

Taking Back the Boulevard

Art, Activism, and Gentrification in Los Angeles

Jan Lin



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CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	vii
Introduction: Scenes from Northeast Los Angeles	1
1. Boulevards, Gentrification, and Urban Culture	17
2. The Stages of Neighborhood Transition	56
3. From Arroyo Culture to NELA Arts	92
4. Neighborhood Activism and Slow Growth	124
5. Gentrification, Displacement, and the Right to the City	168
Conclusion: Going Back to the Future	195
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	217
<i>Notes</i>	221
<i>Bibliography</i>	225
<i>Index</i>	235
<i>About the Author</i>	251

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Figure 5.2. NELA Alliance members stage their first major action. 184

Figure 5.3. “El Capitalista” puppet made by NELA Alliance members in silent procession on December 12, 2014. 185

Figure 5.4. “Housing is a Human Right” projection during course of silent procession on December 12, 2014. 186

Figure 5.5. NELA Alliance member Arturo Romo and Lis Barrajas lead other participants in silent procession to La Culebra Park. 187

TABLES

Table 2.1. Racial/ethnic transition in Eagle Rock and Highland Park, 1960–2010. 82

Table 2.2. Household and housing indicators. 84

Table 2.3. Currently active businesses by industrial sector in Highland Park and Eagle Rock combined. 86

Introduction

Scenes from Northeast Los Angeles

A rolling tortilla stuffed with cilantro and hot *chile* dreams of mailing money to México passes from a mother to a son. The taco maker gashes *cébolla* against the grill. He wears an apron, matted against *mole* skin, carries his form when he peels it off. At 2 a.m. university students stack at the window for *taquitos y burritos*. A girl with hair the color of white shoves A dollar across the counter, he slides extra *jalapeños*. She talks more with the *taquero* than with her parents. *Salsa* sticks to her lips but Never his name. A row of sodas Shimmers through the glass Displays that separate This youth from his own Son learning to read in the char Broiled mist of the griddle Six *lenguas* sizzle Staccato steam puffs In this chrome box oiled With hopes, The taco maker's child Scribbles a *menu* in *ingles* and wonders If he might look at his father From the other side of the glass. —Lisa Marie Sandoval, “The Taco Truck”

In this poem by Lisa Marie Sandoval, a transaction at the window of a taco truck reflects experiences of both cultural encounter and social disconnection on a boulevard of Northeast Los Angeles. An alumnus of Occidental College, Sandoval expresses the tradition of Oxy students venturing from the ivory tower of campus into the neighboring Mexican American barrio of Highland Park to satisfy their late-night appetites and thirst for authentic experiences. The protagonist's lips tingle in the sensual delight of the salsa that she tastes, but she has no subjective recognition of the immigrant worker who produces the commodity. For the food-adventuring student, the food of foreign-born vendors at the nightly sidewalk market of Los Angeles, the Latino and global metropolis, offers temporary escape from the academic pressures of middle-class college life. For immigrant families working late hours, the earnings from these nocturnal white consumers contribute to aspirations of an educational future for their next generation. The taco truck window is a portal in the social intersection between people from different racial and socioeconomic worlds transacting in the same street and neighborhood space as they crisscross on contrasting life journeys of social mobility.

Sandoval's poem appears in *The Yowling and Other Sounds from Highland Park* (2005) and reflects the years around 1990. She was a graduate of English and Comparative Literary Studies at Occidental College and stayed in the neighborhood. In the preface she reflects on her vocational commitment to be an artistic voice for the community:

I crashed here with some friends one summer. Fifteen years later they are gone, yet I have stayed. Perhaps for the same reason others do. Perhaps God permits us to stay because he has heard the cries of a people with yowling stomachs and a hungry seed in their soul. They yearn to give a resonant voice to their dreams.

Her poetry expresses the spirit of Latino/a people in Highland Park through protagonists like day laborers, prostitutes, and *chola* female gang members. She developed a style that combines story, poetry, drama, and body movement in her performances. Her work has enjoyed authentic local credibility and has been featured by Avenue 50 Studio, a key force in the Latino/a arts community. Sandoval works as a professor of creative writing around Los Angeles, with a focus on empowering

women and urban youth to find their literary voices through a book and educational program she calls Yowling Creator. She explains how her role has been "catalytic and also as a translational voice." She is of Sicilian roots but assimilated into the Latino/a community of Highland Park through her bilingual facility in English and Spanish and through marriage to a Mexican American immigrant *jornalero* (day laborer) in Highland Park. She notes, "We both have a yowling and we are human beings and we make sociological racial tensions between the US and Mexico real. We have crossed that sociological racial divide."¹

The racial and socioeconomic class landscape of Northeast Los Angeles, however, has transitioned in the two decades since Sandoval's poem was written. In these gentrifying neighborhoods, the losers made way for the winners as the Great Recession that started in late 2007 forced business shutdowns and homeowner foreclosures that subsequently created the right conditions for the entrance of new investors and speculators during the economic recovery. By the 2010s the gentrification of Highland Park and Eagle Rock had become evident and the boulevards were brimming with new cafés, art galleries, vintage record stores, and

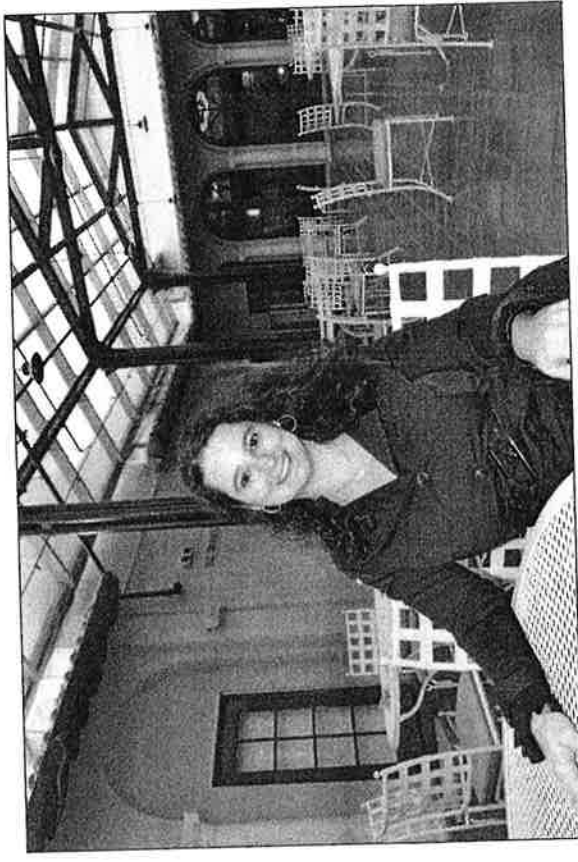


Figure I.1. Lisa Marie Sandoval on Branca Patio at Occidental College.
(Credit: Rebecca Rodriguez.)

retail boutiques. Many businesses featured handmade, artisanal, do-it-yourself (DIY), and repurposed vintage products. Journalists and food and culture critics in Los Angeles and New York wrote articles that portrayed and defined the new bohemian and hipster cultural scene. Hipsters, new homeowners, and commercial entrepreneurs are drawn by an authentic quality of urbanism in the neighborhoods and boulevards of Northeast LA that is pedestrian- and bike-friendly, celebrates small, independent businesses, fosters historical and environmental preservation, and stands at the crossroads of ethnic and vintage American arts and culture.

The gentrification under way in Highland Park has led new middle-class commercial and residential property owners to pressure public officials for tighter surveillance on the foreign-born business sector. Janet Favela, an organizer with the East Los Angeles Community Corporation, noted in a December 2012 interview that taco vendors are increasingly feeling beaten down under policing and legal targeting. She notes that it's particularly difficult for small-scale food cart vendors to afford the \$160 for three-month renewals on street vending permits from the LA Department of Public Health. For these organizers, the public space of the street is an important arena for them to advocate for the rights of immigrant workers. Will the streets of Northeast LA remain a place for immigrants to pursue their American dreams as gentrification continues to unfold?

The Lummis Day Festival

The Lummis Day Festival has been held since 2006 to commemorate the life of Charles Lummis, a great preservationist and one of the founding fathers of Northeast Los Angeles who established the Southwest Museum of the American Indian and the Landmarks Club and helped found the Arroyo Culture that flowered in Northeast LA in the early years of the metropolis. The festival was created by Eliot Sekuler and the Friends of the SW Museum Coalition to foster public awareness of their contention that the future of the museum (the second largest collection of Native American artifacts in the United States) was at risk following its merger with its new owner, the Autry National Center of the American West. While community activist pressure on the Autry continues to

flare sporadically, the festival has become a popular annual nonprofit music, arts, and heritage event that creates a multicultural convergence space for diverse populations while raising the public visibility of the Arroyo Seco and associated Northeast LA neighborhoods.

In 2006 the Lummis Day festivities were held inside the compound of his ancestral hand-built home, the Lummis House, and in the nearby Heritage Square, a collection of preserved historic Craftsman and Victorian homes that were saved from demolition and moved to the site from Downtown Los Angeles. On Lummis Day, visitors can experience a multicultural program of music, visual and performing arts, food trucks, and exchange with community, educational, and environmental organizations representing Northeast Los Angeles in an atmosphere of recreation and civic engagement in the bucolic greenery of the Arroyo Seco, a main tributary of the Los Angeles River. The established residents include old-timer whites and Latino and Asian immigrant families, who mix with newcomer white homeowners and hipster visitors drawn through announcements by public radio stations like 89.3 KPCC and 89.9 KCRW and alternative entertainment newspapers like *LA Weekly*. The festival creates an annual daylong time and space between the public realms of work and the private realms of home for neighbors and strangers to meet and mingle in an environment of social inclusion and playful celebration.

On a Sunday in early June 2012, I attend Lummis Day. I start among the art and craft exhibits and poetry readings at the Lummis Home which seems integrated with the Arroyo Seco landscape as the foundation was built with stone from the riverbed. Then I across the Avenue 43 bridge spanning the Arroyo Seco to Heritage Square for the main musical and community events, where I am welcomed at the entrance by the indefatigable Carmela Gomes, a longtime neighborhood activist and officer of the Historic Highland Park Neighborhood Council. Youth and educational partners are plentiful, as are teachers from Ben Franklin High School including Yim Tam and her students, who are proud to display posters with biographical profiles of neighborhood business people. Many independent small businesses, including white old-timer like Galco's soda shop as well as newer cafés and restaurants, many of them Latino/a-owned, are event sponsors. I eagerly gravitate to the stage housing Dzian!, the cross-cultural vintage seventies Asian alternative

rock band led by Taiwanese American Wendy Hsu and her partner Jake Carey Sargent, who are staff members at the Center for Digital Learning and Research at Occidental College. I see Paul Livingstone, the Lebanese American sitar musician who learned with Ravi Shankar and is leading the Arohi Ensemble in a mesmerizing set of Indian ragas with tabla accompaniment. At various points in the day there are puppet performances, flamenco dancers, Latin jazz, a mariachi ensemble, rhythm and blues, and Americana music. Lummi Day provides a great opportunity for regional artists and musicians to connect with their local audiences while also increasing their broader public exposure. Listening to the mélange of world and American music in a neighborhood setting gives the sense of a global village in the global city of Los Angeles.

The sponsors and informational tables at Lummi Day represent an intersection of civic and progressive causes that links the older booster spirit of the Kiwanis Club with the newer citizen activist energy of several neighborhood councils, the Northeast Democratic Club, and the Uptown Gay and Lesbian Alliance. Latino/a interests are represented

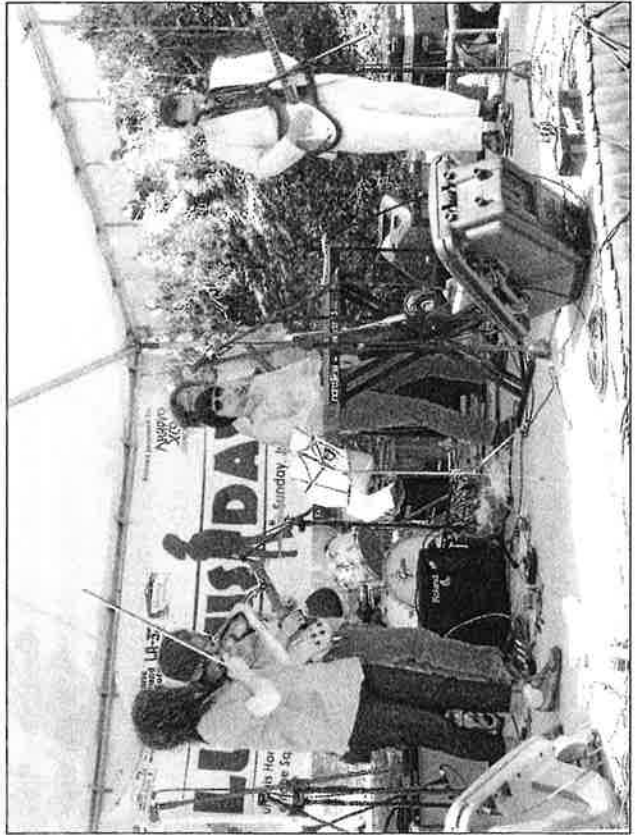


Figure I.2. Dzianl playing on Lummi Day 2012. (Credit: Jan Lin.)

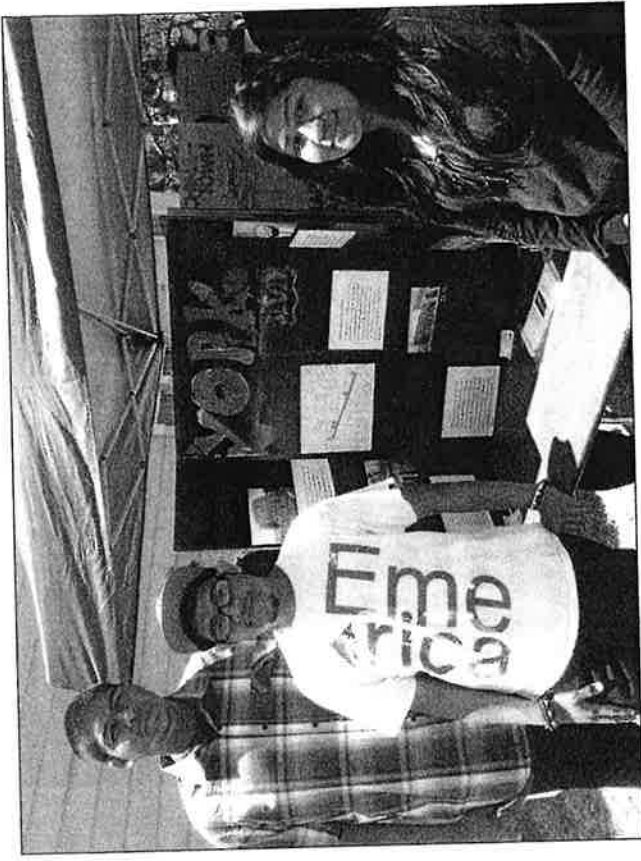


Figure I.3. Franklin High School students of teacher Yim Tam on Lummi Day 2012. (Credit: Jan Lin.)

by several business owners, the Anahuak Youth Sports Association, and Latino/a public officials. Art organization sponsors include the Avenue 50 Studio and the Arroyo Arts Collective. The Arroyo Seco Foundation and the Audubon Society Center at Debs Park represent environmental interests. The coalition of community and environmental interests resembles the Progressive Los Angeles Network, a citywide organizing campaign and conference held at Occidental College in 1999 led by Robert Gottlieb and his staff at the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI). Gottlieb and UEPI also organized an assortment of public, community, and environmental organizations to temporarily close the Arroyo Seco Parkway (110 freeway) to vehicles as part of the ArroyoFest of 2003, a recreational, educational, and cultural event that presaged the more recent CicLAvia events that now periodically close off automobile access to Los Angeles streets to allow cyclists, pedestrians, and cultural performers to use the pavement (Gottlieb 2007; Gottlieb et al. 2005).

Lummis was the original preservationist and bohemian entrepreneur of early Los Angeles. As the city editor for the *Los Angeles Times* and editor of the regional travel magazine *Land of Sunshine*, he was a key figure in promoting a romanticized image of the American Southwest through landmark preservation of the deteriorating Spanish missions. He was a great advocate of progressive issues of his day, including wilderness preservation and American Indian rights, and an impressive collector of Native American artifacts. Lummis was an eccentric and wiry impresario who was a leading figure in bohemian society of the Arroyo Seco at the turn of the twentieth century, when its neighborhoods were the site of the first art colony in Los Angeles. This bohemia drew Arts and Crafts and Mission Revival movement architects, design and crafts workers, artists, and writers who were drawn to the lush riparian environment, the celebration of handcrafted production methods, the collectivist spirit of independent proprietorship against factory manufacturing methods in American capitalism, and the bohemian arts that was flourishing there. It's also significant that Lummis was cozy with LA boosters, developers, and urban "growth machine" (Logan and Molotch 1987) interests who were allied to the *Los Angeles Times* and gladly employed the romantic "mission myth" he helped establish to market LA real estate to migrants and investors from the Midwest and East Coast.

The current Lummis Festival revival updates a cultural icon of the regional heritage of the past to the cultural diversity of the present and helps envision the future. Nicole Possert, a leader of the Highland Park Heritage Trust and the Friends of the Southwest Museum Coalition (FSWMC) who has fought for years to preserve the Southwest Museum as the key landmark among thousands of historic buildings and cultural monuments in the Arroyo Seco, describes the region as the "cradle of culture" in Los Angeles. While the festival is a unifying civic event, the FSWMC continues to engage in activism to raise public awareness of the plight of the Southwest Museum amid the grander ambitions of its corporate parent, the Autry National Center of the American West. The struggle over the museum shows how high the stakes can be in contemporary urban life and politics as culture is increasingly a significant factor in economic development. How will the local artists and residential pioneers who established the Northeast LA art scene fare as they are joined by newcomer hipsters, designers, and retailers, bohemian place

entrepreneurs, and speculator-developers? Will local culture get appropriated, or will new cultural mixing result? Can neighborhood activists and their organizations self-determine their regional political and economic future as the process of gentrification unfolds and speculators are drawn by the buzz of hipster neighborhood investment? How is Northeast Los Angeles evolving as an agglomeration or creative cluster of arts and culture work? Are artists, preservationists, and neighborhood activists opposed to or ostensible partners in the urban growth machine? Can urban growth be managed differently by progressive community coalitions working with public officials? The Lummis Day Festival is an annual community ritual and a fount for cultural heritage renewal but the convergence takes place in a larger historical setting of urban economic transition.

Figueroa Jam, a Day of Celebration and Protest

The Figueroa Jam festival unfolds on the morning of Saturday, March 19, 2016. Fig Jam is a demonstration of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti's "Great Streets" initiative that funds community engagement in connection with traffic signal and crosswalk improvements, energy-efficient buses, bicycle lanes, parklets, and pedestrian plazas to enhance pedestrian life and safety. The changes are supposed to boost urban sustainability, neighborhood quality of life, and tourism at the street level. There is even a solar-powered Soofa bench on North Figueroa Street that charges phones and monitors pedestrian activity in the area. Highland Park's North Figueroa is one of the Great Streets designated in each of the fifteen LA City Council districts. The community engagement activities include music, food, and art and cultural heritage activities to help neighborhoods celebrate their community life while inspiring a vision for the future. Fig Jam represents the culmination of several months of proposal writing, planning, and organizing led by the North Figueroa Association along with dozens of community partners including Gensler, Councilmember Gil Cedillo, the Historic Highland Park Neighborhood Council, NELA Art, Teatro Arroyo, Futures Studio, Occidental College, Highland Park Film Festival, and local artists and businesses.

The day appears to be a great success, with thousands of people thronging open houses and street activities along the North Figueroa

Street corridor and the farmers' market and Avenue 58 performance stage in the parking lots and temporarily closed streets adjoining the Highland Park Gold Line MTA station. But Misty Iwatsu of the North Figueroa Association is distraught because the festival has also been the site of roving demonstrations led by the Northeast LA Alliance (NELA Alliance) to draw public attention to and call out public officials and agencies on the racial injustices of the neighborhood gentrification process that is displacing poor immigrant families who were longtime residents of the area. The actions include a morning "flash mob" that stages a "Die-In" in the farmers' market, "flyer bombing" of the streets, a petition with sixteen hundred signatures opposing new luxury home projects, chants for affordable housing and rights for the homeless and marginalized, and protests in front of the office of Councilman Gil Cedillo on North Figueroa Street. Their picket signs read "600 low income rental units nearby will see rents rise. Displacement!," "People Before Profits," and "Invest in People, Not Land."

The clash between celebration and protest at Fig Jam is a manifestation of an underlying contrast between different networks of neighborhood activism in Northeast Los Angeles. One is a cadre of activists, business leaders, and institutions that "play by the rules" of bureaucratic authority, accommodating to City of LA "request for proposal" challenge grant guidelines and working in partnership with public officials and city agencies. For this group, gentrification is a vexing outgrowth of years of efforts to preserve and revitalize the boulevards and neighborhoods of Northeast LA. The other network is an expressive multitude of immigrant families and the homeless led by the NELA Alliance in guerrilla theater performances, street marches, and political protests for those being displaced or under threat of displacement by gentrification. Activists from the NELA Alliance were actually somewhat comingled with the Fig Jam organizing committees and neighborhood council networks. NELA Alliance took the opportunity for community engagement to call out egregious landlords and make demands on public officials.

The scene at Fig Jam raises questions about the future of those being displaced and left behind by the neighborhood revitalization and gentrification process in Northeast LA. Will immigrant families, seniors, the homeless, and the poor be able to survive as the neoliberal market-stimulating mechanisms of public/private partnership and

transit-oriented development spur corporate investment and urban upgrading of the main boulevards and residential subdivisions of the region? Can public officials and developers be made more sensitive to the social and environmental impacts of new housing and urban development projects? Can distressed tenants under threat of eviction be empowered with legal rights of notice and relocation assistance?

