ESTE LUGAR SI IMPORTA:

HERITAGE CONSERVATION IN UNINCORPORATED EAST LOS ANGELES

by

Laura A. Dominguez

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ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

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Abstract

One of the greatest challenges facing traditional historic preservation in the United States today is the task of integrating a more inclusive definition of cultural heritage in underrepresented communities into the broader movement. As this thesis will demonstrate, the tangible and intangible heritage of Unincorporated East Los Angeles and the burgeoning grassroots movement to safeguard it provide the field with powerful insights into the needs of twenty-first century ethnic communities.

Characterized by a dynamic Chicano population and a long history of social activism, East Los Angeles currently lacks a formal preservation framework, leaving decisions about significance and interpretation in the hands of the community. Community-based heritage conservation and its evolving practices raise a number of questions about cultural memory, authenticity, and social authority, critically reshaping the relationship between place and identity. These changes are particularly visible in East Los Angeles, where heritage conservation belongs to a broader social and political movement over local agency within Los Angeles County.

How do the unique cultural resources found in East Los Angeles produce a new method of recognizing, understanding, and conserving local heritage, and how do residents and activists interpret the significance of those resources? How have scholars depicted the relationship between place and identity in East Los Angeles, and how does an emphasis on the built environment and its associated intangible heritage redefine that relationship? Finally, how does community-based heritage conservation definitively alter the scope of traditional preservation, and how can the field adapt to these changes?

Introduction

Since the early stages of the modern preservation movement, the essential principles governing the safeguarding of significant historic or cultural resources have related to questions of what should be preserved and for whom. The first question traditionally has concerned the protection of noteworthy and well-loved architecture or places of great historical importance, with the beneficiaries being a generalized American public. As the influences of community-based histories have emerged within the field, with greater emphasis on the everyday social and cultural practices of local inhabitants, preservationists have had the responsibility of redefining interpretive practices in order to accommodate a diverse range of themes in both tangible and intangible resources. While existing legislation and practice has been highly successful in protecting the nation's rich architectural heritage, it has failed to adapt to the needs of communities whose unique histories have previously gone unrecognized. Within the United States, the heritage of the diverse population more generally known as the Latino community is a particularly compelling case for the development of a place-based approach to preservation that relies primarily upon community interpretation.

The complex cultural and geographic boundaries of the Latino community in the United States can be no better investigated than in the landscape east of the Los Angeles River, where identity is irrevocably linked to a transnational and multiethnic experience of assimilation and differentiation. The unincorporated area known as East Los Angeles, a region administered by the County of Los Angeles, is composed of the historically distinct communities of City Terrace, Maravilla, and Belvedere, though residents

maintain significant cultural ties to the surrounding neighborhoods of Boyle Heights, Lincoln Heights, and El Sereno and the Cities of Monterey Park, Montebello, Commerce, and Whittier. David Diaz writes that East Los Angeles is an environment "created in its own cultural image":

> There is no other barrio that compares in geography, history, symbolic influence, and/or urban form…Its unparalleled Chicana/o urban geography, its history of racism in urban policy, barrio expansion, middle-class flight, and socio-cultural constitution all give the greater Eastside of L.A. an important role in the social history of land use and planning.[1]

The overlapping social and cultural themes in history of East Los Angeles, including urban renewal, political activism, and transplanted cultural production, are all evident in the physical landscape of the community. While the urban environment has changed dramatically over the last century due to demographic shifts and county development practices, threatening many of the local historic and cultural resources, the residents of East Los Angeles possess a long tradition of social activism that includes a deeply rooted desire to protect the community's heritage and identity. The regional landscape raises the following questions: How does the built environment communicate its meaning through the stories of the people who live and work in a given place, and how is the changing preservation movement connected to broader demographic shifts and cultural challenges in the United States?

Mexican settlement in East Los Angeles can be traced to the 1910s and 1920s, during a period of rapid industrial development in the area known as Sonoratown within

[1] David Diaz, *Barrio Urbanism: Chicanos, Planning, and American Cities* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2005), 232. Please see Chapter Two for a thorough examination of existing scholarship on East Los Angeles.

the City of Los Angeles. Workers living in Sonoratown, the traditional barrio located in the original Plaza area in Downtown, moved just east of the city limits to the newly established community of Belvedere, drawn by the availability of inexpensive housing and job opportunities. While the community would soon grow to be one of the largest Mexican urban areas in the United States, its early history can be characterized by the presence of a strong multiethnic population that included African American, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Jewish and Italian residents. This multicultural composition would last until World War II, when the suburban development of much of Los Angeles led to the out-migration of countless residents, leaving the Mexican-American community in the unincorporated neighborhood.

In addition to these demographic changes, East Los Angeles would experience the rise of a powerful resistance movement in the postwar era. In the 1960s, activists organized to protest widespread social discrimination against Mexican Americans in what would be called as the Chicano Movement. Characterized by a sense of nationalism amid a lack of political representation, the movement focused in part on a reinterpretation of Mexican and Mexican American history that recast the Southwest as an ancient homeland. The idea of identity and its relationship to place was an integral component of the language of the movement. In 1968, students and teachers from East Los Angeles high schools carried out a series of protests known as the East Los Angeles Walkouts or the Chicano Blowouts, which focused largely on educational inequality in local schools, but also reflected more widespread discontent with the restricted civil rights of local residents and with the high death tolls among minority soldiers in the Vietnam War.

In 1970, the Chicano Movement achieved a heightened presence in East Los Angeles with the Chicano Moratorium riot. Angered by the disproportionate number of Mexican Americans participating in the Vietnam War, more than 20,000 protestors marched through the streets of East Los Angeles on August 29, ending in a peaceful rally in Laguna Park.[2] A minor altercation at a nearby liquor store triggered a massive response from the local sheriffs, leading to a violent confrontation between protestors and deputies in the park and the surrounding neighborhood. The clash ended after several hours, during which three people, including prominent Mexican American journalist Ruben Salazar, were killed. Salazar, who had stopped at the nearby Silver Dollar Bar on a break from his reporting of the protest, was struck in the head by a tear gas canister that a deputy fired into the crowd at the bar. Although the deputy was never prosecuted in Salazar's death, witnesses and other members of the community maintain today that the act was intended to silence a vocal representative of the Chicano community.[3] While the protest had begun as a peaceful call for change, the Chicano Moratorium ultimately reinforced the belief among many activists that such change in East Los Angeles, including equality before the law, would depend upon a radical reinterpretation of power and identity from within the local community.

The Chicano Movement expressed an idea that had long concerned residents in East Los Angeles. Because of the community's status as an unincorporated area,

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[2] Arnoldo De León and Richard Griswold del Castillo, *North to Aztlán: A History of Mexican Americans in the United States* (Woodbridge, CT: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 167.

