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The Whiteness Project of Gentrification: The Battle over Los Angeles' Eastside

Jaime Guzmán
University of Denver

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Abstract

For many years, the city of Los Angeles has declared war on communities of color. In the past decade, former communities of color like Echo Park, Silver Lake, and Highland Park have all been converted into predominantly white, affluent neighborhoods. In essence, working-class people of colors' neighborhoods are being uplifted in order to welcome a much more affluent population to town. The newest target of Los Angeles' gentrification for the past couple of years has been the greater Eastside. In this project I present my critical intervention of *gentrification as a whiteness project*. This critical intervention argues that gentrification should be understood as a revitalization process that redevelops a blighted neighborhood by effectively cleaning it of its bodies of color.

As a critical intervention, *gentrification as a whiteness project* posits that the revitalization of neighborhoods of color must be understood as a process with both classist and racist implications. In short, this critical intervention argues that a racialization process undergirds the classist "take-over" of a neighborhood by a wealthier incoming population. In order to support the claim that gentrification should be considered a whiteness project I hope to consolidate three major threads of research that are currently unrecognized in dominant gentrification literature: (1) capitalism is a raced project in the U.S.; (2) displacement is not separate from gentrification; (3) and the locality of gentrification is connected to global systems.

By employing critical and rhetorical methods, I explore gentrification by analyzing three points that contextualize urban communication: materiality, bodies, and movement. In this way, the goal was to understand how the city created new urban built environments for gentrification (Chapter 1), how artists and beneficiaries of a revitalized neighborhood used their bodies to (re)center their right to gentrify any neighborhood (Chapter 2), and finally, which movements were formed in order to counter these claims for gentrification (Chapter 3). Ultimately, by analyzing these three different sites of gentrification I aimed to map out a critical rhetorical cartography of L.A.'s gentrification in order to highlight the ways that power, subjectivity, and place-making are negotiated.

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Christina Foust

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Kate Willink

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Jaime Guzmán

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Advisor: Armond Towns

Author: Jaime Guzmán
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ABSTRACT

For many years, the city of Los Angeles has declared war on communities of color. In the past decade, former communities of color like Echo Park, Silver Lake, and Highland Park have all been converted into predominantly white, affluent neighborhoods. In essence, working-class people of colors' neighborhoods are being uplifted in order to welcome a much more affluent population to town. The newest target of Los Angeles' gentrification for the past couple of years has been the greater Eastside. In this project I present my critical intervention of *gentrification as a whiteness project*. This critical intervention argues that gentrification should be understood as a revitalization process that redevelops a blighted neighborhood by effectively cleaning it of its bodies of color.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION: GENTRIFICATION AS A WHITENESS PROJECT

To live and die in L.A. It's the place to be. You've got to be there to know it.
What everybody wanna see yeah. 'Cause would it be LA without Mexicans? It's
black love brown pride and the sets again…
                                    —Tupac Shakur, "To Live and Die in L.A."

I do none the less believe that your next article, or project, should derive from
some passion greater than simply adding another item to your CV…and I address
that though not only to individual scholars but also to those who put pressure on
people simply 'to produce'…
                                    —Doreen Massey (2001)

For many years, the city of Los Angeles has declared war on communities of

color. In the past decade, former communities of color like Echo Park, Silver Lake, and

Highland Park have all been converted into predominantly white, affluent

neighborhoods—a process termed gentrification. When one considers press reporting on

gentrification, the process for the most part is heralded as the "beautification" and

"revitalization" of ghettos and barrios within the city limits. On the surface, there is a

clear negation of the negative impact that gentrification has on the residents

(predominantly working-class people of color) of a neighborhood, since essentially this

process is making *their* communities "safer" and "nicer" to live in. However, these

revitalization projects are being initiated for a different population—a largely white one

that had, until recently, not considered these spaces as viable living options. In essence,

the neighborhoods of working-class people of color are being uplifted in order to

welcome a much more affluent population to town. For the last couple of years, Boyle

Heights has been at the center of Los Angeles' gentrification.[1] Boyle Heights is the ideal

site for this dissertation project since I would be analyzing gentrification as it is being

implemented and contested throughout the research process.

In this project my overall research question is: if gentrification in places like East

Los Angeles is considered the "beautification" and "revitalization" of a community, why

does this process not benefit the working-class people of color already in these

neighborhoods? I believe that gentrification scholarship needs to interrogate the

inseparable relationship between race and class in order to get a more thorough

understanding of this urban renewal process. Thus, in this dissertation project, I present

my critical intervention of *gentrification as a whiteness project*. This critical intervention

argues that gentrification should be understood as a revitalization process that redevelops

a blighted neighborhood by effectively cleaning it of its bodies of color. Examining

gentrification as a "whiteness project" will help to shed necessary light on the

mechanisms that undergird this redevelopment process. In order to situate this critical

intervention into gentrification, the following chapter will present five separate sections:

first, I will explain the ways gentrification is used to resolve blighted communities as an

entry point into my critical intervention; second, because Boyle Heights is currently at the

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[1] While this project predominantly focuses on the community known as "Boyle Heights," I will use other terms to refer to this neighborhood of Los Angeles (i.e. "East Los Angeles," and "the Eastside"). One of the first signs of gentrification being introduced has been (re)naming a neighborhood by changing the name of the neighborhood entirely or referring to a neighborhood by an abbreviated name (Gallagher, 2013). In terms of Boyle Heights, some people have started to call it "the flats" or "BoHe" (Wagley, 2016). Therefore, the implications of using "Boyle Heights," "East LA" and the "Eastside" interchangeably are twofold: first, it negates the erasure of this neighborhood's history as a containment of brown folks (this will be elaborated further in this chapter); and second, it is intended to counter the segregation of these Latina/o/x neighborhoods that are all fighting against gentrification. While gentrification is most aggressive in Boyle Heights, it is also being implemented in El Sereno, East LA, and other neighborhoods that comprise the Eastside.

center of gentrification processes in Los Angeles, I will cover a brief historical

contextualization for this community; third, a literature review of gentrification studies

and whiteness studies will be presented; fourth, the method for this project will be fleshed

out; fifth and final, the rest of the dissertation will be outlined.

Solving "Blight" & Critical Intervention

When gentrification is implemented in any particular neighborhood, it is viewed

by the city as the necessary process to solve for "blight." Blight can best be described as a

characteristic of a neighborhood that impedes that community from thriving. Some

examples of "blight" can range from buildings that are inadequate or unsafe for people to

live in, to excessive crime rates, or even the existence of excessive amounts of bars

and/or liquor stores (CA H.S.C. § 33031, 2016). Therefore, a blighted neighborhood is

one that has multiple conditions which are detrimental to the overall community. Under

the Community Redevelopment Law of California, "blight" is defined as describing a

neighborhood that is predominantly urbanized and exhibits a combination of physical and

economic conditions

> …so prevalent and so substantial that it causes a reduction of, or lack of, proper
> utilization of the area to such an extent that it constitutes a serious physical and
> economic burden on the community that cannot reasonably be expected to be
> reversed or alleviated by private enterprise or governmental action, or both,
> without redevelopment (CA H.S.C § 33030, 2016).

Thus, the only probable solution to eradicate "blight" from any neighborhood is through

redevelopment. In the past couple of years, many cities have used gentrification as the

primary method by which redevelopment can be introduced to a blighted neighborhood

(Lees, Slater &Wyly, 2008). However, using gentrification to introduce redevelopment

projects is inadequate because of two reasons: first, gentrification essentially views the

3

people of color in blighted neighborhoods as harbingers of urban decay, and second, it essentially suggests that people of color are not worthy of investment in development projects without an influx of population and/or capital.

Furthermore, while the definition of blight offers a legal standpoint to understand how a neighborhood can be classified as "blighted" it omits the fact that these neighborhoods are not naturally connected to blight. In other words, Boyle Heights is labeled as a "blighted neighborhood" by the city of Los Angeles because the neighborhood has faced decades of racist laws (i.e. racial housing covenants, redlining, eminent domain) that have strategically caused Boyle Heights to be classified as "blighted" (Almaguer, 1994; Pulido & Pastor, 2013; Rothstein, 2017). In short, Boyle Heights is strategically disinvested by the city which results in its "blight" classification which then leads to the city being able to implement gentrification as a method of redevelopment. Therefore, gentrification's aim to remedy a neighborhood's blight is simply to eradicate bodies of color and their culture from the city. In this way, I believe that a critical intervention on gentrification is warranted in order to unpack the connections between revitalizing disinvested neighborhoods and the perpetual displacement of working-class bodies of color.

As a critical intervention, *gentrification as a whiteness project* posits that the revitalization of neighborhoods of color must be understood as a process with both classist and racist implications. In short, this critical intervention argues that a racialization process undergirding the classist "take-over" of a neighborhood by a wealthier incoming population. By focusing on gentrification as a whiteness project I hope to consolidate three major threads of research that are currently unrecognized in

dominant gentrification literature: (1) capitalism must be understood as a raced project in the U.S.; (2) the process of racial displacement is not separate from gentrification; (3) the locality of gentrification must be articulated with the global processes of white supremacy, colonialism, globalization, capitalism, and neoliberalism. It should be noted that while these threads are separated in this project, for the purposes of clarification, these threads however are all interconnected when it comes to the inseparable relationship between race and class.

First, gentrification as a whiteness project begins with the inseparable relationship between race and class. Particularly with the focus of Boyle Heights, gentrification as a whiteness project echoes Robinson's (1983) call of "racial capitalism," which he argues is used to describe the relationship that racism had in the "development, organization, and expansion of [a] capitalist society…" (p. 2). Thus, while the classical definition of gentrification was conceived as the middle-class takeover of a working-class neighborhood (Glass, 1964), the racialization process must also be centered as an inseparable concept to the classist notion of gentrification. In short, a classist reading of gentrification fails to articulate the ways that the accumulation of wealth is situated along racial lines. For instance, Feagin (2014) argues that the wealth accumulation of white families is a result of the systemic racism of the U.S., which has granted whites major possession of resources and power over subordinate groups.

By referring to gentrification as a whiteness project, I aim to uncover the structures of gentrification that deny working-class people of color access to the benefits of a "revitalized" neighborhood. Thus, this intervention is aligned with the work by both Omi and Winant (1994) and Feagin (2014). In their seminal work, *Racial Formations in*

the United States, Omi and Winant (1994) propose a racial formations theory which can best emphasize the oscillation of race and racism in the United States at both the macro and micro levels of society in order to accentuate the political nature of racial dynamics. In this way, they argue that racial formations are situated through racial "projects" which they define as "…simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines" (p. 56). Still, Omi & Winant further state two conceptions of racial projects that fail to encompass the reality of race and racism in the U.S.: first, they argue that racism is not an inherent characteristic of all racial projects; and second, they argue that there is nothing inherently white about racism.

While Feagin agrees that Omi and Winant's theory helps to unpack the ways race and racism are represented in the U.S., he argues that racial formations theory falls short of understanding the systemic aspect of racism in the U.S. Ultimately, Feagin disagrees with the two conceptions of racial projects Omi and Winant present. Moreover, Feagin is concerned with the ways that racial projects work to benefit some people over others throughout time. Since the birth of this nation, Feagin argues, white people have substantially benefitted from the systemic racism of the U.S. Thus, he defines systemic racism as "recurring and unequal relationships between groups and individuals" (Feagin, 2014, p. 13). These relationships are routinely perpetuated and normalized on an institutional level and implemented every day on an individual scale. Further, Feagin argues that this conception of systemic racism is grounded on the understanding that in the United States, "the white-racist institutions established during the slavery period and undergirded by the U.S. Constitution have generated, enhanced, and/or reproduced the

privileges and prosperity of most white Americans for many generations" (p. 60). In this way, *gentrification as a whiteness project* merges systemic racism with racial formations to assume: first, that gentrification is an inherently racist process used to erase working-class people of color from the city; and second, gentrification as a racist process is inseparably linked with white supremacy.

Ultimately, Feagin urges scholars interested in U.S. urban development to place "the processes and structures of racial stratification and domination" at the center of our analysis (Feagin, 1997, p. 8). Thus, *gentrification as a whiteness project* means gentrification is best understood as a strategically designed process employed to push out predominantly working-class communities of color at a local and global level for the benefit of a white (physically and/or economically) incoming population. Put differently, gentrification can be seen, literally and figuratively, as a process of "cleaning" the city by removing its people of color. While gentrification has been theorized and contested in academic settings for over fifty years, a focus on "the racial dimensions of gentrification has been under researched" (Kirkland, 2008, p. 19). The absence of a racial dimension of gentrification allows for a proliferation of niche scholarly endeavors that place culpability on a variety of communities[2] but never address the inseparable relationship between race and class.

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[2] For instance, when it comes to pinpointing culpability, some scholars argue that gentrification is caused by artists (de Oliver, 2015; Zukin, 1995); others hold the feminist movement responsible, particularly the breaking down of the patriarchal household (DeSena, 2009; Markusen, 1981); still others claim that the gay community's strive to construct safe spaces and community enclaves have resulted in the gentrification of working-class communities (Castells, 1983; Florida, 2003; Knopp, 1990; Rothenberg, 1995); and there are even those claiming people of color gentrify poor communities (Boyd, 2000; Freeman, 2006; Taylor, 1992).

Second, gentrification is not a revitalization of a community, but rather the redevelopment of a neighborhood at the expense of displacing the previous residents. Even though displacement is one of the most visible effects of gentrification (Krikland, 2008), scholars have yet to agree on the degree to which displacement is connected to gentrification. A major reason for this might be because scholars analyzing displacement in a gentrified neighborhood consider this process as a "yes/no" phenomena (Kirkland, 2008), meaning that displacement is considered only if there is evidence of past residents being removed from the neighborhood entirely. This ultimately excludes other forms of displacement found in gentrified communities such as: the proximity to social resources, adequately priced food, and/or the erasure of their cultural connection to the region. Contrary to dominant notions of displacement within gentrification research, displacement is not "essentially negligible" (Revel Sims, 2015, p. 3) but rather a process that is directly connected to gentrification (Butler, 2003; Freeman & Braconi, 2002; Hamnett, 2003). Correspondingly, as a whiteness project, I argue that "displacement" is connected to the racial dimensions of gentrification because when it comes to the revitalization of neighborhoods of color, the residents that have learned to survive in a blighted neighborhood are not able to reap the benefits of the reinvestment and revitalization of their barrio.

Third, this intervention also works as the connective tissue between the local analysis of urban redevelopment and the global systems, operating at a larger scale, that help facilitate the local revitalization initiatives. In essence, gentrification as a whiteness project follows the argument that the local becomes global. This understanding of gentrification follows Massey's (1994) call for geographers to develop a "global sense of

the local, a global sense of place" (p. 156). Boyle Heights as a place is directly connected to its interrelation to "other" places, which are in relation to larger systems of domination like globalization, white supremacy, capitalism, and neoliberalism. Massey further argues that places are created not just because of these relationships but also through the history of place.[3]

Ultimately, my intervention goes against the current push to accomplish an orderly and simplistic understanding of gentrification (Clark, 2005; Lees, 2000; Lees, Shin, & López-Morales, 2016). The academic endeavor to find a simplification for this urban process has continued to create a fragmented field of research that Redfern (1997) has referred to as a "theoretical logjam." Gentrification is a messy process that incorporates the local/global, race/class, beautification/displacement, etc. Thus, our theoretical and methodological endeavors cannot seek to create a simplification of a messy and complex phenomenon. Therefore, I reject this call for simplification as my project complicates understandings of gentrification by allowing for critical interventions into dominant literature and calling for a social justice component to academic scholarship on this urban process.

The Eastside: A History

The barrio, known today as the Eastside, is a result of a long history of white supremacy and racist laws and ideologies. While there have been multiple practices that led to the creation of the current barrio known as East L.A., Villa (2000) argues that there are three dominant practices that have shaped Chicana/o/x spaces in LA:

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[3] This thread will be further explained in the following section where I will talk about the formation of East L.A. as the barrio for brown folks.

> (1) the physical regulations and constitution of space (via land-use decisions and the built environment); (2) the social control of space (via legal/juridical state apparatuses and police authority); and (3) the ideological control of space (via the interpellation of citizen-subjects through education and informational apparatuses) (p. 4).

Even though the inherent identity of the city of Los Angeles is directly connected to Mexican and Chicana/o/x people, Mexican peoples' historical connection to the city has been strategically romanticized as a lost civilization through these three dominant practices.

Sanchez (1993) argues that "by depicting the city's Latino heritage as a quaint, but altogether disappearing element in Los Angeles culture, city officials inflicted a particular kind of obscurity onto Mexican descendants of that era by appropriating and then commercializing their history" (p. 71). One of the oldest relics that point to Mexican people's connection to the city of Los Angeles is the Plaza of La Reyna de Los Angeles, which is still located across the street from Union Station in the eastern part of downtown Los Angeles. According to Sanchez (1993), by the time City Hall was built in the late 1920s, "the social, business, and cultural center of Los Angeles moved away from the Plaza area in a southward and westward direction" (p. 72). Interestingly, while financial power started to move westward in the city, white institutions and "Anglo Americans increasingly settled in the expansive western parts of the city between downtown and the Pacific Ocean" (p. 73). Consequently, this left the eastern section of the city open for nonwhite immigrant settlement. Today, West L.A. is known predominantly as the "white side" of the city symbolized by the glitz and glamour of Hollywood. Downtown L.A. and the Eastside, on the other hand, are both historical neighborhoods of color facing revitalization efforts. The Eastside especially became one of the "designated" places for

10

nonwhite people, comprised of five major communities: Lincoln Heights, Boyle Heights, El Serreno, City Terrace, and the unincorporated East Los Angeles.
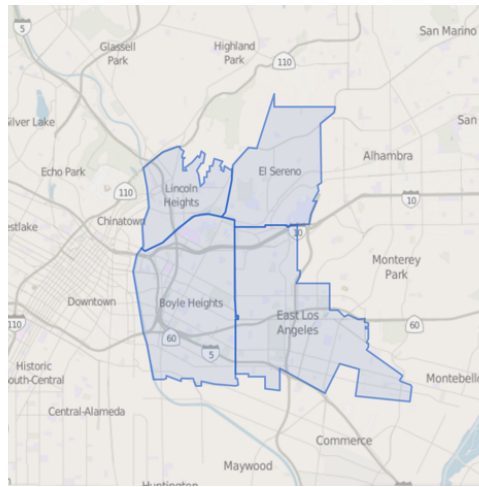
Figure 0.1. A map of the Eastside. Screenshot of map created by the *LA Times*.

Boyle Heights is located just east of the L.A. River. This community. This community is roughly 6.52 square miles, and home to more than 99,000 residents–94% of which are of Latina/o/x descent ("Boyle Heights," 2000). Since the 1930s, East Los Angeles has been the largest Mexican/Mexican-American community in the United States. This has led to it being labeled "A city within a city" (Romo, 1983, p. 3; see also Villa, 2000). Even though it is a community with substantial political, cultural, and social power, East LA is also considered one of the poorest regions of the city, which substantially curbs the level of political impact it can exert on the larger city. For instance, Boyle Heights' median household income is about $33,000 and only 5% of residents 25 years or older have a four-year degree (both statistics are relatively low for both the city and county of Los Angeles). The community also has a high percentage of foreign-born citizens, approximately 52.4% ("Boyle Heights," 2000). Still, even though the community of East LA has one of the highest concentrations of Mexican American

people in the United States, its political power is diminished on a local level because of its status as an unincorporated community—a decision that is made along racial lines. Being unincorporated, this community was left "without either a substantial tax base or any significant degree of local control" which resulted in the community being stricken by poverty for which "only the federal government had the powers to make a difference" (Soja, 2000, p. 133). This historical fact highlights the hypocrisy of using redevelopment to solve blight since restricting the amount of resources this neighborhood received for decades resulted in the development of its blight. It is no coincidence that East L.A. was not incorporated. It is also not a far stretch to see these policy moves as racially charged. Ultimately, this barrio was strategically created to keep Latina/o/x people *in place*.

East Los Angeles is, therefore, a place constructed specifically to contain the "brown scare" of the city. Two different metaphors of Latina/o/x people come to mind when thinking about the "brown scare": Latina/o/x as contaminants and Latina/o/x children as "anchor babies." Latina/o/x people have for the most part been framed as the metaphorical contaminants of the U.S. American body. Cisneros (2008) argues this point by analyzing the ways that media talked about Latinx immigrants crossing the Mexico-U.S. border through the metaphor of "immigrants as pollutant" (p. 578). By using high-tech equipment in the highly militarized border to capture huddled masses of immigrants (mostly men) invading what is seen as the "peaceful desert environment" (p. 579), Latinx bodies are instantly framed as contaminants or social ills that need to be eradicated in order to save U.S. America from contamination. Further, framing Latinx youth as "anchor babies" alludes to the shift in fear rhetoric away from masculine immigration to that of feminine and familial immigration. A child of undocumented parents born in the

12

U.S. is given U.S. citizenship by birth because of the fourteenth amendment. So, if Latino/x men are viewed as contaminants,[4] and undocumented Latina/x women are creating "anchor babies" helping to settle "illegal" bodies within the US territory, then the only solution to this social contaminant is containment.

To reiterate, East L.A. is not a chosen place for brown people. The barrio was specifically fashioned out of racist laws and practices, such as eminent domain which allowed the city to take away property from brown folks in order to complete their inventions of modern transportation systems (see Avila 2004). Still, this space has been turned into a vibrant place that many Latina/o/x people, especially highly politicized Chicanas/os/xs, consider home. This contradictory nature of el barrio (restrictive and culturally liberating) must be placed at the center of this analysis because it highlights why Latina/o/x folks contest calls for revitalization.

Literature Review

The literature review that I provide for this project will be threefold. First, I will specifically analyze gentrification literature through an analysis of ownership, which in this project allows for an acknowledgement of what types of bodies can be considered sovereign and thus capable to own property. Second, focusing on whiteness studies through the frame of whiteness as property helps to uncover a complex view of gentrification through the relationship between ownership, bodies, and specifically the racialization of spaces; and third, by incorporating gentrification (as ownership) to whiteness (as property) and the inseparable relationship between communication and

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[4] This trope of brown contaminants has been further connected to the metaphors of Latinas/os/xs as dirty (Flores, 2003).

transportation, I present gentrification as a whiteness project and as the literal and figural cleansing of cities of its neighborhoods of color through white transportation.

Gentrification as Ownership

The evolution of gentrification scholarship has gone through four distinct waves (Hackworth & Smith, 2001; Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008). Throughout these waves there has been two major theoretical and methodological inquiries: consumer sovereignty (Caulfield, 1994; Lipton, 1977; Ley, 1996) and the rent gap thesis (Clark, 1987; Smith, 1996). While these two threads of research have, for the most part, clashed and have contested one another since the 1980s, these two lines of gentrification scholarship have also framed the discussion of this process along a class-based analysis. Even though in recent years there has been a push to coalesce these theses—since these theoretical camps do not necessarily negate one another (Hamnett, 1991; Smith, 2002)—the taken-for-granted conflations of both "sovereignty" and "property" has resulted in a misconception of what truly is at the nexus of gentrification: which bodies are considered sovereign and which properties can be owned by the sovereign few. Therefore, the following questions run through both of these theoretical and methodological camps in order to critically understand gentrification: *Who is able to own property? Which property can be owned? What places are easier to own and when?* These questions guide my analysis of first the consumer sovereignty thesis and then the rent-gap thesis.