This book examines the current dynamics of gentrification and displacement from the historical standpoint of longer-range trends in neighborhood revitalization and transition. I examine how the cultural and economic revival of Northeast Los Angeles came after several decades of decline in the middle of the twentieth century, when the inner-ring electric-streetcar-served neighborhoods of Northeast Los Angeles were made obsolescent by the expanding freeway system and families were drawn to newer tract homes and shopping centers in outer-ring suburbs of the metropolitan region. Abandonment continued with white flight from inner-city social unrest in the 1960s, with Latino/a and Asian immigrants arriving in their wake. This book addresses the historical cycles of growth, decline, and revival in the streets and neighborhoods of Northeast Los Angeles while paying particular attention to the most recent stages of revitalization and reinvestment by pioneers and homesteaders since the 1970s that preceded the current trend of gentrification by newcomers and white returners in the 2010s. I place special emphasis on the role of Latino/a immigrants, artists, preservationists, and activists in promoting neighborhood revival to set the stage for the subsequent entrance of hipsters, investors, and speculators. I elicited their views on gentrification and the threat of displacement or other effects of the economic and social dynamics of reinvestment. I also asked them to reflect on how to promote interaction between established and newcomer residents across lines of socioeconomic class or racial/ethnic difference. I examine how urban policies can mitigate the problems of gentrification and displacement and foster more public participation while promoting social justice.

Research Methods

My research connection to Northeast Los Angeles began between 1999 and 2003 when I was principal investigator on a US Department of Housing and Urban Development grant to Occidental College to fund

a Northeast Los Angeles Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) with the Hathaway Family Resource Center, led by Pat Bowie in Garvanza as my main community partner. I developed many relationships with community partners and leaders, businesspeople, residents, and youth over these years, many through meetings of the Northeast Community Resource Coordinating Council (NECRCC). I worked with Andrea Brown of the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute, COPC project manager Maria Cardona, and Nancy Blaine of the Hathaway Center. I supervised the work of teams of Occidental College faculty and students on geographic information system (GIS) mapping, business surveys on three boulevards, asset mapping, computer technology training, tenant and block organizing, artist biographies, archival history, community health survey, environmental initiatives, community gardening, and strategic planning.

When the HUD grant ended around 2003, it became increasingly apparent that Northeast Los Angeles was going through a gradual then more dramatic neighborhood transition. Revitalization began to take place first in Eagle Rock along Colorado Boulevard and then on York Boulevard over the course of the 2000s. As Northeast Los Angeles came out of the Great Recession beginning in 2010, I began a new research and teaching agenda examining boulevard gentrification and perceptions of neighborhood transition with students in my Urban Sociology and Los Angeles Field Research courses. In 2012–2013, I collaborated with KCET-Departures, the online publication unit of the LA public television station, to publish interview features in their *Young Voices* series, prepared by my students, spotlighting community residents, artists, and leaders of Highland Park and Eagle Rock. We obtained consent from informants using protocols and questionnaires approved by our Institutional Review Board. The informants reflected on the complex commercial and residential gentrification dynamics caused by the arrival of bohemian hipsters and middle-class residents that threaten the displacement of small businesses and low-income immigrants. They also addressed ways to promote livability, social inclusion, and a more sustainable community. Student engagement in classroom discussions and student writing helped to bring forward focal themes and issues brought up by our informants.

Qualitative research methods including interviews and participant observation were the primary mode of data collection. I conducted

dozens of interviews on my own, sometimes with student partners. I attended many community events, festivals, forums, and protests in the course of participant observation. I performed content analyses of newspaper articles (including metropolitan dailies and community monthlies), organizational newsletters, photos, and other artifacts from archives including the Occidental College Library Special Collections, the Eagle Rock Valley Historical Society, and personal collections of neighborhood activists. My research method was triangulated to include quantitative analysis of US Census of Population and Housing data and City of Los Angeles business data.

My positionality is that of a public intellectual at a liberal arts college who engages with civic issues and diverse publics beyond the academy including urban communities, the public media, and urban policy circles. Some classic books in urban sociology that illustrate scholarly civic engagement include Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) and Mitchell Duneier's *Sidewalk* (2001). Michael Burawoy, president of the American Sociological Association in 2004, is a significant proponent of public sociology. He advocates for professional sociologists to engage in more public dialogue on fundamental values and to reach out to diverse publics beyond the university. Education is a central mission because students constitute the first public and can carry sociology into other realms of life.

My interest in contributing to urban policy and planning debates stems from my earlier years of HUD funding for the COPC. Later I developed a relationship with KCET-Departures (whose stories I was using in my teaching and research) when they agreed to publish online the work that my students and I produced. I also worked with 89.3 KPCC radio's Crawford Family Forum, Pivot/Participant Media cable television *Take Part Live* news show, and American Public Media/National Public Radio-Marketplace "Wealth and Poverty" desk on their "York and Fig" features. These kinds of teaching, research, and media commitments for community-based learning and civic engagement are significant components of Occidental College's mission. I increasingly adopted perspectives of critical sociology after the Great Recession of 2007–2010 when gentrification became more palpable in Northeast LA. I encouraged students to elicit informant responses on issues of gentrification and racial/ethnic transition in their field interviews. I encouraged

KCET-Departures to address these same issues in their features. I made connections between the activities of such urban social movement organizations as the NELA Alliance with Marxist perspectives and “right to the city” discourse in urban studies.

Plan of the Book

The first chapter starts with the legacy of boulevards and how they were superseded by freeways as arenas of neighborhood and public life in Los Angeles. It chronicles the recent commercial and cultural revitalization of boulevard life in Los Angeles and the link to urban design and transportation policy. It more closely examines the stages of boulevard transition in Highland Park and Eagle Rock and the relation to local preservation and “slow growth” movements. It depicts the Northeast LA arts scene that has evolved into a hipster cultural scene. It features many business leaders and public characters who have been a part of the economic and cultural revitalization of the boulevards, neighborhood gardens, and art spaces. They reflect on their public role in community life and impressions of neighborhood transition. The chapter includes a literature review of sociological studies of streets, neo-bohemia, and the creative economy in urban culture.

Chapter 2 outlines the stages of neighborhood transition in Northeast LA through historical periods of growth, decline, and renewal with reference to neighborhood life cycle models and the stage theory of gentrification. It chronicles the early decades of growth of the streetcar suburbs, then their decline with the rise of freeways, suburbanization, and white flight. The presence of a revitalization stage involving immigrant pioneers and homesteaders, followed by investor-speculators and more affluent gentrifiers is outlined. There follows analysis of US Census of Population and Housing data on racial transition and the recomposition of the household structure in Highland Park and Eagle Rock. Business data on Eagle Rock and Highland Park are consolidated to explore the sectoral profile of enterprises and identify growth trends.

Chapter 3 examines arts culture in the Arroyo Seco from the Arts and Crafts movement colony of the Arroyo Culture to the contemporary Northeast LA art scene. It chronicles the major figures of this bohemia, which waned with the decline of the region during the decades of

suburban out-movement and white flight. The significance of art collectives in the revival of the Northeast Los Angeles art scene is discussed, with Chicano(a)/Latino(a) art collectives emerging in the 1970s and white artists arriving through the Arroyo Arts Collective in the 1980s. The central figures and themes of the Latino/a arts renaissance are explored in depth. The contributions of the arts to community development and cultural revitalization are identified. Finally, the growing role of arts entrepreneurs in economic development is discussed, with reflections from arts leaders on the gentrification process and their expanding role in local politics and cultural policy.

Chapter 4 introduces the rise of neighborhood activism in Northeast Los Angeles in the 1980s against the backdrop of slow growth preservation and local control movements in California and around the nation. It begins with a case study of Eagle Rock, where the Eagle Rock Association (TERA) led a series of protests against mini-malls, condominiums, mansions, and big-box chain stores, in favor of better coordinated land-use planning to preserve the sense of a small town, the preservation of natural and architectural landmarks, and the taking back of the boulevard for bikers and pedestrians. It moves to the case of Highland Park, where citizen activists and preservationists worked to create a Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) to save historic buildings and better regulate land-use planning. It chronicles the rise of FSWMC to oppose the veritable warehousing of the Southwest Museum and the storage of the collection in Burbank by its new owner, the Autry National Center of the West. In comparing the two cases, the chapter examines the internal politics of neighborhood activism, the significant participation of women leaders, and the question of minority participation. The chapter finishes with the political legacy of the slow growth movements of Northeast Los Angeles, which are expressed through a progressive coalition of neighborhood activist organizations and Democratic Latino city councilmen, which proved to be a successful platform for Antonio Villaraigosa to win election as mayor of Los Angeles in 2005.

Chapter 5 moves on to examine the impacts of the sharpening gentrification process in Northeast Los Angeles and its socioeconomic and racial overtones as immigrant working-class Latino/a families are increasingly threatened by displacement through rent increases, evictions, and

socially traumatic uprooting of multifamily networks. Gentrification is tied to neoliberal LA government efforts to incentivize private investment through urban policy strategies like transit-oriented development, transit villages, and small lot housing development. I argue that the creative frontier of urban restructuring in Northeast LA also generates social violence, expressing capitalism's tendency to foster "accumulation by dispossession," which has been countered by neighborhood "right to the city" movements. I examine social efforts to advocate for the rights of those threatened by housing displacement and eviction, to address the community and environmental impacts of new high-density housing projects, and to campaign for more socially just housing and urban planning policies in Los Angeles. I also examine the plight of the homeless and rehabilitating gang members.

Chapter 6 examines prospects, implications, and some comparative thoughts in drawing to a conclusion. It begins by considering the challenges of neighborhood activism in Northeast LA as an older cadre of artists and activists makes way for a new generation of movement leaders who confront a shifting racial and socioeconomic landscape in the transition from suburbanization and white flight to gentrification and white return. There is special attention to conflicts in the Latino/a experience in Boyle Heights and Northeast LA and the power of processions and rituals to cope with the social trauma of eviction and displacement. The struggle to save imperiled cultural landmarks and the promise of new cultural festivals and music scenes are addressed. Northeast LA is viewed as an illustration of going "back to the future" as regional transit policy turns away from the failures of the postwar automobile-centered metropolis toward smart growth and green alternatives. Urban policy solutions are considered with respect to transit-oriented development, affordable housing development, and support for tenants' rights and programs for the homeless. Reflections are given on the meanings of taking back the boulevard. The significance of looking at the neighborhood scale in metropolitan change is addressed. Finally I address the book's contributions to interpretive, public, and critical sociology.

1

Boulevards, Gentrification, and Urban Culture

Los Angeles is well known as a decentralized, sprawling metropolis that diverges from the urban prototype of central business districts with grand pedestrian centers like Chicago or New York. The freeways celebrate personal mobility and the aesthetics of the automobile society, but foster social distancing more often than boosting civic engagement or urban public culture. The construction of the freeways helped relieve congestion at the center and abetted the rise of Los Angeles as the prototypical "suburban metropolis" of the mid-twentieth century (Fishman 1987). But freeways and the power of eminent domain also led to the destruction of some established neighborhoods often populated by minorities and contributed to class and racial separation as a result of white flight to the suburbs (Villa 2000; Avila 2004).

Before the advent of the automobile, boulevards serviced by electric railway lines were the main conduits of urban development in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Los Angeles. The electric streetcars were relatively affordable and contributed to social class mixing, and the boulevards were main avenues of commercial and public life. The interurban electric railway networks knit together residential real estate developments scattered throughout the Los Angeles region through vast agricultural estates from the coastal plain to the irrigated inland valleys. The neighborhoods of Northeast LA were some of the first streetcar suburbs to emerge. From the 1880s to the 1930s, Los Angeles was a metropolis of "town and country" (Fishman 1987). The Slovenian immigrant writer Louis Adamic (1932) described Los Angeles during the interwar era as an "enormous village" that was a teeming metropolitan frontier of immigrants and fortune seekers, who had a provincial outlook borne of their small-town and rural origins.

But the electric railways were demolished and their old rights of way were superimposed by a network of freeways servicing the booming suburbs in the postwar period. Many of the boulevards and inner-ring

suburban neighborhoods such as in Northeast Los Angeles suffered through decades of postwar disinvestment and decline as the focus of commercial and residential life shifted to new outer-suburban subdivisions and shopping centers that serviced the automobile-centered mass society. Financial redlining by the government-sponsored Home Owners' Loan Corporation further contributed to the disinvestment of minority inner-ring neighborhoods. But with the passage of civil rights and immigration reform laws in the 1960s, racial minorities began to move into neighborhoods and boulevards being vacated by whites, who increasingly after the Watts Riots of 1965 viewed the inner city as a zone of social disorder.

While the freeways are the main arteries in the regional transportation network, the surface boulevards and avenues of Los Angeles are drawing new interest as the true locational heart of public life in the metropolis. The freeways allow visitors and suburbanites to bypass the inner city and are concrete walls that divide and fragment life at the neighborhood level. The boulevards, by contrast, stretch for miles across the coastal plain, connecting neighborhoods across the sprawling city, traversing socioeconomic divides and a diverse patchwork of ethnic enclaves. Western Avenue, for instance, one of the longest north-south boulevards in Los Angeles, starts in the tony Hollywood Hills neighborhood of Los Feliz and runs down through Koreatown and Latino/African American neighborhoods of South Los Angeles to the ocean. Sunset and Wilshire boulevards are two well-known east-west arteries that extend from Downtown LA through Hollywood and the Westside all the way to the ocean at Santa Monica.

Los Angeles Times architecture critic Christopher Hawthorne wrote a series of stories (2012–2013) chronicling the renewal of public life on several of the city's iconic boulevards, including Atlantic, Sunset, Crenshaw, Harbor, Lankershim, and Wilshire. He describes a cultural and economic renaissance resulting from the combined efforts of architects, urban planners, small business owners, and community activists. Higher density and mixed-use commercial and residential projects are part of the transformations he observes along with street-level cultural amenities like hip art walks, ethnic food scenes, pocket parks, and strategies to share automobile street space with bicyclists and pedestrians. He also credits new Metropolitan Transportation Authority efforts to

fund light-rail, subway, and bus networks armed with new funding from Measure R, a sales tax increase approved in 2008 by Los Angeles County voters, and city efforts to create more miles of bike lanes. He describes the emergence of a "post-suburban" civic identity in contemporary Los Angeles.

Hawthorne draws new attention to a book previously neglected but now in a twenty-fifth-anniversary reprint, Doug Suisman's *Los Angeles Boulevard: Eight X-rays of the Body Public* (2014). Suisman describes boulevards as "the spine or umbilical cord of the city" and argues that they "constitute the irreducible armature of the city's public space and are therefore charged with social and political significance." Suisman has put his theory to action through twenty-five years of work in infrastructure and landscape planning for transit, streetscapes, parks, campuses, and neighborhoods, for local and international clients. His Suisman Urban Design studio advertises a "profound respect for social

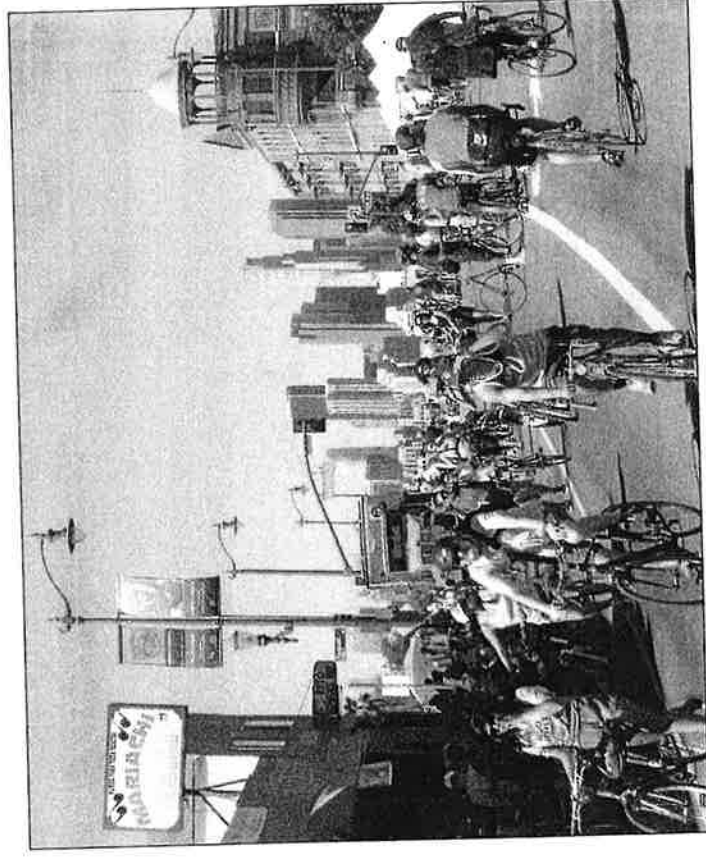


Figure 1.1. CicLAvia in Boyle Heights. (Credit: Jan Lin.)

and cultural fabric” in working to integrate socially diverse and broad public collaboration into its design and planning charrettes.

Widespread public engagement on the boulevards of Los Angeles has also been enlivened since 2010 by the semiannual open-street event known as CicLAvia, inspired by the Ciclovías that have taken place in Bogotá, Colombia, since 1976. Bicyclists predominate, along with pedestrians and skaters, in the streets that are closed to automobile traffic for several hours. Musical performances and walking tours provide a mixed atmosphere of recreational celebration and public education about the local cultures of city neighborhoods. Predating CicLAvia was the ArroyoFest, during which the Arroyo Seco Parkway running through Northeast Los Angeles was closed to automobile traffic for several hours in 2003 to allow for bicycle and pedestrian recreation and a community festival in Sycamore Grove Park (Gottlieb 2007).

CicLAvia has received kudos for promoting carbon-free “green” modes of urban transportation and social mixing among the citizenry. But in working-class immigrant neighborhoods like Boyle Heights, CicLAvia is

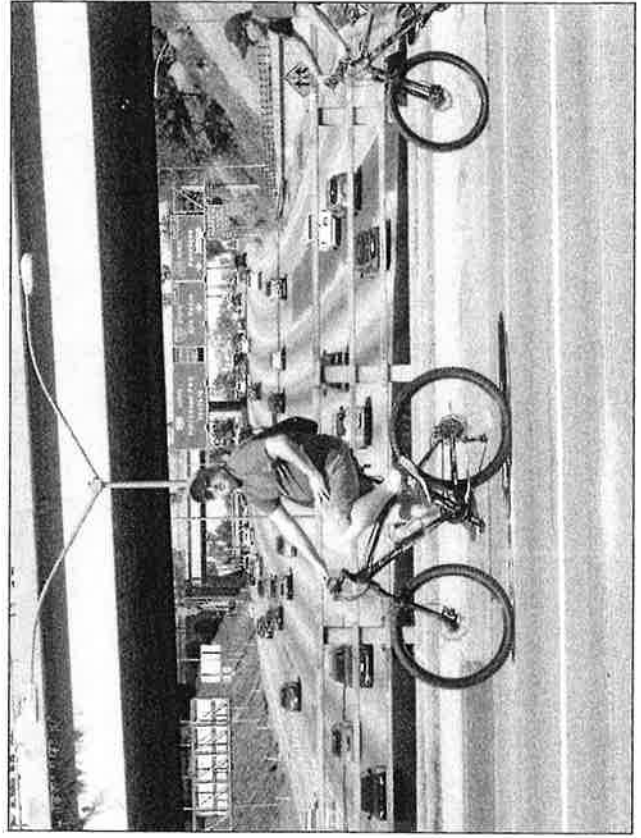


Figure 1.2. CicLAvia over the Hollywood Freeway. (Credit: Jan Lin.)

also perceived by some residents and business owners as a phenomenon that brings in white middle-class tourists who subsequently become home buyers and commercial entrepreneurs and accelerate the gentrification process while promoting displacement in the transitional neighborhood (Bermudez 2014). There was local outcry against a May 2014 flier distributed by Adaptive Realty, an L.A.-based company, for a bike tour of the neighborhood that asked, “Why rent downtown when you could own in Boyle Heights?” The flier also cited Boyle Heights as a “charming, historic, walkable and bikable neighborhood,” “2 seconds from the Arts District,” where buyers can “put down as little as \$40K with decent credit.” Company president Moses Kagan canceled the event in response to the public controversy.¹

Boulevard Transition in Northeast Los Angeles

The neighborhoods of Northeast Los Angeles, particularly Highland Park and Eagle Rock, have historically been known for architectural preservation, artistic and bohemian cultural life, independent small businesses, and racial/ethnic diversity. The neighborhoods are framed by four boulevards, including Figueroa, Colorado, Eagle Rock, and York. Among the first suburbs to be built in Los Angeles, the northeast neighborhoods have experienced historical cycles of disinvestment and white flight, followed by settlement of Latin American and Asian immigrants and their families, and now a trend of gentrification and white return. New coffee shops and restaurants, art galleries, and boutique retailers selling handcrafted home décor and vintage products are sprouting amid the existing retail landscape of Latino/a sidewalk food vendors, taco trucks, bakeries and eateries, and Filipino mini-markets. The boulevards are in a state of active gentrification and racial/ethnic transition that reflects broader dynamics in the neighborhoods of Northeast Los Angeles.

In the last few decades we have seen new interest in downtown and inner-ring suburban neighborhoods such as Northeast Los Angeles, as a countertrend to urban sprawl and the long commutes experienced by residents of exurban locations. The appeal of older neighborhoods with historically significant architecture close to central city cultural amenities has drawn young professionals and business investors to

communities like Eagle Rock and Highland Park. The economic revitalization of the boulevards is palpable, but so are concerns about the displacement effects of commercial and residential gentrification. Turnover in commercial storefronts from ethnic-owned enterprises catering to working-class consumers to white-owned enterprises catering to middle-class consumers has increased during the recent economic recovery from the Great Recession of 2007–2010. Speculative investors are purchasing foreclosed properties and flipping them for windfall profits in the current post-recessionary period and stoking a red-hot residential real estate market that augurs the displacement of Latinos and working-class residents.

Along with the revitalization of the boulevards we have seen the rise of community-based efforts to enhance public space on the boulevards, including the Take Back the Boulevard campaign of the Eagle Rock Association, which seeks to slow traffic on Colorado Boulevard and add bike lanes, enhance pedestrian access, and improve street landscaping. Traffic slowing and bike lanes have been enhanced on York Boulevard for several years, while Councilman José Huizar's office has helped procure public monies for a park and sidewalk "parklet," street beautification, and traffic management. On Figueroa Street, the North Figueroa Association has worked for years with the assistance of Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative funding to improve the boulevard through streetscape enhancements. These public space campaigns mark an evolution of the historical preservation and slow growth movements that emerged in Northeast Los Angeles in the 1980s. These community interests have increasingly converged with a growing regional coalition of cyclist interests, planners, and public officials working to make the boulevards more bike- and pedestrian-friendly. These interests have been boosted with a broader metropolitan movement for "transit-oriented development" arising around the growth of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) light-rail system and the sales tax revenues since the 2008 passing of Measure R. Transit-oriented development has been under way in Northeast Los Angeles since the opening of the Gold Line light-rail system through the Arroyo Seco corridor in 2003.