[3] *Los Angeles Times* columnist Hector Tobar recently reinvestigated Ruben Salazar's death: "Finally, transparency in the Ruben Salazar Case," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 August 2011. Last accessed 12 March 2012 <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/aug/05/local/la-me/0805-tobar-20110805>

decision-making power resided with the often-unsympathetic County of Los Angeles. Over the course of the twentieth century, local business leaders and residents tried numerous times to establish cityhood for East Los Angeles, though they were unsuccessful each time. At the heart of these efforts to incorporate were issues relating to self-governance, community preservation and heritage. Threatened by the power of surrounding cities to annex strategic portions of the East Los Angeles, proponents of cityhood argued that political self-determination for the community would not only secure the basic rights and needs that residents had long lacked, but that it would also ensure the social and cultural agency of the community over its own past and future.[4]

This desire for community empowerment from within East Los Angeles is essential to understanding the role of heritage activism in the area. Because the County does not currently have a preservation ordinance, significant places within East Los Angeles are vulnerable to the forces of development and neglect, although a unanimous vote of the County Supervisors in early 2012 to create a countywide plan may soon allow for certain protections. External stereotypes of the community, based upon highly publicized cases of gang related and political violence, support the idea that East Los Angeles lacks a heritage worth preserving. Two highly researched cultural resources surveys of the eastside performed by the East Los Angeles Community Union in 1979 and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in 1995 have demonstrated the vast error of that logic, but the absence of a proactive local framework for preserving those resources has severely undermined genuine attempts to protect them.

[4] In February 2012, the Los Angeles County Local Agency Formation Commission rejected the most recent incorporation proposal set forth by the East Los Angeles Residents Association.

Out of a determination to counteract these dismissive images of East Los Angeles and to celebrate the rich, yet complex history of the community, the recently formed Eastside Heritage Consortium has investigated creative grassroots methods of conserving and interpreting local history. Composed of residents, local preservation advocates, cultural workers, and representatives from the Maravilla Historical Society, Persona Anima Productions, and the Los Angeles Conservancy, which is the largest preservation organization in the country, the Consortium developed a simple survey in late 2010 that was designed to activate the community voice in the critical discussion of which places matter most in the history and culture of East Los Angeles. While the initial goal was to produce and publicize a list of significant sites, the project evolved into a more comprehensive preservation plan as the members explored the possibilities of a place-based approach to heritage conservation, including the creation of a heritage trail and localized history curriculum for local high school students. The movement to elevate the visibility of community heritage is concurrent with the most recent attempt to incorporate East Los Angeles, and activists involved in both projects have recognized the role of heritage conservation in augmenting the case for cityhood.

In emphasizing the role of "community" in determining the meaning of place, the Consortium has broadly defined the stakeholders in the movement to document local heritage. While certain groups within East Los Angeles, such as the East Los Angeles Residents' Association, have been involved throughout the survey process, the Consortium has sought to elevate the idea of community to exceed the limits of a single organization. Ultimately, the community consists of those individuals and groups,

including past and present residents and people with exceptional memories of the area, who hold in common a relationship to the place-based history and culture of the unincorporated area of East Los Angeles. The certain practices of conserving local heritage specifically affect certain figures within the community, such as educators, business owners, and civic leaders, but the fundamental goal of this project is to achieve recognition for the vibrant cultural heritage of the community as a whole for the primary sake of that community.

Figure 1: Community members pose at the Maravilla Handball Court for the National Trust of Historic Preservation's "This Place Matters" campaign. The National Trust has also translated its signs into Spanish as "Este lugar si importa" or "Este lugar es importante."
Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Conservancy.

The language of this heritage movement is particularly important, and this thesis takes great care to uncover the need for an evolution in terms of how preservationists contend with the vocabulary of heritage and identity. For the purpose of this thesis,

several terms should be specified. Although the name "East Los Angeles" is often ascribed generally to the larger eastside of Los Angeles, this paper will limit its use to the unincorporated, census-designated area bordered by the cities of Los Angeles, Monterey Park, Montebello, and Commerce unless otherwise indicated. In addition, because this paper will argue for the adoption of the language of cultural" or "heritage conservation over the traditional terms of historic preservation, both phrases will be used to encompass different sets of practices and philosophies. Given that advocates of cultural or heritage conservation have not definitively embraced "cultural conservation" versus "heritage conservation," the two expressions will be used interchangeably.

One of the essential questions of this thesis is the authority of cultural identity in East Los Angeles, where the divergent use of the terms "Mexican American" and "Chicana/o" among historians and community members plays an important role in defining local identity. Chapter Two will explore these identifiers in greater depth, but it is worth noting here that the specificity of these terms, which have different implications regarding race, ethnicity, assimilation and cultural agency, counters the homogenizing assumptions and power structures of the labels "Hispanic" and "Latino." Given the intentions of this paper, both "Mexican American" and "Chicana/o" will be used at appropriate instances both for purposes of inclusivity and in order to encapsulate the difficulty in interpreting the identity of East Los Angeles and in establishing preferred vocabulary, even among individual members of the community. Because identity is hardly fixed in time or place, particularly in reference to such a diverse population, this

paper will seek to assign terms in a manner that best represents the content at hand while fully acknowledging the limitations of these identifiers.

The complex cultural heritage of East Los Angeles offers members of the American preservation community an excellent opportunity to understand the role of heritage conservation in empowering underrepresented communities to document and interpret their own histories. The existing field of preservation, which accentuates the importance of architectural heritage in determining sites of historic or cultural significance, supports an imbalanced relationship of authorship between community members and professionals in depicting meaningful stories and places. Cultural or heritage conservation, with its comprehensive approach to tangible and intangible community resources, depends upon place-driven definitions of space and memory that give community members the necessary opportunity to determine how their heritage should be safeguarded and shared. Using East Los Angeles as a foundation, this thesis will explore the ways in which reinvigorated grassroots efforts in unexpected communities and neighborhoods are changing the relevance and role of preservation in the national cultural narrative.

Chapter One will examine the scope of traditional preservation regulations and practices, setting the groundwork for the innovation of community or grassroots heritage actions. It will also contend with the role of cultural memory in shaping community-based history and interpretive strategies, as well as the importance of linking the documentation of intangible cultural resources to the more traditional study of the built environment.

Chapter Two will focus on the heritage movement in East Los Angeles, comparing the methodologies and outcomes of the Eastside Heritage Consortium's work with previous local historic resources surveys. This discussion of the community heritage movement will have its foundation in a detailed analysis of the historiography of East Los Angeles that concentrates on how existing scholarship has framed its interpretation of identity and place, outlining the principle themes for a thorough study of the built environment and associated intangible cultural forms.

