores Magón stopped running in Los Angeles after the 1910 revolution south of the border. He edited an anarchist newspaper, *Regeneración*, which told

⁶⁴⁵ "Auto Busses Stir Trouble," *L.A. Times*, 20 September 1914. I initially found several of the *Times* and *Tribune* articles cited in this paper in the Jitney Busses Scrapbook, Collection no. 6023, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California.

⁶⁴⁶ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* (University of North Carolina Press 2017), 92-130.

⁶⁴⁷ "Referendum Is Threatened IF City Passes 'Jitney' Law," *L.A. Tribune*, 27 February 1915.

readers about the “evidence” that “humanity does not need a boss or a government.” Some examples included “the free communities of the Yaqui [Native people], of [the city of] Durango, in the south of Mexico, and so many other regions where the inhabitants have taken possession of the land.” Magón delineated a choice: “either to be free, entirely free and denying all Authority, or to be slaves perpetuating the command [or management] of man over man.” This article was published in the spring of 1914, mere months before the first jitneys took to the streets.⁶⁴⁸ “Gasoline Gus,” a mocking depiction of a cartoon chauffeur, showed up in tony East Coast newspapers and made his first appearance in the *Times* in 1913. Two years later, a popular song ironically heroized him and described him leaving chauffeuring to drive his own “jitney bus.” Self-employed, Gus was free to drive recklessly, which terrified one prim passenger. A bourgeoisie, she commanded, “‘Don’t go too fa-ar.’ Gus retorted, ‘It’s not that kind of ca-ar.’”⁶⁴⁹

The threat of sexualized danger to women and girls was a key theme in the assault of the bourgeois press against the jitney trade. The most prominent police figure to protest was Aletha Maxey Gilbert. LAPD’s so-called “City Mother” was from a local lineage of women in policing. Her mother had run the Lincoln Heights jail from 1888 to 1912. In 1914, Aletha was promoted and became one of the city’s first full female police officers. Her City Mothers’ Bureau bore responsibility for intimate matters like the sexual activity of “wayward girls.” Such children, who reputedly lacked attentive parents, came to police women for guidance and protection.⁶⁵⁰ In

⁶⁴⁸ Translations are mine: “pruebas...la humanidad no necesita de jefe o gobierno,” “las comunidades libres del Yaqui, de Durango, del Sur de México y de tantas otras regiones en que los habitantes han tomado posesión de la tierra,” “o ser libres, enteramente libres negando toda Autoridad, o ser esclavos perpetuando el mando del hombre sobre el hombre.” Ricardo Flores Magón, “Sin Jefes,” *Regeneración*, 21 March 1914.

⁶⁴⁹ “Gasoline Gus Takes on a New Pupil,” *L.A. Times*, 13 April 1913. Allan Holtz, “Obscurity of the Day: Gasoline Gus,” *Stripper’s Guide*, 21 November 2012. “Gasoline Gus and His Jitney Bus,” performed by Billy Murray and Chorus, 1915, UCSB Cylinder Audio Archive.

⁶⁵⁰ Janice Appier, *Policing Women: The Sexual Politics of Law Enforcement on the LAPD* (Temple University Press, 1998), 73-76 and 85-86. For a fascinating recent literary history linking the waywardness of girls to anarchy, see Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2019).

January 1915, the *Times* reported Gilbert wanted Los Angeles to prioritize women's safety when composing a new law to regulate the jitneys. She was outraged to have learned "that many girl passengers who boarded nickel chasers have been required to sit on the laps of men they had never seen before." Here she echoed the words of furniture retailer W.G. Hutchison, who had objected five days earlier to "the moral menace through allowing this opportunity for unscrupulous persons to crowd in among women and girls."⁶⁵¹ As much as the police, downtown Los Angeles shopkeepers who sold luxuries to the middle classes strenuously guarded the virtue of rich girls navigating the city, for they worried the frightful reputation of men in jitneys was to repel rich, female customers from the city's central shopping district.