In October 2013, Mayor Garcetti made further commitments to public-sector support of boulevard revitalization with the announce-

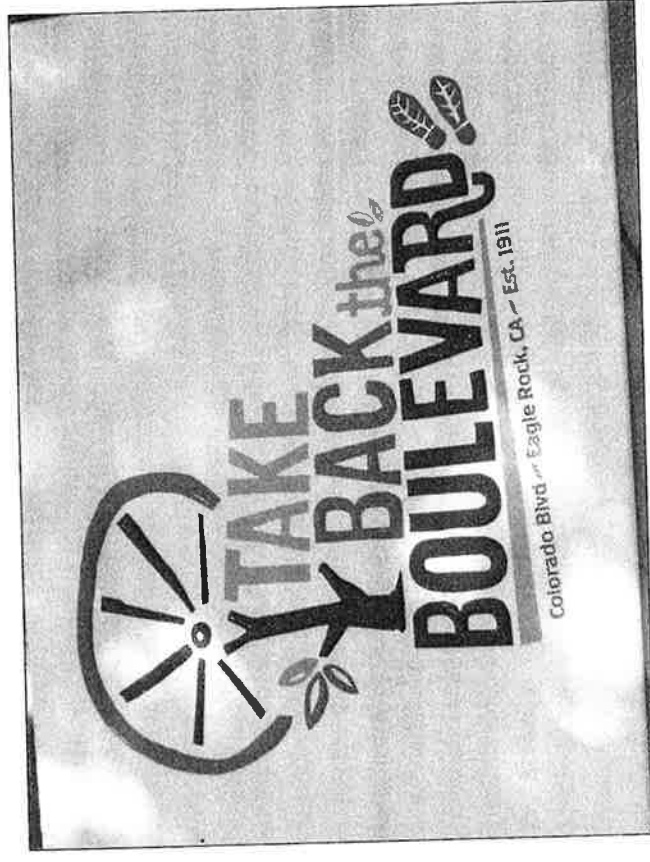


Figure 1.3. Take Back the Boulevard campaign logo. (Credit: Jan Lin.)

ment of his "Great Streets" program to fund design, permitting, and infrastructure changes to make streets more pedestrian-friendly, attract businesses, and improve quality of life. In June 2014, he announced the targeting of fifteen streets in each Los Angeles City Council district, with North Figueroa Street between Avenue 50 and Avenue 60 pegged in Northeast L.A. An associated "People Streets" program was created to facilitate the creation of bike corrals, parklets, and plazas to foster public interaction.

Artists and the Hipster Scene

The transitions in the public space of the boulevards of the Northeast Los Angeles have been accompanied by evolutions in the public identity of the region. The cultural identity of Northeast Los Angeles has its historical precedents in the Arroyo Culture that flowered at the turn of the twentieth century in the Arroyo Seco tributary of the Los Angeles River that flows down through the region from the San Gabriel

Mountains. The Arroyo Culture was associated with the West Coast Arts and Crafts architecture and design movement and organized artist collectives, small-scale handcraft production methods, and retreat into nature in a social and aesthetic critique against industrial capitalism and the white supremacist spirit of frontier conquest (Winter 1999). One of the Arroyo's most famous public figures was *Los Angeles Times* city editor Charles Lummis, who founded the Southwest Museum of the American Indian and the Landmarks Club, and prefigured the modern historical and environmental preservation movement on the West Coast. But Lummis also contributed to the cultural invention of a romanticized mythology of California's pastoral Spanish mission past that served the interests of the boosters and real estate interests during these early decades of urban development in Los Angeles (McWilliams [1946] 1973).

The Northeast Los Angeles region fell into economic and cultural decline with mass suburbanization and white flight in the mid-twentieth century. Latino immigrants began to populate the neighborhoods and stabilize boulevard commerce, although there emerged pockets of poverty, and the Avenues street gang rose in power, especially in the southern part of Northeast LA in Cypress Park and Glassell Park. The Arroyo arts scene began a revival in the 1970s with the emergence of Chicano(a)/Latino(a) artist collectives such as Mechicano Art Center and Centro de Arte Publico in Highland Park. They implanted in Northeast LA their traditions of public art, Chicano(a)/Latino(a) expression, and struggle for social justice that had been nurtured in the original heart of the community in Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles. These ethnic artists helped to restore local public culture and neighborhood stability in the decades of white flight and subsequently stimulated the return of white artists who formed a new super-organization, the Arroyo Arts Collective, in 1989 that amalgamated with the Chicano(a)/Latino(a) collectives, fostering opportunities for artists and promoting heritage preservation and regional cultural identity. The Eagle Rock Community Cultural Center (now the Eagle Rock Center for the Arts) was founded in 1997, creating another hub of regional arts activity and public life. The Avenue 50 Studio opened in 1999, providing a new focus for Chicano(a)/Latino(a) arts in the neighborhood with good links to artists in Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles.

The arts culture of Northeast LA has been undergoing a period of creative efflorescence and public cultural reinvention in the wake of the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. Chicano(a)/Latino(a) artists have infused local public culture with the revolutionary spirit of collective struggle and ethnic cultural expression. They have raised the aesthetic legitimacy and public recognition of popular art forms including folk Catholicism, ethnic vernacular, tattoo art, muralism, graffiti, and other genres of sub-cultural and street art. Meanwhile, white artists returning to the region have revived and pluralized the mythology of the first Arroyo Culture to accommodate the multicultural and subcultural diversity of Northeast Los Angeles in the contemporary global era. The juxtaposition of the cultural past and present is evident at regional cultural events such as the Lummis Festival, which features contemporary multicultural musicians and artists against the backdrop of historic homes at Heritage Square. The intermixing of the past and present also happens at the annual Discovery Tour organized by the Arroyo Arts Collective that exhibits the work of contemporary artists in their studios and in historic Arts and Crafts homes. Arts tourism is most regularized through the monthly Northeast Los Angeles Second Saturdays Art Night run by NELA Arts.

The growth of the Northeast LA arts scene and the commercial revival on the boulevards have sparked popular perceptions of the region as a place of hipster neighborhoods that are drawing business investors and residents from nearby higher income artistic and bohemian neighborhoods like Silver Lake and Los Feliz. Dave Gardetta (a graduate of Eagle Rock High School who returned to be an English teacher at his alma mater while also developing a career as a journalist) wrote a perceptive *Los Angeles Times Magazine* cover story in July 2001 that chronicled the community's shift from a small-town "Mayberry, R.F.D." to "Hipster, U.S.A.," while raising some nuanced questions about the effects of impending growth and development. As a harbinger of the new trend, he drew attention to the opening of Swörk coffee bar (the Scandinavian-inspired name was invented by Neal as a synergy of "success" and "work") by Patricia Neal, a Los Feliz expatriate. A more boosterish *Los Angeles Times* Weekend Calendar cover story followed in November 2006, written by Susan Carpenter and titled "Making Eagle Rock a Hip Nest." Carpenter drew attention to the family-friendly retail business and home property environment of the neighborhood and offered a more

demographically specific categorization of the hipster scene: “If the Silver Lake aesthetic is hip, twenty-something and single, Eagle Rock’s reflects just the next stage in life. It’s just as hip, but thirty-something and married with kids.” The hipster colonization of Northeast Los Angeles represents another beachhead in the “wave” of gentrification that has swept through neighborhoods like Venice, Leimert Park, Boyle Heights, and Echo Park (Zahniser 2006).

The growth of the hipster scene then shifted to York Boulevard, which runs between Highland Park and Eagle Rock. The *New York Times* published a short July 2009 article spotlighting Highland Park as a “New Culture District in Los Angeles” (Brisick 2009). The *Los Angeles Times* followed with an article on March 9, 2012, describing Highland Park as



Figure 1.4. *Los Angeles Times Magazine* story on Eagle Rock in 2001. (Fair use.)

“A Hub of Hip, Really” (Nakano 2012). These articles are shorter and more superficial than the earlier journalism, but draw attention to the arrival of recent retail entrepreneurs from more affluent neighborhoods dealing in vintage and handmade products, with a DIY spirit evident in marketing of artistically refurbished dresses at Orelcul77 (the “hipster tailor shop” owned by Tawni Lucero) and glass-making classes at Cathi Milligan’s Glass Studio. There has been special attention to the block of York Boulevard between Avenue 50 and Avenue 51 that was traditionally dubbed “York Village” by locals, where much of the new commercial turnover has occurred.

I follow Richard Lloyd (2010) in describing the hipster scene in Northeast Los Angeles as a “neo-bohemia.” The area is somewhat of a neo-bohemian variant with “neotraditional” and “green” elements that draw people through the qualities of the original small towns and inner-ring suburbs that are the antithesis of the tract homes and shopping centers of the postwar mass society. People are drawn to the historic residential and commercial architecture, intimate neighborhoods, community gardens and art parks, and pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly streets that teem with a variety of independently owned small businesses. They are lured by the air of authenticity that is both ethnic (Latino/a and Asian) and vintage Americana in character. Vintage products include historic homes, clothing, books, musical instruments, and vinyl records. Foodies are drawn to the authentic thrill of ethnic, fusion, and vegetarian/vegan restaurants. The “indie hipster” cultural scene of Northeast Los Angeles helps to satisfy a white middle-class consumer demand for the experience of “living on the edge” while also nourishing a spirit of cultural rebellion. Buying from small mom-and-pop independent businesses can reflect a rejection of large corporate chain stores and big-box merchandisers.

Gentrification in Northeast LA also has a Latin edge. The National Public Radio station 89.3 KPCC aired a story on April 29, 2013, about Café de Leche, an independent coffee shop at the corner of York Boulevard and Avenue 50 owned by Anna Schodorf, a Latina of Nicaraguan origin and her white husband, Matt Schodorf, that has become recognized as a hipster hangout and somewhat of a symbol of gentrification. The couple had met in Highland Park, married, and had kids when they decided to open the coffee shop. Anna professed to not be a gentrifier: “I’m the café and he’s the leche.” She comments that some local bloggers

had questioned the legitimacy of the name because the Spanish parlance for “coffee with milk” is usually “café con leche” while she had opted for the Nicaraguan regional phrasing “café de leche.” An employee who grew up in Highland Park and had worked there for five years, Carmen Castillo, said, “It’s like my mom; my mom will not come in for a cup of coffee.” She said that she was conflicted about the changes going on in Highland Park, as she loved the new businesses that enlivened the boulevard but was worried about never being able to buy a home in the neighborhood she grew up in.²

The phenomenon of Latino/as being agents as well as victims of gentrification has also been recognized in Boyle Heights, the traditional commercial heart of the barrio that is now experiencing rapid gentrification with the emergence of a Hispanic middle class and the completion of the Gold Line extension to East Los Angeles in November 2009. An August 2013 *New York Times* article by Jennifer Medina refers to the process as “gentefication” (a Spanglish term integrating *gente*, the Spanish word for “people,” with *gentrification*) and the Chicano/a hipsters as “Chipsters.” The same label was applied in a splashy October 26, 2012, *Telemundo* (Los Angeles channel 52) story on the new destination marketing trend in the Boyle Heights neighborhood among retailers and bar and restaurant owners that appropriates the iconography of the historical struggle for Chicano/a recognition and empowerment in East Los Angeles in a hip and fashionable Latino/a middle-class shopping and entertainment environment. The “gentefication” of Northeast Los Angeles is also under way in Highland Park and Eagle Rock with the growth of a population of middle-class Latino/a home and business owners.

Sociology of Hipsters and Bohemia

In a set of essays published in 2010, *What Was the Hipster? A Sociological Investigation*, based on a symposium held the year before at the New School in New York City, Mark Greif and his co-editors looked retrospectively at the phenomenon of the hipster, which he suggested first surfaced in 1999. In a chapter titled “Positions” (that was also released in similar form around the same time in *New York* magazine), Greif points out that “hipster” is primarily a pejorative insult referring to poseurs and scenesters without a revolutionary core, trend-spotters, cool-hunters,

and hangers-on who are attracted to bohemian neighborhoods and draw their feelings and inspiration from a smaller minority of authentic hardworking artists, writers, and politicians. Greif geographically locates hipsters in neighborhoods like Manhattan’s Lower East Side, Brooklyn’s Williamsburg, Jamaica Plain in Boston, Capitol Hill in Seattle, the Inner Mission District of San Francisco, and Echo Park and Silver Lake in Los Angeles. Playfully mixing pop cultural parody and serious intellectual referencing, he identifies an eclectic array of hipster consumer motifs and talismans like trucker hats, skinny jeans, flannel shirts, Pabst Blue Ribbon beer, “porno” or “pedophile” moustaches, lumber-jack beards, Americana T-shirts for church socials, taxidermy, *Vice* magazine, the films of Wes Anderson, locavore food preferences, and indie rock. Rather than fetishizing blackness like the hipsters of the 1950s (like Norman Mailer who wrote the widely cited essay “The White Negro”), Greif says millennial hipsters fetishize the whiteness of low-class suburban or rural white culture. Rather than being artistic producers of bohemian culture, hipsters are rebel consumers of *déclassé* culture.

In his book on Wicker Park, Chicago, which he describes as a “neo-bohemia,” Richard Lloyd (2010) draws attention to the way that neighborhoods act as generative spaces for cultural production where aspiring artists can nurture talent, support each other, build local audiences, and acquire wider commercial success by drawing the attention of gatekeepers such as artists and repertoire men in the music industry. He describes how musicians and artists initially colonized Wicker Park, learning to navigate the mean streets and drawn by the appeal of “grit as glamour,” willing to work downscale jobs like waiting tables and bartending to pay the bills while establishing their artistic careers. Lloyd cites classic sociological work on cultural scenes by John Irwin (1977) and on art worlds by Howard Becker (1984). While historically artists of bohemia were more alienated from the prevailing social order, Lloyd says that contemporary neo-bohemian artists are less alienated and include creative entrepreneurs at the cutting edge of the multimedia and digital economy.

There has been attention in geography and regional planning studies to the “creative economy,” which tends to agglomerate in urban clusters and become a force for economic development, counterbalancing some of the broader declines in traditional manufacturing industries.

Richard Florida (2002) argues that creative economies foster innovation and aggrandize local endowments of human capital that are not easily substitutable in other locations and are thus more resistant to the outsourcing that besets manufacturing. He locates his “creative class” in places like high-technology corridors and university towns that foster social tolerance and nurture talent and innovation. Creative cities and neighborhoods can generate media exposure and a “geography of buzz” that can attract audiences and idea-driven firms (Currid and Williams 2010). Terry Clark ([2004] 2011) describes cities as “entertainment machines” replete with cultural scenes comprising a variety of cultural amenities that draw residents, tourists, conventioners, and shoppers.

Elizabeth Currid (2009, 376) notes that artists are tied to social networks in the neighborhood rather than to industry in the phenomena of bohemian and subcultural scenes. She argues that artists create artistic distinction through a process of forming an initial artist colony that subsequently enables their region to capitalize on its own cultural identity. She also draws attention to how artists create public goods such as youth involvement and educational programs. She says that art scenes form clusters of “constructed amenities” that, in addition to natural amenities like parks, are a key force in cities becoming centers of consumption. The lure of bohemia is its access to authenticity, but art also helps to gentrify neighborhoods because it attracts people with disposable incomes.

Hip Businesses and Buzz on the Boulevards

Classic icons of the urban gentrification landscape are hip cafés and restaurants, retail stores and “boutiques,” art studios and galleries, and bike shops that help create a buzz about the particular neighborhood. They are among the most visible barometers of the economic revitalization and gentrification process and are typically aligned along commercial boulevards, creating a sense of intimate pedestrian encounter along particular block faces such as York Boulevard between Avenue 50 and Avenue 52, historically dubbed York Village by local businesspeople and residents. York Boulevard is narrow enough that people can shout or literally converse with friends from across the street.³ In Eagle Rock, where Colorado Boulevard is wider like a four-lane highway with a median, neighborhood activists have been more intent on slowing

down traffic and adding bike lanes through the Take Back the Boulevard campaign. But there are pockets of pedestrian activity like Eagle Rock’s traditional “downtown” at Colorado Boulevard and Townsend Avenue where the electric streetcar historically terminated, and the Duffy Building that anchored the electric streetcar turnabout at the intersection of Colorado and Eagle Rock boulevards. Business life in Highland Park is centered on a prominent commercial downtown on North Figueroa Street between Avenue 50 and Avenue 60. Businesses are more dispersed along Eagle Rock Boulevard as it runs south toward Glassell Park. All these boulevards have been colonized by new businesses in the era of commercial revitalization and gentrification over the last fifteen years.

A row of commercial shop fronts on urban streets creates the same sense of pedestrian mingling and public intimacy found in classic European colonnaded commercial walkways or the covered *stoa* typical of the Greek agora. The same effect can be found in the Arab *suq* and in the commercial streets and merchant emporia of Asian and African cities. On the Parisian boulevards of the mid-nineteenth century was born the *flâneur* or *boulevardier* who sauntered along the boulevard while drinking in the urban spectacle and exploring the diverse nooks and crannies of its commercial arcades. The flâneur was a celebrated protagonist in the novels of Charles Baudelaire and the intellectual writings of Walter Benjamin in his encyclopedic *Arcades Project* manuscript. They wrote about the experience of detachment and alienation from the aristocratic order experienced by the flâneur in nineteenth-century Paris as a general condition of urban modernity. This invites comparison with the contemporary urban hipster who pursues the buzz of authentic urban experiences and subcultural life on the boulevards of twenty-first-century Los Angeles as an escape from the conformity of the postwar mass suburban neighborhoods and corporate chain-store shopping centers of the suburban periphery. We can imagine Baudelaire and Benjamin exploring Northeast LA in the twenty-first century as bicycle flâneurs.

I cite the urban planner Doug Suisman (2014) who discusses the idea of the boulevards of Los Angeles as a historically significant “armature” of public life, especially during the streetcar and early automobile era when the Miracle Mile of Wilshire Boulevard was a bold urban planning prototype for the Linear City of the future that made disparate elements symmetrical and unified. But the boulevards became distanced from that

promise during the decades of freeway building and urban sprawl, when many Los Angeles boulevards became disinvested and symbols of urban decline and social unrest. After decades of work on street design and urban revitalization planning, Suisman describes streets as a planner's "fuselage" that he architecturally depicts as configurations of roadways, sidewalks, and building fronts through which people move in their daily rounds, creating spontaneous social mixing and cross-ventilation of purpose (2014, 73–77). The well-designed aircraft fuselage, if engineered properly, can generate flight. The well-designed street planning fuselage, if engineered properly, can enliven public spaces and thus generate buzz and the social efflorescence of a successful, hip, and culturally vitalized community. In Northeast LA the fuselage of street revitalization on the boulevards includes bike lanes and traffic slowing, enhanced pedestrian access, sidewalk porches, and corner parklets. The small business fuselage includes a mix of hip cafés and restaurants, retail boutiques, and arts-related businesses.

Boulevard Voices: Mom-and-Pop Owners and Neighborhood Characters

The iconic businesses that create buzz on the boulevards and geographically locate the revitalization and gentrification process are founded by mom-and-pop business owners who are also local public characters. Jane Jacobs (1961) famously wrote about these individuals on Hudson Street in Greenwich Village for the way they helped to facilitate social networks and camaraderie among residents and were "eyes on the street" promoting the sense of urban security. The iconic businesses of Northeast LA, including cafés and restaurants, vintage retail boutiques, and bookstores, help to foster an experience of authentic urbanism that is the antipode of the corporate mass-market chain store, through their mom-and-pop spirit of independent small business ownership and creation of community spaces and gardens for mingling and cultural expression. These mom-and-pop businesses and neighborhood public characters helped to constitute the revitalization process on the boulevards and vacant lots and have a stake in the community. Independent proprietors of these businesses have created authentic safe spaces for the community, and some businesses have been stepping stones to larger

dreams. Some proprietors have a more critical mentality with roots in the struggle against geopolitical and neighborhood violence in the Latino/a community experience, while others are involved in business improvement and branding campaigns relating Northeast LA to Route 66, bicycle activism, community gardens, or art parks.

Authenticity, Community, and Safe Spaces

One of the iconic businesses of the recent transition in Northeast LA is Swörk, an independent coffee shop that opened in the summer of 2000. The business owner Patricia Neal was featured in Dave Gardetta's July 2001 *Los Angeles Times Magazine* cover story on neighborhood transition in Eagle Rock. Gardetta observed that along with Fatty's Café and newsstand and a French bakery café known as Beaujolais Boulangerie, Swörk was a harbinger of Eagle Rock's transition from an old-school "Mayberry, R.F.D." neighborhood known for a plethora of auto repair shops and beauty salons to a hipster enclave with cafés and restaurants catering to incoming young urban professionals. Neal professed to be a transplant from Los Feliz attracted by the entrepreneurial possibilities in the sleepy or vacant storefronts of Eagle Rock, and she smartly set up in one of the sweetest spots available, in the corner of the historic Duffy Building at the intersection of Colorado and Eagle Rock boulevards.⁴ She describes the unique and authentic character of her coffee shop as cutting edge and funky with European inspiration:

I think a lot of people wonder who we are because we've got the question mark as a logo. To the community we're an "uber" coffee bar. We're different, utilitarian, design-oriented, and funky. The purpose is to inspire because the word "Swörk" is actually a combination of the words "work" and "success," which has been my motto for years. The design and inspiration came because I love Europe and Switzerland. I remember visiting a place in Switzerland and seeing how beautiful and clean it was and that was how Swörk evolved. Half my staff is tattooed and pierced. In fact I was a hipster at one point in my younger years when I had a black Mohawk.⁵

She always wanted to bring a family-friendly atmosphere to her café, including a children's play area that has become a meeting place for

mothers and dads with their toddlers. Neal is publicly engaged through her social activism around the rehabilitation and beautification of the Duffy Building and its rear alleyway, organizing block festivals and building business networks with other small businesses and hosting fund-raisers for such groups as the Boy Scouts and the Relay for Life of the Cancer Society.