Finally, Chapter Three will investigate the role of grassroots heritage activism in revitalizing understudied or underrepresented communities through carefully chosen comparisons to East Los Angeles, along with a consideration of the leadership of international agencies in developing wide-reaching methods for including community agency in adopted conservation policies. It will also identify specific cultural, social and economic methods that similar communities have used to recognize or represent local heritage, such as National Heritage Areas, heritage trails, and memory performances. The chapter will conclude with an overview of how current trends within the national preservation movement signal a newfound determination to integrate the roles of professionals and community members in protecting local heritage.

Chapter 1
Cultural Memory and Identity: Understanding Heritage Conservation in Underrepresented Communities

> Self Help Graphics and Art is significant "because it's dedicated to creating art that reflected the cultural values and spirit of the local Chicano community."[1]

Contemporary historic preservation in urban communities requires a thorough evaluation of the meaning of geography, memory, and culture in defining the reaches and challenges of community heritage. Established preservation practices have led to the protection and responsible reuse of thousands of significant historic and cultural buildings across the nation, but the pressing issues regarding the safeguarding of vulnerable resources of multicultural communities, or groups of people who form a collective according to shared memory, culture, and sense of place, have exposed the shortcomings in twentieth century preservation laws and guidelines. Furthermore, the professionalization of the field over the last several decades has complicated the role of communities in documenting and conserving place-based history. This chapter will explore the ways in which a community-based approach to heritage activism that recognizes the interdependency of tangible and intangible resources has the potential to alter dramatically the manner in which preservation occurs within the United States.

Traditional Historic Preservation and its Evolution

Historic preservation has its roots in the efforts of upper-class women during the nineteenth century to protect and to commemorate significant colonial monuments.[2] The

[1] Lesley Casares, Survey Results, Eastside Heritage Consortium (2011).

movement consisted solely of grassroots organizing until the twentieth century, when Congress began to pass legislation governing the management of historic resources. In 1906, Theodore Roosevelt signed the Antiquities Act into law, which gave the executive branch the power to inhibit the use of certain federally owned public lands for the purpose of conserving nationally significant natural, historic, cultural and archaeological resources.[3] In 1916, the Department of the Interior created the National Park Service as an umbrella program designed to regulate public space and oversee national preservation activity. Despite changes in preservation law over the last century, the National Park Service continues to manage federal preservation programs.

During the Great Depression, Congress enacted the Historic Sites Act of 1935, which explicitly defined the federal government's intent "to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings, and objects of national significance…"[4] The law expanded the authority of the National Park Service and the Secretary of the Interior to include the management of historic resources surveys, including the Historic American Building Survey (HABS), the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), and the Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS). These survey programs employed out-of-work

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[2] See William J. Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (Pittstown, NJ: The Main Street Press, 1988) and James Marston Fitch, *Historic Preservation: Curatorial Management of the Built World* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990) for a thorough examination of traditional preservation language, philosophy and practice. Fitch in particular discusses the social consequences of preservation, specifically in regards to the disparity between architectural monuments and vernacular landscapes.

[3] Ronald F. Lee, *The Antiquities Act of 1906*, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. (Originally published 1970, electronic edition, 2000), last accessed 20 January 2012 <http://www.cr.nps.gov/archeology/pubs/Lee/Lee_CH6.htm>

[4] *Historic Sites Act of 1935*, 49 Stat. 666; 16 U.S.C. 461-467, National Park Service, last accessed 20 January 2012 <http://www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/FHPL_HistSites.pdf>

artists, architects, historians, and photographers to document important aspects of American cultural heritage, producing an extensive system of recordkeeping that still exists today.

While these early legislative efforts produced the basic structure of modern preservation policy, certain postwar trends, such as rapid suburbanization, highway construction, and urban renewal, threatened countless historic resources. The National Trust for Historic Preservation was born during this period to provide leadership for and to raise the visibility of the preservation movement in light of changing circumstances in the public landscape.[5] In 1965, the U.S. Conference of Mayors and National Trust co-sponsored a report entitled *With Heritage So Rich*, which chronicled the wide-scale demolition of historically significant properties in the years since the enactment of the Historic Sites Act. Congress responded by passing the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), which established the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, State Historic Preservation Offices, the National Register of Historic Places, and the Section 106 review process. Section 106 requires governmental agencies to analyze all federally funded projects for their potential impacts on sites listed on or determined eligible for the National Register.[6]

The National Register, the nation's official list of designated buildings, structures, objects, districts, or sites, contains generalized measures for assessing properties according to their significance, a method adopted by many state and local governments.

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[5] Diane Lea, "America's Preservation Ethos" in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Robert Stipe (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 9.

[6] Ibid., 10-11.

Table 1 defines the four criteria that can be used to evaluate significance for inclusion on the National Register.

National Register Criteria for Evaluation	
The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:	
A.	That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
B.	That are associated with the lives of significant persons in past; or
C.	That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
D.	That have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

Table 1: National Register Criteria
U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation."
http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_2.htm

These criteria broadly account for a wide range of resource types and, ideally, allow for social, cultural and architectural interpretations of history. Properties listed on the National Register are eligible for federal rehabilitation tax benefits, preservation grant programs, and consideration in the planning of federally funded projects.[7] The National Park Service advertises that there are currently 80,000 listings on the National Register.

Regardless of the multitude of preservation successes afforded by the National Register, the program remains problematic in certain aspects of its design. John M. Fowler, executive director of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, argues that while the original intent behind the register was to create an "all-inclusive" inventory of

[7] John M. Fowler, " The Federal Preservation Program" in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twentieth Century*, 42.

significant places in the U.S., chronic underfunding for surveys and nominations has limited the types of resources selected for listing, preventing it from becoming a comprehensive planning tool for communities.[8] Financial limitations may in certain instances indirectly produce a system that favors the most architecturally or historically distinguished properties, reducing the honor of recognition to the most prominent sites. As Fowler similarly points out, the remarkable number of listings still fails to illustrate the diversity and complexity of American history.[9] Although the National Register does not promote a hierarchy in terms of its listing, the absence of certain historic or cultural themes and the strict requirements regarding a property's integrity imply that exceptionalism is the key to protection.

While the federal government has assumed leadership in establishing the standards for the field, practitioners widely acknowledge that the most successful tools for managing historic resources exist at the local level.[10] Contemporary historic preservation depends upon the close collaboration of federal, state, and local governments, and each branch has a set of unique responsibilities in ensuring the protection of historic resources. In practice, the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) play a crucial role in coordinating national preservation programs and directing

[8] Fowler, 44.

[9] Ibid.

[10] The Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines provide technical assistance in the fields of archaeology and historic preservation. Concerning preservation, the Standards include Preservation Planning, Identification, Evaluation, Registration, Documentation, Treatment of Historic Properties, and Professional Qualifications. While they ensure the high quality of preservation activity in the United States, they are not particularly adaptable to community-based practices.

the Certified Local Government (CLG) programs, which solidify the relationship between cities and the federal government.