The consumer sovereignty thesis focused on the idea that gentrifiers have full agency to move throughout the city, and their decisions to gentrify a community have to do more with their power as consumers than in their accumulation of wealth. Through this frame, gentrification scholarship focused on the "back to the city" movement. At the

14

heart of this line of scholarship is the understanding that gentrification is a result of the actions of the "gentrifiers." Gentrification thus was seen as a "revitalization" process of the city, which was a result of changes for the middle-class lifestyle (i.e. an embracing of the bachelor lifestyle, less emphasis on having children and raising a family). This of course lead to "[the decreasing] relative desirability of single-family, suburban homes compared to central city multiple-family dwellings" (Lipton, 1977, p. 147). The desire to return to metropolitan cities after the monotony of the suburbanization movement, thus framed the gentrifiers as being driven to gentrify communities in the urban city not because of their higher socioeconomic status but because of their desire for a different lifestyle. Their actions and agency to move across the city was, therefore, fueled by their role as consumers.

A major argument against gentrification being seen as the invasion of upper class folks is that across the world many gentrifiers are renters and thus do not purchase property away from poorer people. Yet, narrowing our focus on the gentrifiers limits our understanding of the other agents (bankers, landlords, city officials, corporate developers, and policy makers) who are also involved in the gentrification of working-class communities of color. Thus, while the notion of ownership is acknowledged in gentrification scholarship, it needs to be complicated to include gentrification as a systemic process that gives power to certain bodies (to own and/or rent property at much higher rates) rather than solely focusing on the individual gentrifiers. For instance, once a gentrifier accepts to pay a substantially higher rent in a community all these aforementioned agents will work in tandem in order to increase their profitability. Erased from this discussion are the working-class people of color who cannot afford an increased

rent, which ultimately leads to poorer living conditions and displacement. Thus, the consumer sovereignty thesis, while it professes itself as not being about owning property, ends up forgetting the power dynamics of having the economic means to "own" the privilege and access to the city and essentially to "own" the identity of a fully sovereign consumer.

Viewed as a major contestation to the consumer sovereignty thesis of gentrification, the rent-gap thesis postulates that it is the economic disinvestment and reinvestment of a community that is at the center of this urban process. The rent-gap thesis thus views gentrification as being driven largely by the market. This directly contests the previous thesis on gentrification because the rent-gap thesis postulates that it is "much more important to track the movement of capital rather than the movement of people" (Slater, 2015). In essence, this perspective focused less on the gentrifiers themselves and more on the reasons why parts of a city were cheaper to own or rent. However, many communities of color are strategically placed in disinvested communities of the city (i.e. the unincorporation of East L.A.) so it is not a far stretch to argue that poor communities of color will continuously face possible erasure and displacement due to the economic reinvestment of their consistently disinvested communities.

In his book, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, Smith presents the metaphor of the "revanchist city" which he defines as a city through the metaphor of "combative zones" where people with capital, which in this case are middle-class white gentrifiers, "take back" the city from the people of color. This spurred a differing perspective on gentrification that allowed scholars to focus on the ways that a revanchist city is connected to an analysis of neoliberal urbanism (DeVerteuil, 2006;

Wyly & Hammel, 2005). Gentrifiers' "taking back" a city is very reminiscent of the metaphor of gentrification being a "returning to" the city. Through the metaphor of the revanchist city, Smith allowed scholars like Aalbers to present a different perspective of a gentrified city that argues for an analysis of how "[t]he city is 'made safe' for corporate investment by cleaning it from the 'other', in some way undesirable, groups" (Aalbers, 2010, p. 1696).

Looking at these two interpretations of the "takeover" of the city (consumer sovereignty and rent-gap), it is clear that at the center of these perspectives is an inherent economic stability that grants these bodies full agency to transform the urban landscape to their liking (with the help of other gentrifying agents). A consumer sovereignty perspective, placing most of its attention on the agential gentrifier, fails to connect the individual gentrifiers in order to map a pattern of gentrifiers as they specifically are initiating the cleansing of the city's communities of color. Simultaneously, the rent-gap thesis—while placing more of an emphasis on the economic underpinning systems that guide gentrification—still fails to effectively highlight the fact that only communities of color are consistently disinvested by the metropolitan centers. Given this consistent disinvestment, these communities are perpetually targeted by gentrification for a reinvestment that will only benefit future new community members that belong to a higher socioeconomic level.

Whiteness as Property and Racialized Space

Whiteness can best be understood as the unnamed racial hierarchical system that has shaped western civilization (Mills, 2011). Frankenberg (1993) best defined whiteness as a systemic construct comprised of three tenets:

Firstly, it is a position of structural advantage, associated with 'privileges' of the most basic kind, including for example, higher wages, reduced chances of being impoverished, longer life, better access to health care, better treatment by the legal system and so on…Secondly, whiteness is a 'standpoint' or place from which to look at oneself, others and society. Thirdly, it carries with it a set of ways of being in the world, a set of cultural practices, often not named as 'white' by white folks, but looked upon instead as 'American' or 'normal' (p. 53-54).

Because of this triad nature of whiteness, some scholars have theorized whiteness as being the invisible center of a racialized world (Dyer, 1997), which allows for whiteness to adopt an evasive nature and is therefore difficult to pin-down. Unfortunately, this position often ignores the material implications of whiteness. Thus, whiteness should be understood as

...socially and historically embedded; it is a form of racialization of identity formation that carries with it a history of social, cultural, and economic relations. Whiteness is unfinalizable, but compared to other ethnic formations, its space for maneuvering in the racialized and genderized permutations of U.S. citizenship is infinitely more vast (McLaren, 2000, p. 155).

Whiteness is embedded in the fabric of our society and it manifest in material ways that benefit white and "honorary whites" (Bonilla-Silva, 2004) at the expense of others. For this particular project, I would like to focus on two major theoretical fields within whiteness studies that I believe give academics the necessary tools to show the material implications of this racial ideological construct: first, I will focus on the discussion of whiteness as property, and second, the racialization of space.

Considering whiteness as property, rather than as the invisible center, allows us to understand the material, legal, and economic manifestations of a racial ideology conceptualized within the United States (Feagin, 2010; Harris, 1995; Oliver & Shapiro, 2006; Robinson, 1983; Roediger, 1991). Harris (1995) argues, "Whiteness was the characteristic, the attribute, the property of free human beings…" (p. 279). She situates

this discussion of whiteness as property in the formation of the United States of America with a particular focus on the ways that Black people were framed as objects and thus the legal property of White subjects; it is in this light that Harris further claims, "Whiteness – the right to white identity as embraced by the law – is property if by 'property' one means all of a person's legal rights" (p. 280). However, whiteness as property did not end with Jim Crow era racism, but rather transformed in order to perpetuate the status quo. In essence, "Whiteness as property…continues to assist in the reproduction of the existing system of racial classification that stratification that protects the socially entrenched white power elite" (McLaren, 2000, p. 145). To be clear, whiteness as property affects people's entire lives—from the types of property they can rent/own, to the types of schooling associated with these properties, to access to adequate food and water.

Inherent in the discussion of whiteness as property is the intricate relationship between racism and capitalism. Robinson (1983) argues that the major tendency of a capitalist European civilization was to differentiate peoples along racial categorizations. McLaren further argues, "Racism emerged as the ideology of the plantocracy. It began with the class of sugar planters and slave merchants that dominated England's Caribbean colonies. Racism developed out of the 'systemic slavery' of the New World" (McLaren, 2000, p. 147). Thus, embedded within a class division of workers was a racial stratification, which divided the working class into two (a white working class and a working class of color). Callinicos (1993), thus argues, "Racism…gives white workers a particular identity, and one moreover which unites them with white capitalists" (p. 38). Similarly, Roediger (1991) argues "whiteness was a way in which white workers responded to a fear of dependency on wage labor and to the necessities of capitalist work

19

discipline" (p. 13). Therefore, whiteness could be owned, or rather attained through the accumulation of wealth and the exploitation of others.

The attainment of whiteness through the accumulation of wealth leads the discussion to the literal ownership of property, which ultimately reifies the construction of whiteness as a process of racialization. In his book, *City of Quartz*, Davis (1990) argues that particularly in the city of Los Angeles, there is a material manifestation of white-supremacist ideology inherent in the homeowner's movement. Through the discussion of the movement to privatize public spaces, and their push for a homogenous community along racial and class lines, Davis weaves politics of race and class with property value and thus illustrates the racialization of homeowners' push for exclusivity and divisions.

The phenomenon of white supremacy connected to the homeowner's movement is embellished even more when one considers the ways that the suburbanization movement helped to perpetuate a more crystalized understanding of white identity. Avila and Rose (2009) argue that after World War II, suburbanization spurred the "white flight" away from inner cities. Through this embrace of suburbanization, which included the construction of gating homogenously white communities away from the inner-city slums, "white Americans often embraced a bootstrap, color-blind model of social progress (and a myth of suburban racial innocence) that denied the existence of structural barriers limiting the advancement of African Americans and other racialized social groups" (Avila & Rose, 2009, p. 340). Thus, when looking at the ways in which the law operates, it is clear that "[T]he racial projects of the U.S. society have always been spatial projects

as well" (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 52). To be white is to be protected by law; perhaps to even be the law. To be of color on the other hand, means to be the object of law.

Relatedly, whiteness studies have engaged in questions of the racialization of space (Almaguer, 1994; Gilmore, 2007; Lipsitz, 1998; McKittrick, 2006; Pulido, 2000, 2002, 2016). Geography is always already racialized. The racialization of space dictates that the places systematically created for people of color will be viewed as "ghettos" or "bad" neighborhoods while the neighborhoods of white people will consistently be framed as "good" neighborhoods that become the templates for American normalcy (i.e. the two-story house with the white picket fence and green lawns for the heterosexual white family). Lipsitz (2011) argues that race in the U.S. literally takes up space in the form of racialized space. It is because of this that Kobayashi and Peake (2000) argue the processes of racialization can best be understood as "the material processes and the ideological consequences of the construction of 'race' as a means of differentiating, and valuing, 'white' people above those of color" (393). Focusing an analysis of whiteness on the ways that race is used to structurally skew "opportunities and life chances along racial lines" will ensure that our analysis specifically highlights the ways that race "takes place" (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 41). So, if race "takes up space" and racialization is the understanding of "the way race is produced and bestowed on people by institutional social actions" (Martinot, 2003, p. 13), then it becomes clear that even the neutral process of the market driving the processes of gentrification can be seen as racially fueled.

Gentrification: A Whiteness Project

Through this analysis of both gentrification scholarship and whiteness studies it becomes clear that these theoretical paradigms fail to address the complexity of

gentrification on their own. However, through my intervention of gentrification as a whiteness project, I merge these paradigms in order to garner new ways of unpacking and understanding the process of gentrification. In short, gentrification scholarship needs to incorporate the particular tenets of whiteness as property and the process of racialization into their analysis of gentrification if there is to be a more coherent and complex understanding of this urban phenomenon.

The consumer sovereignty thesis and the rent-gap thesis both fall short in understanding the process of gentrification. While the consumer sovereignty perspective places emphasis on the gentrifier, this frame of analysis is too individualistic to account for larger patterns that connect the individual bodies of gentrifiers to larger structures of whiteness. The rent-gap perspective, on the other hand, emphasizes the housing market, which is also framed as both neutral and natural, to explain the divisions between reinvested and disinvested communities. In this way, both perspectives can be seen as following *white methods*, which are understood as

> the practical tools used to manufacture empirical data and analysis to support the racial stratification in society. *White methods* are the various practices that have been used to produce 'racial knowledge'…since the emergence of White supremacy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and of the disciplines a few centuries later. (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008, p. 18).

In short, both models are not in-tune with the reality of which bodies are capable of being active agents, and therefore owners, of gentrification. Inherent in the conversation about gentrification and the ability to own property and reinvest and revitalize entire communities of color that had been plagued with decades of disinvestment is a discussion of whiteness.

Therefore, *gentrification as a whiteness project* attempts to merge these theoretical paradigms in order to have a more nuanced understanding of gentrification. Specifically, gentrification as a whiteness project argues that gentrification should be understood as the strategically designed process used to push out predominantly working-class communities of color at a local and global level for the benefit of an incoming (physically and/or economically) white population. In this way, gentrification is the literal and figural cleansing of cityscapes through the eradication of bodies and cultures of color. Through this conceptualization, gentrification must be understood as inhabiting both racial and classist dimensions. For the purpose of this project, I choose to call gentrification a "whiteness project" because of the fluid definition of "whiteness."[5] While I argue that gentrification destroyed current neighborhoods for a future white population, I do not necessarily mean literally white people. Since this is a redevelopment process, gentrification is for any bodies that can adopt a neoliberal capitalist agenda. In short, middle-class people of color can definitely gentrify a working-class neighborhood of color. However, rather than view people of color gentrifiers as exceptions to the rule, I view them as falling under the dominant trope of whiteness.[6]

Looking back at the popularized synonyms for gentrification, like "revitalization" and "beautification" it is difficult for an anti-gentrification movement to argue against "revitalization" because at its surface level "revitalization" means improvement. However, it is clear that this improvement is not made for the working-class people of

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[5] Unlike "white privilege" or "white supremacy," "whiteness" has an easier job of extending beyond the literal white body.

[6] In this way, I view gentrifiers of color as following the tri-racial order in becoming "honorary whites" as postulated by Bonilla Silva (2004).

color already living in these neighborhoods. In this way, gentrification as a whiteness project requires whiteness studies (particularly the discussion of whiteness as property and the racialization process) to be placed in conversation with the dominant notions of gentrification (particularly the consumer sovereignty and rent-gap thesis) in order to fully understand the implication of this process on disinvested communities of color.

Methods

Gentrification is messy and to follow a simplified, orderly methodological structure will not clarify the phenomenon "if what they are describing is not itself very coherent" (Law, 2004, p. 2). Therefore, I employ critical and rhetorical methods that are open to the analysis of not only multiple sites, but levels of analysis as well. It is important that I situate my methodological framework on the foundation presented by other communication scholars that analyze the rhetoric of places (Aiello, 2011; Aiello & Dickinson, 2014; Blair, 2001; Dickinson, 2002; Makagon, 2010; Ott, Blair, & Dickinson, 2010; Stewart & Dickinson, 2008), and more specifically the ways that the urban can impact the ways that bodies move and interact with others throughout the city. Specifically when analyzing cities, Dickinson and Aiello (2016) argue:

> Rather than examining cities as contexts or even repositories of different communicative modes and media … We see urban space as 'the production of power-filled social relations'… and the urban built environment as the physical, observable, and always shifting manifestations of such social relations. (p. 1295).

However, their method of "being through there" alone is ineffective at addressing *gentrification as a whiteness project*. One of the major caveats of "being through there" is for the researcher to be within the city they are analyzing. Dickinson and Aiello argue this is necessary since "…the city as a whole – communicatively call on our whole body.

Methodical movement demands, then, that communication scholars pay attention to, record, and think hard about these sensory messages" (p. 1301-1302). However, this position is unreflexive of the power relations that can grant some bodies access to walk across the city while other bodies' mobilities are restricted and/or hyper surveilled. In short, this method does not account for the fact that "gentrifiers," those that benefit from a revitalized neighborhood, are also "being through there" as much as the people being displaced because of redevelopment initiatives.[7] Therefore, essential to the exploration of the transforming urban landscape are the methods of rhetorical cartography (Greene & Kuswa, 2012; Hayes, 2016), and the analysis of multiple rhetorical forms (Enck-Wanzer, 2006; Dickinson & Aiello, 2016).

In order to truly understand gentrification, one needs to account for power dynamics. Hayes (2016) states that the goals of critical rhetorical cartography are "…to examine the apparatus of power and the technologies of governance at work in the social, political, and legal processes of mapping, whether the maps consist of spatial locations or of discursive boundaries" (Hayes, 2016, p. 55-56). Using rhetorical cartography as a method for this project is vital since this method helps to pinpoint the agents of gentrification while also mapping out the contestation of place-making. As Greene and Kuswa (2012) state, "…different regions are made and unmade by different maps of power as rhetorics *of* place and *in* place encounter the uneven global flows of ideas and images…capital and labor" (p. 273, emphasis in original). In this way, the mapping of power relations that contest and transform space is necessarily a communication analysis.

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[7] By not taking this into account, gentrifiers can argue that there is nothing wrong with a revitalizing Boyle Heights as working-class people of color are being forcefully removed.

Hay (2006) argues that "a spatial materialism of communication…seeks to understand communication/media, and their power, in terms of how and where these technologies matter within and are made productive of orderings of time and space" (Hay, 2006, p. 48). In essence, through a critical rhetorical cartography, "rhetoric and discourse matter as much as location…" (Hayes, 2016, p. 49). Ultimately, power must be interrogated in order to fully understand the implementation of redevelopment initiatives through gentrification on a working-class neighborhood of color.

Equally important to this study is the analysis of gentrification through different sites of analysis. Hayes (2016) argues that employing a rhetorical cartography allows us to "think about new modes of materiality…these include the body, technology, and space/place, but also would encompass future extrapolations of new modes of materiality" (p. 49). Therefore, the transformation of the urban needs to be understood through multiple sites of analysis. Enck-Wanzer (2006) refers to this use of multiple sites of analysis as "intersectional rhetoric," which he defines as

> coming to a discourse with the assumption that *different forms intersect with each other equally* will help us to see something differently than if we assume that the primary social work is being done by *either* verbal, visual, *or* embodied forms (p. 181, emphasis in original).

In this sense, I am thinking about Dickinson and Aiello's assertion that the urban can best be understood through the analysis of the three nodal points: materiality, bodies, and movement. In this way, the authors argue, "being there in the presence of communication's materiality [bringing] together the host of mediations that come from past possibilities, present experiences, and future expectations. Being there will always also mean being elsewhere and elsewhen" (Dickinson & Aiello, 2016, p. 1301).

This is an important methodological factor to consider since this would allow for researchers to understand the ways the material transformation of a gentrifying neighborhood translate to the influx or displacement of particular bodies and the movement of gentrification.

Finally, a focus on gentrification needs to account for the ways that history always already informs the transformation and revitalization of present locations. Thus, the temporality of the neighborhood is understood as being from a then and a there as well as a now and a here. Dickinson and Aiello (2016) continue, "methodologically, this means understanding the historical processes by which a place comes to be as a way to grapple with issues of change over time and to explore the ways the past, present, and future always work together" (p. 1302). Interestingly, a way to critically interrogate the historicity of places is to uncover the forgotten oppressive histories of the construction of neighborhoods of color. This means that the researcher should consistently highlight a marginalized vantage point of history in order to critically interrogate concepts like redlining, and eminent domain. Ultimately, this method promises to help produce research that is more than two-dimensional and thus can offer a more nuanced understanding of gentrification.

In order to observe different rhetorical "texts" I will specifically analyze local newspapers and the social media output of the major voices of gentrification in Boyle Heights. While at first glance the analysis of newspapers might seem like a degree of separation, according to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the analysis of newspapers is a fruitful endeavor since "that language use contributes [to] the (re)production of social life…" specifically as they are used in "relationships of disempowerment, dominance,

prejudice and/or discrimination" (Richardson, 2007, p. 26). Further, in order to use CDA

as a tool of analysis, Richardson argues for the use of Fairclough's model of CDA which

analyzes the ways language connects to both discursive and social practices. In essence,

> …to fully understand what discourse is and how it works, analysis needs to draw
> out the form and function of the text, the way that this text relates to the way it is
> produced and consumed, and the relation of this to the wider society in which it
> takes place (Richardson, 2007, p. 27).

In this way, I analyze over 100 local newspaper articles on gentrification in Boyle

Heights that offer insight into the major voices of gentrification and anti-gentrification

initiatives. Further, I analyze official city documents as a way to connect the discourse

practices with the material manifestations of the Eastside transformation.

Chapter Breakdown

Since the fragmented scholarship on gentrification fails to truly understand the

complexity of this phenomenon, this project argues for gentrification as a "whiteness

project." This critical intervention into the literature calls for viewing gentrification as an

urban process that is strategically employed on a global scale to effectively cleanse the

city of its communities of color for an incoming physically and/or economically white

population. Below I flesh out the three chapters that will highlight this complexity.

Chapter one will specifically focus on the replacement project of the Sixth-Street

Bridge. Since the early 1990s, the city of Los Angeles has known that the bridge would

collapse in the event of a massive earthquake. However, the city chose to replace the

bridge after the communities serviced by this bridge (the Arts District and Boyle Heights)

began to be targeted with gentrification. Therefore, the research question that guides this

chapter is: Why did the Sixth-Street Bridge get transformed into the "Ribbon of Light?"[8]

I argue that the transformation of the Sixth-Street Bridge is an initial implementation of

the process of gentrification to revitalize the Eastside. Moreover, this revitalized bridge

points to which bodies the city values by transforming its urban landscape to meet the

demands for a particular form of urban city dwelling.

      In chapter two, I look at the current manifestation of an artist-led gentrification

that local protestors are calling *artwashing*. For Boyle Heights activists, artwashing is the

best descriptor of an artists-led gentrification process that is employed in order to mask

the inherent violence of gentrification by focusing on the "beautification" aspect of this

process. Specifically in this chapter, the research question is: if artwashing is connected

to gentrification, how are artists and artwashing business owners effective in the

conflation between "redevelopment" and "progress" in relation to solving a

neighborhood's blight? In order to answer this, I expand the definition of artwashing to

incorporate a discussion of whiteness that specifically focuses on the politics of civility.

While focusing most of my attention on the multiple artwashing establishments that range

from particular art galleries and coffee shops, I analyze the ways that artwashing

specifically redefines the ways that we understand gentrification in East L.A. by

(re)centering the narrative around the incoming white bodies and by seeking to spark

civil dialogue as a means to solve the issues of gentrification.

      In chapter three, I specifically focus on the varied responses to gentrification by

local residents of Boyle Heights. Namely, I analyze the two prevailing movements

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[8] The "Ribbon of Light" is the official name of the new bridge design that will replace the original Sixth-
Street Bridge.

against gentrification in Boyle Heights: the *gente*fication movement, and the anti-gentrification movement. The *gente*fication movement is initiated as a way to counter gentrification by arguing for Latina/o/x revitalization of their own neighborhood. In this way, they argue that working-class neighborhoods of color can reap the benefits of revitalization by doing it themselves and this will avoid any displacement. Contrary to this movement, the anti-gentrification movement rejects both gentrification and *gente*fication since they argue all revitalization efforts are directly connected to the eradication of working-class neighborhoods of color. Therefore, the research question guiding this chapter is: Can Boyle Heights residents effectively counter gentrification initiatives? Since both of these movements employ their ethnic and class identities as a way to combat gentrification and cultural erasure I analyze the in/effectiveness of each movement in order to show their complicity in the continuation of gentrification.