The trade's opponents also anointed themselves as paternalists in anti-jitney calls to protect pedestrians. Two reports of death and maiming under the wheels of jitneys emphasized drivers as male perpetrators of atrocity against female pedestrians. Mrs. Mary E. Keller, 62, died when the speeding jitney driver Jacob Spilhaulig, 16, dragged her pinned body 100 feet along a street in Boyle Heights before he could get his bus to brake. Jitney driver D. Wolownic "had his eyes on a prospective passenger a half block away" when he hit Mrs. R. Booth. Notice how the *Times* twice highlighted accounts of a female victim, each with an Anglo name, and a male driver, each with a name evoking white ethnic heritage. The jitney trade was the recipient of one more layer of exocitism in "The Jitney Assassins." This article sarcastically told the Germans to wage their "war upon cripples, and old men, and women and children" of London simply by "buy[ing] the thousand jitneys that now make a slaughter pen of the streets of Los Angeles."⁶⁵²

⁶⁵¹ "Outrage: Men in Busses Insult Girls," *L.A. Times*, 9 January 1915. "Imperative: Stringent Regulation of the Jitney Busses," *L.A. Times*, 4 January 1915.

⁶⁵² "The Chase: Nickels Ahead; Blood Behind," *L.A. Times*, 7 December 1914. The age of Spilhaulig [or Spilhauliz] is from the 1920 U.S. Census, which had him listed as a "chauffeur" who "delivers bread." *Ancestry Library Edition*. "Still More Pestiferous: After 'Jitney' Hits Woman," *L.A. Times*, 17 December 1914. "The Jitney Assassins," *L.A. Times*, 4 January 1915.

This trope remains with us among the conservative nationalists and neoliberal thinkers who still use gender to frame attacks on foreigners and workers. Feminist critic Sara R. Farris reads narratives of violence against women - or against any feminized subject - as marking boundary lines between modern versus traditional peoples, career women versus care workers, and urban spaces where women belong versus ones where they are too much at risk of sexual assault.⁶⁵³

The vitriol in these attacks on jitney drivers as vicious men from immigrant backgrounds indicated this trade had real potential to disrupt the railroads, an important local industry and also a real estate conglomerate. A streetcar executive in *Electric Railway Journal* reacted by calling jitney drivers “little better than a parasite sapping the strength and vitality of the railway service” and ominously warned drivers to “voluntarily withdraw from the field” before “public interest must ultimately force its removal.”⁶⁵⁴ When *Sunset*, a magazine printed by the Huntington dynasty’s Southern Pacific (S.P.) Railroad, impugned drivers as “auto snipers,” editors produced an analysis drivers might have relished. After all, working people in Los Angeles owed S.P. no loyalty after its engineers kept the trains running on time during a harbor strike in 1911. Workers with class consciousness knew that S.P. additionally operated the Pacific Electric Railway, and that Henry E. Huntington, the nephew of S.P.’s founder, privately owned the Los Angeles Railway. The industry aggressively maintained an anti-union labor regime called the “open shop,” so the motormen who operated these lines had never organized.⁶⁵⁵ First rail then the jitney

⁶⁵³ This dynamic is called the “sexualization of racism and racialization of sexism” by Sara R. Farris, *In the Name of Women’s Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Duke University Press, 2017). For the parallels between rightwing uses of gender with rightwing uses of queer and/or disabled identity politics, see Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Duke University Press, 2007) and *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Duke University Press, 2017).

⁶⁵⁴ W.E. Dunn, “The Application of Established Legal Principles to the Jitney,” *Electric Railway Journal* (Annual Convention Issue 1915), 504.

⁶⁵⁵ “Auto Snipers and Trolley Cars,” *Sunset* 34, no. 1 (January 1915), 47. Louis B. Perry and Richard S. Perry, *A History of the Los Angeles Labor Movement, 1911-1941* (University of California Press, 1963), 53.

drivers' association turned to Los Angeles City Council, where capital lobbied for heavier regulation and drivers demonstrated for a more laissez-faire approach to urban transportation.

Government abolished the jitneys by setting rules inimical to the trade's competitive advantage. Business leaders like the grocer Walter W. Ralphs had said that jitneys had become a "public utility, and should be treated as such." Bruce Wetherby, a shoe retailer, went one step further. To him, it was "unthinkable that this class shall be permitted to operate without police restrictions."⁶⁵⁶ The *Times* shared a petition calling for the drivers to purchase licenses in order to fund "a board for examination of applicants for license, and the necessary additional police for the enforcement of the ordinance without putting additional burden on taxpayers."⁶⁵⁷