As Elizabeth Lyon and David Brook point out in their essay "The States: The Backbone of Preservation," SHPOs are increasingly responding to changing demographics and the need for historical context. They argue that recent attention in the field on the multicultural composition of the national landscape is the result of SHPO funded survey programs, which have tended to focus more on more encompassing temporal and cultural themes with studies of the recent past.[11] While commentators widely acknowledge the demand for greater diversity and inclusivity in the practice of preservation, most states still maintain a traditional structure that emphasizes monuments over community history. The California Register of Historical Resources, for example, has the same four criteria for designation as the National Register, despite its multicultural identity in the popular knowledge and imagination of the nation. While surveys are the cornerstone of preservation planning at all levels of government, traditional research and documentation methodologies cannot always capture the true essence of a community or place because they rely, in part, upon the observations of professionals, who may be influenced by certain preconceptions due experience and the traditions of the field. While the SHPOs have made great strides in encouraging the need for more rigorous social and cultural theme studies through the development of comprehensive Historic Context Statements in the CLG programs, surveys remain largely

[11] Elizabeth A. Lyon and David L.S. Brook, "The States: The Backbone of Preservation" in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twentieth Century*, 110.

architectural in nature, with historical themes serving a secondary purpose due to the challenge of managing effective public participation.

Local government programs, therefore, should be best positioned to accept the responsibility of identifying and protecting significant community resources. As preservationists and scholars Lina Cofresi and Rosetta Radtke explain, the very nature of local governments and their relationships to communities allow for greater experimentation, including "preservation of the recent past, historic and cultural landscapes, commercial districts in addition to Main Street, ethnic and vernacular traditions, a larger "cultural" heritage, focused on people and the natural environment."[12] Local governments, unlike state and federal programs, have the capacity to develop place-specific preservation methods that can accommodate the unique historic and cultural compositions of individual communities. Grassroots efforts, as a result, play a critical role in establishing the rigor of the local government's preservation practices.

The traditional scope of preservation has, in part, inhibited the ability of advocates to build reliable, widespread public support. Cofresi and Radtke note:

> One source of frustration for preservation at the local level has been the inability of preservationists to build politically strong, viable, and visible constituencies generally respected by community leaders. In terms of accomplishment – buildings saved, sites protected – preservation has gained much ground during the last forty years. But compared with other local government programs such as education and protective services, it is still regarded as a special-interest, low-priority, fringe activity.[13]

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[12] Lina Cofresi and Rosetta Radtke, "Local Government Programs: Preservation Where It Counts" in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twentieth Century*, 123-125.

[13] Ibid., 128.

Regardless of attempts to make local preservation more relevant and inclusive in scope and intention, public perceptions of preservation still reflect the focus of the movement on elite individuals and events and significant architecture.[14] Preservationists, generally speaking, have struggled to articulate the necessary links between their goals and the goals of other community-based organizations. While the preservation movement is becoming more and more interdisciplinary, its opponents often characterize it as overly fixated on the past and even obstructionist in the face of progress. What these critics fail to realize, and what perhaps preservationists fail to communicate, is how a newly defined movement focused on the many layers of community heritage and a critical evaluation of the role of the past in shaping an ever-changing present is a truly progressive venture. Engaging with the public and developing a strong corps of community volunteers are two essential steps in applying the evolving principles of preservation to practice.[15]

Many local governments approach historic preservation within the context of planning departments. This relationship not only brings the management of historic resources into the real-world atmosphere of city government, but it also organizes the

[14] See also Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1, where Kaufman argues that preservationists fall into two competing categories: "One looks inward, seeking progress in the elaboration of tighter criteria and more stringent professional standards. The other looks outward, seeking new areas to meddle in, new problems to take on. The first group gauges the success of preservation efforts by internal measures such as authenticity or technical competence. The second defines success by external measures such as social relevance or utility."

[15] James Marston Fitch similarly observes that existing institutional practices have perpetuated inequities between communities and preservation enthusiasts, highlighting the challenge of determining who should benefit from preservation: "Contemporary activity in historic preservation has enormously extended the number of monuments in all such categories, and modern cultural tourism has enormously increased the number of visitors to them. Until the very recent past, however, this vast and growing interest in historic preservation has taken the form of *some* people visiting the habitats of *other* people. Too often, the "native inhabitants" are, on their own terrain, merely passive spectators of the touristic process. The government institutions which are so admired internationally for their preservation and restoration activities may discourage or actually exclude participation from the local citizenry," 403.

administration of preservation programs according to carefully defined geographic areas that can be easily translated into focused constituencies.[16] If preservation is going to subsist beyond its traditional framework, the field needs to advance beyond city planning departments and consulting firms, which are not necessarily structured to accommodate community heritage. At the most basic level, preservation education must continue to redefine the limits of the field. While conventional university historic preservation programs have focused on architectural history and rehabilitation practices, many across the country have expanded upon this foundation in order to provide cross-disciplinary coursework.[17] The benefits of a more inclusive pedagogical approach will be measured first at the local level, where focused study on historic and cultural landscapes, ethnic history, geography, planning and real estate will increase the quality of the dialogue about the role of preservation in the twenty-first century city. While the role of the preservation professional will be evaluated later in this chapter, it is worth emphasizing the significance that the majority of preservation commentators acknowledge the need for more diversity in assessing previously unanalyzed expressions of heritage.

These arguments for change within the traditional scope of preservation can be synthesized in the related idea of cultural conservation or heritage conservation. While the field has not solidified a set of practices governing the notion of cultural conservation, the idea has existed in national discourse since the early 1980s, when the American Folklife Center, the Library of Congress, and the National Park Service jointly published

[16] Cofresi and Radtke, 138.

[17] Ibid., 145-146.

a study entitled *Cultural Conservation: the Protection of Cultural Heritage in the United States*. The authors define cultural conservation as "a concept for organizing the profusion of private and public efforts that deal with traditional community cultural life," a concept that "envisions cultural preservation and encouragement as two faces of the same coin."[18] While the preservation of built heritage is a longstanding rite in American history, the document argues that the standards set by the federal government have "overlooked…the shared traditional expressive culture of [certain] groups or communities – both the express forms and the living context to which the forms belong – in a word, the folklife."[19] While the authors acknowledge the challenges inherent to the concept, most specifically the fact that culture is, by its very essence, constantly changing, they identify the strong need for legitimizing non-architectural historic and cultural resources in order to focus more thoroughly on human heritage.