Northeast LA is also known for its thrift shops and vintage goods retailers. The Green Bean on Eagle Rock Boulevard opened in 2010 and sells children's resale clothes, toys, shoes, books, and handmade items. Owner Traci Green is a bubbly character who purports to operate her shop as a community resource. She observes that people are drawn to the funky, down-to-earth quality of her resale philosophy:

This particular space where my shop is has actually been a children's shop for the past eighteen years. . . . The community was forming its identity by being a thrifty yet smart area. A high-end boutique in this neighborhood is not going to cut it. More "mom-and-pop," down-to-earth, cultural, funky is what is going to attract people. People have told me that they really enjoy the funkiness of my shop. . . . Some come from Marina del Rey or Montrose because there's nothing else like it in Los Angeles. I think the neighborhood has been discovered by a lot of people possibly because of my circle. They come and then they come every week! . . . They make a whole day of it in this neighborhood.

On Mondays Traci and her staff barter with customers who trade in their gently used children's items for store credit. This is a "positive exchange" she believes teaches children about recycling their belongings when they no longer need them and makes their parents role models. She also helped launch a family-friendly world music song circle called Mothersong that attracts up to fifty families weekly. She manages and sings in a bluegrass folk children's music band called the Hollow Trees and is a kindergarten music teacher at Odyssey Charter School. Traci says,

My band definitely connects families. Music is a very interesting thing for families. The parents feel like it's a very enlightening experience that helps round their children to prepare them to be citizens in the world. Music is an essential part of the human soul. By giving a child that inner rhythm,

it will help them in their lifetime every single day because they have a dialogue and a rhythm going on inside of them.

Traci distinguishes the hipsters in Northeast Los Angeles from those in Silver Lake:

There are a lot of hipsters in this community, a lot of support and love and a village community. People want to know each other here. They want to talk to each other on the street. There have been many new families. I say that we have a lot of new people here who were shooting for Silver Lake, but they ended up here. Highland Park and Eagle Rock has increased a lot in the family-friendly aspect. I have a saying that you can't throw a stone out the front door without hitting a stroller! I always say it's like Silver Lake without the tattoos. There are a lot of edgy, alternative people here who have children now and aren't playing at nightclubs anymore.⁶

Through her work with the American Legion Hall, where she teaches music classes, Traci has become more engaged with neighborhood social issues like assisting homeless veterans. She's been involved in discussions with neighborhood council members to beautify the American Legion Hall, which has become an eyesore to many. She's become increasingly involved with addressing homelessness and promoting neighborhood watch groups to improve residential and pedestrian sense of security on the streets.

Antigua Coffee House on North Figueroa Street in Cypress Park is another Northeast LA mom-and-pop business run by social entrepreneur Yancey Quinones, who is as concerned with delivering coffee and an authentic product that is responsibly and sustainably sourced as with using his shop space to promote community and cultural expression. He recounted his family history and how his mother's German Jewish father escaped racial oppression in pre-World War II Europe to settle in Guatemala. The family became successful farmers but were subsequently displaced by civil war to Los Angeles in the 1960s, where Quinones's mother met Quinones's immigrant father, who had a similar story of struggle and escape from Mexico. His family's experiences of escape from violence abroad to the refuge of America underlay his ambition to create a community space and confront social violence in the streets of Northeast LA.



Figure 1.5. Traci Green of the Green Bean. (Credit: Annika John.)

I'm from Cypress Park, born and raised here. I come from a family that owns coffee farms in Guatemala. So I figured I'll create a community coffeehouse not to get rich but something that I enjoy. So it becomes a passion, like musicians when they play music and artists who create artwork. It was a dream for me to open up a shop in my own community because when I was growing up we had nothing like this. I wanted to have a space where people could use free Wi-Fi. I'm not stuck to capitalism; I'm more of a social capitalist.

Yancey has made a cause out of creating a safe space for the community by beautifying a pedestrian tunnel under North Figueroa Street, near his

coffee shop, which had been boarded up to prevent gang activity, turning it into an underground art gallery. After several years of inquiries with multiple levels of city bureaucracy, his project was awarded a nine-thousand-dollar grant from the Cypress Park Neighborhood Council. The artwork was done by local artist Jose Ramirez, and the grand opening of the tunnel featured a musical performance by Ramirez's band.

There was a time when all these areas here were super gang infested. It was ridiculous. The tunnel was shut down in the early 1990s, completely sealed off to never be used again because there were a lot of drugs going on with the gangs. You couldn't walk out of your door, people had bars all over the windows; people were traumatized. We took them off; I don't live in a prison. We started changing this whole little area here.

On the neighborhood transition and gentrification process, Yancey reflects,

Highland Park is changing little by little. I think it's good. I think it's changing for the better. Personally I don't see anything wrong with the change if you're part of it. You're not an outsider coming in trying to change things but you don't live there. . . . I think there should be a lot more businesses owned by people who live in the community.

He advocates for small, locally owned businesses instead of outsider chain stores operating in the community like McDonald's, Burger King, and Home Depot, which is one of the largest revenue-generating businesses in Cypress Park, but doesn't hire enough employees who are neighborhood residents.⁷

Another public character creating safe spaces is Efrim Chivavetta of Ghetto Grounds, a coffee shop located in La Tierra de la Culebra, a community pocket art park converted from a derelict lot on Avenue 57 by artist Tricia Ward, volunteers, and ArtCorpsLA. Stone foundations from earlier Craftsman homes were used to build an amphitheater. River rock from the Arroyo Seco was hauled in to build the stone Culebra (Spanish for snake). After graduating college in Rochester, New York, Chivavetta came to Highland Park with the AmeriCorps program to help youth self-manage the park under the auspices of the ACLA (Art Community

Land Activism) and offer reading programs, art classes, cultural festivals. His Ghetto Grounds coffee shop is occasionally a live music venue. Chiavetta reflects on how he had to create a safe neutral space, which involved acting as a liaison between rival gangs in Highland Park. He found it helpful to designate a chaperone watching over the coffee shop and park at all hours of the day and night, including a volunteer sleeping in a tent situated atop an alcove overlooking the facility. He lives on the grounds himself and spent many nights negotiating the safety of the park. On Thursdays volunteers spend the day cooking and serving free meals to the homeless. Free vegetables from the garden are available for community residents.⁸

Community Gardens and Cannabis Community

Miguel Luna, the founder and director of Urban Semillas, a community garden in Glassell Park, is working to build community participation through outreach to the Latino community, with a focus on youth. He has worked to build a sense of entitlement and community ownership among disenfranchised Spanish-speaking people and to help them join as participants in the rehabilitation of abandoned lots into community gardens and build their capacity to be a part of social change. He describes going through a reconnaissance process of uncovering community needs, hearing what people are saying, and then building capacity to augment that voice to communicate their needs to planners and city representatives. He collaborates with local soccer leagues like Anahuak Youth Sports Association to reach out to youth. He is working to build youth engagement with broader environmental issues like Heal the Bay, water pollution, water conservation, and rights to safe water. He works with organizations like the Council for Watershed Health and Tree People to lobby for a statewide bill to create a human right to water.⁹

Matt Mihm, an Occidental College graduate who stayed in the neighborhood, worked with Oscar Duardo and others to launch the Milagro Alegro Community Garden in Highland Park. He finds that white middle-class participants are more easily drawn to the garden through their facility with social media announcements, but he believes outreach to urban youth can have a lasting impact and provide living and breathing lessons about food access. As a teacher at Loreto Elementary School in Cypress Park,



Figure 1.6. Miguel Luna at Urban Semillas community garden. (Credit: Emily George.)

Matt developed an afterschool program to take students to the garden via LA Metro for nutrition and gardening classes and partnered with the University of Southern California Childhood Obesity Research Center to teach students how to take biometric measurements of their health.¹⁰

Northeast LA became a significant center for the medical cannabis community after California state voters approved Proposition 215, the Compassionate Use Act of 1996. The presence of affordable commercial properties on the boulevards of Northeast LA led to the opening of dozens of cannabis medical certification offices and dispensaries. Residents began to protest the cannabis economy through their neighborhood council and pressure their councilors to take legal action on the dispensaries and reduce their presence through enforcement of regulations on proximity to parks, schools, churches, and libraries. Tim Ryder, an Eagle Rock resident, founded Cannabis Clubs United with the Community to fight the public stigma against the cannabis economy and lobby and dialogue for compassionate use in neighborhood council politics. He arranged a shuttle service for elderly and disabled medical cannabis users and supported the

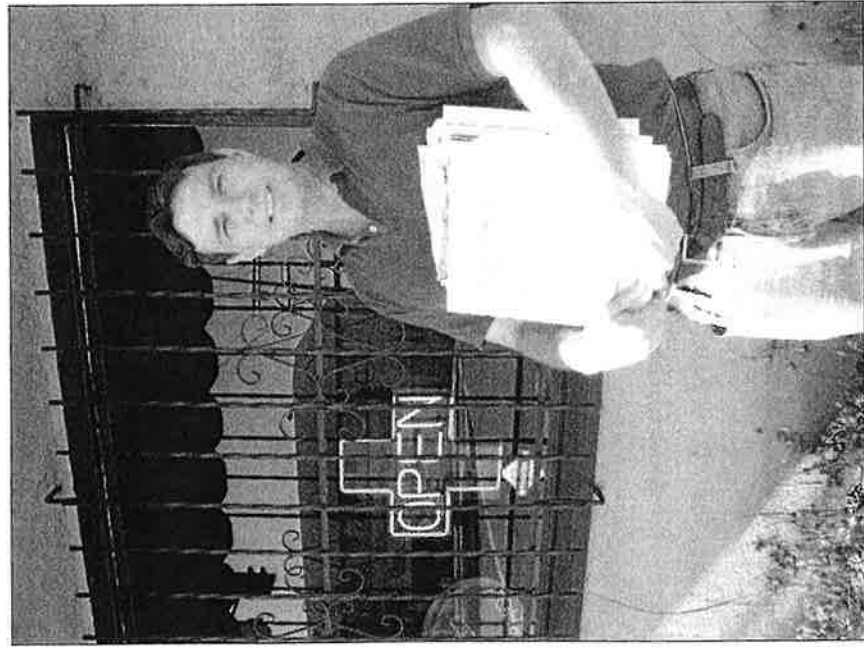


Figure 1.7. Tim Ryder of Cannabis Clubs United with the Community. (Credit: Ashley Lee.)

annual Daydream Festival in Eagle Rock that was helping to sustain the Eagle Rock Canyon Trail.¹¹ Critics of cannabis pharmacies are worried they might spur local crime, but supporters tout their positive impacts on tax rolls and jobs. In 2016 California voters approved cannabis legalization through Proposition 64, with implementation scheduled for January 2018.

The Original Bohemian

An authentic bohemian perspective on the newer hipsters coming into Northeast LA is longtime resident and owner of Vintage Tattoo

Art Parlor on York Boulevard since 1998, Baba Austin. He appears at national conferences for the tattoo industry and is locally active with other business owners as a liaison with city officials and film production companies that are often drawn to his studio for location shooting. Americana art decorates the exterior of the studio, and tattoo sketches line the walls and ceiling. Baba says he “bring[s] people’s ideas and visions to life on their skin.” His family has been in the neighborhood since the 1970s, and his uncle used to bartend at the Dragon, which is now the York. As a longtime presence among business owners and the

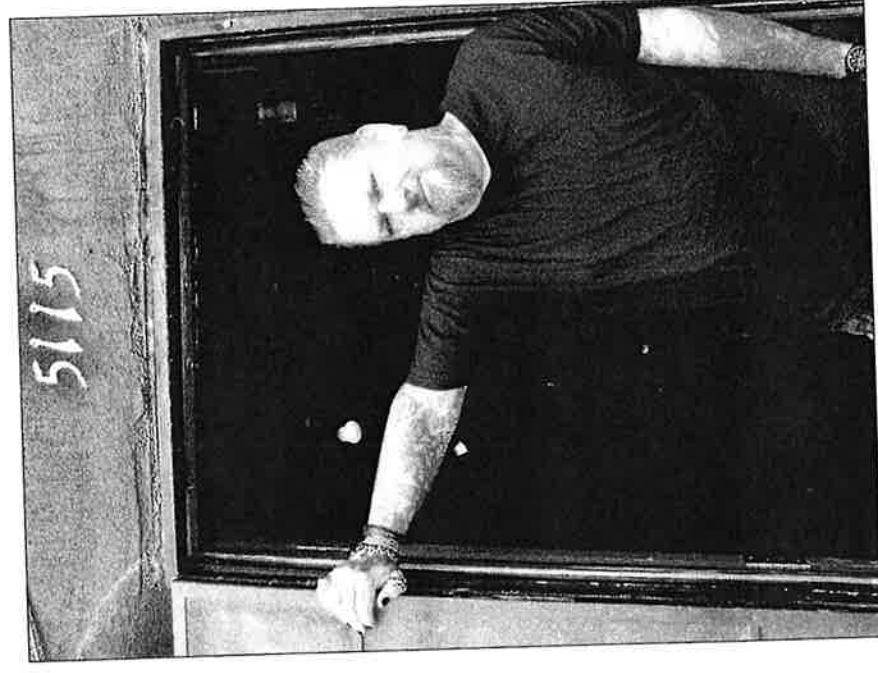


Figure 1.8. Baba Austin of Vintage Tattoo Art Parlor. (Credit: Anonymous.)

Chamber of Commerce, he's quite irked by the growth of the hipster business and residential scene:

The hipsters. They've been trying to change everything. Highland Park was one of the best kept secrets of LA. It's one of the oldest neighborhoods. It used to be all Irish. It basically became a Chicano community as of the 1960s on, very deep in Chicano culture. It's been this special place. Now people are realizing it's special and they're coming in, but they want to change it and make it something else. They're trying too hard, too fast.

He challenges newcomer hipster entrepreneurs to live up to their anti-establishment intentions and get more connected with local businesses and the community:

They preach small business, mom-and-pop business, and keeping it local, but they don't. For instance, a sandwich shop that preaches staying local doesn't buy bread from the bakery right across the street. Why would you preach all this and not buy bread at Elsa's? Elsa's has been there for sixty years at least. . . . I don't see these hipsters going into Connie's and getting their haircut. I do—I go there once a week to get my haircut. . . . The hipster shops they're transplants from different states, trying to act like they know what Highland Park's about. . . . We've done three generations of one family here. We're a part of this neighborhood.¹²

Indie Bookstores and Book Printers

Even in our contemporary era of conglomerated mass media companies, corporate bookstores, and the rise of electronic book publishing, independent bookstores like Read Books, book-making businesses like Pop Shop, and small publishing companies like Siglio continue to forge an economic niche in Northeast LA. Where electronic book reading is usually an isolated and individuated activity, these paper book businesses amplify the social contexts of reading through author readings, book clubs, book-binding lessons, and small publishing activities. Rather than specializing in the classic or antiquarian features of fine publishing, they

offer a mixture of popular and educational titles along with eclectic and nonmainstream genres, books from independent presses, and works of local and Los Angeles-associated authors.

Read Books on Eagle Rock Boulevard was one of only a few independent bookstores in Northeast LA when it opened in 2006. It has been named by the *LA Weekly* as the Best Unknown Bookstore in Los Angeles. It is a family-run business with a homey and inviting atmosphere where owners Jeremy Kaplan and his wife Debbie can generally be seen sitting behind their desk and their son can sometimes be seen doing his homework on the couch. The cozy storefront is 40 percent supported through online sales. Book signings by local authors, monthly book clubs, and block festivals with food trucks help generate foot traffic. Jeremy reflects on the challenges of maintaining his economic niche running an authentic indie bookstore in contemporary Northeast Los Angeles that draws from a motley assortment of local people and wider metropolitan residents, students, the elderly, political radicals, and hipsters:

Bookstores and magazine stands are disappearing. There's really not that many left. Before we started the bookstore, there was always talk around the area of people saying, "We want a bookstore." You have to go all the way to Pasadena to find another magazine place, so it fills a literary void. There are a lot of people who came in from the very beginning who still come regularly. . . . People are looking for bookstores because there are not many around. We'll get people coming in from Santa Monica, the Westside, or the Valley where they don't have many bookstores. We get some Occidental College students, grade school and high school students. . . . There are older people, more unusual and radical, and borderline socialist types. As far as hipsters go, the ones who come here regularly are literary people.

While he found a location for his bookstore on Eagle Rock Boulevard, which is less expensive than Colorado Boulevard, Jeremy worries he may be displaced by gentrification:

In Los Angeles, once a neighborhood starts picking up economically, the landlords tend to get overly excited, then they want to raise the rents and places start closing. Then the only places that can open up are chain

stores and restaurants. Colorado Boulevard is a perfect example of that. Once Eagle Rock started getting a little bit of press, suddenly all the rents went up. Bookstores and record stores aren't the kind of places that make enough money to justify those rents.¹³

Jeremy concedes that he doesn't make much revenue in the meantime with a small store, but that there is greater financial risk involved in getting a larger, more expensive commercial space. He is not currently jumping at the first chance and happy he has a dependable job.

Over on York Boulevard, the Pop Shop, an independent bookstore offering an eclectic collection of used and new classics, fiction, science fiction, and arts books, with attention to independent small presses and zines, opened up in the heart of York Village next to Café de Leche. Partners Sarah Balcomb and Robey Clark raised ten thousand dollars from Kickstarter to establish their business. The bookstore also operates as a print studio, hosting workshops for the community to learn about screen printing and book binding. Sarah and Robey are training people



Figure 1.9. Jeremy Kaplan of Read Books. (Credit: Annika John.)

in esoteric techniques like marbling paper and holding show-and-tells so book collectors can share their special books. Reading events help to bring in visitors.¹⁴

Siglio Press, which operates out of the garage of founder Lisa Pearson in Eagle Rock, is an independent publisher of books at the intersection of art and literature, printed literary-visual hybrids, and special objects that are not just containers or vehicles for content like electronic books. They specialize in eclectic titles, experimental memoirs, and works that expand language and narrative structure beyond the main paradigms of corporate publishing. Lisa collaborates with other independent publishers through the Council of Literary Magazines and Small Presses. The Siglio Press website is important for e-commerce because she doesn't have a storefront, and blogging is an extension of the publishing mission, often containing exclusive unpublished material that may augment the text of Siglio books. On her place in the neighborhood transition process, Lisa reflects,

I'm white, I'm forty-four years old. My husband is a college professor. There is an economic level and race identification there that is clearly contributing to the gentrification. That said, I see a lot of families raising their children here who are all ethnicities. It seems like a place that doesn't feel like Echo Park is on the verge of doing or what Silver Lake has long done. My next-door neighborhoods are immigrants from the Philippines, but their kids were born and raised here, totally American. The house on the other side of me was the first house in the neighborhood and was built by this woman who died at the age of ninety-three. She was white and her daughters still own the house and rent it out now. You have these multi-generations that are already in play or are about to come into play.¹⁵

Small Business as a Stepping Stone

Some independent proprietors like Dave Evans of the sandwich shop Dave's Chillin' and Grillin' view small business ownership as a starter experience on the route to achieving grander ambitions. Dave saved money while working as a bartender in San Diego, and when a girlfriend

told him about the closure of a juice shop on Colorado Boulevard, he leaped at the chance to open a business in Eagle Rock. He observes that many of the other restaurant owners on the boulevard come to his sandwich shop for their lunch. While he works long hours for his modest income, he is working toward the future:

This is like a stepping-stone for a business. It's like building a foundation for a house, but you can't live in it. But you enjoy it, and you own the land, and you're working on the house. . . . But basically, the sandwich shop was going to be my stepping stone so I could open my Italian restaurant . . . a nice Italian restaurant with a full bar, the menus done, and everything. So I have to open a few of these before I can open a half-million-dollar restaurant.¹⁶

Dave has widened his reputation by donating food for charity events like the annual gala of the Saban Community Clinic in West Hollywood (formerly the LA Free Clinic), events at wineries, and events at local public high schools and Occidental College.

Camilo Gonzalez is another Northeast LA food entrepreneur who successfully negotiated his way from a small to a mid-sized restaurant. He immigrated to the United States from Colombia, initially settling in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he became associated with the California cuisine movement and chef Alice Waters of Chez Panisse, who was a pioneer in applying the culinary philosophy that cooking should be based on the finest and freshest seasonal ingredients that are produced locally and sustainably. He operated seven restaurants over the years in San Francisco and Laguna Beach before he opened a café on York Boulevard in Highland Park that had a reputation for marvelous scones and American- or Mexican-style breakfast and lunch. His success at this location helped him to launch Camilo's California Bistro on Colorado Boulevard in Eagle Rock, a larger fine-dining restaurant with a diverse menu marrying Euro-American and Latin American influences, a full bar, and fine artwork by local artists exhibited on the walls. It's a family affair, as he runs the restaurant along with his wife Alicia, and their children are sometimes present for their popular Sunday brunch.

He observes that Eagle Rock's population has transitioned from older people to younger professionals and families. He works with the Chamber of Commerce and advocates for the Eagle Rock Association's

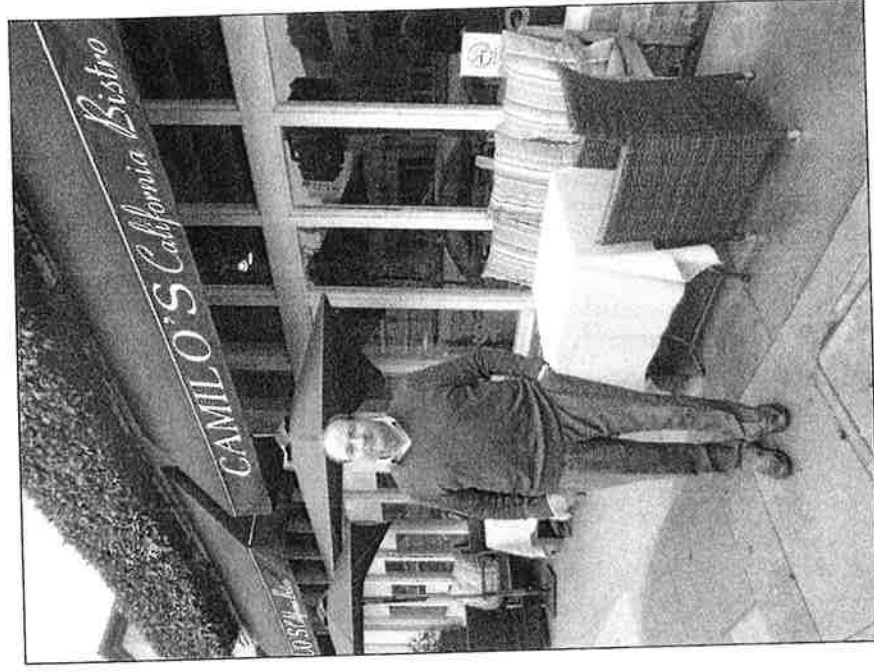


Figure 1.10. Camilo Gonzalez of Camilo's California Bistro.
(Credit: Sophie Putka.)

efforts at design and planning oversight on Colorado Boulevard. He supports the positive features of local economic transition but espouses support for independent businesses like Swörk versus corporate chains like Starbucks.¹⁷

Boulevard Improvement and Bicycle Activism

Future Studio Design and Gallery is in the heart of Highland Park on North Figueroa, housed in a building topped by a twenty-two-foot-tall statue called Chicken Boy, dubbed the Statue of Liberty of Los Angeles.