Councilman James Simpson Conwell predicted "that the situation must yield to the operation of a higher law than any ordinance, a law that is inflexible and merciless - the economic law...the motor buss has come to stay as a means of city transportation, and that it will in the not distant future develop into a system of rapid transit de luxe, in which safety, seats, speed and comfort are guaranteed, and a commensurate price is paid therefor."⁶⁵⁸ Conwell still voted reluctantly to restrict jitney drivers from routes with rail lines. They also were to keep to a schedule and to buy insurance bonds to guarantee compensation in the event of a crash causing injury or property damage.⁶⁵⁹

Jitney drivers fought back against regulation, but their dream died after two successive votes to curtail the jitney trade in Los Angeles. Proposition 4 forbade jitneys from "dangerously congested districts of the City" and required drivers to keep every vehicle in operation daily from

⁶⁵⁶ "Imperative: Stringent Regulation of the Jitney Busses," *L.A. Times*, 4 January 1915.

⁶⁵⁷ "The Why and the Wherefore: Drastic Regulation Necessary Safeguard," *L.A. Times*, 12 January 1915.

⁶⁵⁸ "Jitney Ordinance Passed," *L.A. Tribune*, n.d.

⁶⁵⁹ "Tentative: Five Thousand Dollars for Jitneys' Victims," *L.A. Times*, 19 February 1915.

6 A.M. to midnight.⁶⁶⁰ The *Electric Railway Journal* made no attempt to hide the industry's dirty tricks when the editors boasted that motormen had chauffeured 'yes' voters to the polls in 550 cars. With 100,000 ballots cast, the anti-jitney side won by 9981 votes. A few jitneys were to remain on the road, but the number dropped from a thousand in the year 1916 to 32 in the next year.⁶⁶¹ The next time deregulating the jitney trade made the ballot was at the nadir of the next great crisis in 1935. The Los Angeles Railway Corporation, recently stripped of its Blue Eagle, cut service so drastically that its workers, as the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway and Motor Coach Workers of America, sponsored a bill to bring back jitneys. Five hundred laid-off engineers moved to incorporate their own busing service and drive the vehicles themselves. The voters defeated the ordinance after hearing from Mrs. Marie Colwell, who was worried about crashes, congestion, and the workers' spite against their former employer.⁶⁶²

⁶⁶⁰ Phillip D. Wilson, "Proposition and Ordinances Submitted to vote of Electors, June 5th, 1917," in the appendix to *Analysis of Jitney Operations in Los Angeles* (Southern California Rapid Transit District Planning Department, April 1983).

⁶⁶¹ "Los Angeles Excludes Jitneys," *Electric Railway Journal*, 1917. See Ross D. Eckert and George Hilton, "The Jitneys," *Journal of Law & Economics* 15 (October 1972), 318-322.

⁶⁶² J.J. Morgan, "Initiative Ordinance Proposed by Petition, Repealing Certain Ordinances of the City Prohibiting the Operation of Jitney Busses on Public Streets, Submitted to Vote of Electors May 7, 1935" and Mrs. J.O. (Marie) Colwell, "Argument Against Proposition No 1 Commonly Known As 'Jitney Bus' Ordinance," both in the appendix to *Analysis of Jitney Operations in Los Angeles* (Southern California Rapid Transit District Planning Department, April 1983), Los Angeles Metro Archives.

Jitney and Authority:
Transportation Neoliberals Who Seized the Jitney Legacy



MARISSA ROTH

Jeepney in Manila: Worthy example for U.S. transportation planners?

“Look to the Third World, where small-vehicle, auto-like systems operate successfully and effectively. We have much to learn from the jeepneys of Manila, the *colectivos* of Caracas, and the *mutatus* of Nairobi.”

Melvin M. Webber, “The Joys of Automobility,” April 1988⁶⁶³

Engineer Melvin Webber’s keynote speech at the 1988 UCLA conference themed “The Car and the City” utterly surprised attendees. After city planning’s decades of strong feelings about the car, which ranged mostly from ambivalence to acrimony, Webber broke stride. Recent fieldwork on transportation networks outside of Europe and North America shined a far more sympathetic light on the informal uses of “auto-like” vehicles. Smaller than typical city buses but larger than the single-family personal cars, which were ubiquitous in the U.S., these paratransit vehicles anticipated the possibility “of extending the equivalent of automobility to everyone.”⁶⁶⁴ What gave Webber the authority to make such a bold statement in favor of the jitneys - and in anticipation of a future for startups like Lyft and Uber - was the previous sixteen years of essays on the matter by authors whom I am calling “transportation neoliberals.” Their discourse began

⁶⁶³ Webber’s speech was reported in an article next to this image to illustrate his point. Connie Koenenn, “Future Gridlock: Blame All the Empty Seats, Expert Says,” *L.A. Times*, 12 April 1988.