The recommendations of the authors included expanded partnerships between traditional preservation agencies, such as the Department of the Interior, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and more humanities-based agencies, such as the American Folklife Center, the Smithsonian Institute, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. At both the national and local levels, the suggestions were fairly broad, focusing on the need for more comprehensive documentation approaches, increased citizen education on the importance of cultural heritage, the expansion of preservation tax

[18] Ormond Loomis, coordinator, *Cultural Conservation: The Protection of Cultural Heritage in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1983), iv.

[19] Loomis, 3.

benefits to other cultural resources, and enhanced public programs related to cultural conservation activities.[20] While certain scholars and professionals certainly absorbed much of the language belonging to this perspective on heritage, the study failed to produce widespread change within the governmental structure of preservation.[21] In some ways, the document raised more questions than it answered, questions that are the basis of this chapter's investigation into the role of heritage activism in defining underrepresented communities in the United States.

Cultural Memory and Community Heritage

Over the course of the last several decades, scholars have delved into the concept of "cultural memory" as a method of understanding the collective past experiences of varying social groups. First introduced by Egyptologist Jan Assmann, the theory traces the development of ongoing public remembrance and recreations of the past. While cultural memory is at the core of heritage activism and the idea of cultural conservation, the academic world has similarly turned to the theory as a method of defining agency and a community's relationship to its past. In the book *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith and Identity*, authors Jeanette Rodríguez and Ted Fortier define cultural memory as "the process by which a society ensures cultural continuity by preserving, with the help of cultural mnemonics, its collective knowledge from one generation to the next, rendering

[20] Loomis, 73-73.

[21] The NPS published National Register Bulletin No. 38 in 1990, entitled "Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties." Though document focused on properties associated with Native American cultural heritage, it redefined expectations concerning integrity and authenticity and expanded the relationship between cultural values and place.

it possible for later generations to reconstruct their cultural identity."[22] Essential to the notion of cultural memory is the desire to safeguard community heritage and identity over time.

The role of cultural memory in preservation is particularly compelling in approaching communities that have experienced frequent transformations and therefore lack a concrete framework for traditional preservation. In his article "History and Memory," historian David Glassberg argues:

> Memory in America has always been a transnational phenomenon, as generations of immigrants to America remained in touch with family and friends back home, combined memories and traditions from their home countries with those of neighbors in their new locales, and encountered larger political and economic institutions.[23]

While Glassberg does not single out any particular immigrant community, his case for the ambiguous geography of cultural memory is particularly significant when applied to the cross-border experiences of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans living in Los Angeles. The transnational geography of the local community poses a critical challenge to preservationists concerning the identification spatial boundaries. Cultural memory, rather

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[22] Jeanette Rodríguez and Ted Fortier, *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith and Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 1, last accessed 11 January 2012, Ebrary, Inc. electronic book. See also *Cultural Memory and the Construction of Identity*, eds. Dan Ben-Amos and Liliane Weissberg (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999). Karen E. Till's examination of the politics of place-making and collective memory is particularly valuable for understanding how spaces evoke remembrance, mourning, celebration, and healing in *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005)

[23] David Glassberg, "History and Memory" in *A Companion to American Cultural History*, ed. Karen Halttunen, *Blackwell Reference Online* (Blackwell Publishing, 2008), last accessed 9 August 2011 <http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/tocnode?id=g9780631235668_chunk_ g978063123566826>. See also Benedict Anderson's seminal text *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verson, 2008), which Glassberg cites in his discussion of shared history leading to the creation of a collective identity among disparate individuals or groups.

than geography, can play a powerful role in defining rapidly changing communities, such as the Mexican-American or Chicano population in Los Angeles county.[24]

In many fundamental ways, cultural memory is essential to understanding the more nebulous concept of "sense of place." Dolores Hayden defines this relationship in her pivotal book *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* according to philosopher Edward S. Casey's idea of "place memory," writing:

> Place memory encapsulates the human ability to connect with both the built and natural environments that are entwined in the cultural landscape. It is the key to the power of historic places to help citizens define their public pasts: places trigger memories for insiders, who have shared a common past, and at the same time places often can represent shared pasts to outsiders who might be interested in knowing them in the present.[25]

For Hayden, the connection between memory and place allows for a more inclusive interpretation of the history of the urban environment. At the core of her narrative is the idea that buildings, neighborhoods, and landscapes can evoke vital social and cultural themes beyond the aesthetic or architectural themes that form the basis of the traditional preservation movement. Using Los Angeles as a case study, Hayden argues that the imprints of social history and memory on the built environment, particularly the

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[24] Ned Kaufman discusses the challenge of existing models of interpreting transnational heritage: "One is assimilation: immigrants gradually blend into the mainstream until their cultural identity is submerged, perhaps to resurface in symbolic representations of ethnicity (St. Patrick's Day parade) by later generations. The other is cultural pluralism: ethnic groups will retain the cultural characteristics of their countries of origins to a significant degree, coexisting as culturally distinct groups within the national borders of their new country. Transnationalism adds a third possibility, that new cultural practices, derived from the mixture of languages, customs, and identities, might emerge out of the experience of straddling a border" (81). Incorporating transnational narratives into preservation practice, however, would represent a radical political, social and cultural departure from the traditional goals of defining a cohesive national landscape.

[25] Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), 46.

influences of gender, ethnic and class diversity, redefine the idea of "place" and expand the scope of preservation.

Early in her text, Hayden discusses planner Kevin Lynch's study of cognitive mapping, which captures spatial reasoning according to social and cultural norms. Lynch's work, which analyzed mental images of urban environments, gave rise to subsequent studies of space and memory, including a key report on Los Angeles, which compared varying interpretations of the city according to different socioeconomic groups.[26] Although the results displayed vast inequity in access to the totality of the city, Hayden views this investigation as an opportunity to delve into the diverse, multilayered histories of American cities, namely Los Angeles. In acknowledging the role of abstract culture in understanding urban space, she links the physical environment to the more intangible realm of memory and storytelling, arguing for a recalculation of the methods and goals of community preservation to accommodate the richness of the urban experience.

Hayden's fascination with Los Angeles stems from the city's complicated and often untold ethnic, labor and women's histories. She writes:

> Because the city functioned as more than a series of enclaves, the largest story of Los Angeles is one of the migration experience, job opportunities, bachelor life or family life, neighborhood supports and difficulties, with each group's unique experience contributing to a larger set of common urban themes.[27]

[26] Hayden, 27. See also Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960).

[27] Ibid., 95.