The owner Amy Inouye designs books for independent publishers and hosts monthly gallery shows displaying the work of local artists. She is very active in the North Figueroa Street community, designing newsletters for the neighborhood, and is networked with the North Figueroa Association, the Arroyo Arts Collective, the Audubon Center at Debs Park, and Northeast Democrats. She recalls that joining neighborhood organizations was a way to generate community good will when they were seeking approval to place the giant statue on the roof. She describes Highland Park as transitioning from a “Mayberry, R.F.D.” to a groovier scene in only a short time, with a farmers’ market on Tuesdays and a vibrant pedestrian culture. But Figueroa Street merchants like Amy are often in a position of comparison to the thriving village between Avenue 50 and Avenue 52 on York Boulevard. While Amy observes, “We don’t have the hip bistro thing,” she’s been involved in efforts at tourist branding of North Figueroa Street and Highland Park as part of California’s section of historic Route 66, the interstate highway that was established in 1926, running from Chicago to Los Angeles.

Well with York Boulevard it’s the groovy bars and restaurants. We don’t have that, the cluster of them here. It’s kind of different here. We feel in a certain way that we’re the poor cousin of York, because they get all the attention! They’ve gotten into the *New York Times* how many times? Weirdly we kind of like [that we’re different]. Things are changing, little by little. Route 66, that’s the card we’re trying to play. . . . We did this new logo which is like the Route 66 emblem for the North Figueroa Association. The nickname is “Old L.A.” We’re really trying to jump on this Route 66 as our publicity thing. . . . If you ever go to the Inland Empire, to Glendora or Rialto or any of those small towns up there on Route 66, they use the emblem on everything.¹⁸

Inouye cites the importance of streetscape improvements over the years, including crosswalks, tree trimming, sidewalk improvements, and signage upgrades (such as the classic neon signs like those for the Highland Park Theater and Manning’s Coffee Store), projects of the Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative. She has visions to design and erect some kind of “Welcome to Highland Park” sign, a big archway, and open a Highland Park visitor’s center.

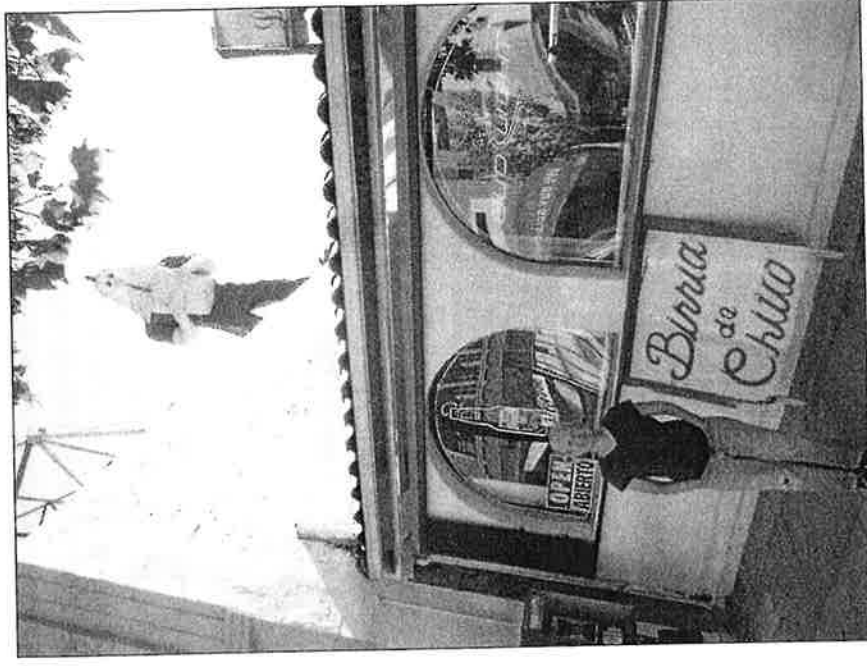


Figure 1.11. Amy Inouye of Future Studio with Chicken Boy overhead rear. (Credit: Sophie Putka.)

Misty Iwatsu, the director of the North Figueroa Association since 2001, has been working with the Business Improvement District, a nonprofit organization representing property owners that raises funds through a special surcharge to run street cleaning, hire private security services, perform marketing and promotion, run the weekly farmers’ market and Harvest Festival, and install Christmas lights. She emphasizes that they feature farmers, food vendors, and arts and crafts vendors of products that are handmade, not mass-produced. She also facilitates a lot of scouting and location shooting by Hollywood film studios in the farmers’ market. She’s had some concerns about food vendors lacking

proper health department permits for sanitation, trash disposal, and food quality. Their security officers refer homeless people to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, and their street cleaning workers are employed through Chrysalis, a nonprofit organization for employment training and placement of homeless individuals. They are also working with the Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative with community outreach to disburse a \$300,000 grant for street improvements.¹⁹

Further down North Figueroa Street, next to the Antigua Coffee Shop, is the Flying Pigeon bike shop owned by Josef Bray-Ali and the Bike Oven bike collective, which he initially started out of his



Figure 1.12. Misty Iwatsu of North Figueroa Association.
(Credit: Jazmine Brand.)

garage as a place for people to hang out and fix bikes. A striking man with long curly hair and infectious enthusiasm, Josef realized early in his life that bringing people together is the best way to create political change. He grew up in the communal lifestyle of Venice, served as a field representative for a state assembly member out of college, and worked as an anthropologist in New Mexico and also in real estate, only to feel unsatisfied and powerless. He moved to Northeast LA to create purposeful change. He was inspired by another bike collective called the Bike Kitchen, which was like an “open source software idea with cycling and political advocacy.” He sponsors rides around the city every month to build community based on the common purpose of bicycling. He thinks the beautification of North Figueroa Street has been auto-centric and focused on store fronts. He wants to take back the street for cyclists and the community.

We’ll get the beautification we deserve when we have the streets. And what we did is we broke our streets on purpose. We made a collective decision; we don’t care about the deaths. We don’t care about the decline in the value of this building and this commercial space. . . . So we’ve turned our little mini traditional downtown here into a North American Auto-mobile Slum. But the main reason is that the street is not a street. Streets should be pleasant places where people can talk and communicate and safely cross the right of way. Socialization and civilization occurs in the streets. [There is] music, dance, people standing in the street and talking, that kind of thing. We don’t have a street because we have all this high-volume car traffic. I feel like that’s where the cycling has to go in its advocacy.

Josef is bullish about the impacts bike lanes on North Figueroa Street can have on recreation and the regional economy. He prefers that economic revitalization be rooted in local ownership and believes that bike culture will eventually evolve beyond a radical or nonconformist phenomenon to be a generalized part of the cultural mainstream.

I think what’s going to happen once these bike lanes go in, and we get a legitimate connection to the LA River that this is going to turn into a neighborhood where people can move to and be like, “Oh I have all these

recreational opportunities, right?" It's going to add to the residential property value. And hopefully the commercial future is right for artisan shops, they live locally and all that money is circulating around and that's the virtuous cycle every city wants. I think the bike culture has already become so quickly in the mainstream political culture. People who are bike culture people are going to be like Portlandia cooks. The cycling thing becomes a mainstream thing when we have Republicans riding bikes with Libertarians and left-wingers. That's where hopefully we're heading.²⁰

Another bicycle and boulevard advocate is Mark Vallianatos, an Occidental College professor and policy director of the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI) who lives in Glassell Park. He's an avid bike commuter and sits on the steering committee of the Take Back the Boulevard campaign, which helped stage PARKing day when two metered parking spaces were temporarily converted to a "parklet"

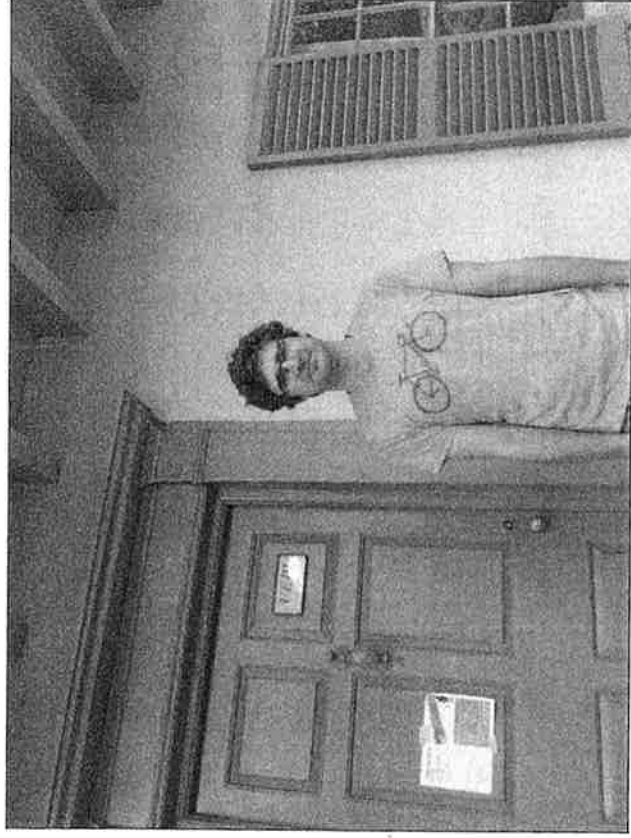


Figure 1.13. Mark Vallianatos, professor at Occidental College's Urban and Environmental Policy Institute. (Credit: Amber Carmi-Smith.)

complete with Astroturf, plants, and chairs. He works periodically with Oxy students in his Transportation and Streets class bicycling and walking around the boulevards, doing orientation and research for classroom projects to study better coordination of traffic patterns, zoning, and land uses that can help promote environmentally sustainable transportation and thriving communities. UEPI students also build capacity and boost green practices on campus while integrating more broadly with Northeast LA.

Vallianatos observes a tension between bicycle culture newcomers and older, more affluent homeowners and neighborhood councils who can be somewhat parochial and want to police their areas and say no:

Ideally you have neighborhoods that are welcoming to newcomers, which allow all residents to feel they can help shape the future of the community. You want long-term residents to not feel like everything they love about a place is being transformed in a whirlwind they have no ability to understand or control. That's part of why some residents might oppose bike lanes; they just have a fear of change in general. You also want to have newcomers feel they can fall in love with a place and help shape it without fear of being accused they are displacing everyone. The key to that is having diversity and flexibility in land use that will cushion change, so there isn't a shock with new people coming in and buying houses and starting to rent so that suddenly rents skyrocket, or long-term merchants have to close. With flexibility, people can experiment with things and build new buildings or adapt them to different uses. It allows people to feel they are driving the change, rather than being driven away by it.²¹

Sociology of Streets and Public Characters

Streets and boulevards can be understood sociologically as main streams of commercial life and urban culture. Iconic "white light" boulevards like Broadway in New York's Manhattan and Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles are the most storied theatrical corridors and collective representations of the American cultural imagination and have gone through periods of red-light district decline and redevelopment across the decades. The boulevards of Northeast LA are more modest

“main streets” that are vivid barometers of local cultural, economic, and political transition. While they were somewhat sleepy boulevards of neighborhood life in the most quotidian senses until quite recently, they are now experiencing their public moment in Los Angeles as hotspots of commercial reinvestment, cultural buzz, and subcultural cool. These pedestrian- and bike-friendly boulevards are “people’s streets” and “green streets,” offering opportunities for promenading and people watching in a more authentic urban fashion than the more “invented streets” of corporate chain-store redevelopment schemes like Universal CityWalk Hollywood or Santa Monica’s Third Street Promenade.

The architecture critic and community activist Jane Jacobs (1961) was a great champion of urban streets. Her classic book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), launched a fierce critique of indiscriminate and bureaucratic-rational “slum clearance” policies for the sake of expressways, bridges, and urban renewal in the early 1960s and led to the financial and social disinvestment of many central city streets and neighborhoods. She blamed the political and economic self-interests of public- and private-sector power brokers like New York City’s Robert Moses for accelerating the decline of the inner city. She looked past the apparent messiness and disorder of inner-city neighborhoods and defended their natural ability to act as representative “organs of self-government.” She admired the way that city streets facilitated daily serendipitous encounters among strangers and how the dense web of social relationships and informal surveillance networks among residents, business owners, and key public characters of the street fostered public safety, a sense of security, and social well-being.

In her 1995 book *The Cultures of Cities*, Sharon Zukin reflects on the historical significance of neighborhood shopping streets and central sites of lived experience, meeting places, and social staging grounds for urban public culture before suburban out-movement and the growth of shopping malls. She draws attention (2004) to the East Ninth Street shopping block in New York’s East Village, which has earned a reputation for merchandisers of small-batch and artisanal goods, such as Eileen Fisher, who started as a retailer and designer of her own simple women’s sportswear line in natural fibers and eventually became a corporate brand name. Zukin argues that local retailers have succeeded through innovation in culturally unique and distinctive products for the

educated and creative middle-class workers and consumers of the new urban economy and formed a visible agglomerative cluster that defines the block as a shopping alternative to the chain-store outlets of global corporations (Zukin and Kosta 2004). In her latest book, *Naked City* (2010), she discusses how bohemian and ethnic shopping districts and neighborhoods in a variety of locations around New York City, including Williamsburg, Harlem, and the East Village, satisfy consumer and residential desire for authenticity and originality in the face of the mass-market landscape of cookie-cutter suburbs and big-box retailers.

In his studies of Venice, California, Andrew Deener (2007, 2012) discusses how Abbot Kinney Boulevard has been both a structure and a symbol of the neighborhood in transition from an integrated working- to middle-class bohemia to a gentrifying commercial landscape of upscale boutiques, restaurants, and housing projects attracting white middle- to upper-class consumers and residents. He reflects on how the community organized the Venice Art Walk and Venice Unchained, a petition campaign to preserve the boulevard as a space of independent businesses as opposed to “formula retail” chain stores, contributed to the “branding” of Venice as an anticommercial but still upmarket and “fashionable bohemia” that is undergoing gentrification and causing displacement of Latino and African American working-class residents and the homeless from its streets and neighborhoods. The boulevards of Northeast LA, including Colorado Boulevard, York Boulevard, and North Figueroa Street, are undergoing similar transitions.

The Stages of Neighborhood Transition

The Arroyo Seco neighborhoods of Northeast Los Angeles, especially Highland Park and Eagle Rock, are on the leading edges of gentrification in contemporary Los Angeles. Along with neighborhoods like Boyle Heights, Chinatown, Little Tokyo, and the downtown Arts District, Northeast LA represents the latest wave of what David Zahniser in *LA Weekly* described as a “tsunami” that started in Venice in the 1990s, flowing from west to east into Los Angeles neighborhoods like Los Feliz, Silver Lake, Echo Park, and Atwater Village. The gentrification of Venice has been well chronicled by Andrew Deener, whose book *Venice: A Contested Bohemia in Los Angeles* (2012) was based on several years of field research while he was a graduate student in sociology at UCLA. Gentrification in Eagle Rock started as early as 2001, as evidenced in articles like Dave Gardetta’s *Los Angeles Times Magazine* feature that described the neighborhood as transitioning from “Mayberry, R.F.D.” to “Hipster U.S.A.” Highland Park has become the new gentrification hot spot post-Great Recession of 2007–2010.

Gentrification in Northeast LA is quite evident, with new white homeowners entering neighborhoods like Eagle Rock, Highland Park, Montecito Heights, Mount Washington, and Glassell Park and also cafés, restaurants, and retail boutiques appearing on major commercial boulevards like Colorado, Eagle Rock, York, and North Figueroa. The focal neighborhoods of Highland Park and Eagle Rock are adjacent inner-ring suburbs popularly known for historic architecture, bohemian and art-based life, independent small businesses, and racial/ethnic diversity. Among the first railway and streetcar suburbs to be developed in early Los Angeles, the Arroyo Seco/Northeast LA region flowered at the turn of the twentieth century with a bohemian Arroyo Culture arts colony of Arts and Crafts architects and designers, *plein air* painters, writers, performers, and luminaries like Charles Lummis

and William Judson (Winter [1974] 1980). But the Northeast LA neighborhoods became disinvested as they were superseded by freeways and mass production in the outer suburbs at midcentury. Latino/a and Asian immigrant households settled in the late twentieth century in the wake of white flight, followed by a period of revitalization sparked by artists and neighborhood activists. This revitalization process set the stage for gentrification and white return in the new millennium.

I situate the case of Northeast Los Angeles in the context of the “stage model of gentrification” in urban studies and geography. I extend the stage model to a larger urban history perspective on gentrification that recognizes how urban neighborhoods have gone through broader economic cycles including initial development, disinvestment, revitalization, and gentrification. Northeast LA exhibits elements of “neo-bohemian” and “green” gentrification, as compared to the corporate “super-gentrification” pattern found in places like the Staples Center–Figueroa Corridor in Downtown LA and the dot-com districts of San Francisco. The boulevards of Northeast LA have been a key factor of gentrification at a point when transit-oriented planning and the urban biking movement have converged to revitalize boulevards and public culture all through Los Angeles. Hipsters and newcomer gentrifiers are lured by the “authentic urbanism” and small-town intimacy of the Northeast LA boulevards, which are crossroads of ethnic culture (Latino/a and Asian) and vintage Americana. While gentrification in Northeast LA generally involves white newcomers and investors displacing low-income Latino residents and businesses, there is some participation of more affluent Latino/as in the gentrification process.

I build upon life cycle models of neighborhood transition in urban studies. I follow the rise, decline, and reemergence of the Northeast LA neighborhoods against the broader cycle of urban economic and demographic change from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first century. Then I turn to examine in detail the shifting demographic composition of the Northeast LA neighborhoods from 1960 to 2010 with respect to race/ethnicity, household structure, and housing indicators. Finally, I examine economic change in Northeast LA through analysis of sectoral shifts in local business life from 2000 to 2015 when gentrification started becoming more tangible in the region.

The Stage Model of Gentrification

Northeast Los Angeles is a good illustration of the stage model of gentrification, where home buyer pioneers, artists, and neighborhood activists who contribute to neighborhood preservation and revitalization of the built environment and urban culture are subsequently threatened with displacement by speculator-investors and more affluent gentrifiers. I draw focal attention to the emergence of Chicano/a art collectives in the 1970s and white artists through the Arroyo Arts Collective in the 1980s. Avenue 50 Studio and the Center for the Arts Eagle Rock flowered in the 2000s. They created opportunities for artists, enlivened public space, and fostered regional cultural identity and community through their exhibitions, murals, public art, and youth involvement projects. I cite also the rise of regional neighborhood activism in the 1980s by organizations like the Eagle Rock Association (TERA) and the Highland Park Heritage Trust against mini-malls, uninspired condominiums, and big-box and franchise chain stores, in favor of coordinated land-use planning, preservation of small businesses and historic-cultural landmarks, and a campaign to Take Back the Boulevard in Eagle Rock for bikers and pedestrians. In addressing the collective efflorescence of arts and activism in the stage of neighborhood revitalization preceding gentrification, I suggest that gentrification happens not just anywhere, but especially in certain focal neighborhoods that go through earlier phases of cultural change and economic renewal.

British sociologist Ruth Glass (1964) is popularly credited with coining the term “gentrification” in her study of residential rehabilitation in the north London neighborhood of Islington, where middle-class home buyers were displacing working-class families. The concept of the stage model of gentrification originated with studies of American cities experiencing private reinvestment in the late 1970s (Clay 1979; Gale 1979). Clay’s model was based upon comparative work across a range of neighborhoods including Boston’s South End, Philadelphia’s Society Hill, San Francisco’s Western Addition, and Washington, DC’s Capitol Hill. Gale focused on three areas experiencing different stages of gentrification in Washington.

The stage gentrification model is a classic social scientific *ideal type* or analytical construct that describes the generalized sequence of stages

that the common social phenomenon of gentrification goes through across different urban locations. Others writers critique the stage model, asserting gentrification is a more “chaotic” process involving multiple economic processes, housing factors, and resident motivations at different locations (Rose 1984; Beauregard 1986). Lees, Slater, and Wylie (2008, 173) have revisited the debate and proposed a “new stage model of gentrification” that recognizes sequential “waves” of gentrification across the last four decades separated by recessionary periods. Adapting a three-wave model first applied by Hackworth and Smith (2001) to New York, they recognize local residential pioneers and small investors in early waves, followed by later waves increasingly marked by super-gentrification linked to global financial markets and larger corporate developers as evident in neighborhoods like Barnsbury in London and Brooklyn Heights in New York. The high-technology venture-capital-fueled transformation of San Francisco’s “dot-com” neighborhoods is another current manifestation of super-gentrification. Lees et al. speculate upon the emergence of a “fourth wave” of super-gentrification marked by discontinuity from the earlier progression. In Downtown Los Angeles in the Figueroa Corridor–Staples Center–LA Live area, transnational corporate investment capital from China (Greenland Group) and South Korea (Hanjin Shipping/Korean Airlines) has entered the mix with mixed-use high-rise projects, recalling the Japanese investment boom of the 1980s.

Lees and colleagues also observe a varying spatial “geography of gentrification” that includes new-built gentrification and rural gentrification or “greentrification.” The phenomenon of green gentrification suggests that gentrification is not just a “back to the city” movement but also includes urban and suburban expatriates seeking idyllic quality of life in quaint seaside resorts, rural communities, and college towns (Saracino-Brown 2009). New home buyers in Northeast Los Angeles are similarly attracted to the Arts and Crafts architecture and tradition of historic preservation, its bohemian arts scenes, the “indie” ethic of its small business community, and the small-town pace of life on its boulevards where “road diets” and new bike lanes have slowed down automobile traffic and fostered a more lively public culture on the streets. The special locational characteristics of Northeast Los Angeles in the bucolic green setting of the Arroyo Seco tributary and restoration efforts for new parks along the

adjacent Los Angeles River are also prime attractions. A bohemian and green variant of gentrification is evident in Northeast Los Angeles that contrasts from the corporate super-gentrification seen in Downtown Los Angeles around the Convention Center. Northeast Los Angeles is an urban refuge, a Southern California "Portlandia" offering closeness to nature and more authentic quality of life that attracts escapees from the auto-centric and cookie-cutter suburban sprawl of the larger metropolis in pursuit of cultural diversity and a more environmentally aware urban future.