⁶⁶⁴ *The Car and the City: The Automobile, the Built Environment, and Daily Urban Life*, Martin Wachs and Margaret Crawford, eds. (University of Michigan Press, 1992), 284.

after the 1960s and its so-called urban crisis. White flight shrank tax bases and led policymakers to model their domestic antipoverty programs on lessons learned from countries in the process of decolonization.⁶⁶⁵ Calls to break up public transit monopolies and open the streets to competition by jitneys came from young graduate students and tenured professors, consultants and con men.

The jitney made its first jump from the postcolonial Philippines into the urban economics discourse of California in the spring of 1972. Sandi Rosenbloom, a UCLA political science Ph.D. candidate, published “Taxis and Jitneys: The Case for Deregulation” in *Reason*, a libertarian magazine then only in its fourth year. Publication had begun in Boston and moved to the beach city of Santa Barbara in 1971.⁶⁶⁶ Rosenbloom had earlier published a short literature review about *colectivos* in Caracas, but the sunbelt city of Houston published new data about the jitney trade that was booming in Manila, Seoul, and Teheran (sic). These three mega cities had informal, fully privatized ride-share networks carrying 25%, 15%, and 100% of transit riders. Rosenbloom also made a quick reference to the history of jitneys in Los Angeles and alluded critically to their demise at the hands of a “trolley lobby.” To outlast and to suppress the jitneys, an alliance of rent-seeking streetcar interests had relied on “restrictive injunctions and prohibitive legislation.” Sometimes termed “gypsy taxis,” jitneys in the U.S. survived here and there. As the racialized moniker implied, the trade predominated in working-class minority group’s urban enclaves like the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Hunters Point in San Francisco, and South Chicago.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁵ For two excellent books on this nexus of foreign and domestic politics, see Alyosha Goldstein, *Poverty in Common: The Politics of Community Action During the American Century* (Duke University Press, 2012) and Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Harvard University Press, 2015).

⁶⁶⁶ “A Message from the Publisher of Reason,” *Reason* (January 1971).

⁶⁶⁷ Sandi Rosenbloom, “Taxis and Jitneys: The Case for Deregulation,” *Reason* (February 1972). The first entry in Black playwright August Wilson’s *The Pittsburgh Cycle* was called *Jitney* (Samuel French, Inc, 2002 [originally 1982]) and set in the Hill District, 1977.

Hot on Rosenbloom's heels, UCLA transportation history professor George Hilton wrote "The Jitneys" with USC economics doctoral student Ross Eckert. Published in the University of Chicago's *Journal of Law & Economics*, a major forum for debuting libertarian economic theory since 1958,⁶⁶⁸ this article became the most influential history of the jitney trade ever written. To the present, "The Jitneys" is the most widely cited source on the topic. At 33 pages and with 139 notes, it ranks among the most rigorous academic accounts of the trade. The authors argued that the hostility of railroads to jitneys, and the anti-jitney laws they lobbied cities to pass, led urban transportation development in the U.S. in an entirely "unsatisfactory" direction. Looking back, Hilton and Eckert prescribed competition between streetcar monopolies and an alternative like the jitneys, especially if "operators and all other users of the streets were bearing the full costs of their operation. This implies a system of user charges which would reflect the social costs of movement at various times and places in the city."⁶⁶⁹ Without commenting explicitly on their moment, the authors nonetheless implied that policymakers should consider measures like opening streets to competition - or congestion pricing - to reduce transportation inefficiencies.

In October 1972, when "The Jitneys" appeared in print, Hilton was ten years into his life membership with the Mont Pelerin Society, neoliberalism's "thought collective," and halfway through a consulting gig with the American Enterprise Institute (AEI). AEI hired the professor to conduct a study soon after the Powell Memorandum of 1971 had encouraged rightwing donors to give to such foundations to counteract the New Left on campuses.⁶⁷⁰ Hilton zeroed in on Urban

⁶⁶⁸ Arguably, the economic analysis of law made its major advance since Jeremy Bentham when Chicago professor of economics Ronald Coase published "The Problem of Social Cost" in this journal in 1960. A. Mitchell Polinsky and Steven Shavell, "law, economic analysis of," *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, Second Edition (2008).