In other words, the idea of place and history in Los Angeles depends upon the stories and experiences of everyday people. While these histories have been included in much of the scholarship on Los Angeles, the preservation community has struggled to integrate these layers into its more widely accepted architectural narratives. As Hayden points out, the emphasis on the rehabilitation of architecturally significant buildings or neighborhoods, a cornerstone in preservation at the local level, often has unintended consequences, such as gentrification and the displacement of low-income residents.[28]

In certain cases, the disproportionate focus on architectural history in many cities can be traced to the politics, backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses of many of the figures with interests in the preservation process. The preservation movement has long been associated with elitist sensibilities and while the field has certainly evolved in the United State since its birth in the nineteenth century, its development has depended heavily upon the legacy of earlier wealthy women's groups seeking to enshrine colonial heroes and monuments and the private entrepreneurs and philanthropists who inherited the movement from them.[29] Hayden argues in a separate article on placemaking that much of the neglect of ethnic and gender history in the preservation movement can be attributed to the political and economic factors that determine the involvement of certain stakeholders in designating landmarks, such as "politicians seeking fame or favor, businessmen exploiting the commercial advantages of specific locations, and

[28] Hayden, 53.

[29] David W. Morgan, Nancy I.M. Morgan, Brenda Barrett, "Finding a Place for the Commonplace: Hurricane Katrina, Communities, and Preservation Law" in *American Anthropologist* 108:4 (2006), 708, last accessed 31 May 2011 <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals>

architectural critics establishing their careers by promoting specific persons or styles."[30] As a result, choosing to honor the commonplace activities that define much of urban history is not always seen as particularly advantageous.

Although the preservation profession has changed a great deal since Hayden published this article in 1988, her observations regarding landmark nominations continue to resonate. The very nature of designating a building or district requires that the subject of the nomination be exceptional in some way. The language of many city preservation ordinances, for example, does not openly encourage the recognition of the ordinary activities that define urban life. Some cities, such as the City of Los Angeles, have made progress in trying to accommodate a changing definition of historic or cultural significance according to the reaches of local cultural memory. The proposal for the updated city preservation ordinance, for example, would add a new criterion for designation that would explicitly recognize properties that represent the ethnic and cultural diversity characteristic of Los Angeles.[31]

Despite its importance in community heritage, cultural memory cannot be the sole factor in communicating significance. Historian William Estrada's study of cultural memory in the Los Angeles Plaza district captures the difficulty in ensuring the authenticity of place-based memory when the official interpretation of a site does not reflect its genuine heritage. The efforts in the mid-1920s of Anglo American socialite

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[30] Dolores Hayden, "Placemaking, Preservation and Urban History" in *Journal of Architectural Education* 41:3 (Spring 1988), 46, last accessed 31 May 2011 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1424895>

[31] City of Los Angeles, Department of City Planning, "Supplemental Recommendation Report, Proposed Amendments to the Cultural Heritage Ordinance." (2009), 14, last accessed 22 January 2012 <www.preservation.lacity.org>

Christine Sterling to reinvent the deteriorated Olvera Street, located at the heart of the Plaza and the historic Sonoratown, as a vibrant Mexican marketplace reveal the extent to which romanticized Mexican heritage represented a tourist fantasy. During a time when downtown development displaced countless Mexican families and caused widespread migration to the eastside, Olvera Street was revived as an idealized landscape that transcended the negative associations between Mexican residents and destitution and crime. Estrada comments that Mexicans working in the "reincarnated" Olvera Street were "relegated to the "usable" past made safe for public consumption by exhibiting their assimilation into the fabric of American culture."[32] The plan for Olvera Street engaged Mexican participants as performers in an inauthentic representation of their experiences and memories of living in Sonoratown. The small vendor stalls, embellished with colorful *piñatas*, puppets in peasant attire, pottery, leather *huaraches*, and exaggerated *sombreros*, created the illusion of a picturesque cross-border marketplace for the sake of an audience of outsiders, but the charade, like many others throughout Southern California, diluted the practice of heritage for local Mexican residents and workers.

While Olvera Street originated as a disingenuous expression of local tradition, over time it has become an important component of Mexican and Mexican American cultural memory in Los Angeles. When the Eastside Heritage Consortium conducted its

[32] William Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 193. See also Pheobe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) for a detailed discussion of how the idyllic reinterpretation of the Spanish-Mexican past in Southern California stimulated the development of the regional public narrative and built environment. Kropp and Estrada both demonstrate the complexity of establishing authenticity in public places due to interpretations of historical themes. While the recreation of Olvera Street is an authentic representation of Anglo American attitudes towards Mexican heritage in early twentieth century Los Angeles, it is thoroughly inauthentic in its communication of the Mexican experience in Southern California during the same time period.

survey in East Los Angeles, it found that a number of respondents indicated that Olvera Street held significant meaning as a cultural site. The roots and meaning of the space lost over several generations, the inauthentic has become an authentic component of Mexican American cultural memory, as Mexican Americans find themselves to be both actors in and consumers of the spectacle of Olvera Street. What this example of the reimagining of a heritage site unveils is the centrality of questions relating not only to the issue of whom preservation acts should benefit and represent, but also the problem of authority over the construction and assimilation of community memory.

In expanding preservation to include places where significance is derived from cultural memory, complications similarly arise regarding authenticity and community healing. One of the greatest challenges in the public history approach to preservation is the issue of accounting for moments of conflict in a community's collective memory. Hayden points out that commemorating historical controversies can destabilize the process of positive change in certain communities while undermining the benefits of heritage conservation:

> The underlying, sometimes unstated experiences will be less hopeful – confinement to a ghetto or barrio, segregation in housing, schooling, and work opportunities, legal discrimination, competition with other ethnic groups, suppression of women and children by the male competition. Compensatory histories may nurture ethnic pride, but they also breed divisions between ethnic groups, and between men and women, as well as individual bitterness among those who didn't fare as well as the exceptional individuals.[33]

[33] Hayden, 96. See also Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) for a discussion of multilayered memory and meaning in public spaces. Boym argues that a juxtaposition of "intentional monuments," which recover single moments or themes in history for interpretation in the present, and "unintentional memorials," fragments of past eras that threaten carefully curated urban environments, inherently complicate the public's engagement with memory and the demands of modern progress, 78.

Heritage activism, therefore, cannot arise from a community's desire to seek redress for historical inequity, but, rather, must result from a conscious decision to demonstrate authorship over one's own history. As Hayden indicates, the purpose of an inclusive approach to history and place cannot be the elevation of a community's heritage to an exceptional status. Instead, the goal should be the enrichment of the local urban history taken as a whole.

In some instances, moments of crisis allow for the greatest reflection upon the role of public history and diversity in preservation. As authors David W. Morgan, Nancy I.M. Morgan, and Brenda Barrett point out, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans represented a decisive period in recognizing the shortcomings of traditional national preservation policy and redefining the impact of cultural memory in community identity and its importance in preservation. In evaluating the meaning of community and cultural resources in the wake of widespread regional losses, the authors maintain that the disaster highlighted the pluralism of American society in terms of class, culture, and ethnicity, as well as the idea that the methods communities employ to "identify themselves [are] fluid and situational, as is the way in which communities define the relationship between themselves and the places they inhabit."[34] While preservationists focused on recovering the places of greatest significance, the more consequential losses occurred in those places that mattered most in everyday life.