In the concluding chapter of this project I will focus on providing the significance of *gentrification as a whiteness project* as the future of Los Angeles continues to unfold. Not only do I piece the entire project together, but I also offer the foundations for future scholarly endeavors into gentrification. In this way, I hope to present the limitations of this dissertation by specifically outlining future research that can continue to consider gentrification as a whiteness project.

Through this project I propose that an analysis of gentrification as a whiteness project will help to push the scholarship of this phenomenon to be more nuanced as the analysis incorporates the theorization of gentrification through the vantage point of the community. Ultimately, interdisciplinary work and a keen analysis of the urban place will provide a space for further inquiries on the ways that communities of color communicate,

exist, and combat dominant urban policies that strategically aim for the erasure of their

neighborhoods. Gentrification scholarship needs to start professing, alongside

communities of color: *¡Ya basta con la erradicacción de comunidades de color!*[9]

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[9] *Enough with the eradication of communities of color!*

CHAPTER ONE: THE SIXTH-STREET BRIDGE: A GENTRIFYING URBAN BUILT ENVIRONMENT

> The joke going around is that the new bridge is going to be a very expensive homeless encampment. The beautiful parks under it will be perfect for sleeping
> —David Hollen, L.A. resident being evicted due to gentrification (Lovett, 2015)

> The historical background of the east side's automotive transportation network can help to illuminate longer and more layered relationships between the politics of transportation and the racialization of people and places in Los Angeles. Sixth Street Bridge and Whittier Boulevard did not create the barrio, but they did establish the kind of path dependencies that are most difficult to overcome – the kind that are poured in concrete
> —Matthew W. Roth (2004)

As an urban built environment, the replacement of the Sixth-Street Bridge,[10] speaks to the gentrifying reality of the two neighborhoods serviced by this structure—the Arts District and Boyle Heights. Even though this bridge has had a long history of having a weakening structural integrity, replacement of the bridge was not fully embraced by the city of Los Angeles until this particular region of the city started to undergo processes of gentrification. In this chapter, I explore the transformation of this urban built environment to understand the further gentrification and cleansing of East L.A. Thus, this study follows Carey (1992) in arguing that reality can be understood by analyzing the ways in which we attempt to "construct, maintain, repair, and transform reality" through publicly

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[10] While the structure is a viaduct, and all city officials, engineers, and architects refer to this structure as a viaduct, they also—along with the majority of residents in Los Angeles—refer to this structure as a bridge; thus, I will be referring to this structure as the Sixth-Street Bridge.

observable action (p. 30). In this way, the replacement of this historic bridge can be viewed as both the single most ambitious project to solve the issue of blight in the Eastside and also as the creation of an urban built environment specifically fashioned for a future white population. Therefore, I argue that the transformation of the Sixth-Street Bridge, as an urban built environment, is an initial implementation of the process of gentrification to revitalize the Eastside. The replacement of the Sixth-Street Bridge can be seen as a strategic move for two reasons that are rarely if at all addressed in conjunction with gentrification: the protection of white life and the sanctity of white mobility throughout the city. In short, the transformation of the urban built environment speaks to which bodies the city values; and ultimately transforms its urban landscape to fit the expectations of these bodies for what is essential in urban city dwelling.

In the past couple of years, the neighborhood known as the Arts District (located on the western end of the Sixth-Street Bridge) has undergone major gentrification initiatives that have started to impact the culture of the Arts District. This neighborhood has been converted from a predominantly working-class, artist-loft neighborhood to one that offers residents trendy new restaurants, coffee shops, and breweries walking distance from upscale apartments. This increase in amenities in the Arts District has led to a surge in population growth within the neighborhood. According to the mapping of the 2010 Census by the New York Times, between the years 2000 to 2010, the Arts District has seen a population change of about 97 percent ("Mapping"). Further exacerbating the issue of population growth in this particular area of L.A. is the current housing crisis affecting the city (mostly neighborhoods like the Arts District and Boyle Heights). A

recent study found that in L.A. the median rent has jumped 28% from 2000 to 2014; in that same time frame renter income declined 8% (Holland, 2017). This has caused a major impact on communities like Boyle Heights where about 75% of residents are renters (McGahan, 2017). At the center of two different neighborhoods combating gentrification and evictions is a demolished bridge.

The iconic Sixth-Street Bridge was demolished in February 2016 to make way for the replacement bridge, created by L.A. architect Michael Maltzan, which was officially named "The Ribbon of Light" due to the structure's night-time feature. While the construction crew has already broken ground on this new bridge, "The Ribbon of Light" will not be completed and open to the public until late 2021 (Barragan, 2016). However, the plan to take some action on the bridge has been well documented since the late 1980s. Therefore, as an urban built environment that is being radically transformed through the process of incorporating revitalization plans directly connected to the intention of gentrifying East L.A., the Sixth-Street Bridge presents itself as a vital artifact of gentrification.

Policy makers and city planners view gentrification as the "one size fits all" in terms of fixing their urban centers since gentrification has been marketed across the U.S. as the method by which urban decay and blight can be resolved. However, this process does not solve blight since it merely removes the people that are consistently facing these social issues due to racist policies and ideologies. Gentrification as a whiteness project uncovers the driving force of this process: the revitalization of urban cities by cleansing the city of its people of color in order to attract a white affluent population. Throughout

34

gentrification literature there has been a push to erase the culpability of white bodies from the process of gentrification and displacement. Analyzing the transformation of the urban built environment as an initial process of gentrification can offer a link to the claim that white bodies are the driving force for revitalization and beautification initiatives.

This chapter is guided by the research question: Why did the Sixth-Street Bridge have to be redeveloped in this particular way? To answer this question, I analyze local press reporting on the project while also analyzing city documents found in the online archive for this project (www.sixthstreetviaduct.org) and city council minutes and announcements in the online archive for the city of Los Angeles (http://clkrep.lacity.org/oldcfidocs/). The city documents help to provide background information on the decision-making process of the Sixth-Street Bridge, while the press documentation provides L.A. resident statements and contextualization for the city's decisions. The following chapter will be presented in seven parts: first, I will present a contextualization of blight and redevelopment in relation to the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles; second, I will provide a brief definition of Caltrans; third, a discussion of the original Sixth-Street Bridge's relevance to the city of Los Angeles and Boyle Heights; fourth, a description of the new replacement bridge and its architect; fifth, I will argue for a merging of communication theory and L.A. studies as a way to understand the city; sixth, an analysis of the Sixth-Street Bridge Replacement project; and seventh I will conclude with a discussion of the impacts of this newly redeveloped bridge as the initial process of cleansing the city of L.A. of its brown inhabitants for a white future Los Angeles.

Blight and Redevelopment

As stated previously, blight can best be described as a characteristic of a neighborhood that stops the community from thriving. In the state of California, blight is separated into two different categories: physical conditions and economic conditions. Some of the physical conditions of blight include having multiple buildings with serious building code violations, deterioration, or having subdivided lots "whose physical development has been impaired by…present general plan and zoning standards and present market conditions" (CA H.S.C. § 33031, 2016). Economic conditions range from a stagnant property value, to a lack of necessary commercial facilities like grocery stores, and banks, or even "serious residential overcrowding" which relates to "significant public health or safety problems" (CA H.S.C. § 33031, 2016). Thus, a blighted neighborhood can only be resolved by the city officials through revitalization efforts that require redevelopment initiatives. However, there are substantial issues with the blanket understanding of the simplistic belief that "redevelopment will solve blight." Specific to East L.A., the issues with eradicating blight through redevelopment can be best understood through an analysis of the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles (CRA/LA).

The CRA/LA is a local city organization that is "dedicated to revitalizing, refurbishing, and renewing economically underserved areas of Los Angeles" (Final Environmental Report, 2011, p. 123). With an aim to remove physical and economic blight, the CRA/LA has two redevelopment projects in the area around the Sixth-Street Bridge. The CRA/LA's mission statement suggests the agency was trying to help

36

eliminate blight from the community by helping the current residents of Boyle Heights, but a closer look uncovers the reality that CRA/LA's mission to revitalize the community is strongly tied with other initiatives that have started to enforce a gentrification agenda. There are two major points that frame the CRA/LA as an untrustworthy partner in truly solving the issue of "blight" in East L.A: the Metro Gold Line initiative; and the allocation of funds.

The first example is the opening of the Metro Gold Line in East L.A. To lay out the Gold Line, Metro usurped multiple properties through eminent domain. Interestingly, the CRA/LA uses the term "redevelopment" for the Gold Line when in actuality it was a transportation link that was built from scratch. To "redevelop" connotes fortifying something that is already in place, however since there was no metro link already set in place, this entire project focused on bulldozing sections of the barrio and creating an entirely new urban built environment geared at incentivizing gentrification. Unfortunately, the creation of the Gold Line has already been linked to the gentrification of the Eastside, particularly when increased white residents, increased median income and property value have all been recorded along this transit rail system (Urban Displacement, 2017). The second example is their past allocation of funds. For instance, in 2011 the CRA/LA was responsible for allocating $52 million for a garage structure for Eli Broad's museum in downtown L.A. while simultaneously only securing $5.2 million in public help for Watts (Rothman & Stewart, 2011). If the CRA/LA were to genuinely try to solve the region's issue of blight by helping the current residents, it would be most beneficial to allocate funds to help reinforce poor quality buildings still being used by

renters rather than to allocate greater funds towards a tourist destination. While the Broad museum is a valuable addition to the city of Los Angeles, it is predominantly a tourist destination rather than one aimed at assisting residents of a blighted neighborhood. Thus, the CRA/LA's decision to "revitalize" through helping build a garage speaks volumes about the city's push to create spaces for white tourists and white (future) residents. In short, a parking garage communicates to the surrounding community that this recreational space was not specifically built to address their blighted community.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the CRA/LA was one of three different revitalization organizations in the city of L.A. that was mentioned in the final report for the Sixth-Street revitalization plan by Caltrans and the city of L.A.: the CRA/LA, City of L.A. Bicycle Plan, and the L.A. River Revitalization Master Plan. These initiatives might seem like a positive response to address blight in the neighborhood; however, much like the issues of CRA/LA, protecting the bike plan or revitalizing the river have both already resulted in major red flags for residents fighting gentrification and eviction. For instance, the innocent bike has already been identified as a sign of gentrification since "cycling feeds into wider urban changes, including gentrification…a bicycle lane gets put on a street that is already undergoing change" (Goeghegan, 2016). Bikes have always been used by residents of Boyle Heights, but they are just now being protected. Further, the effects of an L.A. River revitalization project have already doubled the sales prices of the riverfront property in the neighborhood known as Frogtown, nestled between the two heavily gentrified communities of Atwater Village and Silver Lake (Kudler, 2016). Thus, these organizations are mentioned in the plan since they all focus on transforming the

urban built environment (e.g. building tourist museums, integrating bike lanes in gentrified neighborhoods, or revitalizing sections of a concrete river that are adjacent to substantially increasing rent value) in order to incentivize an increase in consumerism. It is clear that while it is important to analyze "blight" in any given neighborhood, the past instances of reviving blighted areas have come at a cost of displacement particularly through eminent domain. Ultimately, "redevelopment" is an open phrase for creating new urban spaces that might not necessarily benefit the current blighted community residents.

Caltrans

When it was first established in 1895, this organization was first named the Bureau of Highways Commission. Its creation made California one of the first states to name a bureau for highway transportation. A year after its first meeting, the Bureau of Highways Commission would "recommend a 14,000-mile network that would become the basis for today's State Highway System" ("Get to know Caltrans," 2017). This led the commission to primarily focus on materializing a state highways system that would connect all parts of the state together. In essence, the road system would link "'the great belts of timber, fruit, agriculture, and mineral wealth to the state's population centers" ("Get to know Caltrans," 2017).

During the time that then president Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act of 1956, this organization changed its name to Caltrans, short for the California Department of Transportation. The name change had to do with the rise in concerns about the highways system so the organization expanded its frame to incorporate other modes of transportation (i.e. light rail transit, public

transportation, and carpool) which could help dissipate the negative effects of highway transportation (i.e. traffic congestion and air pollution). Overall, "Since its creation in 1895, Caltrans has been steadfast in making sure transportation within the state is safe, sustainable, integrative and efficient" ("Get to know Caltrans," 2017). In its entirety, Caltrans oversees six primary programs: Aeronautics, Highway Transportation, Mass Transportation, Transportation Planning, Administration, and the Equipment Service Center. Importantly, in the last few years since the aftermath of the Northridge earthquake, Caltrans has "focused attention on the need to strengthen state highway bridges against the immense power of seismic forces" ("Get to know Caltrans," 2017). This latest concern is a major catalyst for Caltrans to mobilize its efforts in implementing a revitalization effort for the Sixth-Street Bridge.

Sixth-Street Bridge: History & Relevance

In order to truly understand the relevance of the Sixth-Street Bridge, this section will specifically present three important facets of the iconic bridge: its history, its relevance to the city, and its connection to Boyle Heights. The Sixth-Street Bridge was first opened in 1933 as one of the bridges connecting East L.A. to downtown L.A. This 3,500-foot-long bridge, most recognized for its 66-foot-wide viaduct, consisted of a four-lane roadway, no shoulders or bike lanes, and a "variable-width sidewalk along both sides of the structure" (Final Environmental Impact, 2011, p. 47). Since its start of operation, this bridge has been one of the twelve historic bridges/viaducts to cross the L.A. River (Moore, 2011, p. 2). The Sixth-Street Bridge is owned by two separate entities. The city of Los Angeles owns 3, 264 feet of this structure that stretches from the

western end, which begins in the Arts District, up until the start of the US 101 freeway. After this, Caltrans begins its 235-foot ownership of the structure that stretches the span of the US 101 into the eastern end of the bridge which ends in the community of Boyle Heights.

Figure 1.1. A picture of the old Sixth-Street Bridge. Photo taken from Caltrans' 6th Street Viaduct seismic improvement project.

As an L.A. structure, the Sixth-Street Bridge became an icon through its Hollywood portrayals of a notoriously gritty L.A. The bridge was first introduced to Hollywood audiences in the film, *Them!* The Sixth-Street Bridge became a central feature of films based in L.A. which led to "over 80 movies, television shows, music videos, and commercials" being shot near or underneath this structure (Koeppel, 2016). Most notably, this structure's centrality in Hollywood representations was in part due to its connection to the automobile:

> if you want to film something set in Los Angeles that makes reference to the city's automotive culture, or if you're just looking for a place to shoot a car chase that's cheaper and more available than a clogged freeway, the channelized, concretized bed of the Los Angeles River is your best choice. (Koeppel, 2016)

Mike Davis (1998) argues that one major Hollywood representation of the city has been the city of bad futures and grim realities for urban centers. L.A. was consistently framed

41

as a post-apocalyptic environment "overrun by terminators, androids, and gangs" (p. 278). As the years went by, the Sixth-Street Bridge became an archetype for all that is bad in L.A.

Still, the Sixth-Street Bridge's importance extended beyond the Hollywood screen, as this structure was also highly important to the residents of Boyle Heights. According to Louis Huot, the architect of the original bridge, the importance of the structure went back to the fact that "the viaduct is conformable to the automobile which it carries across the chasm" (Koeppel, 2016). Back in the early 1930s the transformation of the urban landscape to accommodate the automobile was revolutionary since it was a structure that was projecting what the future of Los Angeles would look like. Therefore, this urban built environment became very important for the community of Boyle Heights since it helped connect the neighborhood to the downtown area that Latinas/os/x, especially Mexicans, were separated from. For many brown residents of East L.A., their separation from the city's capital and ultimate segregation and containment from the rest of Los Angeles was materialized by the concretization of the L.A. River. Thus, many Latinas/os/x view the river as that which "separates us, and continues to separate us to this day…from the Westside of Los Angeles…" (Herrera, 2014). In short, the Sixth-Street Bridge connected the eastside after its brown residents were forcefully segregated and relocated to the eastern shore of the river.

Maltzan's Ribbon of Light

In 2012, Michael Maltzan along with his design-build team and contractor partners Skanska and Stacy and Witbeck won the international competition created by the

city of Los Angeles to find the next bridge project for the city. The reward garnered

Maltzan and his team a "$25 million contract for one of the most prestigious construction

projects in the region" (Curwen, 2015). The new Sixth-Street Bridge, now called "Ribbon

of Light," will consist of a "four-lane road" while providing "equal space to pedestrians,

bicyclists and cars" (Hamilton, 2016). Its design paid homage to the previous bridge by

incorporating ten curved arches of varying heights along both sides of the bridge. Other

L.A. residents have perceived the arch design as "following the approximate path of a

stone skip[ing] across a pond" (Hamilton, 2015).

Figure 1.2. A conceptual picture of the new Sixth-Street Bridge
at night. Photo taken from Michael Maltzan's website.

Beyond its functionality, Maltzan presented this design as a way to construct an

urban space in and of itself. In his description of the bridge, Maltzan was recorded as

saying:

> Our new bridge will not only bring people from Point A to Point B but to Point C
> – the bridge itself…We want to create a space that wants to be inhabited…this
> could not and would not be achieved by a monumental span over the L.A. River.
> (Curwen, 2015)

In his justification for the focus on creating a tourist destination type of bridge, Maltzan

also indirectly stated that prior to his bridge, this part of the city is deemed unworthy of

being inhabited which negates the ways that people of color have inhabited this area of the city. One of the major ways that Maltzan aims at creating this desire for inhabitance is by creating a bridge that can be accessible to all residents, not just those that use a personal car for their primary means of transportation. In this way, this bridge includes a ramp on both the east and west end of the bridge in order to allow both pedestrians and bicyclists access to the area immediately around the structure. This area would also offer guests "an amphitheater under the western grade and a municipal park to the east…" (Curwen, 2015). Thus, beyond its literal use as an urban built environment to protect the means of transportation, this new bridge would also create urban place(s) of leisure.

Figure 1.3. A conceptual picture of the public park which will be located under the new bridge. Photo taken from Michael Maltzan's website.

L.A. Communication: Roads, Bridges, & Freeways

For the purposes of this chapter, communication can best be understood as the media by which certain bodies, ideas, viewpoints are given liberty to move across space and time. Thus, modes of transportation such as roads, freeways, and bridges, can be considered forms of communication that need to be analyzed. In order for the analysis of the Sixth-Street Bridge to take place, it is important to merge communication theory with

L.A. studies; particularly the voices of Carey, Sterne, Avila, and Banham. Having these voices speak to one another will help us in understanding the full impact of this bridge redevelopment project by arguing that bridges, much like roads and freeways, can be viewed as forms of communication that speak to/about the racialized forms of mobility as they are materialized in Los Angeles. In this section, I will begin by covering the work of Carey and Sterne around communication and transportation, then I will move into how these voices allow for a more critical understanding of Avila and Banham's work.

In his germinal work, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, James W. Carey argued that while throughout most of western civilization there was a link between communication and transportation, the invention of the telegraph separated them. For Carey, this separation offered some vital innovations to society, specifically, "the telegraph not only allowed messages to be separated from the physical movement of objects; it also allowed communication to control physical processes actively" (Carey, 1992, p. 203). For Carey, communication (or what he considers to be the symbolic) can thus travel faster and separate from the material geographic infrastructure (or what he names as the railroad, highway, etc.). Still communication is not just the symbolic. In this way, Sterne differs from Carey's postulation of communication and transportation when he argues, "*transportation and communication seem to be doing the same thing*" (Sterne, 2006, p. 126). Therefore, for Sterne, "transportation was *intensely* meaningful and intensely constitutive. It formed a condition of possibility for social action as well as the substance of that social action in some cases" (p. 125). Put differently, communication is both symbolic and material.

Ultimately, Sterne claims that "communication is unthinkable without communications, and they are both constitutive and instrumental" (p. 128). Through this communicative lens, mobility is not a given for all bodies. Particularly in the city, the urban built environment can be analyzed as a way to understand which bodies are allowed to move throughout the city. In this way, freeways, bridges, and streets can all be viewed as communication since these infrastructures not only allow mobility from point A to point B but these infrastructures communicate about what type of bodies can use these structures, and ultimately, which bodies these structures were built for. Therefore, because of the freeway, it is possible for white affluent Angelenos to expand the ever-growing urban sprawl that is collectively known as Los Angeles.

In Los Angeles, mobility is synonymous with the freeway system and freeways are instrumentally important for the discussion of the Sixth-Street Bridge. The Los Angeles School of Urbanism believed that Los Angeles presented a materialization of a much broader socio-geographic transformation unlike any other urban center in the United States or abroad. One such feature that made Los Angeles unique from other urban centers in the country was its integration of a freeway system. While other cities have a freeway system, L.A.'s system was so integral for the characterization of the city that it is only through the freeway that one gets to experience the entirety of this urban sprawl in a single day (i.e. mountains, beaches, downtown, and suburbia). Therefore, the freeways have transformed how the city, and even its bridges, are understood. For example, Caltrans not only claims ownership of all freeways in the state of California, it also controls a portion of the bridge. Therefore, in order to understand the true nature of

46

the Sixth-Street Bridge Replacement Project, we must look at the medium of transportation in the city of L.A.

The freeway system in Los Angeles offered a medium of transportation for its residents at the cost of communities of color being pulverized and destroyed. Rayner Banham (1971) in his germinal work, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, was one of the first to explain that even though there are four ecologies that comprised L.A., the freeway ecology (what he referred to as *the autopia*) was the most important since, "For the Freeway, is where the Angeleno is most himself, most integrally identified with his great city" (Banham, 1971, p. 221). The successful and all-encompassing integration of the freeway system into the city helped make the freeway its own "single comprehensible place, a coherent state of mind, a complete way of life…" for people living in the city (p. 213). Still the freeway system wreaked havoc on the Eastside— particularly the community of Boyle Heights. According to Avila, "the interstate highway program unified a nation around a 42,800-mile highway network…" but it also "divided the American people, as it divided their cities, fueling new social tensions that flared during the tumultuous 1960s" (Avila, 2014, p. 1). The luxury of traveling throughout the city came as a result of literally bisecting and closing in neighborhoods of color.

For Avila, the freeway is a medium for a silent narrative of pulverizing existing communities of color in order to pave the connective arteries to and from suburban Los Angeles and its downtown urban center. Those living on the Westside and thus plagued with white privilege saw the highway system as an engineering accomplishment and thus, "one of the greater works of Man…a work of art, both as a pattern on the map, as a

47

monument against the sky, and as a kinetic experience as one sweeps through it"

(Banham, 1971, p. 88-90). However, not all Angelenos have this similar connection to

the freeway since the integration of this transit system was fashioned through racist laws

and ideologies, which neglected the existing communities of color for the benefit of the

suburban White flight Angelenos. It is clear that "race…shaped the geography of

highway construction in urban America…" (Avila, 2014, p. 2-3). Ultimately, the freeway

system in Los Angeles presented a medium of transportation that privileged the mobility

of white bodies throughout its city limits while restricting the mobility of folks of color.