⁶⁶⁹ Eckert and Hilton, "The Jitneys," 293 and 325. For the number of citations, see Google Scholar.

⁶⁷⁰ *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*, Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe, eds. (Harvard University Press, 2009). "Mont Pelerin Society Directory - 2010," *DeSmogBlog*, accessed 11 January 2021. AEI's top donor was Richard Mellon Scaife, heir to the Mellon banking family of Pittsburgh. Jane

Mass Transportation Assistance (UMTA), a federal antipoverty program from the 1960s Great Society. Published in 1974, Hilton's *Federal Transit Subsidies* described UMTA as wasteful and ineffective. The data showed the proportion of U.S. work trips by car had risen from 64% to 78% in the last ten years. To Hilton, down trends in transit usage mostly came of riders making the rational choice to buy a car for more convenient commuting rather than factors like industrial flight to edge cities and the Sunbelt's planning for low-density suburban landscapes. At the end of the study, Hilton cited his own article "The Jitneys" while dreaming about another path. The legalized jitneys trade "would have adapted readily either to expanding or declining demand conditions. In particular, the industry would have adapted to the forces for diffusion which began to shape our cities as dependence on the streetcar declined."⁶⁷¹ To legitimize jitneys in the 1970s had the potential to open a market suited for riders in urban cores and on the suburban fringes.

In 1974, UMTA hired the Urban Institute, another think tank, to study alternative modes of transportation like "car pool, subscription bus, and jitney." While *Para-transit* briefly touched the history of jitneys, the report noted a crucial link between future developments in this arena and *Dial-a-ride*, "where new calls may be answered while other passengers are still in the vehicle."⁶⁷² By 1982, an UMTA paratransit study by Ronald Reagan's Department of Transportation hired author Gabriel Roth, a consultant and transportation economist with the World Bank since 1967. In the first chapter, "Learning from Abroad," Roth stressed how micro entrepreneurs in "developing" countries offered "urban public transport that run at a profit while

Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (Doubleday, 2016), 73-111.

⁶⁷¹ George W. Hilton, *Federal Transit Subsidies: The Urban Mass Transit Assistance Program* (American Enterprise Institute, 1974), 97, 109-111, and 130. Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton University Press, 1996) and Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (Anchor Books, 1992).

⁶⁷² Ronald F. Kirby, *Para-transit: A Summary Assessment of Experience and Potential* (Urban Institute, 1974), 9 and 14.

providing good service.” He then added a list of eleven locations around the globe where jitneys contributed to transportation infrastructure: Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Buenos Aires, Calcutta, Manila, Istanbul, Cairo, Singapore, Nairobi, Belfast, and Puerto Rico (a territory of the U.S.).⁶⁷³ The trio of cities Webber was to list in his keynote speech at UCLA six years later included two of these, Manila and Nairobi, and one from Rosenbloom’s work: Caracas. Roth’s case that global paratransit models had potential for “application in the U.S.” informed Webber’s speech.

Missing from Webber’s speech was any mention of the recent attempt, in winter 1982, at the establishment of a jitney service called Express Transit District (ETD). The founders were the Mendenillas, three brothers with experience driving taxis. They applied for a license to start a business in Los Angeles named ETD, an acronym similar to RTD. Rapid Transit District was the region’s public bus network. Unlike RTD, which serviced a massive area, ETD proposed routes just through Hollywood. Forty “investor/drivers,” mostly immigrants from Mexico, Russia, and Iran, fronted \$10,000 each. ETD used the funds to purchase jitneys and to cover logistics. Riders were to pay the same per ride as RTD,⁶⁷⁴ but Los Angeles anticipated a fare hike on the horizon in the event that the courts struck down Proposition A. In 1980, voters had approved this half-cent bump in sales tax to fund transit. Betting on a favorable judicial decision, ETD was unable to turn a profit after judges upheld the vote to subsidize RTD in April of 1983. ETD closed shop that month. Looking back from 1986, a UC-Irvine planning professor named Roger Teal found that “subsidized transit” forced this exercise in ethno-capitalism into bankruptcy. He then veered

⁶⁷³ Gabriel Roth and George G. Wynne, *Free Enterprise Urban Transport* (Urban Mass Transportation Administration Office of Policy Development, 1982), 1/1, 4/11.