Although the framework established for preservation at the federal level maintains a more narrow definition of significance, a great deal of progress has been made in

[34] Morgan, et. al., 715.

documenting community heritage in large urban centers such as Los Angeles and New York City, where issues relating to diversity and are more visible in the city fabric. Nonetheless, as Hurricane Katrina and the rebuilding of New Orleans revealed, the American public has not afforded adequate value to the often-unremarkable aspects of place that shape the lives of most individuals. Learning to acknowledge the importance of protecting place-based culture will require a new measure of interdisciplinary cooperation and community engagement.

Finding Meaning in the Material and the Intangible

Traditionally, historic preservation in the United States has focused on the enduring significance of built heritage, while folklorists and anthropologists have examined and maintained those aspects of human production that are intangible. While that definition has expanded over the last several decades to include designed and natural landscapes as well, it has remained firmly rooted in concrete expressions of history and culture. One of the more pressing concerns that preservationists currently face is the expansion of the field to accommodate intangible, non-architectural resources in its evaluation of heritage. The evolving presence of community-based preservation actions has called further attention to the need for establishing guidelines for documenting and conserving intangible resources, given that tangible and intangible heritage are often irrevocably linked in ethnic or immigrant communities. This debate, however, has required great reflection upon the language of the preservation movement and its implicit meanings.

In his essay entitled "Folklife, Intangible Heritage, and the Promise and Perils of Cultural Cooperation," Alan Jabbour, the founding director of the American Folklife Center, explains that the term "intangible culture" likely originated out of efforts to transcend the language of archaeologists and preservation professionals:

> Since the buildings or pots that architectural historians and archaeologists deal with so extensively are tangible manifestations of culture, the preservation community have come to refer to the stories, music, dance, and other cultural elements that they encountered as "intangible culture" or "intangible elements of culture."[35]

Intangible culture or heritage increasingly plays a vital role in explaining and interpreting cultural memory and contributes greatly to the concept of "sense of place." While professionals and community members alike can observe the physical landscape of a place to decipher the underlying value and belief systems, technologies and events that produced that space, albeit with varying levels of success, the imbedded social rituals, artistic practices and community stories directly link the place to the inhabitants, both past and present. As the preservation field expands to consider critically the role of social and cultural history in shaping the built environment, the influence of intangible culture will become inextricably connected to actions taken in the physical environment.

Although the U.S. does not currently have explicit policies governing the protection of intangible heritage, the international community has made advances in defining and managing these forms of cultural production. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has pursued a

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[35] Alan Jabbour, "Folklife, Intangible Heritage, and the Promise and Perils of Cultural Cooperation" in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twentieth Century*, 441.

comprehensive approach to preservation through its World Heritage Convention of 1972 and Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage of 2003.[36] The 2003 Convention emerged out of a decade-long effort to expand the scope of its heritage programs, which largely focused on the built and natural environment. The Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, made up of members elected by the represented States, maintains several lists of significant manifestations of culture based upon urgency in developing protections.[37] There are currently 267 elements of culture listed, and the Committee incorporates more each year.

UNESCO upholds an interest in the protection of cultural diversity amid growing globalization, noting that the fragility of such expressions can be respected while communities explore the social and economic value of their traditions. As defined by Section 1, Article 2 of the Convention:

> The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. [38]

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[36] While this chapter explores the language of intangible heritage according to UNESCO's practice, the Convention of 2003, along with Australia's Burra Charter and China's Princples for the Conservation of Heritage Sites, will be examined in greater depth in Chapter 3.

[37] UNESCO compiles two lists: the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* and the shorter *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding*, which consists of those elements that communities and States consider to be endangered.

[38] UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (17 October 2003), last accessed 15 January 2012 <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=EN&pg=00022>

Whereas "tangible" culture has a physical presence in a community, such as a building or a feature of the natural landscape, intangible culture includes such traditions as music, theater, visual arts, crafts, knowledge, storytelling, and technical skills. The insular nature of these elements, as they are called, poses a great challenge in identifying and protecting them, as the knowledge of such cultural forms is often limited to the remaining practitioners.

In the simplest terms, UNESCO advocates an approach to cultural resources that treats intangible heritage as "traditional, contemporary and living at the same time," "inclusive," "representative, and "community based."[39] It perceives culture as a continual process of human expression, allowing for both natural and intentional change. Protected forms of intangible culture must encourage connectivity among individuals, where the celebration of difference heightens the cohesiveness of the greater global community. UNESCO, in particular, points out the importance of securing practices that are not simply exceptional, but also of understanding how knowledge and traditions survive and evolve over time.

Ultimately, the entire foundation for conserving culture is localized. The organization maintains that "intangible cultural heritage can only be heritage when it is recognized as such by the communities, groups, or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it – without their recognition, nobody else can decide for them that a given

[39] UNESCO, "What is Intangible Cultural Heritage," last accessed 15 January 2012 <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00002>

expression or practice is their heritage."[40] While UNESCO certainly relies upon a group of educated leaders and expert opinions to manage such a sweeping system of evaluating culture, it explicitly recognizes the agency of the communities represented. The United States has not yet ratified the Convention, and the absence of a substitute framework for evaluation has left the profession without a clear method of engaging communities in preserving their own heritage, both tangible and intangible. While preservationists and community members in some cases still represent conflicting ethos, for some time even heritage professionals lacked cohesion in their approach to the past on the grounds of intangible culture.

The Heritage Professional and Community-Based Action

In the most traditional sense, historic preservationists can be characterized as devoted to defending the past, where the most critical issues facing the field must be administered according to the professional guidelines or standards established by the Secretary of the Interior, such as the balance between the historic integrity and alterations necessary for the restoration or rehabilitation of a given property or the eligibility criteria required for listing on local, state, or national registers. Jabbour describes, "The context woven around the built environment is past-oriented, and the citizens of the present are viewed almost as bystanders for whom the past is explicated, or as an educated context for which the history is interpreted."[41] This approach creates a problematic barrier

[40]UNESCO, "What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?"

[41] Jabbour, 443.

between professionals and community members over the matter of interpretation, where communities are given little agency over their own histories and culture and the continuity found therein, and objective documentation is preferred to public memory and storytelling. This streamlined process, while efficient for planning purposes, is nevertheless divisive in communities characterized by a complex history and ever-changing demographics, where the past and present do not necessarily diverge into neatly divided categories. In some cases, it alienates newcomers by defining the place's significance as a fixed point in the past, one that predates any recent or future historical developments and discourages natural change. In Los Angeles, the profession has made great strides in its determination to develop a more inclusive attitude towards community history, yet the existing language and structure for protecting important resources adheres to the traditional method of identifying historic properties.