Freeways were integrated into the Los Angeles cityscape during the time that the

city faced a huge wave of suburbanization. The freeway system provided the means for

the urban inner-city core to become largely associated with communities of color

(predominantly Black communities) while simultaneously having suburban development

follow patterns of whiteness. Avila argues that the isolation of suburbia led to the

systemically sanctioned formation of "a new 'white' identity" (Avila, 2004, p. 5). This

white identity was predicated on the separation between public and private life along the

black/white binary, which was executed precisely because of the effective

implementation of the freeway system. Suburban mobility was free and protected.

Banham (1971), while missing the consequences of the freeway, was able to latch onto a

portion of this reality as he articulates:

> the private car and the public freeway together provide an ideal … version of
> democratic urban transportation: door-to-door movement on demand at high
> average speeds over a very large area. The degree of freedom and convenience
> thus offered to all but a small … segment of the population is such that no
> Angeleno will be in a hurry to sacrifice it for the higher efficiency but drastically

lowered convenience and freedom of choice of any high-density public rapid-transit system." (p. 217)

Public spaces (parks, streets, roads, etc.) were removed in order for the private suburban cars to transport the white suburban dwellers to work and play in the urban city and return them safely to their white gated-communities all while speeding past all the communities of color left to rot in the urban decay. Therefore, while the history of the freeway systems was riddled with racist laws and ideologies that removed property from people of color through policies like eminent domain, the integration of the freeway completely transformed how Los Angeles as a city was understood by residents and tourists alike. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the implications of freeways as forms of communication.

As a constant flow of movement, mobility is the ultimate way one can understand the city of Los Angeles. Specifically, people from different cities visiting L.A. had to learn "the language of design, architecture, and urbanism in Los Angeles…the language of movement" (Banham, 1971, p. 23). In this way, Banham claims that the urban built environment must be understood for what the structure offers and what it communicates in order to be immersed in the L.A. culture. While presented from a privileged standpoint the same can be said for the people living in the remaining fragments of the communities freeways were built upon. For instance, in East L.A.

> freeways dominated the sensory experience of daily life in the nation's largest barrio: the roar of traffic coursing above or below surface streets, the shadows cast by soaring interchanges, the dead ends and circuitous detours, the odor of traffic emissions, and the foreboding maze of concrete walls, piers, and embankments. (Avila, 2014, p. 120)

Sharma and Towns (2016) extend this conversation further as they articulate these public spaces as contested sites of a culture that are predicated on "white control of mobility" (p. 40). Through this exploration of contested spaces, they present the reality of free and protected mobility as the central aspect that undergirds subjectivity in a racialized world.

The freeway integration into L.A. radically transformed how L.A. was built and how its people interacted with its urban built environment. Since the initial building of the freeway system, the city of Los Angeles has not had a major transportation initiative—that is of course until the Sixth-Street Bridge Replacement project was introduced. In total, the Sixth-Street Bridge Replacement Plan will cost roughly $428 million (Curwen, 2015), making it one of the most expensive projects the city of L.A. has undertaken in recent years. This chapter's analysis on the Sixth-Street Bridge builds upon the theoretical conversation on freeways by continuing to view the urban built environment as a "new urban realm" (Avila, 2014, p. 18) that warrants further conversation with the revitalization of historically disinvested communities of color.

Ultimately, viewing the Sixth-Street Bridge as a form of communication helps to crystallize the city's push to redevelop urban spaces specifically for the dual notion of increasing the influx of capital and ensuring the mobility of particular bodies across the city. Mediums are constructed for particular bodies, the Sixth-Street Bridge is no different. Thus, understanding the Sixth-Street Bridge replacement project through the lens of communication helps to connect this urban built environment to the concept of gentrification as a whiteness project since it sheds light on the connection between whiteness and gentrification by specifically focusing on the protection of white mobility.

The following three sections will analyze the ways the Sixth-Street Bridge replacement project is being used as a catalyst for the continued gentrification of East L.A. In order to begin building the future Los Angeles through this bridge, the city leaders had to accomplish three tasks: fortify an unsafe urban environment for future populations; transform the Sixth-Street Bridge to include amenities for urban leisure; and (in order to accomplish these goals) silence residents of Boyle Heights.

Unsafe Bridge

Initially, the original Sixth-Street Bridge was analyzed for a redevelopment project due to its structural integrity. However, the ultimate decision to replace the bridge was propelled even more when the new bridge was attached to other gentrifying revitalization initiatives. The construction of a new bridge would offer many benefits for the city of Los Angeles. Importantly, the new bridge would "preserve 6th Street as a viable east-west link between Boyle Heights and Downtown Los Angeles, reduce the vulnerability of the bridge during major earthquake, and bring the bridge up to current highway and safety standards" (Villaraigosa, 2012). For this first section of analysis there are two major reasons for its replacement that I want to focus on: first, the inherent structural integrity of the bridge; and second, its outdated design issues. The history of its weakened state is recorded in the initial reports of this replacement project. After a couple of years of operation in the 1940s, it was discovered that the cement mixture used in the bridge's composition had developed Alkali-Silica Reaction (ASR). This concrete disease can best be described as a chemical reaction between alkali and silica which are both found in the concrete mixture used for the bridge. According to the Final

51

Environmental Report for the 6th Street Viaduct Replacement Project written by the

Caltrans and the City of L.A., when exposing both silica and alkali to moisture, they

create a gel like substance that expands within the concrete. This expansion creates

"tensile stresses" in the structure that lead to visible cracking on the surface of the bridge

and thus a debilitation in its strength (Final Environmental Impact, 2011, p. 54). In the

late 1980s the entire bridge was stripped of asphalt and a waterproof coating was applied

to the underlying concrete in an attempt by both the City and Caltrans to "minimize

moisture infiltration, which is a necessary component for ASR" (Final Environmental

Impact, 2011, p. 55). This helped prolong the lifespan of the bridge and ensure that the

people using the bridge would be safe.

However, what set in motion a replacement project was the analysis conducted on

the bridge after the 1989 Whittier Narrows earthquake. This magnitude 5.9 earthquake

caused severe damage to the "shear keys and a column crack" on the bridge (Final

Environmental Impact, 2011, p. 55). This led to Caltrans placing the bridge under

"Category I," which meant that the structure was in danger of collapse in the event of a

major earthquake (Final Environmental Impact, 2011, p. 55). Being listed in this

category, the Sixth-Street Bridge became an ideal candidate for mandatory seismic

retrofit (Final Environmental Impact, 2011, p. 55). Even though Caltrans owned the

smaller portion of the bridge, after it got categorized for seismic retrofit Caltrans became

the active agent in analyzing the integrity of the structure and ensuring that the bridge

would not collapse during an earthquake.

In the Final Environmental Impact Report for the 6th Street Bridge replacement plan, Caltrans and the city of Los Angeles laid out two possible actions to solve the problem of ASR and the earthquake damage: retrofit or replacement. While the retrofit would ensure that the structure would not completely collapse in the event of an earthquake, it would not completely solve the ASR issue that was quickly deteriorating the bridge further. In the mid-90s, only Caltrans chose to retrofit their portion of the bridge. The city of L.A., on the other hand, chose not to retrofit their portion since it would not address the ongoing degradation of the concrete. While there is no public statement on why Caltrans chose to retrofit the 235 feet of the bridge when the rest of the bridge would still collapse, it is safe to say that having their portion of the bridge retrofitted was essential for the continued use of the 101 freeway below the bridge. In short, in the event of a hypothetical earthquake, the majority of the 6th Street bridge would collapse but the portion above the freeway would stay intact. Thus, the retrofit became more about ensuring the safety of the 101 users rather than ensuring that the actual users of the Sixth-Street bridge would be protected. In short, this action can be seen as occurring along racial lines: the residents of Boyle Heights using the bridge to go to work in downtown were not granted safety along the entirety of the bridge, however, the predominantly white commuters using the highway system to move from white suburbia to work were ensured that the bridge would not collapse on them.

Beyond the debilitating nature of the bridge, the design of the bridge was also not up to date with current standards. According to an initial report conducted by the city engineer Gary Lee Moore, "the viaduct has design deficiencies related to roadway width,

horizontal sight distance, seismic detailing, and railing crash-worthiness. It has no shoulder for bicyclists and has substandard sidewalks" (Lee Moore, 2011, p. 3). At the end of the report, the Bureau of Engineering (BOE) for the city of Los Angeles recommended the city council replace the bridge altogether rather than retrofit the bridge. One of the major reasons for this decision was due to the fact that the original bridge had a sharp left turn that could be fixed with a replacement project. Thus, the BOE presented "replacement alternatives" to the redevelopment option. Each alternative they suggested would, however, interfere with current businesses surrounding the original bridge. Therefore, they would require the acquisition of property and lead to displacement of businesses.

Together, its substandard features and structural integrity due to ASR ended the lifespan of the original bridge. As the bridge got older, the ASR became more aggressive and total collapse became a serious concern for the city of Los Angeles and Caltrans. According to the announcement for the 2012 International Design competition by the then L.A. mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, "The City is taking this risk into its own hands by undertaking the reconstruction of the bridge now, before any catastrophic events require emergency response" (Villaraigosa, 2012). Therefore, the primary reason for a new bridge was to ensure the safety of all its users.

Region Revitalization

Councilmember Huizar, along with the voices of Michael Maltzan, the Bureau of Engineering, and CRA/LA, used the safety concerns of a bridge as a catalyst for the revitalization of the region. Thus, for most city officials the new bridge would "represent

a new era of optimistic growth and change for downtown Los Angeles" (Villaraigosa, 2012). Even though the initial inspection of the Sixth-Street Bridge were propelled by a motivation to keep the public safe, the replacement plan was created in order to incorporate revitalization initiatives that would ultimately use gentrification as a means to solve the blight of the Eastside. This is shown in three different instances: the announcement for the bridge design competition, Maltzan's views of urban built environments, and the city's overall vision for the bridge.

In the design competition announcement, José Huizar, councilmember of the 14th district stated, "the bridge design we ultimately selected should honor the original's history by ushering us into the future with a new iconic bridge. We want to create a bridge that will make all of Los Angeles proud" (Villaraigosa, 2012). Further Alex Ward, a chairman of the Friends of the L.A. River, declared "This bridge can be a landmark, glowing at night like a beacon, a tourist attraction, a catalyst for economic growth…and a route for pedestrian and bicycle access to the River" (Villaraigosa, 2012). As the previous analysis section showed, the bridge needed attention because of its structural integrity; however, when it came to planning the new bridge, the focus became more about what the future Los Angeles could look like. In this instance, the safety of the bridge became secondary to the city's push to transform the Eastside's urban environment to incentivize an increase in consumerism.

The architect of the new bridge has been vocal about his bridge's impact on the urban landscape since he was declared the winner. As an architect, he argues that architecture must contain a certain elastic nature in order to thrive in the urban landscape.

Specifically, he argues that architecture must "become instrumental in what the future may look like" (Korody, 2015). In this way, Maltzan viewed his architecture as offering the city a vision of a future cityscape that could help usher in a new Los Angeles. Maltzan has made a name for himself as an architect that actively pushes against the misconception that an urban structure is a monolithically built environment that "only does one thing" for the community it serves (Dodgen, 2015). As expressed previously, Maltzan actively works on designing structures that offer more than just one service for the public. For instance, his discussion of making a bridge that not only takes people from one side of the river to the other but can also bring the public to the bridge itself. In this sense, the concretization of this new urban environment signals the start of a new Los Angeles.

Beyond the similar rhetoric between city leaders and the architect, Michael Maltzan's bridge design materializes the city's desire for increasing tourism. In this way, the bridge design's target audience was tourists rather than the current residents that have used the previous Sixth-Street Bridge as a means to travel into downtown Los Angeles. On his website, Maltzan argues that designing a bridge that allows equal access for bicyclists and pedestrians alongside drivers creates a bridge that is open for transformation since it

> enables a more significant degree of connectivity with the ground plane and a less prescriptive approach to landscape that will allow for expanded flexibility overtime. A wide range of public activities and open space will be created under the eastern portion of the viaduct in what was an industrial zone. There are also two bike ramps for cyclists, with one ramp to the west and the Arts District, and one to the east and Boyle Heights. A new sloping River Gateway path will link the River to a future Arts Plaza at the terminus of the viaduct in the heart of the Arts District. (Maltzan, 2017)

It is clear that from the beginning the actual design for the bridge focused more on

creating urban spaces for leisure and expanding the scope of how the bridge could be

used by the public. Of course this is not just found in the views of the architect but also in

the actual revitalization plan for the bridge.

The Sixth-Street Bridge revitalization plan became more about introducing

revitalization to this part of the city, which went beyond the initial concern of a

structurally failing bridge. For instance, on the website for the Sixth-Street Viaduct

Division of the Bureau of Engineering (BOE) visitors are presented only one paragraph

that summarizes the entire project. The BOE argues that the new $428 million

replacement offers "wide sidewalks, bicycle lanes, artistic lighting, and a new 12-acre

park beneath the viaduct" ("Sixth street viaduct," 2017). Further, the BOE states that the

project has also allocated $23 million in Active Transportation Program improvements

which would be used to "add sidewalks, traffic signals, street lighting, and street

improvements in the area around the bridge to enhance mobility for bicyclists and

pedestrians" ("Sixth street viaduct," 2017). On the surface this all seems like necessary

improvements for the neighborhood; however, connected to the desire to create a tourist

destination with this new Sixth-Street Bridge the racial implications of tourism are

blatantly clear. By transforming the bridge into a tourist destination, the city along with

Caltrans transform the use of the bridge away from merely connecting East L.A. to the

downtown area into creating an urban tourist destination where white bodies can have

free mobility throughout a historically brown community.[11] In this light, the safe mobility of current East L.A. residents is not of utmost importance to this replacement project.

Silencing of Boyle Heights

At the start of the redevelopment process, city officials stated that the community would play a pivotal role in the negotiations for the replacement bridge. Specifically, they argued that the community would be "involved in the redesign process" (Villaraigosa, 2012). However, the redevelopment of the Sixth-Street Bridge silenced input from Boyle Heights residents. Whether this decision was strategic or not is irrelevant to the material implications of the bridge that is currently being constructed for this community. Now of course this erasure can be interpreted as a silly overlooked mistake on the part of the planners. However, throughout the redevelopment process, the erasure of Boyle Heights is clear in three major ways: first, in the types of resident voices that were involved in the planning stages of this bridge project; second, in representing Boyle Heights as a historic relic of the city; and third, in the symbolic erasure of Boyle Heights and its residents from the future Los Angeles.

Before he left office, mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, along with the city council, announced that they would create the Design and Aesthetic Advisor Committee (DAAC) in order to ensure that the final decision would "give all stakeholders a voice" (Villaraigosa, 2012). This committee would consist of "professionals in the engineering,

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[11] Comparatively, this discourse reminds one of the stark use of funds and revitalization initiatives to protect and fortify the Watts Towers as a tourist destination. While the region of the Watts Towers is routinely surveilled by police, the area is regularly cleaned up, and the towers themselves are protected by a border that was built around them, the actual city of Watts continues to be a blighted black neighborhood with limited access to city resources.

architecture, and urban planning professions, as well as residents of the neighborhood,

local business representatives and river advocates" (Villaraigosa, 2012). Presently, the

DAAC consist of 12 members. Of these members only two of them are listed as being

"residents" of the community surrounding the Sixth-Street Bridge. However, these

members are both "new" residents of the Arts District community. Further still, one of

these residents, Yuval Bar-Zewer, was also listed as being the CEO of Linear City, LLC.

This real estate developer has multiple properties in Los Angeles with multiple buildings

residing in the Arts District. At a time where the Arts District is facing drastic

transformations and artist evictions, it is interesting to see that the DAAC has affiliated

itself with a resident who is the CEO of a company that markets itself as being "focused

on transformative projects on the urban frontier" (LinearCityDevelopment, 2017); rather

than residents like Michael Parker, an Arts District community organizer who has

consistently fought gentrification initiatives that result in the eviction of working-class

artists in the Arts District. Specifically, Parker has been recorded as saying,

> If you want to call this place the Arts district, then you need to make it so that we
> [artists] can stay in the Arts District. And if we can't stay in the arts district then
> you need to change the name from the 'Arts District,' mayor Garcetti [and] city
> councilmember José Huizar…to the 'Luxury District, or the Douchebag River
> District. (Contreras, 2017)

Clearly, the DAAC along with the Sixth-Street Bridge replacement project only

incorporated voices that already were in favor of introducing revitalization initiatives to

these neighborhoods of Los Angeles.

The Sixth-Street Bridge project continues to silence the community of Boyle

Heights by representing the neighborhood as a relic of the past. In the website dedicated

to the Sixth-Street Viaduct Replacement Project, the team described the bridge as being "a vital connection between the growing Arts District on the west side of the Los Angeles River and the historic neighborhood of Boyle Heights on the east side" ("About the Project," 2016). In this dichotomy, the Arts District is seen as active while the community of color is seen only for its historic value and thus as a place "stuck in time." By referring to the Arts District as a "growing" and thus thriving community, it effectively erased the fact that the Arts District is also contesting gentrification. In other words, the violence being inflicted on the Arts District is being overlooked in order to focus on the "up-and-coming" and "trending" potential of this neighborhood's redevelopment.[12] Further, one of the major fears of the new bridge is that it signals the material transformation of gentrification in Los Angeles and by referring to an entire neighborhood as "historical" it flares the fear of displacement. For instance, a community member was recorded as saying "the bridge used to be a gateway for low-income people…the new bridge is beautiful. I just hope even 50 percent of the people who came out to say goodbye today are still going to be here to enjoy it" (Lovett, 2015, p. 20). This fear is conflated with the Arts District's current increase in evictions and skyrocketing rent.

As stated previously, the bridge is being built to incorporate a park, an amphitheater, and access to a future revitalized L.A. River. These changes are not being made for the residents of Boyle Heights but for the future residents of Los Angeles, some

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[12] It should also be pointed out that terms like "up-and-coming" and "trending" signal to the ways codes of whiteness are used to mask the inherent violence inflicted on residents of color in these neighborhoods due to processes like forced evictions and hyper police surveillance.

of which are already living in the Arts District. This can further be seen in two instances: the strategic naming of the park that is scheduled to be located beneath the eastern side of the new bridge after the late L.A. architect Leonard Hill; and the fact that Boyle Heights is altogether erased from public discussion. Hill is remembered for his role in the revitalization of Echo Park and downtown Los Angeles (Leovy, 2016). Leonard Hill donated $1.9 million to the city for a new downtown park (Leovy, 2016). After his death, the city of Los Angeles decided to name one of the Sixth-Street Bridge spaces in honor of Hill. Interestingly, Leonard Hill was a former president of Linear City, LLC and on their website they have credited Hill's donation as "philanthropic" work for the development company:

> In 2016, the Mayor's Fund for Los Angeles received a major philanthropic gift from Leonard Hill to fund the design, construction, and programming of The Leonard Hill Arts Plaza beneath the new Sixth Street Bridge. The gift includes funding for a stage and a public performing arts series, features that will draw valuable recreational and community-building opportunities to the area (LinearCityDevelopment, 2017).

The naming of this public park is problematic for two reasons. First, by choosing to name the park after Leonard Hill, which will be located under the eastern portion of the bridge, it can be considered the first sign of gentrification. Connected to the current push to rename Boyle Heights as "BoHe" or "the flats," naming a park after a person that is not a part of this neighborhood is a clear indication of a purposeful erasure of brown culture and the historical legacy of Boyle Heights. Second, the naming of this park is directly connected to the fact that Leonard Hill had the means not only to financially fund a revitalization endeavor but also the social capital to be included in these initial conversations about revitalization.

Although the major focus of this section is the literal erasure of including voices from Boyle Heights, it is important to note that excluding Boyle Heights from being a part of the discussion process relates to the literal and figurative erasure of the entire barrio. For instance, when Michael Maltzan was going to be announced as the winning architect for the new Sixth-Street Bridge design, his design-build team and contractor partners Skanska and Stacy and Witbeck wrote a short press release of the announcement on their own site. In the press release, the firm stated:

> we have just been told that the city of Los Angeles is preparing a press release for notification that our team…is the successful proposer on the…demolition of the existing bridge and construction of the new iconic bridge structure over the LA River, from Highway 101 to the Arts District. ("Congratulations," 2013)

For Maltzan's partners, the biggest barrio of Mexican American people in the United States is not worth mentioning in their celebration. Maybe the omission of Boyle Heights in this congratulatory press release points to two vital implications: first, the current residents of Boyle Heights are not meant to enjoy this newly built bridge and urban space; and second, since this bridge is aimed for a future Los Angeles, the erasure of Boyle Heights might also signal the city's ultimate goal of completely re-making the neighborhood.

Conclusion

For the past couple of decades, Los Angeles has become known as the city of Latina/o/x people (Davis, 2000). Latina/o/x culture, especially Chicana/o/x culture, can be seen as a huge amenity for the city. Even so, the physical manifestation of a Latina/o/x neighborhood is not embraced as part of the L.A. culture. This is evident in the recent prank which placed an official-looking sign along the Malibu city limit which read,

62

"Cheap nannies and gardeners make Malibu great! (Boyle Heights not so much)"

(Moreno, 2017). Even though this unofficial sign was taken down the following morning,

it shows that while Latina/o/x folk have a history within the city of Los Angeles and their

labor is valued in order for the city's elites to thrive, Latina/o/x communities bordered by

racist redlining laws and plagued by disinvestment (i.e. "blight") are consistently framed

as a sore eye for the city's future character. In short, because Boyle Heights is considered

the Mexican American barrio, the city can label it "blighted" in order to have a legal way

of wiping it clean rather than working with the community to fix the barrio by reinvesting

in its predominantly brown community.

Thus, the transformation of the Sixth-Street Bridge as an urban built environment

is made specifically for the protection of white life and the medium of white mobility

throughout the city. In essence, this bridge's replacement is being manifested by

following gentrification's motive of revitalizing the region in order to increase economic

growth in a previously disinvested neighborhood. Thus, this replacement project speaks

to which bodies the city values by transforming the urban landscape to fit the

expectations of these valued future residents rather than the residents currently living in

these neighborhoods.

This chapter thus follows my discussion of *gentrification as a whiteness project*

by showing the process by which a bridge was revitalized for the purposes of revitalizing

the surrounding community. In this way, it proved that the replacement project used the

vulnerability of an old bridge in order to initiate the revitalization process against East

L.A.'s "blight" by radically transforming the urban landscape and thus the means of

63

transportation away from the brown Boyle Heights and into the hands of a vastly

gentrifying Arts District. *Gentrification as a whiteness project* is intended to be a

strategic tool of white supremacy to radically transform the urban landscape to one of

urban leisure.