⁶⁷⁴ *Analysis of Jitney Operations in Los Angeles* (Southern California Rapid Transit District Planning Department April 1983), Los Angeles Metro Library Archives.

into romance by stressing that ETD was “a family owned business” with Spanish speakers for drivers and “loyal riders” wanting “to support a Chicano-owned and operated business.”⁶⁷⁵

Teal’s elegy for ETD, published in the journal *Transportation*, marked the apotheosis of transportation neoliberalism as an intentionally dissembling and outright malicious discourse. The article did not mention how Teal, as a consultant, had testified on ETD’s behalf at the Public Utilities Commission hearings where a judge approved the business license.⁶⁷⁶ Teal selectively reimagined the third act of the plot. In winter 1983, regulators began scrutinizing the company. RTD reported infractions like overcrowding, vehicles using RTD route numbers, and drivers stopping in RTD bus zones and “honking...to attract passengers.” The California Department of Labor Relations responded to three complaints of wage theft and concluded the company owed its drivers over \$140,000. The Highway Patrol had inspected the jitneys and placed 73% of them “out of service” for “lights, tires, and mechanical equipment in unsafe condition.” A month later, these buses were not fixed and still in use.⁶⁷⁷ Finally in April, one of the company’s founders absconded to Ciudad Juárez with what was left of an estimated three to ten million dollars the firm had collected from driver-investors. Not the 40 mentioned in the application, but at least 373 drivers, mostly immigrants, claimed the brothers had sold them routes. ETD conned them.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁵ Roger F. Teal and Terry Nemer, “Privatization of urban transit: The Los Angeles jitney experience,” *Transportation* 13 (1986), 5-22. For a glowing review of intercity jitneys as “community-based transportation” and “an important example [of] the viability of market-based, privatized transit” in Southern California, see Abel Valenzuela, Jr., Lisa Schweitzer, and Adriele Robles, “*Camionetas*: Informal travel among immigrants,” *Transportation Research* 39, no. 10 (December 2005): 895-911.

⁶⁷⁶ *Analysis of Jitney Operations in Los Angeles* (Southern California Rapid Transit District Planning Department April 1983), Los Angeles Metro Library Archives, 9. Labor contractualization and the romance of life without a long-term boss had a structural appeal to short-term business consultants, who consistently recommended that major firms hire temps. Louis Hyman, *Temp: How American Work, American Business, and the American Dream Became Temporary* (Viking, 2018).

⁶⁷⁷ Jerry Crumpley, *An Overview of Jitney Operations in Los Angeles* (Southern California Rapid Transit District Planning Department, August 1983), Los Angeles Metro Library Archives, 17-19.

⁶⁷⁸ Jerry Belcher, “Jitney Bus Firm Probed for Possible Investment Fraud,” *L.A. Times*, 13 April 1983. Jerry Belcher, “PUC Laxity in Probing Jitney Backers Told,” *L.A. Times*, 14 April 1983.

Transportation neoliberalism had no regard for workers who have stood to lose their jobs as bus drivers when consultants recommended cutting public transit nor for workers who have suffered when deregulation opened space for con men to enact fraudulent wage theft schemes. Only the entrepreneurs, never those whom they trampled, mattered to informalist economists like Hernando de Soto. The Peruvian author of *The Other Path* (1986) has long whitewashed the worst of trade liberalization, urban disinvestment, and government retreat with his naively populist renderings of multiculturalism. Regarding transportation, this book prescribed Lima's "colectivo...the sedans with a capacity for 5 riders and 'station wagon' vans properly upgraded to carry 8 and 9 persons." Such observations inspired de Soto's countryman, the poet Mario Vargas Llosa, to see the slums of Third World cities as the setting for romantic adventure. The bourgeois bohemian living the expat's life in Paris celebrated "the informal economy - a parallel and in many senses more authentic, industrious, and creative society than the society which claims to be the legal country."⁶⁷⁹ When transportation neoliberals have urged urbanists and planners to go learn from abroad, these are the kinds of lessons they have hoped we will go find.

Critics of neoliberalism nevertheless must be more wary of reading Latin American or other "developing" countries as the preeminent staging ground for this turn in economic thought. Geographers like David Harvey, who write as if neoliberalism was born in Chile and Argentina, are especially susceptible to the Marxist slip into borderline xenophobia.⁶⁸⁰ Storper has helped us redirect anti-neoliberal attention from the 1970s back to earlier uses of the term in the 1930s Atlantic World. To the likes of Walter Lippmann, neoliberalism was not a slur but a label

⁶⁷⁹ "los automóviles sedán con capacidad para 5 pasajeros y camionetas station wagon, debidamente acondicionadas para llevar 8 y 9 personas" and "la economía informal - sociedad paralela y, en muchos sentidos, más auténtica, trabajadora y creativa que la que usurpa el título de país legal." Hernando de Soto, *El otro sendero: La revolución informal* (Editorial El Barranco, 1986), 104 and xx.