The Arts and Crafts and Mission Revival bungalows of Highland Park and Eagle Rock constitute an architecturally distinct built environment that has drawn renovators and home buyers to stake their investment claims. Comparable gentrification districts would include such iconic built environments as industrial artist lofts in New York's SoHo district (Zukin 1982), Victorian row houses in San Francisco, tenement row houses in New York's East Village (Abu-Lughod 1994; Mele 2000), and brownstone row houses in New York's Harlem (Taylor 2002) and Brooklyn (Osman 2011). The gentrifying "bungalow heaven" of Northeast LA differs from other US gentrification districts in being a landscape of detached homes more typical of suburbia. This relates to the particularities of LA's urban history as a prototypical sprawling "suburban metropolis" where the first inner-ring residential suburbs featured single-family homes in close proximity to downtown.

The long gestation process and late timing of gentrification in Northeast Los Angeles coming some thirty to forty years after gentrification emerged in East Coast cities invites a revisiting of the stage model that recognizes the role of earlier pioneers in revitalization and setting the stage for later gentrifiers to come. My presentation of stage theory furthermore pushes back the chronology of neighborhood transition to stages of initial development and disinvestment before the stages of reinvestment. I draw attention to the initial phase of postwar government-incentivized suburban out-movement and white flight from urban unrest during which the turn-of-the-twentieth-century streetcar suburbs of Northeast Los Angeles were disinvested and the housing and commercial property stock filtered down to Latin American and Asian immigrants. The subsequent phase of revitalization, reinvestment, and white middle-class return exhibits signs of socioeconomic

and interracial transition beyond the black-white dynamics commonly found in other gentrification districts like New York's Harlem (Taylor 2002) or the Capitol Hill and Shaw/U Street neighborhoods of Washington, DC. The displacement of Latino/a immigrants by returning whites in Northeast Los Angeles is comparable to gentrification dynamics found in New York's Lower East Side (Abu-Lughod 1994; Mele 2000), Chicago's Wicker Park (Lloyd 2010), and San Francisco's Mission District (Beitel 2013). But in Northeast LA middle-class Latino/as are also part of the gentrification process as home buyers and commercial entrepreneurs.

An Urban History Model of Neighborhood Change

Pushing back to the stages before revitalization and gentrification, I aim to improve upon urban ecology and life cycle models of neighborhood change that emerged in urban studies of the early and mid-twentieth century to explain the birth, decline, and revival of neighborhoods. The classic theories are the invasion-succession model of the human ecology school of urban sociology (Burgess 1925; Park 1936) and Hoover and Vernon's (1959) life cycle model of five stages (development, transition, downgrading, thinning out, and renewal). The human ecologists applied principles of competition, dominance and succession drawn from studies of plant and animal communities (Park 1936) and charted the typical expansionary growth process of cities from central business districts across class stratified concentric zones of residential settlement (Burgess 1925). The life cycle model compared cities to biological organisms that experienced birth, maturation and aging. Factors impacting the neighborhood life cycle included status, race and age composition of the population, development and population density, and the age and quality of housing (Schwirian 1983). Free market assumptions of the "invisible hand" of capitalism underlay these earlier complementary theoretical models. The neighborhood life cycle approach viewed urban decline as analogous to the natural aging process of organisms while revitalization and gentrification could be interpreted as human ecological processes of invasion-succession.

The free market structural-functionalist studies of neighborhood change were subsequently challenged amidst the urban social movements

and political ferment of the 1960s. The architectural critic and urban activist Jane Jacobs (1961) saw urban decline not as a natural process but instead an unfortunate byproduct of misguided postwar urban renewal policies. Marxist perspectives addressed how the competitive forces of capitalist over accumulation led to periodic cycles of economic crisis (Harvey 1978). Furthermore, the postwar movement of capital from the city to the suburbs and depreciation of the inner city through redlining and abandonment contributed to a “rent-gap” between the emerging suburbs and the declining inner city that set the stage for back-to-the-city gentrification (Smith 1979). Political-economic viewpoints recognized the significance of intersecting interests of capitalist and state actors in “growth machines” (Logan and Molotch 1987) and “public private partnerships” (Squires 1989) in the controlling postwar urban renewal, freeway construction and housing programs that restructured the inner city and created the suburbs. David Harvey (1989) addressed the contradictory nature of urban capitalism as a historical engine of creative destruction that engineered the displacement and “slum clearance” of inner city neighborhoods while enabling the outmovement of capital and people to the outer city.

I present an urban history model of neighborhood transition in Northeast Los Angeles across the last 130 years in a four stage cycle of investment, disinvestment, revitalization, and gentrification.

1. Investment—1880s–1930s: Emergence of the rail and streetcar suburbs of Northeast LA including Highland Park and Eagle Rock, and the flowering of the Arroyo Culture bohemia.
2. Disinvestment—1940s–1960s: Freeway construction and residential and commercial movement to outer suburbs leads to residential decline and commercial disinvestment from Northeast LA boulevards. There is withering of the Arroyo Culture and Northeast LA from public awareness.
3. Reinvestment-revitalization stage—1970s–1990s: While there is continued disinvestment, out-movement, and white flight, there is infill of the housing stock by Latino/a and Asian immigrants. There is neighborhood revitalization and reinvestment with incoming residential pioneers and efflorescence of the arts and neighborhood activism.

4. Reinvestment-gentrification stage—2000s–2010s: Revitalization stage pioneers are superseded by a broader flow of returning white middle-class residents and commercial entrepreneurs attracted by the improving investment environment. While reinvestment stalls during the Great Recession, gentrification accelerates during the 2010s with entrance of speculator-property flippers and growing displacement of the earlier pioneers.

Locating Northeast Los Angeles in Geography and American Culture

The Arroyo Seco of Northeast LA is a lush green tributary of the Los Angeles River that traverses the Verdugo foothills of the metropolis. It is replete with sycamore trees, native plants, wildflowers, and geologic curiosities such as Eagle Rock, a granite spherical monolith. The region has over the decades drawn pioneers, settlers, immigrants, bohemians, and place entrepreneurs attracted to the great natural beauty and its great potential for urban development. The beautiful landscape inspired naturalists, artists, and boosters to extol their vision of the American Dream whether through preservation or through development across boom and bust cycles of metropolitan investment, disinvestment, and reinvestment.

Some of the earliest suburbs of the metropolis were located in Northeast Los Angeles. There is a spectrum of socioeconomic diversity reflected across its neighborhoods from mansions in the sumptuous hills of Mount Washington and Hill Drive in Eagle Rock to everyman's bungalows in York Valley and apartment buildings in the Flats of Highland Park. Located between Glendale, the gateway to the San Fernando Valley, and Pasadena, the gateway to the San Gabriel Valley, the Arroyo Seco has been a historical crossroads for a series of transportation routes including the Spanish Mission Trail (El Camino Real), rail lines, streetcar lines, automobile boulevards, and freeways.

Figure 2.1 depicts the neighborhoods of Northeast LA as officially recognized by the LA City Planning Department. Although the heart of Boyle Heights is further south, the northern parts of the neighborhood are included in this designation of Northeast LA. The map furthermore labels adjacent neighborhoods such as Elysian Park, Silver Lake, and

Echo Park and cities including the central city of Los Angeles, Glendale, and Pasadena. The many freeways that cross-cut or frame Northeast LA are depicted (including the 2, 5, 10, 101, 134, and 110), as are the four major boulevards North Figueroa, York, Eagle Rock, and Colorado. The route of the Metro Gold Line can also be seen. The major landmarks of Northeast LA are identified, including the Eagle Rock Natural Historical Landmark, Occidental College, Southwest Museum of the American Indian, and Lummis House.

Northeast LA illustrates what architecture critic Reyner Banham called the "transportation palimpsest" in his 1971 book, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, which looks through the urban rearview mirror of successive transitions in the landscape from Spanish-Mexican agricultural pueblo to Anglo rail and boom town and postwar modern freeway metropolis. The hills of Northeast LA are a hipper and edgier version of the classic residential Foothills ecology that Banham describes running through such affluent areas like Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Pasadena, Palos Verdes, and Pacific Palisades, where the "fat life of the delectable mountains" is lived behind private shrubbery or in mountain-cropped homes with spectacular views of the coastal plain and ocean (Banham [1971] 2009, 82). In the low-income Flats of Highland Park, there are elements of Banham's "Plains of Id," the psychological heartland of the coastal plain, an undistinguished sprawl of mass-produced bungalows and apartments built for immigrants, workers, and retirees extending for miles and miles amid crisscrossing freeways. The bohemian artists, naturalists, hipsters, and urban bicycle enthusiasts of Northeast LA are akin to the nonconformists of Banham's coastal "Surfurbia," where the beach cultures express the spirit of nonmaterialism and rejection of the consumer society ([1971] 2009, 20).

The Arroyo Seco has also been a key contributor to the cultural mythology of Los Angeles as a place of endless sunshine, an agricultural paradise, and a suburban metropolitan utopia (McWilliams [1946] 1973; Starr 1985; Davis 1990; Keil 1998). The early railroad barons, developers, and auctioneers fueled this mythos through their hoopla and booster advertising as their subdivisions arose amid farms, orange groves, and giant inland agricultural colonies. The Edenic representation of the American Dream was a strong force in attracting westward settlers, tourists, immigrants, and retirees over the years. In Pasadena

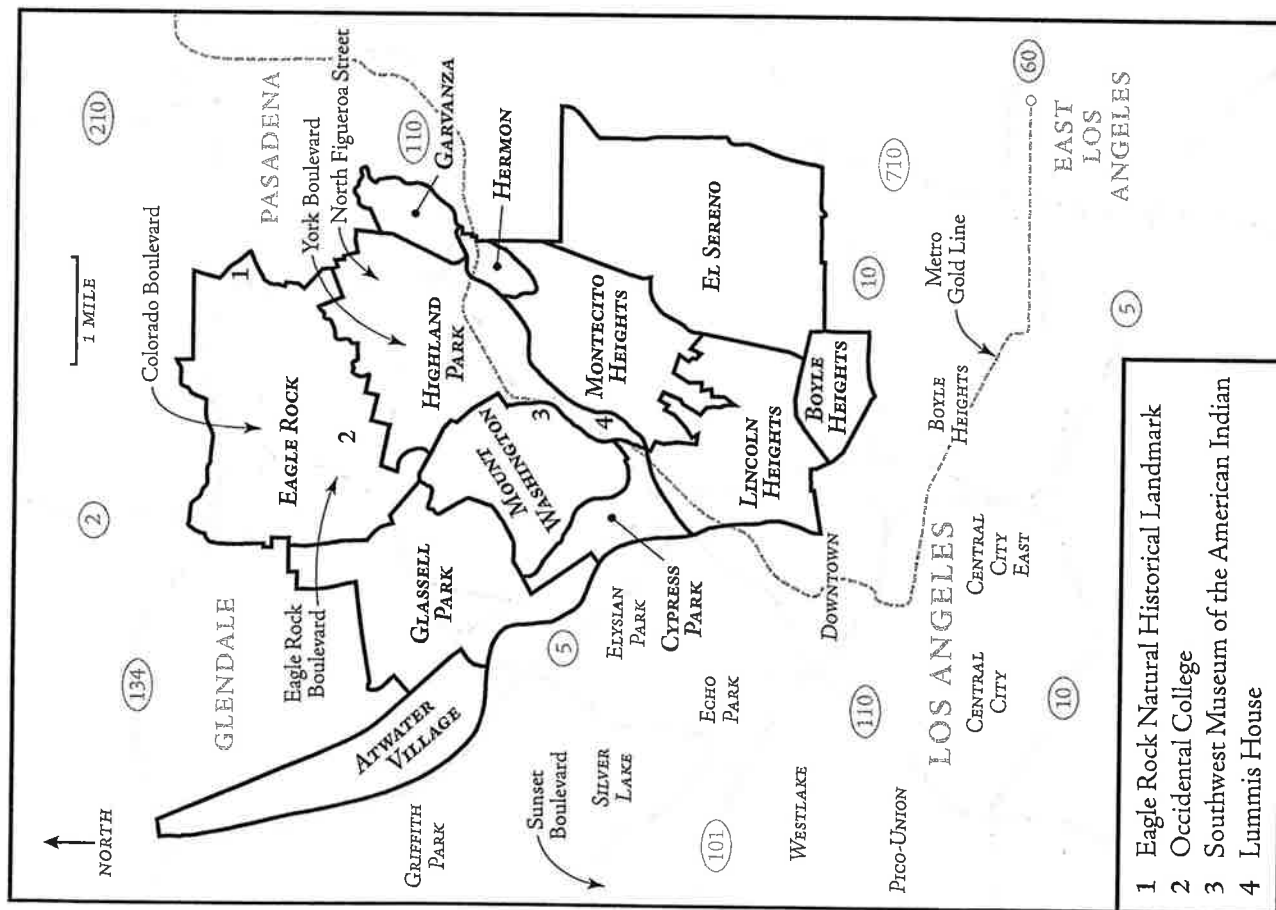


Figure 2.1. Map of neighborhoods of Northeast Los Angeles. (Credit: Kate Blackmer)

and the upper Arroyo Seco, the genteel elites built mansions and villas inspired by Spanish, Mediterranean, and Italianate architecture and outdoor-oriented home design (Starr 1985), while the lower Arroyo Seco of Northeast LA had a more bohemian and rustic atmosphere with the widespread Arts and Crafts bungalow being the iconic domicile of the everyman (Winter [1974] 1980). The boosterism of the Arroyo Seco was well represented by the work of Charles Lummis, editor of *Land of Sunshine* travel magazine published by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, which he imbued with literary and intellectual distinction; Lummis became a great proponent of Spanish mission and Southwest Native American cultural preservation.

The Los Angeles “sunshine myth” was renewed over the twentieth century through the economic cycle as the initial rail and land boom and succeeding bust period was followed by a sequence of booms produced by oil production, motion pictures, wartime defense contracting, and postwar manufacturing and aeronautics. Reynier Banham’s 1971 book radiates the optimism of an expatriate British intellectual still exhilarated by the freeway mobility of “autopia” and futuristic midcentury modernist architecture. But in the 1940s, literary noir writers like Nathaniel West and Raymond Chandler were already puncturing the Hollywood dream factory façade with social criticism and expressionist tales of crime, moral depravity, and corruption at the heart of the metropolis. Mass media representations like police detective shows over the years (*Dragnet*, *Hill Street Blues*) and classic urban science fiction films of the 1980s (*Blade Runner*, *To Live and Die in L.A.*, *Terminator 2*) fed late twentieth-century darker portrayals of Los Angeles as a sprawling dystopia that in the American collective imagination represented stark urban crime, social inequality, immigrant diversity, urban disaster, and environmental degradation (Davis 1990).

Investment: Rise of the Rail and Streetcar Suburbs, 1880s–1930s

Native Americans including the Chumash and the Tongva had long since settled in the Northeast LA region when the Spaniards led by Gaspar de Portolá explored the area in 1769, identifying the dry wash that converged with the LA River as “Arroyo Seco.” José María Verdugo, a corporal of the guard at the Mission San Gabriel, was granted the land

as the Rancho San Rafael in 1784. Following the founding of modern Mexico in 1821–24, the rancho passed to his children with his death in 1830, but by the 1860s the Verdugos had lost most of the land through a loan default, a drought that devastated the regional ranching industry, and the transition from Mexican to Anglo rule. The Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department sold the land to Andrew Glassell Jr. and Albert Beck Chapman, who leased the land for sheep grazing for some years before it was resold for development (Fischer 2008). Some Tongva (renamed the Gabrielino by the Spanish) and Mexicans persisted in Northeast LA into the 1880s. Rancho San Rafael was also known to the Spanish/Mexicans as La Zanja, Arroyo Hondo, and Rancho de los Verdugos, and as Hahonuput by the Tongva (McCawley 1996).

Southern California was a rural hinterland to the Gold Rush and land boom epicenters in the northern part of the state in the decades following the 1848 American conquest of Mexican territory. The foothills and coastal plain of the Southland underwent a transition from the mission and ranching economy of the Spanish and Mexican periods to more intense agricultural development from the 1850s to the 1870s. Residential colonies adjacent to citrus-growing estates, ranches, and coastal resort towns were typical of this period. After these tentative waves of property development by the 1880s came the anticipated real estate explosion from 1887 to 1889 as the completion of the Santa Fe rail line to Los Angeles in 1886 sparked a transcontinental rate war with the Southern Pacific line. Developers platted more than a hundred towns in Los Angeles County between 1884 and 1888, with residential subdivisions and associated amenities such as hotels, health resorts, and colleges or universities (McWilliams [1946] 1973: 120–121).

Free train excursions were typically offered to support the lot and property sales of the real estate boosters who promoted their auctions as grand jubilees, festive spectacles of hoopla complete with brass bands, ox and pig roasts, and menus complete with California fruits and wines presented by reputable New York City caterers. The boosterism of the Southern California railroad barons and place entrepreneurs illustrated the “lively competitive spirit” among the “growth machines” of the nineteenth-century western urban frontier (Logan and Molotch 1987). The railroad boosters also promoted transcontinental excursion parties organized by home city, “Pullman coaches” with entertainment, and or-

ganized itineraries for winter tourists and prospective immigrants from the East and Midwest (McWilliams [1946] 1973, 126–127).

The Los Angeles and San Gabriel Valley Railroad was completed in 1885 as a key connector between the Santa Fe terminus points in the eastern San Gabriel Valley and Downtown L.A. Passing through the Arroyo Seco, this railway had stations at Garvanza, Highland Park, and Sycamore Grove, the first neighborhoods of Northeast LA to be developed. Garvanza was named for the abundance of garbanzo beans reportedly planted by José Verdugo in the area. California “paint brush” poppies thrived on the hillsides. The Garvanza Villa hotel was built in 1886, and a grand free excursion was held on May 6, 1887, to auction business and residential lots. The property developers were Rogers, Booth and Company. Ralph and Edward Rogers had come west from Texas with their illustrious “Pioneer Mother,” Tempe Sarah Ann Rogers, by covered wagon on the Santa Fe Trail in 1868 (Howard and Youngmans 1990). George W. Morgan and Albert H. Judson were the developers of the Highland Park tract. A second railroad, the Los Angeles Terminal Railway, came through in 1890, and then the Los Angeles Pacific (later the Pacific Electric), an electric trolley line in 1893. Garvanza and Highland Park were annexed to the City of LA in 1898. Occidental College was established in Highland Park in 1898 after a fire at its first site in Boyle Heights forced its relocation (Security Trust & Savings Bank 1923). In 1904 the “yellow cars” of the Los Angeles Railway were extended through Highland Park and into the York Valley in 1906. In 1911 President Theodore Roosevelt gave an address at Occidental College during a West Coast campaign swing when he pronounced, “This Arroyo would make one of the greatest parks in the world!” (Lin and Won 2002).

Development spread quickly to the Eagle Rock Valley, where the Gates Strawberry Ranch opened in 1901, employing Chinese laborers, but was in operation for only a few years before the land was converted to a residential subdivision. Growth was further stimulated by the extension of the Los Angeles Railway in 1906 terminating at Townsend and Colorado Boulevard, the first commercial “downtown” of Eagle Rock. Developers Edwards and Winters Company advertised Eagle Rock as the “Switzerland of Los Angeles” (Warren and Parrello 2014). The alpine environment was suggested by the granite Eagle Rock and the towering

San Gabriel Mountains in the background, which could be ascended from Altadena via the Mount Lowe Railway.

Mount Washington was opened up by Robert Marsh & Company in 1909 with its own incline railway and a hotel and subdivision at the top that afforded spectacular views of the ocean. The two railcars were named Florence and Virginia, after the daughters of the principal investors. The Self Realization Fellowship later purchased the hotel and grounds in 1925 for its international headquarters. Meanwhile congestion in Highland Park led Occidental College to make a final move in 1914 to a ninety-five-acre site in Eagle Rock. Two-thirds of the acreage was donated by a real estate syndicate including James Garth, W. A. Roberts, and Ralph Rogers, who expected the college’s establishment to reinforce public interest in their adjacent subdivision, Occidental Park (Rolle 1962).

The first suburbs of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Los Angeles encompassed a sequence of transportation modes found in other US urban centers that included steam rail lines, horse-drawn cars, and electric trolley or streetcar lines. Across America single-family homes became a paragon of middle-class housing that permitted a romantic sense of privacy and retreat into family life for the suburban commuter. Philadelphia’s Main Line and New York’s Westchester suburbs are examples of the elite railroad suburbs that included country clubs and catered to the interests of the American leisure class (Jackson 1985). Robert Fishman (1987) called them “bourgeois utopias.” These first steam railroad suburbs were more elite than the electric trolley or streetcar suburbs that later opened up the city for the middle and lower socioeconomic classes. The steam rail trains were difficult to start and stop, and these rail suburbs were discontinuous, with gaps or green belts between them, like beads on a string, in contrast to the horse car and streetcar suburbs that were more conducive to continuous development along streets and boulevards and infill of urban development along a grid pattern. Garvanza and Highland Park began as elite railroad settlements but became more socioeconomically affordable with the spread of streetcar lines into Northeast LA.

The streetcar trolleys enhanced the public space of Los Angeles, permitting interurban travel on weekends for tourism and cheap amusements and shopping. Kenneth Jackson (1985, 112) describes the streetcars as tying the city together in an “urban tapestry.” Department store kings

like Wanamaker, Gimbel, Woodward, and Lothrop thrived in the street-car era. In centralized cities like Chicago the trolley formed a commercial ring or loop near the center, while in LA the system created by Widney, Temple, and Huntington came to define the sprawl. At the neighborhood level there was lively commercial and public life near the trolley stops as commuters could exit the streetcars and stop to run errands between home and work.