This redevelopment of an urban built landscape for leisure is being established for

the enjoyment of a predominantly white (hipster) population. Of course, the "hipster" is

currently riding the coattails of apologia through the writings of self-identified gentrifier

Peter Moskowitz who wrote:

> Someone who learned about gentrification solely through newspaper articles
> might come away believing that gentrification is just the culmination of several
> hundred thousand people's individual wills to open coffee shops and cute
> boutiques, grow mustaches and buy records. But those are the signs of
> gentrification, not its causes. (Moskowitz, 2017, p. 9)

The important caveat here is that this particular urban space is created to lure buyers into

this particular housing market. These parks and amenities of leisure of sought out by a

future (hipster) population rather than the current population presiding in Boyle Heights.

In this chapter, the analysis of the urban built environment clearly points to the ways that

gentrification caters specifically to profit off of the "hipster" while simultaneously

providing an urban space where hipsters can see themselves leisurely spending capital.

This sets the foundation for the following chapter since it shows how the urban landscape

has been transformed specifically for a future Los Angeles, one which is economically

and/or physically whiter than the current Eastside.

CHAPTER TWO: *ARTWASHING* EL BARRIO: (RE)MAKING BOYLE HEIGHTS

> Artists who didn't grow up in Boyle Heights…look at Boyle Heights as a blank canvas…they don't realize they are painting over another work of art
> —Josefina López, founder of Casa 0101 (Miranda, 2016)

> Gentrification and art come hand in hand…block by block, building by building, the area was converted to a landscape of glamour and chic spiced with just a hint of danger.
> —Neil Smith (1996)

While developers and city politicians are blamed for their involvement in renovating disinvested communities by bulldozing the prior working-class neighborhood, artists are praised for their contribution in making a neighborhood look "nicer." In one of the only communication studies articles on the subject of artistry and gentrification, Makagon (2010) explores the ways that artists are framed in the press when they reside in a neighborhood that is battling the process of gentrification. Makagon finds that when artists are involved in the process of gentrification, the press conceives gentrification as an organic or natural process. This is because gentrification that is artist-led is represented as artists moving into a disinvested working-class neighborhood and "making over" that part of town through art rather than having city officials work with developers to bulldoze a community one block at a time. However, the main issue with the understanding of an artist-led gentrification is that it can "lead readers to conclude that gentrification is just a natural feature of urban life…as if change is needed for the sake of change" (Makagon, 2010, p. 40). Therefore, specifically analyzing artist-led

gentrification and the ways artists influence the continued gentrification of working-class neighborhoods of color needs to be further explored.

As shown in the previous chapter, longtime residents of Boyle Heights have been completely shut out of the replacement process of the Sixth-Street Bridge in favor of the new Arts District voices that support the city's plan for replacement, redevelopment, and revitalization. Adjacent to this up-and-coming tourist bridge destination, a dozen or more art galleries have opened their doors in the last couple of years. Since the bridge is still being built, the art galleries' presence in the barrio show the clearest signs of gentrification in East L.A. Local activists believe that these art galleries are taking up space while simultaneously not providing any amenities for the current residents of Boyle Heights; therefore, they declare, "We have one pretty simple demand which is for all art galleries in Boyle Heights to leave immediately and for the community to decide what takes their place" (Aron, 2016). This strict stance on art galleries has resulted in a misunderstood and heavily negative reporting of events, such as a local reporter arguing against the protestors of art galleries by stating that "Attacking the creative forces that can save cities is a tragic and destructive folly" (Jones, 2016). Ultimately, by painting the artists as the only creative force that can "save cities," artists are predominantly portrayed in media as urban pioneers—the brave creative souls that venture into urban blighted neighborhoods and use their art to beautify the community. In this way, artists can be viewed as "urban heroes" for being able to find the beauty in a disinvested neighborhood. Importantly, they are blameless for the negative effects of gentrification like the displacement of residents that lived in the previously disinvested neighborhood.

Rather than viewing these artists as pioneers or heroes, Boyle Heights activists are using the term "artwashing" to pinpoint the ways that art and artistic labor is strategically used "to perpetuate and enable gentrification" (Delgadillo, 2017). For example, Boyle Heights residents like Nancy Meza think about art not as development but as destructive: "These galleries are coming in and trying to replace the current culture that is already in Boyle Heights. They are not looking to attract members of communities" (Medina, 2016). In Boyle Heights, activists contend, gentrification is being implemented through an artist-led frontier as a way to make "progress" seem more natural and ultimately a neutral, inevitable process for the greater Eastside. For these young Latina/o/x activists, artwashing, or artist-led gentrification, is best understood as the strategic use of art to cover up the inherent violent nature of gentrification.

In this chapter, I utilize the term artwashing as a means to explore gentrification since it is a term specifically created by community members of Boyle Heights to address the particular type of gentrification that is being manifested in their neighborhood. Still, the conversation around art and gentrification is nothing new. Back in 1996, Neil Smith noted this relationship within his germinal work *The New Urban Frontier*. Twenty years after Smith's statement which opened this chapter, art's involvement with gentrification is also present in a paper commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts. Specifically, the paper states:

> A great deal of case study work demonstrates that individual artists, artistic businesses and artistic spaces (e.g. small galleries, theaters, music venues and art studies) function as a 'colonizing arm' that helps to create the initial conditions that spark gentrification. (Aron, 2016)

Since an artist-led gentrification has historically been viewed as organic, inevitable, and

an inherent good in any given neighborhood, a major research question for this study is:

if artwashing is connected to gentrification, how are artists and artwashing business

owners effective in the conflation between "redevelopment" and "progress" in relation to

solving a neighborhood's blight? I believe that an analysis of artwashing allows us to

understand how whiteness, particularly the politics of civility, can be strategically used to

reify artist-led gentrification as an inherently positive process for any blighted

neighborhood.

In order to answer these questions, I focus predominantly on press reporting of

gentrification. Specifically, I focused on local press reports on the topic surrounding

"Boyle heights and "gentrification."[13] After analyzing these articles, I found the major

voices being highlighted by the press and thus, I sought out the social media output of

these groups (i.e. Weird Wave Coffee, PSSST, etc.). As a result of this data, this chapter

helps to crystallize the connection between art and gentrification by offering two thematic

clusters that help pin the influence of whiteness in the gentrification of Boyle Heights:

first, artwashing (re)centers white people in the conversation over gentrification's

"progress" in East LA; second, the establishment of artwashing businesses presents a

material discourse situated within politics of civility. Each of these themes help me in

proving that artwashing is reproducing the barrio in ways that are not for or by the current

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[13] Throughout this process I chose to use "gentrification" as my dominant search word rather than "artwashing" because many articles talking about "artwashing" would default to terms like "artists" and "art galleries" while failing to even mention the term "artwashing" in their reporting. Again, I choose to use the term "artwashing" because this is the way local activists are referring to the process of gentrification. Therefore, I politically align myself with the linguistic positionality of anti-gentrification groups rather than with media representations of gentrification.

residents of Boyle Heights. Therefore, the following chapter will be presented in three parts: first, I will present a context to understand both the artwashing of Boyle Heights and the relationship between whiteness and civility; second, an analysis of artwashing's connection to whiteness will be explored; and third, I will conclude the chapter with a discussion of the impact of artwashing on the overall understanding of gentrification as a whiteness project.

Artwashing in Boyle Heights

While gentrification has been the term used to refer to the process of remaking a neighborhood through the influx of capital, for some residents of Boyle Heights there is another sinister process taking place—the erasure of the inherent violence of gentrification. Defend Boyle Heights (DBH) and Boyle Heights Alianza Anti-Artwashing y Desplazamiento (BHAAAD) have been the originators of a new political term they are using to speak to the ways gentrification is being implemented in their barrio. Artwashing, as a term, is used to connect separate businesses to the larger process of displacement and cultural erasure. Specifically, DBH defines artwashing as:

> when gentrifiers (artists, the City, private developers and investors) redevelop a neighborhood 1.) to make it nicer for the newer, more well-off residents; and 2.) in the process of 'beautifying' it, involves artists and institutions (often non-profits) to make violent gentrification look pretty. (DBH, 2017b)

For these groups, artwashing accomplishes two goals: literally creating a new place for future residents while also masking the violent process of displacement and cultural erasure. To help contextualize this definition of artwashing, DBH further argues that an event can be considered artwashing:

if Boyle Heights were to contract an artist to paint small murals on telephone boxes on First Street supposedly to make the street look nicer but in reality it's a project between the City and Metro to make these areas more attractive to investment and redevelopment. (DBH, 2017b)

Therefore, while the terms are not synonymous (i.e. not all gentrification requires artwashing), artwashing is an important element of gentrification in Boyle Heights.

While the groups are mindful to note that sometimes artists are used without their knowledge by the City and developers for these larger projects, they place all artists involved in artwashing culpable of remaking working-class neighborhoods of color. Ultimately, to call a business artwashing is to say they are complicit in the process of gentrification that remakes a neighborhood.

Accordingly, while many assume that "all art is good," "art is culture," or even "art is neutral," the Boyle Heights activists (many of whom are artists themselves) argue that this strategic use of art to redevelop their neighborhood, without their input, makes it clear that the art, culture, and lifestyle that existed in this community prior to gentrification are not deemed legitimate forms of art to the city of L.A. In this way, art is not synonymous with artwashing. An example of art that is not artwashing can be found in the Boyle Heights staple Casa 0101. This theater was founded by Josefina Lopez, the playwright and co-screenwriter of *Real Women Have Curves*, in 2000 as a way "to fulfill her vision of bringing art and live theater programs to the community she grew up in…" ("About Us," 2018). In the eighteen years that it has existed in the Eastside, Casa 0101 has "mentored over 100 playwrights, empowered at least 40 Latinas and over 100 Latinx to write, direct and produce…[they] have taught acting to hundreds of children, have presented over 100 cultural events, including film festivals, musical events, [and] poetry

events" (Miranda, 2018). While this art resource center is not directly impacted by gentrification, they are struggling to pay their rent. Josefina Lopez, whose statement on artwashing also opens this chapter, is a testament to the local art world that has existed in the Eastside and is not causing any significant signs of gentrification.

Contrary to Casa 0101, examples of artwashing establishments can be found in the more than a dozen new art spaces that have opened their doors in the last couple of years, many of which "beginning with the 2013 launch of 356 Mission…are outposts of prominent New York galleries…" (Miranda, 2016). Since 2013, 356 Mission has been joined by about a dozen or so other galleries within walking distance of each other which include: Cloud Noir, Chimento Contemporary, Ibid Gallery, Corey Helford Gallery, Ground Space Project, Little Big Man Gallery, Maccarone, Museum as Retail Space (MaRS), Nicodim Gallery, PSSST, UTA Artist Space, the Journal Gallery, and Venus Over LA. This cluster of gallery spaces have received contestation from anti-gentrification groups because these groups argue that the galleries constitute an amenity that is intended to resolve the issues of "blight" on the Eastside while not directly benefitting the current residents of Boyle Heights. According to one member of Boyle Heights Alliance Against Artwashing and Displacement (BHAAAD), artwashing exists beyond the actual boundaries of the individual art gallery spaces since

> underneath the [Sixth-Street] bridge will also be an art plaza named after artists-loft-developer Leonard Hill… Further, the site is 3 blocks from where 5,150 units of market rate housing are being planned. It is also the beginning of Whittier [Blvd.], where 4 local businesses have been displaced as a result of land speculators buying up properties. (Stromberg, 2017c)

Therefore, artwashing connects art galleries, coffee shops, and even larger redevelopment projects, like the Sixth-Street Bridge, that are intended to radically transform the Eastside for an incoming population.

In order to contextualize the artwashing of Boyle Heights, I will describe four particular locations that have been identified by anti-gentrification groups as artwashing: 356 Mission, Nicodim Gallery, PSSST, and Weird Wave Coffee. I am specifically focusing on these establishments for three reasons: first, they have been the most vocal artwashing establishments; second, they have received substantial criticism from anti-gentrification groups; and third, these have been sites of highly confrontational events that have shaped the reality of the artwashing frontier in Boyle Heights.

356 Mission is the first and most influential artwashing gallery that has opened its doors in the Eastside. Presented as "a space for art, performance, and community activities in Los Angeles" (356 Mission, 2016), this gallery is created by local L.A. artists Laura Owens and Wendy Yao, in collaboration with New York artist Gavin Brown.[14] Located on the corner of South Mission Road and Artemus Street, this gallery's exterior is an inconspicuous industrial building with no identifying feature other than the front green steel door with the gallery's address discreetly painted on the left front door.

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[14] Gavin Brown was named one of the most influential people in the art world (Farago, 2014).

Unlike the plain appearance of 356 Mission, Nicodim Gallery publicly declares its

identity as an art gallery to the community. Located on the corner of Anderson Street and

East 6th Street, the name "Nicodim Gallery" is plastered in large white letters across the

building's red brick architecture. The gallery's front door is right below a small white

marquee with the gallery's name again printed across it in black letters.

To this date, PSSST has been the only artwashing establishment to have permanently closed its doors due to the anti-gentrification campaign created by local anti-gentrification groups. PSSST, a nonprofit gallery space with an onomatopoeic name (Kennedy, 2016), presented itself as being "founded on the principle of *artists supporting artists…*" (Stromberg, 2016a). This establishment prides itself for working with underrepresented communities; specifically, PSSST argued that its major goal was "investing in artists by valuing process over product and community over singular success. PSSST actively works with underrepresented artists – women, people of color, and LGBTQ-identified" (Stromberg, 2016a).

Weird Wave Coffee is the most distinctive artwashing business on this list because it is not itself connected to "art." Opened in June of 2017, Weird Wave Coffee opened as the new shop on the busy commercial center of Boyle Heights in Cesar E. Chavez Avenue. Located just across from a King Taco (a major chain of tacos in Los Angeles) location, the café's main entrance is a literal white-washed wall with giant windows and the word "COFFEE" painted across the top of the building in black paint. The café's insignia resembles a black and white Starbucks knockoff: a round seal with the name of the establishment encircling a one-eyed octopus in the center of the logo. Although this establishment is not connected to art, the anti-gentrification groups have labeled it artwashing because it fits their definition of an establishment that "beautifies" the neighborhood and incentivizes reinvestment by developers. Further, coffee shops are consistently at the center of gentrification initiatives in working-class neighborhoods: "Though coffee's long been an affordable drink for the masses, coffee shops have – for

just as long – appealed primarily to the leisure class" (Kilkenny, 2017; see also Ellis, 2004). Therefore, coffee shops can also be complicit in the strategic remaking of neighborhoods through gentrification.

Figure 2.3. Image of Weird Wave Coffee on East Cesar E. Chavez Ave. Photo taken by the author (3/6/18).

Whiteness and the Politics of Civility

Since 356 Mission first opened their doors, anti-gentrification groups have been confrontational and verbally opposed to the existence of artwashing establishments in their working-class neighborhood of color. Their combative tactics, which will be analyzed in the next chapter, have drawn attention to the issues of artwashing; for the purpose of this chapter, it is important to highlight the artwashing response that framed these tactics as uncivil. In order to explore the relationship between labelling activists and their tactics as uncivil and artwashing as a form of gentrification, there needs to be an exploration of the politics of civility as they relate to whiteness.

For Bonilla-Silva, "colorblind racism" can best be described as the ideology that white people have created in order to remove their culpability in the status quo

oppression of people of color. Specifically, "[t]his ideology…explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics" (2006, p. 2). For Bonilla-Silva, ideologies like meritocracy are emblematic of this colorblind racism since this new ideology effectively stratifies people along racial lines without the use of overt racist language or action. While Bonilla-Silva refers to this as a "new" ideology, it is important to note that this is not a new form of racism but rather a new way of speaking about the same racism. Feagin (2014) calls this the "white racial frame" of our society. Through this frame, Feagin argues that while there are multiple frames of reference for varying people in our society, the dominant frame is the "white racial frame" which "provides an overarching and racialized *worldview* extending across major divisions of class, gender, and age" (2014, p. 26, emphasis in original). This is an important concept to explore since "at the center of the dominant white frame is a pro-white subframe accepting white privilege and power, as well as a certain arrogance and certainty of racial judgement" (2014, p. 28). Even though this "white racial frame," like whiteness, extends beyond the literal white body, Feagin argues:

> For most whites…this dominant racial frame is more than one perspectival frame among many. Indeed, it is a worldview that *routinely defines a way of being and acting*, a broad perspective on life, and one that provides the language and interpretations that structure, normalize, and make sense out of much in this society. (p. 28, emphasis added)

Interestingly, this draws attention to the ways that whiteness not only defines particular ways of being but also normalizes particular responses to the challenges against system of domination like white supremacy, colonialism, and neoliberalism.

76

Bonilla-Silva argues that one of the most productive ways to analyze the colorblind racism embedded in our society is by looking at the discursive because this form of racism is "produced and reproduced in communicative interactions" (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 11). One of the ways whiteness is produced in communicative interactions is through the framing of victimhood. "An important aspect of the contemporary white frame buttressing systemic racism is the omnipresent notion of white innocence and virtue" (Feagin, 2014, p. 91). At the center of this colorblind racism is the white subject as innocent victim. Especially when talking about concepts like race and racial awareness, whites consistently position themselves as being dubious of the sadistic racial politics in society. Their innocence is given while people of color are always already suspect. For instance, Karen L. Dace (2012) explores the ways that whiteness affects academics of color through the strategic ploy of innocence. Specifically, she found that when white women are "called out" for uttering a racist statement by a woman of color in an academic setting, white women use tears to frame themselves as innocent. This communicative interaction ultimately frames white bodies as unknowing while simultaneously framing bodies of color as aggressive. Ultimately, when talking about racism and race politics in the U.S. it is important to note that while white subjects frame themselves as innocent, ignorant, and thus victims, "Whites know much more about race as both lived experience and a structural system of privilege than typically acknowledged" (Moon, 2016, p. 283). The strategic performance of victimhood allows the white bodies to center their pain and innocence at the forefront of the conversation by ignoring the pain (internal or external) of people of color.

Connected to this centering of white victimhood is an incessant call for civility

and respectability. When discussions of race and racism are brought forth, there are

certain politics that people must follow in order to get their message heard. For instance,

in the preface to her germinal work *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins states,

"oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we

frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group"

(Hill Collins, 2009, p. ix). Calls for civility and respectability force people that do not

uphold dominant ways of being and thinking to either distort their statements in order to

be heard or they will be silenced. In essence, whiteness is employed in order to frame not

only who can speak but also what can be said since

> whiteness operates by means of its constitution as a universalizing authority by
> which the hegemonic, white bourgeois subject appropriates the right to speak on
> behalf of everyone who is nonwhite while denying voice and agency to these
> others in the name of civilized humankind. (McLaren, 2000, p. 149)

Further, in a study exploring the connection between higher education and covert

whiteness, Owens Patton presented the concept of "hegemonic civility," which she

defines as "normalized or naturalized behavior – appropriate behavior – even as the

action can be incivil or even silencing in order to uphold the hegemonic order" (2004, p.

65). A clear example of this can be the politics of who can speak, when they can speak,

and what they can say on any given subject matter.

By focusing on civility, Patton argues that we can uncover the ways that

colorblind racism and hegemony are reinscribed in everyday interactions. While some

have argued that politics of respectability have been used strategically by organizations of

color to demand social justice (Cooper, 2017), this chapter will focus predominantly on

the discursive ways that civility is implemented as a way to pacify the dissemination of an anti-gentrification movement in Boyle Heights. Therefore, the following two sections will analyze the relationship between whiteness and civility: first, artwashing effectively (re)centers whites in conversations surrounding the gentrification of Boyle Heights; and second, artwashing co-opts the dialogue about gentrification through a call for civility.

(Re)Centering Whiteness

One of the most powerful ways that artwashing has effectively transformed the local conversation(s) around gentrification is by effectively (re)centering white people as the focus of gentrification in Boyle Heights. In this way, incoming white artists (i.e. new residents of Boyle Heights) become the protagonists of the gentrification narrative in the Eastside. In this section of analysis there are three ways that white folks are centered in this narrative: first, artwashing reframes who has access to "progress"; second, artwashing (re)defines Boyle Heights as a space for white mobility to exist; and third, artwashing shifts the "problem" of gentrification to the non-white activists opposing their existence.

As a process, artwashing helps to reframe who has the power to attain and/or own the "progress" narrative of gentrification. Rather than listen to these critiques, artwashing establishments have defaulted to centering themselves over the struggle of current residents in Boyle Heights. This point can best be explained through the similarities between two artwashing locations: Nicodim Gallery and Weird Wave Coffee. In October of 2016, the owners of Nicodim Gallery reached their business one morning to find that their front door was spray painted with the phrase "Fuck White Art" in black and yellow

paint (Carroll, 2016). The tagging on Nicodim's front door also consisted of someone

spray painting the number 187 (which is a California police code meaning murder) across

the name placard of the gallery. As a response to this vandalism the owner of the gallery,

Mihail Nicodim, stated:

> I was not born into money. When I was their age, I had my protests back in
> Romania. When people start to dictate who can live in which neighborhood, that's
> when it's dangerous. That is what I fled I built this space from scratch with no
> developers. I still rent this building, owned by Mr. Chang. If he can't rent to small
> businesses, a corporation will buy the whole block. 5,000 condos or five galleries,
> which is more dangerous? (Stromberg, 2016b)

While this might be viewed as a valid response to this vandalism it fails in three ways.

First, Nicodim ends the statement by pointing out that he is not the owner of the building

thereby shifting the "blame" to the owner, "Mr. Chang," as the person most responsible

for gentrification. Second, Nicodim conflates the Romanian Revolution with the current

political tension in Boyle Heights. In this way, he frames DBH and other local activist

groups as antagonists similar to those in the Romanian Revolution. One of the first local

reports on this vandalism showcased the immigration narrative of Nicodim. Specifically,

the article wrote, "As a young artist in Romania, Mihai Nicodim had to get approval from

a Communist Party commission to show his work…For a chance at freedom, Nicodim

swam across the Danube River in 1983, risking capture by Romanian soldiers" (Chang,

2016). In this instance, the local activist groups impede Nicodim from exercising his

freedom to use art as a form of expression and thus are viewed as oppressive. Third, and

most importantly, Nicodim centers his strife by claiming that the vandals in conjunction

with local activists are stopping him from choosing to live and have a business in Boyle

Heights. By making this claim, Nicodim's statement pushes the discussion of

displacement and cultural erasure and instead focuses on his apparent right to live anywhere in the city and showcase his artwork.

This centering of white bodies/businesses is also clear in the picketing of Weird Wave Coffee. When they first opened their business in Boyle Heights, they instantly received negative attention from local protestors. While the cluster of artwashing galleries are all situated within an industrial zone of Boyle Heights, Weird Wave Coffee is located in the heart of the commercial street of the neighborhood. DBH and BHAAAD quickly mobilized to protest their business, and the coffee shop owners responded to these claims by placing a sign at the front of their shop that read, "Latino Owned Business" since one of the three owners was of Latino heritage (Soto, 2017). After posting the sign on their front window, Mario Chavarría (one of the co-owners of the shop) defended his white business co-owners by stating:

> I think [the activists'] whole message is getting lost and they're actually here highlighting race, simply because my friends happen to be Caucasian…the rhetoric doesn't make sense, it's backfired. It has actually made the community engage us more as a new shop and a new business and they've all come out and supported us (Soto, 2017).