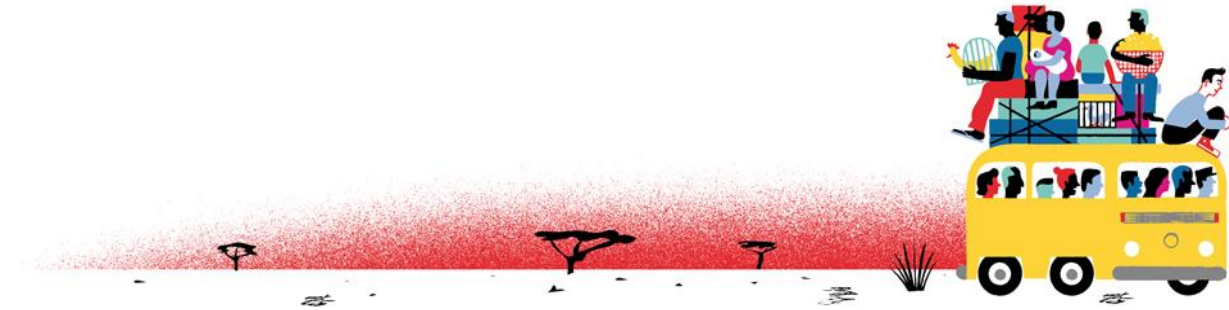
⁶⁸⁰ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

proudly used for differentiation from statism in the Third Reich or in the Soviet Union. This big tent held transportation neoliberals who prioritized both traffic efficiency and the joys of mobility. Some among them were ideological to a point of cruelty, but others were a lot more pragmatic.⁶⁸¹ During the Northridge Earthquake crisis of 1994, *Times* columnist and USC urban planning professor Kevin Starr saw the disaster as “a window of opportunity” for Los Angeles to legitimize the jitney, a transit mode he knew from his research into the history of the California Dream. Several freeways had collapsed, and paratransit might help prevent a looming traffic nightmare. Preempting critics, Starr wanted the city “to diversify its transportation options,” not simply abolish public transit, as the “Adam Smith boys” among his USC colleagues wanted.⁶⁸²

⁶⁸¹ Storper, “The neo-liberal city,” 11 and 19.

⁶⁸² Kevin Starr, “The Ultimate Car Culture Was Built on Public Transport,” *L.A. Times*, 31 July 1994. For the uses of crises by neoliberal thinkers and policymakers, including pragmatists, see Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Knopf Canada 2007), 166.

Conclusion:
Transportation Neoliberals Have Seized the Future



“...allow private jitney and bus operators to enter the transportation market to compete with the MTA and with each other. Transit entrepreneurs who get 100% of their revenues from fares...would quickly figure out what kinds of services would attract car drivers.”

James E. Moore II, USC engineering, April 2007⁶⁸³

This James Moore quotation shows how calls for transportation diversity, regardless of any denialist claim to the contrary, stemmed from neoliberal ideology. The first sign the Southern California real estate bubble was bursting had arrived on 2 April 2007 when a subprime lender called New Century Financial Corporation of Irvine filed for bankruptcy. The crisis had begun, and transportation neoliberals were amply prepared to restructure California cities in response.⁶⁸⁴ That spring, Logan Green was finishing his tumultuous last year at UC-Santa Barbara. Aspiring entrepreneur and a close reader of urban planning literature, Green had been elected to the campus “Parking Rate Payers Board.” With UCLA professor Donald Shoup’s *The High Cost of Free Parking* in hand, he convinced the board to increase parking prices dramatically to reduce congestion. On the side, Green had founded a “car-sharing” startup with a fleet of Prius cars. The campus decried the cost increases, rates went back down, and Green’s startup soon failed. The new graduate left to travel the world for a summer. Green visited Zimbabwe, a country where a crisis of runaway inflation since 2006 had plunged car owners into

⁶⁸³ “How to Fix Traffic,” *L.A. Times*, 15 April 2007.