From 1915 to 1925 in Northeast LA, North Figueroa Street transitioned from a residential corridor of mansions to mainly commercial buildings. The Ivers Department Store was established on North Figueroa in 1921. There was also a Hall's Dry Goods and Men's Furnishing Goods Store. In 1929 there were five cinemas in the area, including the Sunbeam, York Valley, and Highland Park theaters, and by the 1930s there were eleven movie theaters.¹ In the 1930s the greater Highland Park area was a major metropolitan trading zone of a thousand retail businesses serving some sixty thousand people. There were four major theater houses. Highland Park Heritage Trust member Virginia Neely recalled that in its heyday "Figueroa had everything. You could buy anything in Highland Park; you didn't have to go outside. We had a See's Candy Store, Kresge's, Woolworth's, and a variety of chain shoe stores like Karl's Shoe store and Gallen Kamp's" (Lin and Won 2002: 26). In Northeast LA the Arts and Crafts architectural style was prevalent, although the Mission or Spanish Colonial Revival style was also common. An inventory of several thousand homes were built throughout the Northeast Los Angeles region. The Arroyo Seco region was the beneficiary of LA's economic prosperity in the early twentieth century brought on by an expanding metropolitan industrial base including the petrochemical, aircraft, and motion picture industries. There was also early automobile, furniture, and apparel production (Soja and Scott 1996). Native-born rural immigrants from the Midwest formed a large part of LA's population. It was one of the most "Anglo" of American metropolises in the early twentieth century (Abu-Lughod 1999).

Disinvestment, Suburbanization, and White Flight, 1940s–1960s

The mid-twentieth century was a time of gradual disinvestment as Northeast LA and other inner-ring suburbs like Boyle Heights were

superseded by newer outer suburban subdivisions. A regional military-industrial complex that emerged during World War II transitioned in the postwar period to an aerospace, defense, and electronics industry complex (Soja and Scott 1996). Shipbuilding and automobile assembly were significant too (Abu-Lughod 1999). This was a long period of economic boom when LA County's population grew from 2.8 to 7 million people. Nearly sixty cities were incorporated, many of them in southeastern LA County on the model of Lakewood (the West Coast "Levittown"), which purchased its basic services at low prices subsidized by county taxpayers (Davis 1990; Soja and Scott 1996). Municipalities were also incorporated in northern Orange County, the San Gabriel Valley, and the San Fernando Valley, where citrus orchards were converted to residential subdivisions aimed at GI Bill veterans and aircraft workers (Davis 1998). Government financing via the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Fannie Mae promoted home mortgages and the ventures of regional builders and savings-and-loan banks. The FHA, however, sanctioned the racially restrictive covenants of white homeowner groups and the racially coded "redlining" recommendations of the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (Davis 1990).

Government highway financing was the other main engine of postwar Keynesian spending that spurred mass suburbanization in Los Angeles. Elite political and racial interests put the affluent white neighborhoods of the Westside out of bounds and steered the freeway routings and monster concrete interchanges toward the politically disenfranchised and unincorporated Latino/a communities of East Los Angeles. A series of intersecting freeways were built through East LA from 1944 to 1965 (Estrada 2005). The LA City Planning Department and the Automobile Club of Southern California portrayed East LA neighborhoods as "blighted" areas replete with crime and public health hazards that were in need of slum clearance to make way for the new supercity of modernist freeways (Villa 2000). The documentary film by Betsy Kalin, *East LA Interchange* (2015), documents the devastating impact on the East LA neighborhoods that were increasingly Latino/a and addresses the importance of FHA home mortgages and the GI Bill in sparking white flight. Jews, Russians, Italians, Armenians, and other white ethnics moved out of Boyle Heights to the San Fernando Valley to pursue their dreams of suburban homeownership.

An infamous case in the local folklore of racial removal was the displacement and eviction of a Latino/a neighborhood in the 1950s at Chavez Ravine just north of Downtown LA to make way for the construction of a new baseball stadium for the move of Walter O'Malley's Brooklyn Dodgers to the West Coast. This episode along with the eviction of neighborhoods closer to the nucleus of East LA was catastrophically memorialized by Judith Baca in her mural *Division of the Barrios* that is part of *The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, now a cultural landmark in the Tujunga Flood Control Channel of the San Fernando Valley. The freeways effectively enabled white flight while fostering racial removal, erasing and obscuring the visibility of racial minorities while promoting edifices of redevelopment progress and utopian white modernity like Dodger Stadium, Disneyland, and an elite civic center at Bunker Hill (Avila 2004).

While Latino East LA was devastated by freeways and modernist city planning, Northeast LA experienced a more integrated experiment in urban parkway planning. The Arroyo Seco Parkway, built in segments from 1938 to 1953, was actually LA's first urban expressway, but it was inspired by greenbelt landscaping ideals of the East Coast regional planning movement that created the Bronx River Parkway and Merritt Parkway. Landscape planners Frederick Olmsted, Jr. and Harland Bartholomew in their 1930 report to the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce had endorsed parkway development to address traffic mobility problems while preserving open spaces with parklands including along the Arroyo Seco and Los Angeles River watershed. The serpentine roadway was designed to integrate with rather than cut through the natural and cultural features of the landscape (Loukaitou-Sideris and Gottlieb 2005). The Arroyo Seco Parkway was supported by Downtown LA department business interests intending to lure shoppers to the central city, but instead it promoted out-movement of residents (Jackson 1985, 167). The commercial boulevards of Northeast LA, especially the main corridor of North Figueroa Street, fell gradually into decline as they were bypassed by faster moving intercity traffic on the Arroyo Seco Parkway, which was renamed the Pasadena Freeway in 1954.

The riparian environment of Northeast LA was also transformed as the Arroyo Seco was concrete channelized for flood control in 1935

ahead of the construction of the parkway. There had been periodic floods of the Arroyo Seco and Los Angeles River and calls for flood control since the 1910s were buoyed by approval of federal Works Progress Administration funds in 1935, with construction planning and administration led by the US Army Corps of Engineers. The first segment of the LA River to be channelized was just upstream from the confluence with the Arroyo Seco in 1938 (Gumprecht 1999). By 1960 the LA River was completely channelized to form a fifty-one-mile concrete waterway.

Some single-family homes in Highland Park were converted to rooming houses to support returning single defense workers. As younger families moved to newer housing in the outer suburbs, the population began to gray, with increased empty nesters and seniors (Fisher 2008). In 1947 a daughter of the original "pioneer mother" Sarah Tempe Rogers the matriarch of the Rogers family, lamented on the passing of the Garvanza identity in the *Highland Park News Herald*. The period witnessed a series of historic demolitions in Garvanza including the Wells Fargo Office in 1947, Miller's Hall in 1959, and the Campbell-Johnson Building in 1961 (Fischer 2010, 83). Businesses also moved out of Highland Park in the postwar era and in the 1950s, and by 1961 the Los Angeles Planning Department issued a plan for "urban renewal" in the heart of North Figueroa Street from Avenue 50 to Avenue 60 (Fisher 2008).

While the general trend was disinvestment in Northeast LA, there was actually some residential development, as the Stimson's Lemon Ranch in the east end of the Eagle Rock Valley was subdivided from 1948 to 1950. The removal of the streetcar trolley tracks and renovation of Colorado Boulevard in 1949 marked the final transition to automobiles and buses. In 1955 the tracks were removed from Eagle Rock Boulevard.² The streetcar era came to a close on North Figueroa Street in 1958 (Fisher 2008).

The process of white flight and racial transition can be seen in photos documented by KCET-Departures online from Highland Park's Franklin High School yearbooks in the 1960s showing the student body still to be primarily white, with a sprinkling of Latino/a and Asian minorities. Among the Latinos was the great Chicano movement activist Rosalío Muñoz. In the 1970s Latino/as were increasingly visible in campus photos, along with student organizations like MECHA (Movimiento

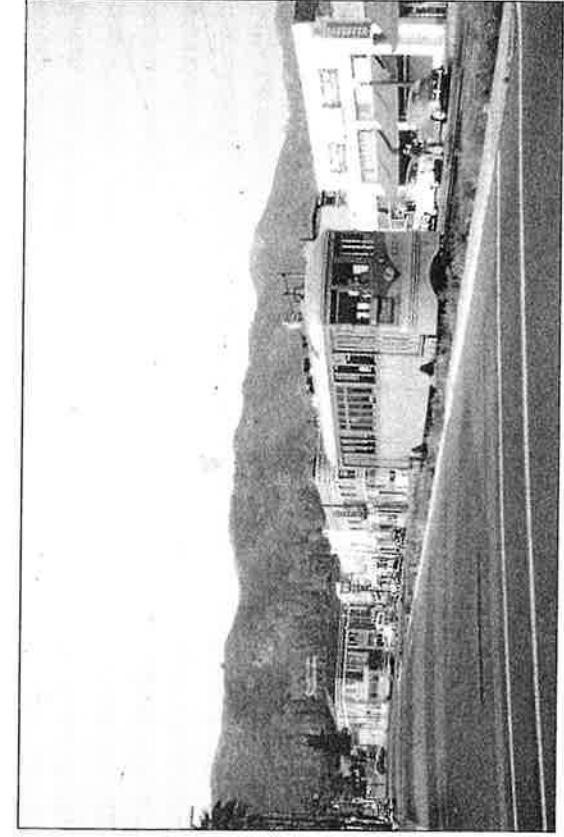


Figure 2.2. Streetcars on Eagle Rock Boulevard on last day of service in 1955. (Credit: Alan Weeks. Image furnished by Photograph Collection / Eagle Rock Valley Historical Society.)

Estudiantil Chicanos de Aztlan). Yearbooks show that by the 1980s racial/ethnic minorities represented the majority of the student body.³

Revitalization and Racial/Ethnic Succession, 1970s–1990s

The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of demographic transition in Northeast LA as suburban out-movement and white flight proceeded along with residential succession as the housing stock was filled in by Latin American and Asian immigrants. The Hart-Celler Act of 1965 had abolished national origins quotas, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 addressed discriminatory practices in housing markets. Los Angeles neighborhoods like Highland Park and Eagle Rock were opening up to ethnic minorities. Families from the heart of the Mexican American community in East Los Angeles began exploring Northeast Los Angeles.

One of the pioneering Latino/a families moving to the area was the Duardo family, led by the matriarch Josephina, who moved from Boyle Heights to Highland Park in 1963, buying a home on Echo Street. Her

son Richard Duardo, who became an important figure in the Chicano/a art movement, recalls,

I remember we were the first Mexican family probably within blocks. We were the first sign of the Mexican migration into Highland Park. And we were like the worst version of that sign because we rolled in with nine kids and they freaked! We were from two to eleven years old. The neighbors would come and scold my mother to keep the kids in the house. The neighbors would say “there goes the neighborhood!” . . . In the 1960s it was like Mayberry, U.S.A. . . . Franklin High School at the time was about 70 percent white. Most of the kids were from Mount Washington, an upscale neighborhood. And it was about 30 percent Chicano and maybe 5 percent Asian.⁴

He recalls helping senior women who had no children with their housework and yardwork and eventually endearing themselves to their empty-nester neighbors. But Duardo also reflects on the racial discrimination he faced at the time from white business owners: “We would get harassed in the department stores on Figueroa Street. See’s Candy was there but they wouldn’t let in mothers with kids, the kids had to be outside. It was harassment!”⁵ It was a time of social change, and Duardo, like other Latino/as in the 1960s and 1970s, came of age carrying the spirit of political protest and community empowerment through their affiliation with the Chicano/a movement that went through successive campaigns, including the East LA Walkouts/Chicano Blowouts of 1968 protesting unequal conditions in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) schools and the Chicano Moratorium protests of 1970 against the Vietnam War. They were influenced also by Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers mobilizations in California’s Central Valley, protests against the freeways, and campaigns for Chicano elected officials including US Congressman Ed Roybal and City Councilor Richard Alatorre, who went on to serve in the California State Assembly.

By the 1970s Chicano/a art collectives would emerge to activate a cultural renaissance through their iconography and social practices of self-help, youth education and mentorship, public art, and community building. Many Latino/as were encouraged to settle in Northeast LA, bringing new life to its declining residential neighborhoods and com-

mercial boulevards. White artists would follow with the founding of the Arroyo Arts Collective in 1989, and they incorporated many Latino/a artists and themes into their membership and mission. Preservation movements arose in the region to restore homes and landmark buildings, designate and protect cultural monuments, and establish community input into local land-use policy. The arts and neighborhood activism were dual engines of cultural revitalization and the social efflorescence of community spirit.

While Latino/as and Asians filtered into the Northeast LA neighborhoods and the cultural revitalization unfolded, the region continued to be subject to freeway construction. In 1971 the 134 freeway opened and the commercial district on Colorado Boulevard was now bypassed as the exclusive connection between Pasadena and Glendale, the San Gabriel and San Fernando valleys. In 1973 the Eagle Rock Mall opened as one of the first regional shopping malls. The May Company and Montgomery Ward helped to finance the project (Warren 2009), and these department stores further eroded the position of the mom-and-pop businesses in Eagle Rock and Highland Park. State Route 2 (known as the Glendale Freeway) was finished in 1978, providing another connector between the foothills and Downtown LA but creating a concrete barrier between Eagle Rock and Glendale. Residential succession by incoming Latin American and Asian immigrants helped stabilize the residential and commercial property market. One of the more exceptional immigrant stories was Korean immigrants Do Won Chang and Jin Sook Chang who in 1984 established Fashion 21, a discount women's clothing and beauty retailer on North Figueroa Street. Their highly successful business eventually became Forever 21, now the fifth largest specialty clothing retailer in the United States with over six hundred stores globally. The decades of immigration inflow in LA took place during a period of urban restructuring.

The 1970s to 1990s saw a dramatic regional economic transition as globalization proceeded and Los Angeles became a "world city" (Sassen 1988; Soja and Scott 1996). Economic restructuring and offshore outsourcing had fostered deindustrialization and a decline of LA's industrial complex while a more bifurcated economy of advanced producer services and low-wage manufacturing and services emerged with foreign and immigrant flows of labor and capital key factors in the transition (Sassen 1988). Japanese investors were active in Downtown LA in the 1980s as office towers

were built to service global corporate headquarters and advanced service functions. The transnational features of Los Angeles were celebrated with the staging of the 1984 Olympic Games. New ethnic enclaves were emerging like Koreatown, Pico-Union (Central Americans), the Chinese San Gabriel Valley "ethnoburb," and Orange County's Little Saigon, alongside already established enclaves like black South LA, Chicano East LA, Little Tokyo, and Chinatown. White flight continued into outlying newer subdivisions in southern Orange County, the Inland Empire areas of Riverside and San Bernardino counties, northern Los Angeles County, and Ventura County. There was racial/ethnic succession in Northeast LA that was quite typical of the demographic transition that was occurring throughout inner- and middle-ring suburbs of the greater Los Angeles region.

The "LA School" of urban studies (Soja 1989; Davis 1990; Dear 2002) emerged as a critical perspective on Los Angeles at the end of the twentieth century as a geographically decentralized, socially polarized, and politically fragmented metropolis. In the late twentieth century, LA possessed an extensive industrial ensemble comparable to Germany's Ruhr Valley that was declining into a dystopic symbol and degraded natural environment built on freeway concrete and water imperialism (Keil 1998). Hollywood used the stark weed-infested and trash-strewn LA River viaduct for location filming of drag racing (*Grease* 1978) and crime and dystopic science fiction chase scenes (*Point Blank* 1967, *To Live and Die in LA* 1985, *Terminator 2* 1991). The grunge rock band Red Hot Chili Peppers based their 1991 hit song "Under the Bridge" on the despondent memories of singer Anthony Kiedis walking the lonely streets of the City of Angels looking to score drugs underneath a bridge. The music video shows him running in the LA River channel as a nuclear bomb explodes behind him. The river had become associated with urban decay and deviant and criminal behavior (Keil 1998, 37).

The LA River and Arroyo Seco were jurisdictional no-man's-lands not used by the public, but they provided some refuge for homeless encampments and a concrete canvas for graffiti expression by marginalized youth artists. Friends of the LA River was founded in 1986 to advocate for removing the concrete to restore the river to its original riparian environment. Their founding figures like Lewis McAdams, Melanie Winton, and Joe Linton engaged in guerrilla theater performances, political lobbying, environmental watershed and land-use studies, community

organizing, and bike tours to change public perceptions of the viability of restoring the LA River. The moribund Arroyo Seco Foundation, initially founded by Charles Lummis, was revived in 1989 to promote watershed management, habitat restoration, and community engagement, and Tim Brick became their longtime managing director. Northeast Trees was founded in 1989 by Scott Wilson, a retired LAUSD high school teacher and landscape architect who pledged to plant five trees a day for the rest of his life. He has led many planting campaigns and educates at-risk youth and assists them in finding green industry employment.

Robert Gottlieb, director of the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI) at Occidental College, led his staff and community partners in a series of campaigns including the launch of the Progressive Los Angeles Network in 1999 that worked to bridge race and class divides among organizing networks while outlining a progressive policy vision for Los Angeles housing, land use, parks, food security, clean air and water, citizen participation, workers' rights, and responsive governance. There was also the ArroyoFest in 2003 when UEPI collaborated with public agencies and community partners to close the Arroyo Seco Parkway for a day to liberate the space for use by pedestrians and bicyclists, along with festival entertainment and educational booths in Sycamore Park (Gottlieb et al. 2005; Gottlieb 2007). Helping to sustain community engagement with the Arroyo Seco in the years after the event were figures like LAUSD teacher Carmela Gomes, who created "A River Runs through It: Charles Lummis and the Culture of the Arroyo Seco," an educational curriculum and annual teaching workshop taken by over 125 teachers. It encourages use of experiential learning to foster community sense of place and integrates experts on Native American, artistic, architectural, and environmental history. Furthermore, the Audubon Center at Debs Park in Montecito Heights opened in 2003 with a focus on outreach to children and families in the predominately Latino community for environmental education and conservation.

There was also the rise of neighborhood preservation land-use review organizations in Northeast LA including the TERA and the Highland Park Heritage Trust. Homeowner activists and small business owners defended their towns against mini-mall developers and corporate branch store interests. They gained legal power to formulate specific plans and overlay zones to protect architecturally significant buildings and advi-

sory review power over urban development. These organizations were part of the legacy of "slow growth" or "growth control" movements that swept through California in the 1970s and 1980s. In Southern California, coastal and hillside protection interests from the Westside, Hollywood, and coastal Orange County were joined by movements in the San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys, where neighborhoods were increasingly opposed to high-density development, traffic congestion, and rising property taxes (Baldassare 1986; Davis 1990). William Fulton (1997) described LA as a "reluctant metropolis" that was exhibiting "the collapse of the growth machine." Movements for secession were brewing in the San Fernando Valley, Hollywood, and the Harbor Cities, but voters rejected the referendum for secession in 2002.

Reinvestment and Gentrification, 2000s–2010s

Rising out of the uncertainty of a metropolis that was at risk of political fragmentation at the end of the millennium, Los Angeles has demonstrated both resilience and reinvention in the years since with a city charter reform, redevelopment expansion of Downtown LA south to the LA Live/South Park area, major regional rail and transit expansions, and significant gentrification in several neighborhoods. In 1999 city voters approved charter reform, designed to address the threat of the secessionist movements by unifying government around a stronger mayor and creating a channel for citizen participation through a system of neighborhood councils to be funded and administered by a newly created Department of Neighborhood Empowerment (Sonenshein 2006). Northeast LA was quite active, with neighborhood councils created for Eagle Rock, Historic Highland Park, Arroyo Seco, Glassell Park, Greater Cypress Park, and Hermon.

Tourist, sports, and entertainment interests opened up a second front in Downtown redevelopment in the Convention Center and South Park area with the construction of Staples Center (1999) and LA Live (2007). In the 2010s came significant new East Asian–financed construction projects for hotels and residences from Chinese corporate investors in the South Park area (Metropolis towers and Oceanwide Plaza, among others). In the nearby office center, in 2017 Korean Airlines completed the Wilshire Grand, a hotel and office tower that with its spire claims the title of tallest skyscraper west of the Mississippi River.

The slow growth and secession movements of the valleys and coastal peripheries subsided and were superseded by the progress of environmental activism and “green” social movements that had emerged in the 1990s advocating for parks, LA River restoration, bicycle lanes, public transit, community gardens, and farmers’ markets (Gottlieb 2007). In the 2000s LA River restoration planning proceeded with the participation of the City of Los Angeles, the Army Corps of Engineers, US Housing and Urban Development, and the design and planning firm of Frank Gehry, and gentrification trends have begun in adjoining neighborhoods like Chinatown, Elysian Park, Lincoln Heights, and Atwater Village in anticipation of the larger restoration.

The Los Angeles Metro rail system continued to expand with the additions of the Gold, Purple, and Expo lines. Los Angeles County voters approved sales tax measures in 2008 and 2016 to fund the public rail and transit expansion. LA Metro stations have become key nodes for transit-oriented development (TOD) projects that mix housing, office space, retail, and other amenities integrated with pedestrian enhancements. The Gold Line is illustrative of TOD effects at Metro stations in Highland Park, Lincoln Heights, Chinatown, Little Tokyo, and Boyle Heights, where new investment and gentrification dynamics have been at work since the stations opened in 2003. The LA Planning Department has promoted private development of higher density market-rate housing at these sites, sometimes by assembling city-owned vacant lots such as for the Highland Park Transit Village.

During the Great Recession of 2007–2010, a plethora of foreclosed properties and low interest rates attracted speculator-flippers, whose projects came to fruition as the recovery unfolded after 2010. Developers like Steve Jones, the principal of development firm Better Shelter, reported flipping twenty homes in Highland Park and fifteen more in other parts of Northeast LA (Lazo 2012; Schmidt 2012). His makeovers typically featured marble countertops, gray or green-gray exterior paint, white or brick-red trim, and flamboyant orange, red, or green doors. Colorful accent mailboxes and horizontal wood slat fencing are also common elements. Other “hipster-flipper” outfits like ModOp Design, Native Homes, and ReInhabit styled their renovations in the aesthetics of *Dwell* magazine in an effort to attract creative economy types. Another technique was stripping away stucco to reveal original wood siding. Greg

Steinberg and Alexandra Becket of ModOp featured semi-ironic, kitschy décor like bird candles and arty terrariums. Rudy Dvorak featured a 1968 vintage RCA console television in one property (Rapkin 2013).

Signs of gentrification were becoming visible in Northeast LA beginning in the early 2000s along Colorado Boulevard, then along York Boulevard in the late 2000s and into the 2010s. In the mid-2010s the North Figueroa Street corridor along the Metro Gold Line has become the new focus of corporate developer investment in multiunit rehabilitation and new construction projects. LA City Planning and LA Metro cooperated to plan the Highland Park Transit Village on city-owned parking lots near the transit station. See chapters 1 and 5 for more details on the economic transition during the onset of gentrification in Northeast LA since 2000.