In this statement, Chavarría casts doubt on the politics of activists by pontificating a liberal race-absent statement defending the right of anybody to own a business in any neighborhood. To accentuate this point further, Chavarría declared, "Gentrification already took place and we're just a mom and pop coffee shop that's trying to sell coffee…I don't see where the problem is with that" (Soto, 2017). Thus, Chavarría separates his small mom-and-pop coffee shop from larger systems of gentrification.

Ultimately, by framing themselves as merely "doing business" they are effective in positioning themselves as the recipients of the progress that gentrification can offer. For instance, Chavarría later argued,

> The resistance has certainly propelled us into the limelight…but to be honest, this isn't about Weird Wave. This is about two parts of a community trying to decide their future – the part that wants to grow and the part that prefers no progress. (Do, 2017)

By saying their coffee shop is on the side of progress and anyone countering their existence is anti-progress, Weird Wave Coffee positions themselves as the rightful owners of this progress narrative. Put differently, all it would take for any current Boyle Heights residents to reap the benefits of this progress is to purchase a cup of gourmet coffee at their store.

The attainment of the "progress" narrative is embellished further when artwashing owners are supported by local business owners. A clear example of this can be found in the ways that other small business owners have accepted Weird Wave Coffee as a new business in town. A fellow business owner was recorded as saying, "I want the coffee shop here…if it's going to bring more people, the better for us" (Vives, 2017b). Collectively, these businesses (artwashing and pro-gentrification) help to propel the narrative forward that their business should be supported by locals since they are the catalyst for solving the blight in the neighborhood.

A second way that artwashing continues to perpetuate this narrative of gentrification as organic and natural is by romanticizing the history of Boyle Heights as being an inclusive space for all bodies. For instance, when thinking about the inception of artwashing in Boyle Heights, the origin is located with the establishment of 356 Mission.

Laura Owens, a co-founder of the space, was interviewed by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. In the video interview, Owens argues that 356 Mission was first envisioned as a space she could use to both create art and also showcase that art to the public. Specifically, she stated, "I was looking for pretty unique architecture like theaters and churches…I live in Echo Park but, like, I kept moving east and looking here in Boyle Heights, it was first of all *amazing buildings that are not being used or large and empty…*" (MOCA, 2013, emphasis added). For Owens, her use of Boyle Heights is instantly validated since she is using spaces that are not being used. This notion of Los Angeles being an empty space is a sentiment that other owners have perpetuated. For instance, painter and street artist Kim West stated, "I have found Los Angeles in particular to be an optimistic place, with plenty of space to spread out, create and recreate" (Christian, 2015). In this instance, an artwashing artist's statement shaped how the reporter presented this narrative because in this same article the author of the piece wrote, "[I]f there's one unifying theme to any of it, it's that artists, like our 19th-century pioneering forebears, have begun heading west, in some cases all the way to Los Angeles" (Christian, 2015). Of course, this perception of "finding" empty land is a settler colonial viewpoint that can be traced throughout the narrative of Manifest Destiny and even the initial colonization of the Americas. The ultimate goal of saying a space is empty is to justify its redevelopment.

Beyond the notion that Los Angeles is empty, there is also a push to romanticize the history of what type of neighborhood Boyle Heights is. When covering the protest of Weird Wave Coffee, the press focused on incorporating Latina/o/x voices that disagreed

83

with the racial critiques being presented by DBH and BHAAAD. Specifically, an article highlighted the perspective of Steven Almazan, a former Boyle Heights neighborhood council member, who was quoted as saying, "The fact that they're using racially-based tactics is a bit demoralizing. Boyle Heights once was seen as the Ellis Island of the west coast. It shouldn't be a place of contention" (Carroll, 2016). This notion of Boyle Heights being similar to Ellis Island romanticizes the actual birth of this neighborhood. Rather than owning up to the racist and thus constrictive origin of Boyle Heights and East L.A. for bodies deemed not white, this retelling of history frames Boyle Heights as a "gateway" for all people. In other words, white artists' movement into Boyle Heights is appropriate since Ellis Island becomes the ideal metaphor for a space built on embracing the recognized mobility of white bodies.

In this context it makes sense why Jose Huizar, the councilmember for the Eastside and major proponent for the presence of art galleries in the Eastside, would offer a romanticized version of Boyle Height's history. In a public announcement to his constituents in the Eastside, he urged current residents to embrace the character of Boyle Heights which was established by "rejecting racist covenants prevalent in other Los Angeles neighborhoods that literally outlawed people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds from living together" (Vives, 2017c). History tells us that Boyle Heights was home to Russians, Jews, Polish, Germans, along with Japanese, Chinese, and Mexicans prior to the end of the second world war, but when these racist housing restrictions expanded the notion of "white" to encompass Eastern Europeans, most of the white population living in Boyle Heights left the community to own property in West

L.A. This movement parallels the creation of freeways which were mechanisms of white flight in the city.

A third and final way that artwashing (re)centers white folks in gentrification is by shifting the "problem" in Boyle Heights to the predominantly Latina/o/x anti-gentrification activists. When activists started to protest and boycott these artwashing businesses, the artists and their patrons were shocked that a community would not welcome them with open arms. When confronted with protestors, one gallery owner argued, "the galleries are here to help. We're not the enemy! I've worked in the art world for 35 years, I've never seen anything like this. Ever. *Art galleries are usually a welcome resource*" (Aron, 2016, emphasis added). Artwashing establishments assume that their business is needed in order to help revive a blighted neighborhood so when activists protest their businesses the critiques are viewed as being naïve. In this way, it is important to return to Nicodim Gallery's vandalism.

When Nicodim Gallery owners found the profanity-laced message on their front door, the cops were notified. This vandalism was quickly labeled a "hate crime." Hate crimes in Los Angeles are defined as "any criminal act or attempted criminal act directed against a person or persons based on the victim's actual or perceived race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, disability or gender" (LAPD, 2018). Since the LAPD had already recorded a couple of other vandalism cases against other artwashing galleries, and the vandalism at Nicodim Gallery was viewed as the most aggressive (i.e. "fuck white art" and "187"), the LAPD along with the Sheriff's Office elevated the vandalism into a hate crime. Captain Rick Stabile of the Sheriff's Office stated, "Everyone has a

right to protest, but when it becomes a hate crime, we have a problem in the area that we really need to address…the concern is this getting more out of hand" (Medina, 2016b). The swiftness of this graffiti being labeled a hate crime has drawn some attention from activists along with some academics. Particularly because of our current socio-political climate of "wait for the facts" civility, it is interesting that the LAPD along with the L.A. Sheriff's Office would quickly label this vandalism a hate crime when the graffiti is critiquing a type of art rather than a particular body. Daria Roithmayr, a professor of law at USC states, "It's not an easy conclusion that the hate crimes statute would apply to graffiti on an art gallery where the graffiti refers to the art. It's not clear if it's art that's produced by white artists, or consumed by white patrons – none of that's clear" (Stromberg, 2016c). Still, this situation is explained by Detective John Parra of the LAPD's Hollenbeck station as necessary since, "We don't know who actually did the vandalism, but because it actually made a reference to anti-white art or anti-white, it's basically saying that it's a hate crime based on that" (Mejia, 2016a). Further, LAPD captain Rick Stabile argued, "when I saw the number of these [acts of vandalism] and… they were all related to art galleries, just from a common-sense standpoint, I wanted to try and figure out what was going on with the community" (Mejia, 2016b). Still, the police involvement and protection of art galleries has sparked a major backlash from the activist groups.

While the police force has aligned themselves with gentrifying establishments, it is being recognized by local activists as a link between artwashing, gentrification, and the official plans by the city to re-make the character of Boyle Heights. For instance,

86

Elizabeth Blaney, co-director of Union de Vecinos, argues, "It's another way for the LAPD to criminalize youth and create racial divisions in this community, to allege an anti-white hate crime when they're out there shooting our youth… of color" (Chang, 2016). In this statement, Blaney is referring to the recent killing of Jesse Romero who was killed by police after they caught him tagging "gang-type graffiti" on the corner of Chicago Street and Cesar Chavez Avenue and officers feared he was reaching for a weapon tucked in his waistband (Mather, 2016). Although some gallery owners have tried to separate themselves from local police involvement (Owens, 2017), the Hollenbeck Police Station had a meeting with a couple of invited representatives of the several galleries in Boyle Heights. An anonymous tip argued that, "Police Chief Rick Stabile allegedly announced plans to set up surveillance cameras in the area, as well as his intention to investigate this act of vandalism as a hate crime" (Stromberg, 2016c). Walking around Mission Road and Anderson Street to take pictures of these art galleries for this chapter, I was quickly made aware of the presence of newly installed surveillance cameras along the rooftops of many of these artwashing establishments.

Centering Civility Discourse

Beyond centering their white bodies in the conversation surrounding gentrification in Boyle Heights, artwashing establishments refuse to engage with local anti-gentrification groups. Whiteness, in this instance, assists these artwashing establishments in continuing to ignore local activist groups through a call for civility, which seeks to only recognize refined and "civil" discussions. In short, there is no space for anger to exist in civility calls for dialogue. This yearning for civility is predicated on

87

white fragility over the accusation of being complicit in a violent erasure of Latina/o/x culture in East L.A. There are two ways that civility is used to squash the critique brought up against them: first, artwashing establishments highlight what they argue is the inappropriate hostility of Boyle Heights activists; and second, artwashing establishments view civility as a means to solve the problem of gentrification.

Whether the artwashing establishments are truly naïve about their complicity in displacement and cultural erasure in Boyle Heights or not, the fear of these newly arrived residents, artists, and gallery owners is centered around a lack civility. There are two major places that this is present: Chimento Contemporary, and PSSST's closure. For starters, when DBH and BHAAAD marched through the neighborhood to put up mock eviction notices as a way to bring attention to the galleries complicity in the eviction of people of color, Eva Chimento, owner of the Chimento Contemporary gallery located just down the street from Nicodim Gallery, stated, "I've been scared and nervous and jumpy. In the beginning I wanted to leave, but now its principle…" (Medina, 2016). In this way Chimento is centering her reaction through a fear for her safety which is an issue that takes precedence over the calls against gentrification from current Boyle Heights residents. It should be noted that since the beginning of these boycotts against artwashing places, no one has been physically assaulted by any of these group members. This relates to my argument of civility because if one were to take these art gallery owners and artists' comments at face value, it would appear as if their mere existence is being opposed on a daily basis in Boyle Heights.

Similarly, PSSST had to close its doors in 2017 and published an open letter

explaining that their sudden closure was caused by the hostile nature of local activists.

Specifically, in an open letter to the community PSSST wrote:

> It is with heavy hearts that we announce PSSST is closing…Our young nonprofit
> struggled to survive through constant attacks. Our staff and artists were routinely
> trolled online and harassed in-person. This persistent targeting, which was often
> highly personal in nature, was made all the more intolerable because the artists we
> engaged are queer, women, and/or people of color. We could no longer continue
> to put already vulnerable communities at further risk (Cohen, Gallego, &
> Gimbrone, 2017).

Most interesting in this open letter is how PSSST framed DBH and BHAAAD as

attacking "vulnerable" communities of artists being housed at PSSST. PSSST framed

themselves as the saviors of these queer/women/of color artists and their closure was

directly caused by a failure in keeping these artists safe from Boyle Height's anti-

gentrification groups. Further, by claiming their gallery's artists are vulnerable it

inadvertently erases the fact that these anti-gentrification groups are propelled to engage

in these anti-gentrification struggles because of their vulnerability to displacement and

erasure.

Another way that artwashing connects whiteness and gentrification is by claiming

that civil dialogue will be able to solve the problem in Boyle Heights. When PSSST

closed its doors, they argued that their closure would ultimately hurt productive dialogue

which would be a valuable resource to solve the problems in Boyle Heights. Specifically,

the co-owners wrote:

> While our closure might be applauded by some, it is not a victory for civil
> discourse and coalition building at a time when both are in short supply…No
> matter…what we do, we remain committed to the fundamental idea that…in a
> country that provides little to no support for the arts…and where institutions

privilege the already privileged, we believe art is beyond the monetary. It is community. It is conversation. It is critical thinking. It is the space and time to experiment. It is empathy and generosity. (Cohen, Gallego, & Gimbrone, 2017)

PSSST owners place all the blame on the activists for destroying coalitional opportunities and in this way, they directly connect their non-profit business as a valuable resource in resolving the issues that anti-gentrification groups were attempting to thwart. Further, this statement identifies dialogue as only existing when it follows the specific protocol defined within the restrictive confines of their art gallery. Specifically, with PSSST's closure, activists called attention to the fact that PSSST's call for dialogue was connected more with civility politics than with actual discussion of the problem of gentrification to try and resolve it. In their open letter response to PSSST, BHAAAD along with DBH stated, "Coalition building takes active listening and building from within communities, it requires humility and acknowledgement of many voices. It is time to plug yourselves into existing movements and organizations that have been fighting…" (BHAAAD, 2017c). Further, when talking about having dialogue with artists, these activists stated, "We've had sit downs with artists and curators and players in the art industry…We've seen time and time again their deliberate, ignorant, [and] arrogant carelessness" (Soto, 2017). According to the anti-gentrification groups, the galleries use civility as a way to guard themselves from the unwillingness to truly engage with the surrounding community members to talk about their complicity (whether intentional or not) with continued displacement and cultural erasure.

There seems to be a pattern of art galleries trying to use their space as a means to engage in dialogue as an ultimate solution to solve the problem of gentrification. For

instance, in early 2017 local protestors picketed the first meeting by a newly formed

group of eight well known LA-based artists known as Artists' Political Action Network

(APAN). The group's aim was to create "a network for artists to share information,

coordinate responses with established organizations, and leverage our cultural capital to

effect meaningful change in our communities, at the state level, and nationally" (Griffin,

2017). APAN decided to host their first meeting at 356 Mission even after knowing about

the current boycott by local activists as a way to "create an opportunity for engagement

and dialogue" with the local community (Stromberg, 2017a). DBH and other local groups

picketed the event outside of the establishment with the hopes that they could begin the

conversation with attendees before they stepped into the gallery. However, after many

people continued to cross the line, BHAAAD members led other protestors into the

gallery as a way to disrupt APAN's meeting.

As protestors entered the art gallery they were met with a roaring applause.

However, Michael Mandiberg, a visiting artist from New York claimed that the protestors

"marched into the meeting, chanting… and it appeared that the audience attempted to

drown them out by clapping…They didn't stop until someone shouted, 'let them talk'"

(Stromberg, 2017a). To silence a person's right to speak is to engage in ending dialogue.

However, since their entire meeting was predicated on initiating dialogue, the act of

clapping to drown out the disruption becomes more difficult to identify as a violent act of

silencing activists of color. Further, while APAN did concede the fact that "artists and art

organizations are often the vanguard of gentrification..." they do not see art and/or artists

as enemies of the community (Griffin, 2017). Rather than follow this statement up with

an invitation for coalition building, APAN and 356 Mission owners and patrons

continued to argue with the protestors about their tactics. For instance, Ethan Swan, one

of the directors of 356 Mission, has failed to meet with local activists but this failure does

not stop him from critiquing the activists since according to Swan "their position is an

uncompromising one since they don't see a solution unless we leave" (McPhate, 2017).

Calls for coalition through civility not only frames the activists as "too aggressive" and

"hostile" but it also leaves the activists' call unanswered.

Unfortunately, the calls for civility have not stopped in Boyle Heights. In a

recently released statement, Laura Owens, owner of 356 Mission, stated "[t]he

relationship between art and gentrification is an urgent issue for the art community *to*

discuss and should be further explored thoughtfully and *respectfully* between artists, civic

leaders, and most importantly the residents of the neighborhood" (Owens, 2017,

emphasis added). While the relationship between art and gentrification has already been

proven time and time again, artwashing artists consistently insist on engaging in civil

dialogue as a means to solve the problem with art's involvement in displacement. In this

same statement Owens echoes fellow artwashing gallery owners when she poignantly

stated, "I have always been and remain *committed to engaging in productive dialogue*

that results in effective actions to battle the issues facing our communities" (Owens,

2017, emphasis added). However, missing from this statement is any acknowledgement

of the ways that artwashing galleries are complicit in the movement to solve the blight of

Boyle Heights. By revitalizing the neighborhood through redevelopment initiatives (i.e.

garage space for The Broad museum, revitalizing the L.A. River, and rebuilding the 6th

Street Bridge) the ultimate aim becomes the creation of tourist destinations rather than offering resources for current Boyle Heights residents. To acknowledge this link is to challenge the assumption that dialogue will save the residents of Boyle Heights.

Conclusion

Artwashing has become the new word to help explain the process of gentrification. Many have misunderstood the intent of the term and have dismissed the racial capitalist critiques it has helped bring to the forefront of the current anti-gentrification movement in Boyle Heights. For those who consider particular galleries, cafes, restaurants, and shops as necessary additions to any urban setting, artwashing might be considered a frivolous and even redundant critique of gentrification. From the fully supported gentrification initiatives such as the Sixth-Street Bridge, to the embracing of art galleries, coffee shops, and recently opened microbreweries, it is clear that through political and economic involvement, the city of Los Angeles is actively working on re-making the neighborhood known as Boyle Heights through the strategic use of a particular art aesthetic in order to effectively cleanse the eastside of people of color.

Predominantly explored in this chapter, artwashing helped to uncover the politics of civility imbedded within the artwashing movement in order to cover up the inherent violence of "beautification" at the expense of poor and working-class people of color. Specifically, through the analysis of artwashing, it became clear that white bodies were framed as the protagonists when it came to the gentrification of Boyle Heights since they were the predominant owners of attaining the "progress" that gentrification promised, had the power to reshape the purpose of Boyle Heights to fit their desire to move there, and

shifted the problem in the community to the protestors of color. Another major way that artwashing was explored in this chapter was through the way that artwashing demanded the materialization of a particular type of dialogue—namely civility dialogue. In this way, artwashing co-opted the discussion surrounding gentrification by framing any anti-gentrification protest as hostile and dangerous, and finally by claiming that dialogue would be the resource to solve the issue of displacement and cultural erasure.

In light of their militant tactics, BHAAAD has been criticized for not focusing on adding more pressure on L.A. Mayor Garcetti, councilmember Huizar, or the city council in order to stop gentrification in its tracks. For instance, Mihail Nicodim argued, "I understand gentrification is a real issue, but I also think some of the activists, they should…maybe go to City Hall to get affordable housing from them. They should protest against developers" (Mejia, 2016a). While this might seem like a valid counter argument against these local activist groups it fails in understanding the reasons for the tactics they have chosen to implement in order to challenge gentrification. In the following chapter, BHAAAD along with DBH and other groups will be the center of the analysis.

Overall, the fight against gentrification initiatives in Boyle Heights is directly connected to a fight against the artwashing campaign used to dictate what type of neighborhood merits existence within the city limits. Since the start of this anti-artwashing and anti-gentrification struggle, many Latina/o/x artists have supported the boycott and have even used their art to politically make a statement against the displacement of Boyle Heights residents. Ambar Navarro, a transplant artist originally from San Antonio was supposed to have her work screened at 356 Mission but rather

94

than have that spotlight on her work, she "cancelled the event to join community in resistance" (BHAAAD, 2017c). Understanding that gentrification can operate as an artwashing initiative helps to identify covert ways of masking the inherent violence of displacement and erasure. Only by understanding this manifestation can we truly find ways to stop predominantly poor and working-class communities of color from having their art and history in a city whitewashed and painted over.

CHAPTER THREE: DEFENDIENDO EL BARRIO:[15] LOCAL MOVEMENTS

CONTESTING GENTRIFICATION

> East Los Angeles is both a place and a mode of being, a physical homeland and the spiritual heart of the Mexican diaspora in the United States. (Garner, 2017)

> The organization and sheer tenacity of the protestors should have been enough to earn them the respect and ear of the art world. Instead, we arrived in their neighborhood and demand that they compromise. It is us who have miscalculated where the line should be drawn. The only question left is: where do you stand?
> —Nizan Shaked (2017)

Boyle Heights is in the midst of a transformation the likes of which it has not seen since it became the predominant Mexican and Chicana/o/x barrio in the 1950s. The city of Los Angeles is in the process of redeveloping Boyle Heights for a future white population by reinvesting in the historically disinvested Eastside. However, the barrio residents have mobilized and organized themselves to respond to the gentrification initiatives intended to erase Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x culture and people from the Eastside. Inherent in this contestation is a desire to maintain the integrity of East L.A. Massey (1994) argues that while attempts to secure the identity of places are common and understandable, they are also important since, "such attempts at the stabilization of meaning are constantly the site of social contest, battles over the power to label space-time, to impose the meaning to be attributed to a space, for however long or short a span of time" (p. 5). Therefore, the current contestation over what the future might hold for

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[15] Spanish phrase meaning, "Defending the neighborhood."

Boyle Heights (i.e. the culture, its aesthetic, and the people that may call it home) point to the struggles over who can lay claim on what this neighborhood can become.

As soon as the first attempts of revitalization were noticed by the community, gentrification received aggressive contestation. According to Dana Cuff, USC professor of architecture, "I think [residents] are slowing things down there…I think they're actually making their voices clear. And I think people, development interests and gentrifiers, have to listen" (McGahan, 2017b). Thus, unlike neighboring communities like Highland Park, Lincoln Heights, or even Echo Park, which were victims of a rapid neighborhood revitalization, Boyle Heights has slowed down gentrification initiatives.

Beyond the multiple artwashing establishments opening their doors in the Eastside, our streets have been cleaned up, bike lanes have been added, police have increased their surveillance, and every day it seems like more "For Sale" signs are popping up around our neighborhood. When focusing on the responses to these changes, being imposed on the community members of Boyle Heights, a major question is presented: Can Boyle Heights residents effectively counter gentrification initiatives? To answer this question I focus on the *gente*fication movement and the anti-gentrification movement since these each view themselves as being the effective way to counter gentrification on the Eastside. When focusing on the responses to the implementation of gentrification it is clear that racial/ethnic and class identities play a central role in the type of responses being heard from Boyle Heights.[16] However, unlike other studies that shed

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[16] In a similar study focusing on the gentrification of Santa Ana, California, Erualdo R. González (2017) found that for a great majority of the activists and coalitions created to fight off gentrification, "Mexican/Latina/o and working-class community identity would be a critical primary feature of their

positive light on tactics that centered a racial/ethnic identity in challenging gentrification (González, 2017), this study will be critical of identity politics. Through this critical analysis of these tactics, I hope to embrace the contradictory tension of barrio resistance since "only in identifying the tense relationship between socially deforming (barrioizing) and culturally affirming (barriological) spatial practices – which together produce the form and meaning of the barrio – will we come to understand the nuances of this recurring dialectic" (Villa, 2000, p. 8). Therefore, *gente*fication and anti-gentrification movements' use of identity politics must be critically explored.