⁶⁸⁴ Julie Creswell and Vikas Bajaj, “Home Lender Is Seeking Bankruptcy,” *New York Times*, 3 April 2007.

poverty, and many retooled their vehicles into jitneys called *kombis*. Green returned to the U.S. and founded Zimride.⁶⁸⁵

Zimride connected drivers seeking a little cash income with riders looking for a cheap trip between campuses. By 2012, the firm was renamed Lyft and released a smartphone “app” or application to help drivers and riders find each other anywhere in the city. Four years later, the UCLA Institute for Transportation Studies associate director Juan Matute called the upgraded Lyft Line the “21st-century versions of jitneys.” Users gained the option to pay cheaper prices per ride if they were willing to risk a longer trip. Only when Lyft Lines began to pick up multiple passengers going to different destinations did the company fully revive the jitneys of 1914 Los Angeles or jeepneys of Manila. *Reason*’s Robert Poole acclaimed the thought work behind Green’s innovation, which he dated to Roth’s *Learning from Abroad* and its passages on Manila, Nairobi, Khartoum, and San Juan. Poole proceeded excitedly to predict both Lyft and Uber amounted to the “first steps toward [a] private transit future.”⁶⁸⁶ The critics of neoliberalism have denounced these developments, but even they often mount their attacks in decidedly neoliberal terms. According to technology writer Tom Slee, the problem is less the privatization of a public service than ratings systems and the threat to both drivers and riders of “algorithmic regulation.”

Cities might resort to abolishing rideshare once again, but I believe paratransit has proven a useful addition to urban transportation networks. The pandemic halted the growth of rideshare, but Lyft remains strongly positioned to resume its encroachment on Los Angeles Metro after the Covid-19 lockdown ended. California voters passed the strikingly neoliberal Proposition 22 after rideshare poured unprecedented funding into the “yes” campaign. This law has stripped drivers

⁶⁸⁵ Ryan Bradley, “Lyft’s Search for a New Mode of Transport,” *MIT Technology Review*, 13 October 2015. This is where I found the image at the beginning of this section.

⁶⁸⁶ Robert Poole, “Surface Transportation News #147,” *Reason*, 7 January 2016.

of their worker status and their access to associated rights and protections. As independent contractors, Lyft jitney drivers have gone back, ironically, to the *sin jefes* ideal of transportation anarchism. However, times have obviously changed. Jitney drivers were the rider's equal. Since Lyft users have the power to issue complaints about drivers, they risk losing employment every time they rebuff a user for a bid to drive over the speed limit - or for sexual favors. In answer to concerns about both algorithmic regulation and privatization, I recommend these paths forward.

- Like with the Auto Buss Owners' and Operators' Association, jitney operators who resisted the city and capitalist rail interests, drivers should form collectives. Such groups as Gig Workers Rising have the potential to select representatives to help set in-vehicle policies and to enforce compliance fairly to labor. Only these quality control personnel should have access to driver-installed and driver-operated dash recordings of driver-rider interactions plus the riders' smartphone ratings of driver performance.
- Remembering crimes associated with Express Transit District (ETD), a startup that stole wages from workers and defrauded investors, rideshare should collaborate with cities to legitimize a business model heavily associated with fraud. In short trials of public-private partnerships with transit, Lyft can stop poaching riders from bus corridors and blocking bus loading zones. Instead, Lyft can accept a public mission like serving riders beyond Metro's reach. The public should also fund Lyfts for riders in need, especially elders, school children, and people with mobility impairments, chronic sickness, or blindness.
- Knowing the risk jitneys presented to rail in Los Angeles, for this door-to-door dynamic service has clear competitive advantages over fixed transit lines, government officials should strenuously regulate rideshare. Since Lyft shows no sign it will stop at mere transportation diversification, the state should put ceilings on the amount of capital such firms can raise and bust this trust into regional units. The localization of rideshare will allow for policies better attuned to specific places, as opposed to the universal ambitions of so many tech firms to remake the world into a single California design dominion.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁷ These recommendations came from discussions, demos, and debates with Martin Wachs, Yu Hong Hwang, Sandi Rosenbloom, Andrew Utas, Marques Vestal, Gus Wendel, Colin Scott, Zachary Pitts, and Peter Lunenfeld. "The California Design Dominion: Thirteen Propositions by Peter Lunenfeld," *WIRED*, 8 January 2020.

APPENDIX B
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The Dangerous Stranger
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Dragnet
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Wattstax
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