Demographics of Race and Household Transition in Northeast LA

US Census of Population and Housing data were assembled for a demographic portrayal of Northeast LA neighborhood transition through historical cycles of white flight and immigrant succession, revitalization, and gentrification. Table 2.1 along with figures 2.3 and 2.4 present the data on population by racial/ethnic group from 1960 to 2010 for both Eagle Rock and Highland. Both neighborhoods show a significant white population decline from 1960 to 2000, with a slight increase in the first decade of the new millennium. In Eagle Rock whites declined from over 97 percent of the population in 1960 to 33.5 percent in 2000, with an increase to 34.9 percent in 2010. The white flight in Highland Park was more intense, with whites declining from 91.5 percent of the population in 1960 to 11.7 percent in 2000 and a slight increase to 13 percent in 2010. Latinos/Hispanics, Asians, and other racial minorities succeeded in the wake of white flight.

Interracial succession in Northeast LA was primarily Latino and Asian, marking the significance of immigrants and their children in the internationalization of Los Angeles from 1960 to 2000. In Highland Park, Latinos exploded by nearly a factor of ten, from 7.7 percent of the population in 1960 to 72.6 percent in 2000, decreasing to 71.8 percent in 2010. In Eagle Rock, Latinos similarly reached their apex at 36 percent

Race/ethnicity	1960		1970		1980		1990		2000		2010	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Eagle Rock												
Total population	20,254	100.0	20,215	100.0	20,389	100.0	22,327	100.0	23,867	100.0	22,242	100.0
White	19,673	97.1	17,374	85.9	13,229	64.9	10,791	48.3	7,997	33.5	7,754	34.9
Latino/Hispanic	484	2.4	2,540	12.6	4,679	22.9	6,897	30.9	8,587	36.0	7,639	34.3
Black	16	0.1	73	0.4	183	0.9	326	1.5	445	1.9	413	1.9
Asian/Pacific ^a					2,055	10.1	4,168	18.7	5,940	24.9	5,660	25.4
American Indian ^b							97	0.4	92	0.4	66	0.3
Some other race	81	0.4	228	1.1	243	1.2	48	0.2	68	0.3	44	0.2
Two or more races ^c									738	3.1	666	3.0
Highland Park												
Total population	33,723	100.0	39,353	100.0	42,631	100.0	55,128	100.0	58,062	100.0	57,232	100.0
White	30,852	91.5	26,172	66.5	15,470	36.3	10,472	19.0	6,799	11.7	7,423	13.0
Latino/Hispanic	2,603	7.7	12,167	30.9	22,076	51.8	35,398	64.2	42,157	72.6	41,088	71.8
Black	26	0.1	97	0.2	581	1.4	1,020	1.9	1,431	2.5	1,072	1.9
Asian/Pacific ^a					4,054	9.5	7,820	14.2	6,521	11.2	6,623	11.6
American Indian ^b							263	0.5	273	0.5	159	0.3
Some other race	242	0.7	917	2.3	450	1.1	155	0.3	76	0.1	132	0.2
Two or more races ^c									805	1.4	735	1.3

^aData on Asian/Pacific not available at the tract level before 1980. For 1980 the figure includes American Indians.

^bData on American Indians not available before 1980. For 1980 they were enumerated along with Asian/Pacific.

^cData on two or more races not enumerated until 2000.

Source: US Census of Population and Housing, 1960–2010, accessed via Social Explorer.

Note: In table 2.1, Eagle Rock is defined as census tracts 1810, 1813, 1814, 1815, and 1816. Highland Park as census tracts 1831, 1832, 1833, 1834, 1835, 1836, 1837, and 1838. To investigate trends before 1980, the census tract definition rather than the zip code definition (Eagle Rock 90041 and Highland Park 90042) is employed because the US census did not offer population data enumerated by zip code until 1980.

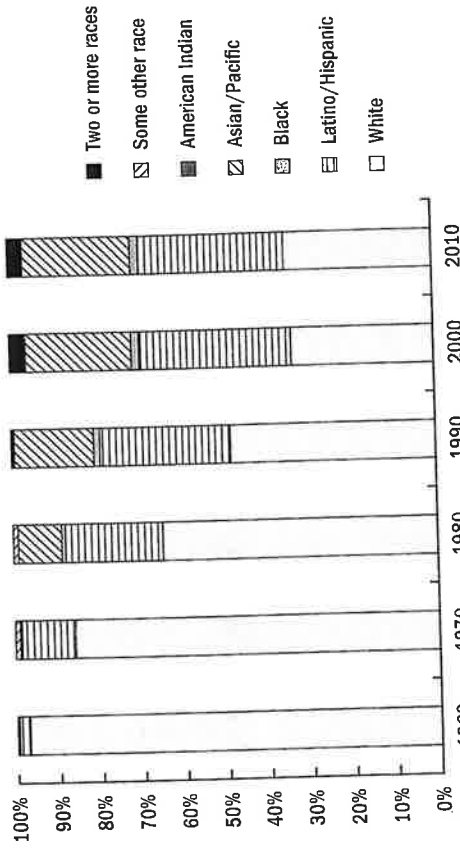


Figure 2.3. Racial/ethnic profile of Eagle Rock, 1960–2010.

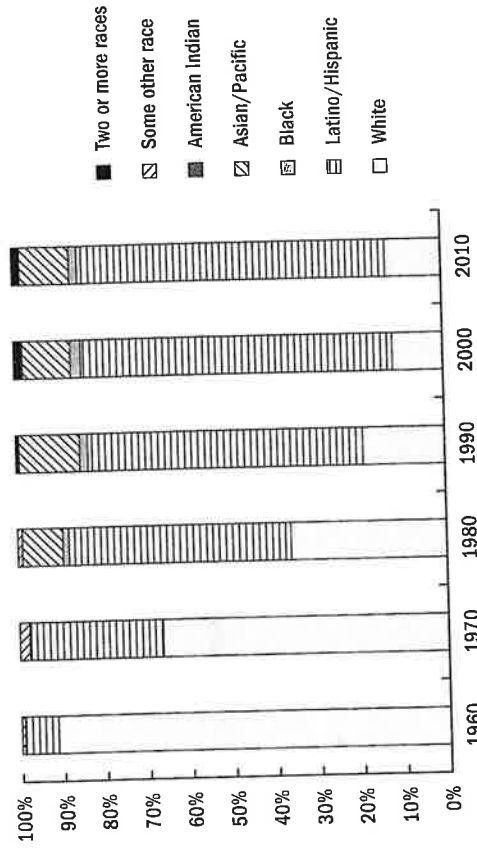


Figure 2.4. Racial/ethnic profile of Highland Park, 1960–2010.

in 2000, with a decrease to 34.3 percent in 2010. The Latino population percentage in Highland Park has historically been at least double that of Eagle Rock. The recent decline in the Latino population in both neighborhoods is expected to continue after 2010, with Highland Park likely to show steeper declines because of recent eviction and displacement dynamics. Meanwhile, Asian/Pacific populations slightly increased from

2000 to 2010 in both neighborhoods. The total population has been significantly declining in both neighborhoods, with gentrification from 2000 to 2010 reversing the trend of population growth from 1960 to 2000 during the decades of white flight and Latino and Asian population inflow.

Table 2.2 examines in detail the shifts in household structure from 2000 to 2010 and shows that the number of households was increasing while the total population was declining. The average household size declined from 2000 to 2010 (from 3.3 to 3.11 persons per household in Highland Park and from 2.8 to 2.71 in Eagle Rock). The data demonstrate a *demographic recomposition of the household structure* with declining numbers of family households and increasing numbers of non-family, single, and same-sex households. There was a decline in married couple families in the two neighborhoods from 46.8 percent to 42.6 percent in Highland Park, and from 47.5 percent to 44.8 percent in Eagle Rock. This trend is counterbalanced by increases in non-family households in both neighborhoods. Non-family householders living alone in Eagle Rock increased in number by nearly one thousand households, representing a growth from 15.5 percent of total households in 2000 to 25.6 percent in 2010. The growth of non-family households and people living solo affirms popular and scholarly perception of gentrification being linked to a shift from traditional two-parent family households with children to more alternative households like single-parent households, gay/lesbian couples, and unrelated people living together (Rose 1984). There have been clear increases of unmarried partner households including same-sex partners in both neighborhoods. While the percentage and number of Latino households decreased slightly in Eagle Rock from 2000 to 2010, they increased very slightly in Highland Park during the same period. Highland Park has continued to maintain a level of 60 percent Latino households during ten years of gentrification, providing some evidence for "gentefication." Households that own the property they occupy have increased more dramatically in Highland Park than in Eagle Rock.

Economic Trends by Industrial Sector

Table 2.3 reports on the active businesses in Highland Park and Eagle Rock combined (as defined by zip codes 90042 and 90041) as reported

TABLE 2.2. Household and housing indicators

Year	Highland Park (90042)			Eagle Rock (90041)		
	2000	2010	Percent	2000	2010	Percent
Households	19,592	19,892		9,375	9,513	
Family households	14,104	13,682	68.8	6,326	6,176	64.9
Married-couple family	9,174	8,479	42.6	4,456	4,265	44.8
Single-parent family	4,930	5,203	26.2	1,870	1,911	20.1
Non-family households	5,488	6,210	31.2	3,049	3,337	35.1
Householder living alone	4,121	4,312	21.7	1,449	2,437	25.6
Householder not living alone	1,367	1,898	9.5	1,600	900	9.5
Unmarried partners	1,450	1,977	9.9	575	729	7.7
Same-sex partners	218	328	1.6	135	158	1.7
Opposite-sex partners	1,232	1,649	8.3	440	571	6.0
Households with Hispanic/Latino	11,644	11,833	59.4	3,149	3,025	31.8
Average household size	3.3	3.11		2.8	2.71	
Owner-occupied housing	8,505	8,941	43.4	4,769	4,812	50.6

Source: US Census of Population and Housing, 2000 and 2010, accessed via Social Explorer.

by the Los Angeles Department of Finance as of June 2015. While there were 7,250 active businesses reported, over 1,000 were not classified by industry sector, so I worked with a subset of 6,166 businesses that did list North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) six-digit codes and descriptions. Of these 6,166 businesses, 2,135 were in Eagle Rock and 4,030 in Highland Park. Table 2.3 reports that 1,144 of the currently active businesses were opened before 2000, while 5,022 were opened since 2000. According to news reports and analysis of demographic change, 2000 marks the onset of gentrification dynamics in Northeast LA.

Figure 2.5 graphically charts the currently active businesses in Eagle Rock/Highland Park that opened before 2000, showing businesses related to FIRE (finance, insurance, and real estate) and retail trade and transportation to be the most prevalent. Information and arts, entertainment, and recreation businesses represented a minimal presence before 2000. Figure 2.6, by contrast, shows that the new leading sector for businesses opened since 2000 is professional and technical services, while retail trade and transportation remains second. It's significant to note that the arts/entertainment and information sectors have grown considerably in importance.

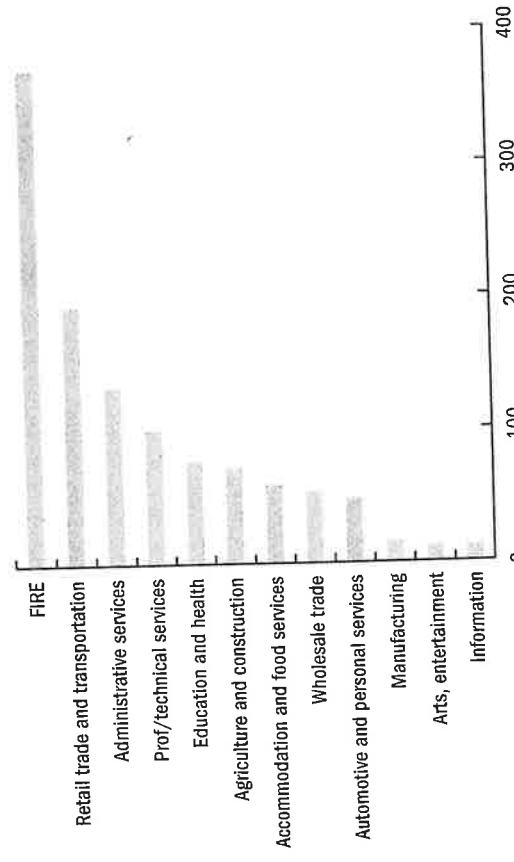


Figure 2.5. Currently active businesses that opened before 2000.

TABLE 2.3. Currently active businesses by industrial sector in Highland Park and Eagle Rock combined (zip codes 90042 and 90041)

Industry sector	Active businesses that opened before 2000		Active businesses that opened since 2000		Active businesses in 2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	1,144	100.0	5,022	100.0	6,166	100.0
Agriculture and construction	71	6.2	279	5.6	350	6
Manufacturing	16	1.4	211	4.2	227	3.7
Wholesale trade	53	4.6	192	3.8	245	4.0
Retail trade and transportation	193	16.9	637	12.7	830	13.4
Information	12	1.0	220	4.4	232	3.8
Finance, insurance, real estate (FIRE)	371	32.4	518	10.3	889	14.4
Professional and technical services	100	8.7	876	17.4	976	15.8
Administrative services	133	11.6	482	9.6	615	9.9
Education and health	77	6.7	398	7.9	475	7.7
Arts, entertainment, recreation	12	1.0	414	8.2	426	6.9
Accommodation and food services	58	5.1	163	3.2	221	3.6
Automotive, personal, other services	48	4.2	632	12.6	680	11.0

Source: Los Angeles City Department of Finance data for June 2015.

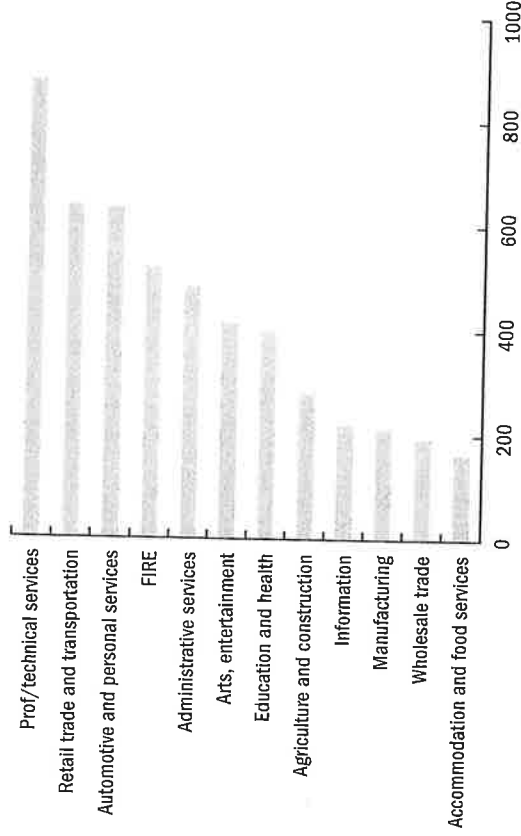


Figure 2.6. Currently active businesses that opened since 2000.

Figure 2.7 graphically presents the contrasting growth and decline patterns of the major industrial sectors among currently active businesses by comparing the percentage share of each sector in the fifteen years since 2000, as compared to the percentage share of each sector among businesses that opened before 2000. Professional/technical services and automotive/personal services show the most robust growth. The professional/technical services sector is more completely described as the professional, scientific, technical, and management services sector and includes a variety of activities including legal services, accounting and tax services, landscape, engineering, specialized design services, computer systems design, management, scientific and technical services, advertising, and photographic services.⁶ The professional and technical services are more knowledge-intensive and illustrate the greater demands in the postindustrial economy for professional, scientific, and creative producer enterprises, especially related to the regional prominence of film and entertainment industries and colleges and universities. The producer services of contemporary global cities like Los Angeles also include the global financial and corporate management producer services that are housed downtown (Sassen 1988) and in immigrant enclaves like Koreatown and the San Gabriel Valley Chinese ethnoburb. In Northeast LA, automotive and personal services

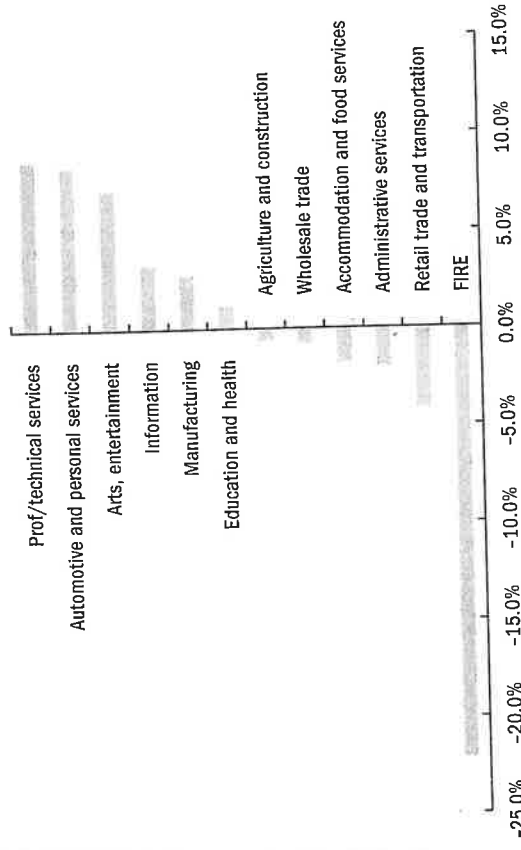


Figure 2.7. Sectoral growth and decline among currently active businesses that opened since 2000 as compared to before 2000.

continue to prosper. Automotive repair enterprises and hair, beauty, and nail salons have been a common presence on the boulevards for decades and key components of the small business sector and provide opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurs and service workers who have limited English proficiency and educational capital. A sign of gentrification and socioeconomic class transition on the boulevards is the growth of the health services economy, which includes businesses such as fitness clubs and yoga studios that serve households with greater discretionary incomes.

The arts and entertainment and information sectors also show strong growth. The information sector includes motion picture and video industries, sound recording, Internet publishing, and data-processing services. A Northeast LA independent music scene comprising vintage record stores, recording studios, record labels, and musicians has emerged in the last fifteen years (Roberts 2015). The arts, entertainment, and recreation sector includes performing arts companies, spectator sports, arts and sports promotion, independent artists, writers and performers, talent agents and managers, and other amusement and recreation services. The information and arts/entertainment sectors compose important elements of the postindustrial digital and creative economy.

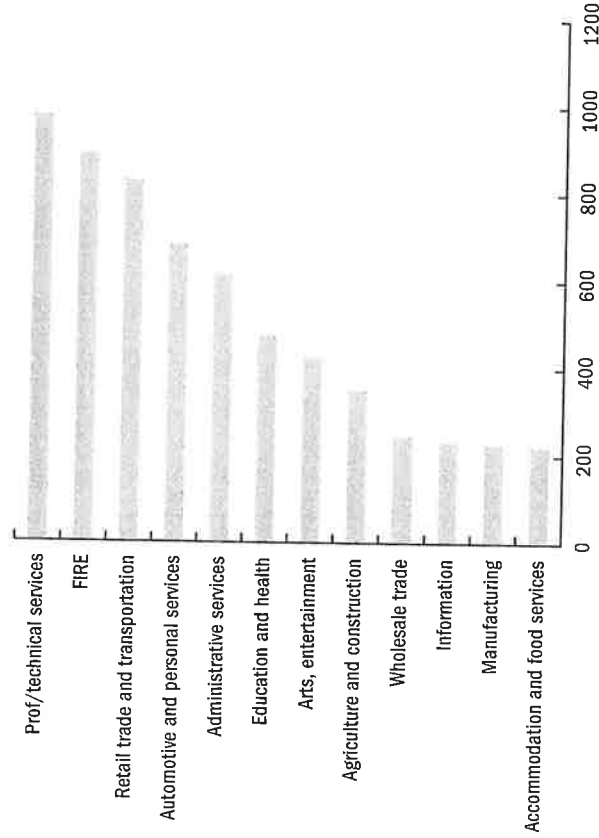


Figure 2.8. Currently active businesses in 2015.

Figure 2.8 ranks all currently active businesses in 2015, and it can be seen that professional/technical services constitutes the largest economic sector, with nearly a thousand enterprises. FIRE is the second most important sector, but it also experienced a decline in the last fifteen years (as reported in figure 2.7). The sectoral decline may be related to larger economic restructuring in the financial and housing markets related to the Great Recession that hurt the small-business FIRE sector, which remains robust with about nine hundred enterprises and will likely prosper given the new investment environment coming out of the recession. The continued importance of retail trade (over eight hundred enterprises) and automotive and personal services (close to seven hundred enterprises) is illustrated. A lively retail trade sector including eating and drinking establishments is commonly associated with commercial gentrification, and the boulevards of NE Los Angeles are replete with coffee shops, restaurants, bakeries, and businesses specializing in cheeses and health foods. Roy Choi, the LA food entrepreneur who invented the mashup Korean-Mexican fusion cuisine, regularly parked a Kogi truck on Colorado Boulevard next to Trader Joe's in the 2000s when his star was rising in the LA foodie scene. Vegetarian restaurants

are an increasing presence, and the local supermarkets have been upgraded, with a Sprouts health food store replacing a budget Super A market on Eagle Rock Boulevard. Some automobile repair stores were converted into restaurants like Fatty's (now Eagle Rock Brewery Public House) and Found Coffee. The adaptive re-use of automobile repair shops to hipster neo-bohemian eating and drinking establishments is an ironic illustration of the broader economic and cultural transition underway in Northeast LA.

Conclusion

This chapter has contextualized the recent gentrification of Northeast LA within the larger urban history cycle of investment, disinvestment and reinvestment in the inner-ring suburbs of Los Angeles across the last 130 years. These chronicles of the birth, decline and revival of railway and streetcar suburbs like Highland Park and Eagle Rock help illuminate human and neighborhood scale experiences of broader trends of economic restructuring and demographic transition. White transcontinental immigrants from the Midwest and east coast predominated in the first flowering of the streetcar suburbs when the boulevards were focal corridors of commercial and public life and an artistic bohemia blossomed. Postwar freeway construction and channelization of regional waterways undermined the natural environment and economic integrity of the region as it became superseded by outer city subdivisions and the rise of the mid-century modernist automobile society. Latin American and Asian immigrants filtered into Northeast LA amidst white empty nesters as residential pioneers, artists and community activists stabilized the housing market, culturally revitalized the boulevards and advanced neighborhood quality of life in the final decades of the twentieth century. Revitalization gave way to gentrification at the turn-of-the-twenty-first century as the Northeast LA neighborhoods experienced a new round of investment aimed at returning white middle-class residents drawn to the historic architecture, cultural diversity, authentic urbanism and lively public life of its boulevards.