Embracing their Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x, and their working-class identities, Boyle Heights groups and residents have collectively used their ethnic identity as a central catalyst not only to stay in East L.A. but also to ensure that the Eastside's barrio culture will not be eradicated. While they both define themselves as anti-gentrification, *gente*fication believes that Boyle Heights' Latinas/os/xs residents should revitalize their own neighborhood in order to avoid any displacement or the cultural erasure of East L.A. On the opposite side, the anti-gentrification movement rejects both gentrification and *gente*fication since they believe all revitalization initiatives will inevitably displace working-class people of color.

The following chapter will be presented in three parts: first, I will contextualize the two movement responses to gentrification in Boyle Heights; second, I will present an analysis of these movements against gentrification by focusing on their effective and ineffective positions to problematize the use of ethnic identity as a salvation from the

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activism" (p. 93). Santa Ana (a major metropolitan center of the neighboring Orange County) is located roughly 32 miles south of East Los Angeles.

displacement caused by the whiteness project of gentrification; and third, I will conclude the chapter with a discussion on the implications of this study.

Contextualizing the *Gente*fication Movement

The *gente*fication movement can be understood through an analysis of their self-identified name. Replacing "gentry" with "gente" which is the Spanish term for "the people," the young Latinas/os/xs that identify with this movement ultimately position themselves against "outsiders" coming into their barrio. They view gentrification as causing ever-lasting change to their community in the form of erasing the current culture and pushing its brown residents away. Still they are captivated by the promise of "revitalization" and have taken it upon themselves to be the catalyst for this barrio transformation. They believe that if Latinas/os/xs from within the community push to revitalize their own barrio, then their form of revitalization will not lead to displacement or cultural erasure. Therefore, *gente*fication refers to the "process of upwardly mobile Latinos, typically second generation and beyond, investing in and returning to the old neighborhood" (Lee, 2016). In this way, Marco Amado, a local small business owner, stated, "we're not trying to get out of the barrio, we're trying to bring the barrio up" (Medina, 2013). While there are a number of businesses and people that consider themselves a part of the *gente*fication movement, for the purposes of this chapter, I will only showcase three major voices of this movement: Eastside Luv, Espacio 1839, and Primera Taza.

*Gente*fication was initiated by the owner of the Eastside Luv bar located right across from the Mariachi Plaza in Boyle Heights. Guillermo Uribe, the owner of the

Eastside Luv, considers himself to be a person that was raised in the Eastside and as an adult he uses his business as a way to cater to other Latinas/os/xs who want a place to relax and have fun while still remaining in their own backyard. The Eastside Luv is described as being "a sleek bar that attracts younger patrons whom some call Chipsters, for Chicano hipsters" (Medina, 2013). Synonymous with the call for revitalizing from within is also the notion that gentrification is an inevitable process and so if they do not act before this inevitable process, their barrio will be eradicated:

> If we want to preserve the cultural integrity, the pride we have, the only shot we have is to do it ourselves…My grandmother here covered everything in plastic because there wasn't extra money to go buy another couch if one of us messed it up. That's something we should celebrate now. I want to be amongst people who understand that and get it. (Medina, 2013)

This nostalgia of Boyle Heights propelled Uribe to open Eastside Luv which he describes as "a space that was representative of the Mexican American cultural history of the Eastside of Los Angeles in the Eastside of Los Angeles" (Herbst, 2014). The bar's exterior showcases this Mexican American representation as the bar is known for its giant mariachi painted on the wall facing the Mariachi Plaza.

Figure 3.1. Eastside Luv, mariachi mural. Photo
taken from author (4/12/18).

A couple of doors down the street is the second establishment of *gente*fication:

Espacio 1839. The name of the location is the Spanish word for "space" followed by their

literal address: 1839 E. 1st Street. Espacio is the project of four Eastside entrepreneurs:

Marco Amador, Nico Avina, Elisa García, and David Gómez. Amador states, "The

inspiration was to create a core of a group of people that were thinking about media and

about creating spaces…I felt our community needed a space to really feel comfortable

within the environment" (Foley, 2013). The location offers a variety of spaces for the

community: a store front, an art gallery for local Latina/o/x artwork, and an online radio

broadcast studio. Espacio 1839 is known for offering shirts that showcase not only

Latina/o/x pride but also pride in being from the Eastside. As Avina argued, "If it is

cultural pride, then you're wearing that cultural pride on your chest, because you're not

embarrassed. You actually have the knowledge of self, and you are aware of who you are

and where you come from" (Foley, 2013). Clearly, for Espacio it is important to have a

local store embrace the pride in heritage and pride in being from the barrio. All of their

merchandise and community output is centered around Eastside Latina/o/x identity.

Figure 3.2. Image of Espacio 1839. Image taken
from Instagram (Quitl, 2017).

Primera Taza is located just across the street from both Eastside Luv and Espacio

1839. The coffee shop was opened by Guillermo Romero whose parents lived in the

Eastside. For Romero, the creation of Primera Taza was propelled by the struggle to find

a coffee shop when he was a college student in Los Angeles. Rather than continue to

have Chicanas/os/xs drive to another community to study or go to the Starbucks, Romero

opened Primera Taza as a space not only to provide Boyle Heights residents with coffee

but also a space they could feel welcomed. Primera Taza has gone to great lengths to

transform the "coffee shop" aesthetic into one that embraces the culture and heritage of

Boyle Heights. For instance, if you want to order an Americano type of drink you can

order a "café Chicano" (Medina, 2013). Further, the art on their walls showcases local

artwork by Latinas/os/xs while also displaying these local artists' photography with a

short biography. Romero stated, "We grew up always talking about being a part of

something bigger…We've learned just how to create it for ourselves. Making it doesn't

mean moving out" (Medina, 2013). In 2015, Primera Taza was transferred to two

different owners: Chuy Tovar and Rosalinda Hernandez (Elliott, 2018). While Guillermo

Romero no longer owns the coffee shop, the shop still follows the same passion to

provide an amenity for college students and coffee aficionados.

Figure 3.3. The original front entrance of Primera
Taza. Photo taken from Primera Taza's website
(Primera Taza, 2018).

Anti-Gentrification Movement: Who Are They?

The anti-gentrification movement in Boyle Heights is defined through

collaborative radical work by multiple grassroots organizations. Not only do these groups

vehemently counter gentrification initiatives, they are also anti-*gente*fication. For the

anti-gentrification groups there is no difference between gentrification and *gente*fication

therefore they challenge all initiatives that aim to revitalize the barrio since it will lead to

the displacement of working-class people of color already living in Boyle Heights. The

anti-gentrification groups contest gentrification by engaging in aggressive boycotts in

order to make it clear that gentrification is a type of class and racial urban warfare. For

instance, when a DBH member was asked why they are anti-artwashing galleries they

replied, "It's about how capitalism works. We're not just fighting realtors, we're fighting

American capitalism" (Carroll, 2016). Therefore, this movement makes a point to

highlight the ways that their local struggle against gentrification is connected to a larger

system that consistently uses this process to displace people of color and erase their

connection to the city. For the purpose of this chapter, I will focus on the four groups that

have received the most media attention in this movement: Defend Boyle Heights (DBH),

Boyle Heights Alianza Anti-Artwashing y Desplazamiento (BHAAAD), OVAS, and

Union de Vecinos. At the beginning of the fight against gentrification lies the creation of

DBH. On their main website, DBH defines themselves as:

> an autonomous coalition committed to building community power against
> gentrification principally through direct actions that target institutions and
> individuals that are aligned with the capitalist, pro-gentrification status quo. Our
> best line of defense is our own community; we are devoted to defending our hood
> by any means necessary. (DBH, 2017)

They are notorious for their militant and intimidating tactics. For instance, in November

2015, Defend Boyle Heights' first direct action as a coalition against gentrification

involved rushing a mobile opera group called Hopscotch which had set up a scene in

Boyle Heights' Hollenbeck Park. While the mobile opera group tried to begin their

performance in the public park, DBH, with the help of some high school band members

rushed the group loudly playing brass instruments and shouting, "This is our park!"

Because of such tactics, DBH has defined itself as "the next generation of Angelenos

who grew up in, or migrated to Boyle Heights who have joined all our autonomous crews

together in this historic struggle for community – defense and collective self-

determination in greater East L.A." (BHAAAD, 2017a). Their creation has single-handedly defined the war against gentrification and the artwashing of Boyle Heights.

Following a similar political agenda, as an organization of activists, BHAAAD was created "to confront the current crisis of evictions and abusive real estate practices in L.A., to question the role of culture in gentrification and the narrative of 'inevitability,' and to push to stop displacement in its tracks" (BHAAAD, 2017c). While DBH is a stand-alone group, BHAAAD differs in that it is a collective group comprised of other local anti-gentrification groups within it. For example, in their main web page, BHAAAD states that they are comprised of five groups: Union de Vecinos, Defend Boyle Heights, Multiple Affinity Groups of Artists, Schools of Echoes Los Angeles, and The Eastside Local of the Los Angeles Tenants Union (BHAAAD, 2017). Through their leadership they have received notoriety in the creation of coalitions that are propelled by a leftwing militant ideology which has been effective at protesting, confronting, and intimidating many "galleries whom they fear will pave the way for development that will push out residents and erase a cradle of Chicano identity" (Carroll, 2016). Thus, the battle for Boyle Heights has been known as extremely aggressive since BHAAAD and DBH "have been militant, insistent, and extraordinarily confrontational – often singling people out for public condemnation and physically chasing out unwelcome visitors" (Delgadillo, 2017). While these two groups have been negatively represented in the media because of their tactics, these groups believe that their actions are justified since they have "pursued militant and aggressive tactics on purpose. [BHAAAD chooses] these tactics because we

understand that city council members, politicians, and non-profiteers aren't going to advocate for us, and we have to fight back" (Delgadillo, 2017).

Two other groups involved in this response against gentrification are Union de Vecinos and the OVAS.[17] Union de Vecinos[18] has focused on demanding tenants' rights for residents of Boyle Heights. Specifically, this group has worked to "fend off multiple forms of violence and displacement in the Pico Aliso Projects…" (BHAAAD, 2017c). Importantly, these projects are located within walking distance from the cluster of artwashing establishments covered in the previous chapter. Of all the activist groups that comprise this movement against gentrification, OVAS have been the only group to have been physically displaced by gentrification. OVAS, which originally started off as a feminist of color bicycle brigade, had to vacate their original headquarters, known as La Conxa,[19] due to their landlord raising their rent. Since their displacement, they have opened up their organization to incorporate other marginalized voices that are not cis-gendered women of color.

Together, these four groups represent the biggest voices that counter any gentrification initiative in their barrio. These anti-gentrification organizations unify to demand a couple of things through their militant tactics: affordable housing that is calculated to the specific neighborhood of Boyle Heights, and that no new development

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[17] The OVAS were formerly known as Ovarian Psycos. While their current name, "OVAS," is a shorthand version of their original name, many members of the group have stated on social media and in their paraphernalia that OVAS actually stands for "Overthrowing Vendidxs, Authority & the State" and/or "One Very Angry Squad" (Lloyd, 2017).

[18] Their name is Spanish for Union of Neighbors.

[19] "La conxa" is a Spanish term that roughly translates to "the shell." Importantly, this is also a Spanish slang term for vagina.

in Boyle Heights should displace current residents, but if they are displaced, the activists demand that residents should have the "right of return" to their same neighborhood first (Delgadillo, 2017). As a collective DBH and BHAAAD proclaim, "Boyle Heights will continue to fight against the false promises of development and community improvement that are supposed to benefit us, but end up displacing us from our homes" (Mejia & Saldivar, 2017). Now that these movements are contextualized, the next sections will analyze each movement individually.

*Gente*fication Movement

For this movement, gentrification and displacement are not inseparable concepts; therefore, the community should be revitalized by Latinas/os/xs in order to avoid the displacement of other Latinas/os/xs. While this might sound like a great idea, the reality is that *gente*fication is merely gentrification perpetuated by brown folks. This relates to my larger argument of gentrification being viewed as a whiteness project because in this aspect, Boyle Heights is being remade by a socioeconomically mobile Latina/o/x population, which will ultimately lead to the displacement of Latinas/os/xs that are not also college educated. An example that *gente*fication fits the definition of gentrification as a whiteness project can be found in the identity marker of the "chipster" that enjoys *gente*fying space like Eastside Luv, Primera Taza, and Espacio 1839 because the beneficiaries of *gente*fication are still (brown) hipsters. In this way, the hipster identity is central to the goals of redeveloping the barrio. In this section I will explore both the effective and ineffective aspects of this movement. First, there is one area in which *gente*fication is effective as a counter to gentrification and that is in its push for youth

107

empowerment and racial pride. However, secondly, *gente*fication is ineffective as a response to combat gentrification initiatives in Boyle Heights because of its commodification of Latina/o/x culture as a way to challenge gentrification, and the co-opting of their revitalization message by gentrifiers and gentrification sympathizers. Both ineffective and effective aspects of this movement connect to the notion of gentrification as a whiteness project because, just like earlier chapters that explored the ways cities are creating spaces of leisure for hipsters, in this movement, Chipsters are proud to shape the Eastside in their image and this is causing displacement of other Latinas/os/xs that do not meet the criteria for this version of Latina/o/x barrio formation.

While there might be some issues with *gente*fication, this movement excels at generating youth empowerment and cultural pride for Latinas/os/xs in Boyle Heights. This can be explored through the cultural work initiated by Eastside Luv, Primera Taza, and Espacio 1839. For starters, the Eastside Luv bar is presented as "the 1st pocho[20] bar of its kind! Eastside Luv was established…as a place we could all celebrate the uniqueness of being Mexican-American in East Los Angeles" ("About Eastside Luv," 2017). Guillermo Uribe, the owner of the bar, prides himself in establishing a place where local community members can be proud of their Mexican American identity. Eastside Luv's calendar of events page is a significant example of their use of Latina/o/x identity as a driving force for their business. Monthly, Eastside Luv will host a variety of karaoke nights that range from "MorriseyOke, MariachiOke, JuangaOke, and SelenaOke"

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[20] Pocho was and can still be used as a derogatory term to refer to a Mexican-American individual who exhibits more American qualities. A popular example of this would be a brown person not knowing Spanish or having a heavy accent when speaking in Spanish. However, when referenced in the bar's website, "pocho" was used in a way to reclaim the term for Mexican-Americans.

("About Eastside Luv," 2017). Beyond these nights, this establishment also has monthly events known as "Oralé Pari"[21] where their resident DJ is known to mix top musical hits in both English and Spanish.

Following a similar pattern, Espacio 1839 and Primera Taza both are ideal sites of cultural pride and empowerment. In the past couple of social media posts, Espacio has showcased artwork by local Latina/o/x artists such as the "Eres Poderosa[22] Art Exhibit" (Espacio 1839, 2018). Beyond their gallery space, they also provide the community of Boyle Heights with a free online radio broadcast which offers programing such as "Venimos a Triunfar," and "Chisme with Yesika," which both showcase young Latinas/os/xs artists from the Eastside sharing their views on politics, music, and art for other Latinas/os/xs. Across the street, Primera Taza is also a central hub for young Latinas/os/xs to relax, work on homework, and convene with other residents of the community. Recently, a community member named Natalia praised this establishment for supporting her work by saying, "this month I was given the opportunity to showcase my photos in the same walls I used to stare at every Saturday afternoon, Thank you @primerataza, I can finally consider myself one badass artist" (Angeles, 2018). While I have not entered Eastside Luv, I have visited Primera Taza and Espacio 1839 on multiple occasions.[23] Both locations were effective in making me feel not only proud of my community and my cultural identity, but these locations also made me feel welcomed.

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[21] It's a Spanglish vernacular which merges the Spanish word "Oralé" which translates to "Alright" and the Spanglish term "Pari" which is a Spanglish version of the English term "party."

[22] "Eres Poderosa" is Spanish for "You are powerful" and it is an art exhibit showcasing Latina artwork.

[23] In fact, I first heard of Espacio 1839 while a friend and I waited for Nico Avina (one of the owners of Espacio) to meet us at Primera Taza in order to each buy special prints he had made.

However, as I continued to enter these spaces I realized that this sense of pride and empowerment for young Latinas/os/xs not only came at the cost of ostracizing older generations of Latinas/os/xs from the same community, but participation often came at the economic cost of purchasing the versions of Latina/o/x pride and identity that these *gente*fication businesses were offering. For instance, a "decolonize" or "Sin Mujeres No Habra Revolución"[24] t-shirt at Espacio 1839 will cost you about $25 each. The cost of cultural and barrio pride is important to point out since these locations are still situated within a neighborhood whose median household income is relatively low compared to the overall median household income of the city.

Further, the *gente*fication businesses covered in this chapter ultimately push for consumerism as a method of getting access to the "progress" narrative of revitalization. In other words, if Latina/o/x bodies do not want to get displaced from the Eastside, they need only to support these *gente*fying businesses that are commodifying Latina/o/x culture. For instance, Chuy Tovar presents Primera Taza as a necessary resource to his neighborhood of Boyle Heights. On the contrary, he argues that Weird Wave Coffee is not a coffee house for Boyle Heights since "The owners are not engaged in what the needs of the community are…" (Rebolledo, 2017). However, Primera Taza uses the same approach of "progress" as Weird Wave does. Beyond using their walls to showcase the work by local artists of color, they sell caffeinated drinks to the community just like Weird Wave Coffee. The only exception is that with each cup of coffee, Primera Taza sells Mexican identity to its customers by announcing where their current coffee beans

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[24] "Sin Mujeres No Habra Revolución" is Spanish for "Without Women There Won't Be A Revolution."

are grown. In this way, they bill themselves as a coffee shop for "the people" (Rebolledo, 2017). This statement can also be found on the front page of their website, visitors are presented with a picture of coffee beans behind giant red letters that read: "coffee house for the people" (Primera Taza, 2018). Even though a coffee house "for the people" might sound radical (i.e. it's not about profits it's about bringing people together), Tovar has consistently argued that while at school for business at USC, his greatest lesson was to know the customer. Therefore, he states that the success of Primera Taza can be traced to them effectively marketing their product to the community. Specifically, Tovar states, "if you don't know your customers, there's no way you're going to sell anything, no matter what it is" (Rebolledo, 2017). In this way, there is no difference between Weird Wave Coffee and Primera Taza since at the end of the day, these establishments are both trying to make a profit by claiming that their commodity will save the neighborhood. Moreover, beyond their coffee products, Primera are now working closely with Dry River Brewery (which is one of the newest artwashing establishments in town) beginning to blur the lines separating *gente*fication from gentrification.

At the end of March 2018, Primera Taza had to close their doors since their landlord gave up their lease to another gentrifying business rather than wait for Primera Taza to renew their contract (Mejias-Rentas, 2018). During the time of Taza's relocation, they used the hashtag "coffee as resistance" in their social media when they announced their relocation plans (Primerataza, 2018). On April 6, 2018 however, Primera Taza had a soft opening at their new location (in the middle of the artwashing cluster of Boyle Heights just across the street from Venus Over LA and half a block away from Nicodim

111

Contemporary). This soft opening also came with a rebranding of their store name –

rather than being called Primera Taza, they would now be called El Café by Primera

Taza. While they still continue to use Mexican coffee beans for all their drinks, they are

now strategically catering to artwashing establishments and their patrons.

In a similar vein, Eastside Luv is a space for Mexican-American pride. However,

unlike all other bars and establishments in the surrounding vicinity, Eastside Luv has a

strict dress code. While their policy is "casual attire" they do not allow "attire with sport

logos, ball caps, flip flops, plain white t-shirts or tank top, excessively baggy pants or

shirts" ("Dress Attire," 2017). In essence, the enforcement of a dress code for a local bar

in the Eastside signifies the policing of particular markers of class and identity. This

illustrates that while this business markets itself as passionate about their surrounding

community, there are restrictions for who can have access to this *gente*fying business and

their commodified Latina/o/x identity. Even though these *gente*fication businesses

present themselves as small businesses from and for the community of Boyle Heights,

they are ultimately complicit in commodifying a culture and reaping the benefits of the

continued gentrification in Boyle Heights.

Beyond their commodification of Latina/o/x culture, another telling sign of their

complicity with gentrification is that *gente*fication businesses are getting praised by

gentrification sympathizers and thus, their central argument of Latina/o/x revitalization

can be co-opted by the same system they are trying to fight. A central voice in the

gentrification of Boyle Heights has been Latina/o/x politicians, most notably Jose Huizar.

Even though Huizar has been vocal about his disdain for anti-gentrification tactics, he has

been silent about *gente*fication. Based on his previous statements against gentrification and his silence against *gente*fication, it can be implied that the *gente*fication movement aligns with his vision of Boyle Heights:

> my vision for this area is to have restaurants and a commercial center here. We're going to have a lot of people from downtown coming up here during lunchtime. They'll be on the subway in five minutes and get here and listen to mariachi music during the day and evening. (Contreras, 2007)

Similar to this vision of the future Boyle Heights, the former East L.A. representative on the L.A. County Board of Supervisors, Gloria Molina, argued that East Los Angeles "should change for the better…" (Contreras, 2007). She, along with Huizar, was responsible for the metro transit extension into East Los Angeles in the early 2000s which is known as the "Metro Gold Line." In essence, Molina and Huizar's vision for an East L.A. revitalization involves upgrading the area in order to "attract private investment" (Contreras, 2007). In this way, gentrification and *gente*fication become one and the same. These redevelopment projects have aimed to maintain the current cultural heritage of the Eastside, but these projects are still gentrification initiatives. This co-opting of Latina/o/x commodification and revitalization has led these two forms of gentrification to "upgrade" the neighborhood for capital reinvestment. Back in 2007, when the Gold Line had just been introduced to the Eastside, Molina stated, "You're going to see more businesses along the transit lines" (Contreras, 2007). It is no surprise, then, that the major *gente*fying businesses are all located along the Gold Line. Thus, while these establishments go against an "outsider" coming into the barrio, they end up presenting the community of Boyle Heights with the same solution. *Gente*fication offers a commodified version of brown culture as a cure for a blighted neighborhood's fears of cultural erasure caused by

113

reinvestment and redevelopment. In other words, they commodify Latina/o/x culture

while simultaneously benefiting from the continued gentrification of the barrio.

Anti-Gentrification Movement

As a movement, the anti-gentrification groups have successfully drawn the most

attention to the current situation in Boyle Heights. They disagree with any redevelopment

initiative suggested by the city or its politicians, and they also disagree with the

*gente*fication movement which professes an ideology of revitalization without

displacement. Importantly, the anti-gentrification movement relates back to my central

argument of gentrification being viewed as a whiteness project because of their strict

stance against all gentrification initiatives. By claiming to reject all revitalization efforts,

they engage in a politic that links gentrification to cultural erasure and the forceful

removal of working-class bodies of color. In this section I explore the aspects of this

movement as a legitimate counter to all revitalization initiatives. First, there are two key

areas that highlight this movement's effectiveness: their combative and militant tactics,

and their enforcing of a "zero compromise" agenda. Second, while they are a strong

movement in Boyle Heights, an ineffective aspect of the movement is their major focus

on small businesses (the ones they call artwashing establishments) rather than also

focusing on other agents of gentrification.

First, the reason they have been so effective has been their confrontational tactics

used to hold gentrifiers accountable for their direct role in displacing working-class

people of color. While most of the press has painted them negatively, these groups

continue to reject calls for civil dialogue. Having aggressive militant tactics, the anti-

114

gentrification movement has presented a clear statement against gentrification and its

connection to "revitalization" and "beautification." 356 Mission was the major target of

all anti-artwashing protests initiated by the anti-gentrification movement. They were

faced with protestors outside their front door countless times, including: the 4-hour

march, the protest of their APAN meeting, and the OVAS' Black Mass procession.

Because of these constant protests, artists like Nizan Shaked (whose statement opened

this chapter) listened to the critiques of gentrification and decided to align themselves

with the activists. However, for the purpose of this chapter, I will analyze their tactics as

employed through two different public protests: first, the 4-hour communal eviction

notice march, and second, the protesting of 356 Mission owner Laura Owens' first solo

art exhibit at the Whitney Museum in New York City.

In the evening of September 17, 2016, Union de Vecinos, Los Angeles Tenants

Union, DBH, and BHAAAD took to the streets to protest the slew of newly opened art

gallery spaces in the western part of Boyle Heights. This march was initiated by these

community activists as a way to outline the key areas of gentrification in Boyle Heights

while also targeting the people that they felt were responsible for these gentrification

initiatives. During the march, the activists used megaphones to chant "Fuera! Fuera!

Fuera!"[25] as they arrived to each artwashing establishment in their barrio (Miranda,

2016). Beyond these tactics, the activists also hung communal eviction notices on all

gentrifying businesses. The eviction notice read:

> You are hereby notified by the people of Boyle Heights, who have fought for
> decades to preserve affordable housing for low-income families, reduced violence
> in the neighborhood, and have given their own labor and resources to make Boyle

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[25] Spanish for "Out! Out! Out!"

> Heights a culturally vibrant community, that you must remove your business from the neighborhood immediately. [Signed] The people of Boyle Heights. (Wagley, 2016)

This march coincided with the grand opening of PSSST Gallery which ultimately closed its doors before it reached its one-year anniversary in Boyle Heights. In the media, PSSST's closure was presented as caused by their small non-profit business model which could not survive the slew of boycotts from the anti-gentrification movement. However, their closure was also viewed as not having a huge impact on other galleries that were for profit, like 356 Mission or Nicodim Contemporary. For instance, Mihail Nicodim of Nicodim Contemporary stated, "I don't think this boycott affected commercially any of the other galleries…PSSST is different if they depend on their business to be from fundraisers…I'm pretty sure none of the galleries are affected by this protest" (Mejia, & Saldivar, 2017). However, in the process of writing this chapter, 356 Mission declared on their social media accounts that they would be closing their doors at the end of May 2018. Even though the gallery argued that they were leaving because they chose not to renew their lease, BHAAAD along with DBH argue that their aggressive tactics led to 356's eventual closure.

One of the most influential protests that will be explored in this chapter was the protest at the Whiney Museum. When Owens had her first solo exhibit at the Whitney Museum in New York City, DBH and BHAAAD flew to New York to team up with local anti-gentrification groups to confront the reception. Positioned at the entrance of the museum, protestors created a picket line with signs that read "Defend Your Hood From NYC to LA" and "Laura Owens + Gavin Brown Fuera de Boyle Heights" (Sutton, 2017).

Inside the museum, DBH member Nancy Meza and BHAAAD member Angel Luna read a letter to Laura Owens from the women of the Pico Aliso Projects. At the end of the reading, the activists chanted inside the museum, "Laura Owens, Gavin Brown, our hoods unite to take you down! Leave our hoods and do what's right! Give your keys to Boyle Heights!" (Alianza Anti-Artwashing, 2017). In these protest, activists were not willing to have a civil discussion about gentrification with artists; they have not been reserved when it comes to disrupting civil environments like museums and/or meetings by telling predominantly white audiences, "Fuck all you guys" (Stromberg, 2017a), and/or silencing patrons by yelling, "White boy I am talking at the moment" (Alianza Anti-Artwashing, 2017). These abrasive and "uncivil" linguistic tactics follow their mission to make the Eastside a hostile space for the incoming white population complicit in the displacement of working-class people of color. As Luna stated, "our emphasis is not on hipsters and white people walking our neighbourhood but when they come here…perhaps these folks should feel uncomfortable. Boyle Heights is not a poverty zoo for wealthy people from west L.A." (Carroll, 2016). Together, these groups have used their aggressive militant tactics to draw attention and disseminate their viewpoint on gentrification.

Beyond their confrontational tactics in protests and picket lines against artwashing establishments, they have also been successful in enacting a "zero compromise" agenda against gentrification. The mariachi, a Mexican folk attire worn by musicians, have become a symbol synonymous with this form of protest in Boyle Heights. The cultural hub of Boyle Heights is found in the Mariachi Plaza, which was named after decades of

mariachi groups standing along the plaza hoping to get hired for a local party. In the

spring of 2017, many of these musicians whom live in a neighboring apartment complex

were given a notice by their new landlord notifying them of an 80% hike in their monthly

rent (McGahan, 2017). This led to a strict rent strike sponsored predominantly by L.A.

Tenants Union and Union de Vecinos. The strike was propelled by the fact that their rent

was risen substantially overnight without having any improvements to their living

quarters. After almost a year of refusing to both pay rent and vacate their apartments, the

musicians were able to sign a new agreement to stay:

> the tenants have agreed to backpay a portion of the rent withheld during the strike, and to pay a roughly 14 percent price increase moving forward. In return, they'll get a new 42-month lease with yearly rent hikes capped at 5 percent. They'll also be able to collectively bargain for new leases as a renter's union. (Chiland, 2018)

Having a "zero compromise" agenda might sound like a fruitless endeavor; however, like

the mariachi, Leonardo Vilchis (member of Union de Vecinos) has stressed, "the only

way you can start this conversation is by saying no…The only way we are heard is when

you say no" (Miranda, 2016). Thus, by starting the discussion against gentrification and

displacement with a resounding "no," activists refuse gentrifiers the authority to structure

the terms of the discussion and instead, situate their anti-displacement agenda at the

forefront.

Yet, the anti-gentrification movement is not free of being ineffective at

completely stopping gentrification in their barrio. There is one major reason for their

shortcoming that needs to be explored: their primary focus has been small business

owners rather than the property owners which ultimately have the power to decide who is

allowed to rent the property. A major target for DBH has been what they call the

"artwashing" of gentrification. Even though their website is filled with articles and reports on the connections between art and cultural spaces to development companies (DBH, 2016; 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; 2018a; 2018b), they fail to be as aggressive on the development companies as they are on the gallery owners. For instance, during their November 2017 public meeting DBH presented their findings surrounding the artwashing galleries' connections with Vera Campbell (a major developer buying up property in Boyle Heights). However, after they showed their evidence, their plan of action was the continued boycott of these artwashing establishments, while not focusing equal energy or attention on the landlords and developing firms connected to these art gallery locations. During the same meeting, when they gave time to Union de Vecinos to speak about the mariachi strike, there was a direct call to action that involved disseminating the landlord's information (i.e. phone, twitter, and address). This uneven approach to activism fails to address the entire system of gentrification. Their boycotts have effectively forced three galleries to close their doors, but Boyle Heights property continues to be bought by developers, and the city's leaders continue to support the redevelopment of the barrio. By not addressing the land owners as vehemently as the artwashing gallerists, this movement fails at accomplishing their goal of successfully halting gentrification in East L.A.

This movement has received substantial criticism for attacking "amenities" of gentrification rather than the developers that hire these "amenities" to beautify the neighborhood for redevelopment. When confronted with this critique, Angel Luna has argued, "we believe that attacking the galleries is a useful strategy because we are directly attacking the amenities that developers are trying to use to attract new people into

Boyle Heights" (Delgadillo, 2017). Central to their tirade against artwashing locations has been predicated on art galleries handing over their keys to the community in order for them to decide what takes its place. This ultimate call for community ownership has yet to be fulfilled.

Conclusion

The critiques against gentrification are complex. In this chapter's exploration of Boyle Heights' contestations of gentrification, it becomes clear that no one is completely free of being complicit in the further gentrification of their disinvested blighted barrio. Consequently, this enforces the importance of viewing gentrification as a whiteness project because the complicity allows for the continuation of the redevelopment of the Eastside. *Gente*fication empowers the youth while also making the community proud of what their own *gente* can accomplish. Still, as a counter to gentrification, *gente*fication fails to make any impact on the overall progression of gentrification in the Eastside. In the end, *gente*fication becomes a mirror copy of gentrification. Unlike this movement, the anti-gentrification movement, led by DBH and BHAAAD, has been a powerful counter movement against gentrification. Even though anti-gentrification groups have not successfully stopped gentrification in Boyle Heights, they have substantially slowed it down by employing militant and confrontational tactics. Since their inception, these groups have mostly focused on confronting the "artwashing" façade and only within the first couple of months of 2018 have they begun to integrate an action plan geared at combating gallery owners, developers, and politicians with equal force. While the anti-gentrification movement has fallen short of successfully stopping gentrification in Boyle

Heights, their networking with other anti-gentrification groups in different states has only just begun. This exciting new venture connecting anti-gentrification groups from New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles must be explored for if successful, this national coalition might deliver a substantial blow to this process of urban renewal.

As previously stated, at the center of these movements against gentrification lies a pride in their barrio and all the community has been able to accomplish as an ethnic group for the past decades. In this way, these movements understand that gentrification is instrumentally a whiteness project since its ultimate goal is to create a new white neighborhood through the bulldozing of a neighborhood of color:

> all over this city, people create these completely artificial spaces and call them communities, but we've had that here for the last 100 years…It's one of the few places in L.A. where you can go to the doctor, go to the bank, go to the pharmacy and get your groceries and stop at a bakery just by walkin'. (Medina, 2013)

The current struggle to protect the barrio from erasure is the realization that even though Boyle Heights was shaped through racist laws and ideologies that forced people of color to live in ghettos, these oppressive spaces have been transformed into neighborhoods people are proud to call their home. The issues of el barrio are multiple; however, gentrification will not solve them. If any anti-gentrification movement is hoping to have any lasting impact on gentrification initiatives, they must specifically target the root problem of gentrification: revitalization is only intended for a future (physically and/or economically) white population, while spiraling working-class people of color into yet another disinvested part of the city.

121

CONCLUSION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

You see we're…making way for something new…But sometimes, just
sometimes, you have to get your hands dirty to build something beautiful.
—L.A. Mayor Garcetti (#101SlowJam, 2016)

The differential capacity or resources…of each group, as well as the way they are
perceived by others, help to facilitate or obstruct their opportunities of power and
influence in the production and/or transformation of built forms. The shape of the
city, where people live, where they work, their movements and relationships are
influenced by this conflict and spatial and social changes are its product.
—Vicky Muñiz (1998)

In 2014 when I temporarily left East L.A. to continue my graduate work, the

gentrification frontier had just solidified its foot in the Eastside. Since then, Highland

Park and Lincoln Heights have both fallen to gentrification's persuasive pull for

"beautification." As a neighborhood, Boyle Heights has fought the hardest against these

revitalization initiatives and have thus presented the other two remaining communities

possible pathways to, at the very least, slow down gentrification. When I returned to East

L.A. in 2017, the gentrification frontier in Los Angeles had expanded beyond the

Eastside. The entire city was littered with cranes, slowly inching closer to a future Los

Angeles. For instance, in 2022 the city of Los Angeles will host the National Football

League's Super Bowl by building a new football stadium in Inglewood, CA that will be

worth $2.6 billion (Farmer, 2017). Further, in 2028 L.A. will once again play host for the

summer Olympics which currently has an estimated budget of about $5.3 billion

(Wharton, 2017). History informs us that the last time Los Angles hosted the Olympics,

East L.A., and other barrios and ghettos around the city, were highly criminalized which consequently led to one of the biggest urban revolutions in U.S. history (Zirin, 2012). Propelled by these two high profile events, L.A. is looking to "clean up its character" by multiplying its revitalization projects. This current situation in Los Angeles incentivizes further research exploring *gentrification as a whiteness project.* Therefore, for this concluding chapter, I will summarize the concept of *gentrification as a whiteness project*, and will lastly present the future research projects that will continue to push the theoretical intervention presented in this dissertation.

A Whiteness Project

In this project, my aim was to problematize current trends in gentrification scholarship by offering an answer to the research question running throughout this project: if gentrification in places like East Los Angeles is considered the "beautification" and "revitalization" of a community why does this process not benefit the working-class people of color already in these neighborhoods? Through this dissertation, I argued that gentrification never benefits the current residents of a disinvested neighborhood because the process of revitalization was never meant to enrich their livelihood. In fact, gentrification, as the process of reinvesting in a disinvested neighborhood, should be understood as the process of cleaning the city by removing its people of color. In this way, I presented the concept of *gentrification as a whiteness project* as a way to highlight the ways in which the process of gentrification continuously (re)creates new urban places at the expense of working-class neighborhoods of color. Through this project, I argued that gentrification must incorporate a clear understanding of whiteness, which is to say

123

both race and class, if scholars are to have a more coherent and complex understanding of this urban phenomenon. While many cities across the nation and around the world argue that gentrification will help revitalize and cure blighted neighborhoods, this project shows that the ultimate goal of gentrification is to revitalize neighborhoods for a future (physically and/or economically) white population and not for its current working-class residents of color. Therefore, using gentrification as a whiteness project as my foundation, I consolidated three major threads of scholarship to help our understanding of gentrification: (1) capitalism must be understood as a raced project in the U.S.; (2) the process of racial displacement is not separate from gentrification; and (3) the locality of gentrification must be articulated with the global processes of white supremacy, colonialism, globalization, capitalism, and neoliberalism.

Since this dissertation aims to problematize current trends of gentrification scholarship by presenting a complex analysis of this process, I selected three different sites in order to understand gentrification from different nodal points of analysis. Specifically, by employing critical and rhetorical methods, I explored gentrification by analyzing the three points (materiality, bodies, and movement) that Dickinson & Aiello (2016) argue can help unpack "the communication produced in, by, and through the city" (p. 1301). By focusing on these three points of analysis I presented an initial rhetorical cartography to help explain the manifestation of gentrification as it is being implemented on the Eastside. In this way, the goal was to understand how the city created new urban built environments for gentrification (Chapter 1), how artists and beneficiaries of a revitalized neighborhood used their bodies to (re)center their right to gentrify any

124

neighborhood (Chapter 2), and finally, which movements were formed in order to counter these claims for gentrification (Chapter 3). Ultimately, by analyzing these three different sites of gentrification I aimed to follow Hayes (2016) in mapping out a critical rhetorical cartography of L.A.'s gentrification in order to highlight the ways that power, subjectivity, and place-making are negotiated.

In chapter one, I specifically focused on the relationship between the urban built environment and gentrification. By analyzing the replacement of the Sixth-Street Bridge, I argued that the revitalization of the urban built environment speaks to which bodies the city values most. In order to analyze the connection between the Sixth-Street Bridge and the continued gentrification of Boyle Heights, I merged communication theory (specifically the link between communication and transportation) and L.A. studies. These voices informed my decision to define communication as any media that grants certain bodies, ideas, and viewpoints more liberty to move across space and time. This then offered the foundation to argue that the redevelopment of the Sixth-Street Bridge can be viewed as a form of communication that speaks to and about the racialized forms of mobility as they are materialized in a gentrifying Los Angeles. In essence, the city of Los Angeles used the vulnerability of an old bridge to initiate the transformation of the urban landscape away from servicing a predominantly working-class neighborhood of color into a cityscape anticipating white urban leisure and tourism.

In the second chapter, I focused on the artist-led gentrification that local activists in Boyle Heights have called "artwashing." Artwashing was presented using a particular art aesthetic to mask the inherent violent process of gentrification by fixating on the ways

that incoming artists beautify the disinvested streets of a neighborhood of color. Using

chapter one as foundation, rather than focus on the artists' transformation of the urban

built environment, this chapter focused on understanding how an artwashing frontier of

gentrification continued to revitalize the barrio even when there was strong opposition to

their presence in the Eastside. Essential to this analysis was the theoretical paradigm of

whiteness and the politics of civility. Consequently, I found two ways that artwashing can

sustain the continued revitalization of Boyle Heights even in the presence of contestation

from local residents: artwashing (re)centers white people (particularly white artists)

within discussion of East LA's gentrification, and also, the presence of artwashing

galleries presented a material discourse about gentrification that is strictly enforced

through constant calls for civility. In this way, the city of Los Angeles is viewed as

actively working on re-making the blighted neighborhood of Boyle Heights through the

strategic use of art that, they hope, can effectively cleanse the Eastside of its people of

color.

Even though the artwashing movement has masked some of the violence inflicted

on residents of color, Boyle Heights residents have not given up on fighting to stay in the

home they have created. Therefore, in the third and final chapter, I specifically focused

on the anti-gentrification sentiment in the Eastside. Moreover, the movements of

*gente*fication and anti-gentrification were explored since these two movements were

initiated to counter the city's gentrification initiatives on the Eastside by employing their

ethnic and working-class identity at the center of their opposition. At the crux of the

contestation was a drive to defend both Latina/o/x bodies from forceful removal and the

erasure of brown culture from this part of the city. However, while *gente*fication was

created as a counter gentrification movement, it became obvious that there was no other

distinction between *gente*fication and gentrification other than the ethnic identity of the

people revitalizing a neighborhood. Because of this, and the fact that the anti-

gentrification movement has yet to effectively halt gentrification in the Eastside, I argued

that both of these movements are complicit in the continued gentrification of their barrio.

Therefore, using an ethnic and class identity as the major catalyst to fend off

gentrification initiatives alone is an ineffective way to address the macro level of

gentrification's continued extermination of neighborhoods of color.

Future Endeavors

Future research projects can continue to push a serious consideration of

gentrification as a whiteness project. There are two major points of this dissertation I

wish I had more time to flesh out; namely, problematizing the relationship between art

and gentrification and having a more thorough analysis of the movements against

gentrification.

In chapter two of this project, I specifically focused my analysis on the artwashing

of Boyle Heights. However, in the beginning of the chapter, the conversation had to be

contextualized not only on Boyle Heights but the Arts District as well. Upon revising the

project, there was a realization that I had an explicitly positive outlook on "art" in the

Arts District, yet on the Eastside, "art" became a site of contestation. While the chapter

argued that all art is not artwashing and therefore "art" should not be viewed as either "all

good" or "all bad," it would be interesting to explore the relationship between art and

127

gentrification in three different projects: the Arts District's artists-led anti-gentrification movement, Casa 0101's art projects in Boyle Heights, and Self-Help Graphics. First, the Arts District offers a vital context to explore the complexity of art and gentrification since this neighborhood is being revitalized by art's involvement with developing companies and the victims of this process are mostly other artists. In this study I would like to once again understand the historicity of a neighborhood in order to truly unpack the current eviction of artists for high-end luxury apartment complexes.

Second, in the late summer of 2017, Casa 0101 provided the community of Boyle Heights with a production by local playwright Oscar Arguello titled, *Sideways Fences* ('Sideways Fences,' 2017). An analysis of this play, in conjunction with its Casa 0101 affiliation can offer insight into the ways that art can be used to specifically address the gentrification of neighborhoods of color from an artist of color's perspective. Third, in Chapter Two, it was inferred that local anti-gentrification groups had identified Self-Help Graphics (SHG) as an artwashing establishment. SHG has been a staple of Chicana/o/x art for over fifty years in East LA and the accusations of SHG perpetuating the gentrification of Boyle Heights have been well-documented by both local newspapers and the anti-gentrification groups. This research project would provide a fruitful endeavor to continue problematizing not only art's relationship with gentrification but the complicity of Latina/o/x artists as well.

Beyond the focus on art, I am interested in further exploring the counter movements created in the Eastside against the city's gentrification initiatives. While it is clear that the *gente*fication movement is no different than gentrification, this movement

has achieved some victories on behalf of working-class residents of Boyle Heights.

Specifically, it would be important to analyze the East L.A. Community Corporation

(ELACC) as a *gente*fying organization that advocates for redevelopment only if it will

ensure low-income housing. For instance, in April 2018, the ELACC was responsible for

the opening of a complex, named Cielito Lindo,[26] which would house fifty low-income

families ("Mayor Garcetti," 2018). The ELACC caught my attention well after the

chapter on *gente*fication was written so an in-depth analysis of this organization can offer

a different outlook on the *gente*fication movement.

Further, the anti-gentrification movement needs to also be closely analyzed in the

coming months and years. The material that I used for the third chapter ended with their

protest of Laura Owens' exhibit in November of 2017. Since then Defend Boyle Heights

(DBH) has energized their movement against gentrification with the closure of 356

Mission (which was mentioned in Chapter Three) and the sudden announced closure of

UTA Artist Space in April of 2018. In the last couple of months DBH has begun to create

a network of anti-gentrification groups across the nation while also refining their tactics

to contest artists, gallery owners, land owners, city politicians, and gentrification

sympathizers. However, while this further research can be rhetorical in nature, I am still

passionate about merging academic scholarship with social justice activism.

Initially, gentrification was a topic of discussion among family and friends in Los

Angeles. This topic would be brought up after someone would point out the arrival of a

new business, service, or amenity on the Eastside. In short, my interest in gentrification

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[26] "Cielito lindo" is Spanish for "Beautiful sky." However, "Cielito Lindo" is also a famous Mexican mariachi song.

was initiated by a fear of being evicted and the ultimate fear of my neighborhood's erasure. The discussions over gentrification only intensified as I began work at the University of Denver. I now had a new vocabulary to speak about the nature of gentrification. However, it became clear early on that there was a different understanding about gentrification from an academic standpoint than from a local standpoint of a resident facing possible displacement. A central component of *gentrification as a whiteness project* was to uncover the ways that gentrification was being used by the city of Los Angeles to forcefully remove people of color and (re)make a neighborhood on top of the existing Latina/o/x barrio of Boyle Heights.

Just like in 1928, when the Los Angeles Plaza was being restored as a Mexican tourist destination for the city, today Latinas/os/xs are faced with the daunting reality that their culture can only be accepted if it is commodified and made profitable for the city of Los Angeles. For Mexicans, as well as other people of color,

> The lesson was clear: Mexicans were to be assigned a place in the mythic past of Los Angeles – one that could be relegated to a quaint section of a city designed to delight tourists and antiquarians. Real Mexicans were out of sight and increasingly out of mind…physically further away from the center of power… . (Sánchez, 1993, p. 225-226)

While the fight against gentrification is complex and convoluted, I am still passionate about merging social justice advocacy with my academic scholarship. *Gentrification as a whiteness project* presents an avenue to challenge the assumption that gentrification can save urban decay and its current residents by introducing revitalization initiatives. Future scholarship on gentrification must support local anti-gentrification movements and fight towards stopping this urban renewal process.

130

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