On the other hand, folklorists and cultural anthropologists have actively pursued a conceptual model that focuses on the idea of "living cultures," where the past is treated as a lens for understanding present communities.[42] While this approach, which is present in the UNESCO Convention on intangible heritage, still depends upon an outside observer to exercise judgment in interpreting cultural expressions, it offers preservationists an important model for evaluating the interconnectedness of the past and present in changing communities or societies. It also encourages preservationists to consider the sum of all potential resources within a given place. The greatest challenge within both of these

[42] Jabbour, 444.

approaches, of course, is the unresolved role of the community in both the formal and everyday practice of preservation.

In a widely discussed and highly controversial speech from the 1997 conference of the National Council for Preservation Education, Frits Pannekoek addressed the consequences of the growing professionalization of the preservation field in terms of community participation in documenting and protecting the past. He argues:

> First, since professionalization usually requires a university education, and universities tend to hold and perpetuate the beliefs of the dominant class, heritage significance must now be validated by that class. Those who have cultural values that are not those of the dominant class, or whose values are based on informally acquired knowledge, will need to hire degree-holders to provide the validity of their knowledge.[43]

While the professionalization of field that has its roots in grassroots organizing has had the advantageous effect of applying more critical scholarship to the history of the built environment, the creation of what Pannekoek calls "a heritage priesthood" has granted cultural authority to individuals who are not necessarily connected to their subject matter. Preservation, at its core, is a deeply personal activity, made all the more rich by community engagement and the act of recognizing and protecting a collective identity. While the most sensitive professionals limit their involvement to advising communities on a course of action, many simply make unimpassioned decisions about the significance of historic and cultural resources without meaningful community collaboration.

The second problem with the new dynamic in preservation, Pannekoek insists, is that "the emphasis on the importance of professionals in determining heritage

[43] Frits Pannekoek, "The Rise of a Heritage Priesthood," *Preservation of What, for Whom? A Critical Look at Historical Significance*, ed. Michael A. Tomlan , Conference Proceedings, Goucher College (The National Council for Preservation Education, 1997), 30.

significance, and the fact that heritage plans will require professional input, means that heritage, like justice, is now a commodity that can be bought and sold, rather than a precious trust."[44] The commercialization of community heritage in the decade since Pannekoek's speech is a sensitive subject, particularly in light of the tax incentives afforded to property owners to encourage rehabilitation projects and the ongoing criticism that preservation can lead to gentrification, but his point is nonetheless valid. The elite status of the majority of preservation professionals has reinforced a preference for material culture, most specifically for architectural treasures. The emphasis in many preservation graduate programs in the United States on architectural history further restricts the familiarity of professionals with intangible heritage. For Pannekoek, the greatest repercussion of the professionalization of the field is the inadvertent engineering of hierarchies among historic resources within a given community.[45] If heritage has indeed become a commodity in some circles, inevitably those who stand to benefit the most from preservation incentives and the services of the field may not be those communities that have been understudied and underappreciated thus far, communities that are poised to gain the most from conservation efforts.

Pannekoek's words are echoed in historian Antoinette J. Lee's essay "The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Historic Preservation." While she observes an increase in diversity at National Preservation Conferences due to targeted funding initiatives, she notes that preservation professionals, namely historians, archaeologists, preservation

[44] Pannekoek, 30.

[45] Ibid.

architects, non-profit leaders, and educators, remained largely homogeneous in ethnic composition.[46] Across different ethnic communities, however, Lee indicates that there exists a wide range of commitment to preservation activities. African American communities, she points out, have achieved a great deal of success in traditional preservation programs, which Lee attributes to their broader involvement in social and political movements in the U.S.[47] Other groups, however, such as Asian Americans, Latinos, and Native Hawaiians, have shied away from established preservation programs, instead relying on community institutions or families to sustain cultural identity. Lee argues that these groups may even view existing programs "as unresponsive or even irrelevant to their preservation concern."[48]

The idea of preservation for many non-white communities transcends the concept of architectural heritage and its corresponding protective framework because it inherently involves the complications of identity politics. While the significance of certain historical narratives may be widely accepted by the preservation community and the American public, other groups face a social and political climate that does not necessarily acknowledge their contributions to national, state, or local history. Similarly, an approach to cultural conservation or preservation that focuses on ethnic communities as separate groups without accounting for the interweaving of the resulting narratives and resources does not properly represent the complexity of American history.

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[46] Antoinette J. Lee, "The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Historic Preservation" in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twentieth Century,* ed. Robert Stipe (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 392.

[47] Ibid., 396-397.

[48] Ibid.

Lee nonetheless maintains that these challenges in illustrating the links between social and cultural history and the built environment will only lead to the strengthening of the preservation movement in the U.S. She writes:

> Few nations have had such wrenching experiences with race and ethnicity as has the United States, and few have exhibited such a strong interest in preserving and interpreting places associated with this subject…As the diaspora of people from all over the world settle in new countries because of free will or wars and conflicts, many more countries will host newcomers and will thus integrate new cultures into their existing ones.[49]

Regardless of the level of representation of ethnic communities within the traditional preservation movement, a strong passion for managing and protecting cultural heritage is present throughout the country in unconventional ways. Heritage plays a critical role in the political and social activism of these communities, and the profession cannot afford to ignore its potential for change within those contexts. As Lee points out, many ethnic groups believe that preservationists undervalue or outright disregard the customs or places that hold the most meaning to them.[50] Within these communities, heritage or cultural conservation can be an essential form of legitimization and empowerment.

The importance of amending the language of the preservation movement is a central theme in many existing commentaries, as is the more subtle appeal for a revision of the political and cultural agendas that uphold the outdated language. As preservation educator and activist Ned Kaufman illustrates, the discomfort among many preservationists with the nuances of race, ethnicity and place prevents them from engaging in a meaningful discussion about changes to the profession and existing

[49] Lee, 403.

[50] Ibid., 397.

practices. He points out the ease with which preservationists speak of "cultural diversity" or "multiculturalism" without confronting the underlying complications of those terms.[51] "Diverse," for example, is frequently substituted for "non-white," even if the community in question is largely homogenous. Kaufman argues, "We need more powerful and nuanced words for explaining why the stability of cherished places is useful to people, communities, and society in general. We need more confident arguments with which to oppose the normative language of development, change, progress, capitalism, and property."[52] Before the national preservation dialogue can accept the challenge of integrating community-specific narratives into a more complicated American story, the profession has to adopt a more compelling language of place, perhaps provoking a larger shift in the underlying language of politics and identity.

Kaufman proposes the phrase "story sites" as a mnemonic device for approaching the inclusive historic, cultural or social value of place.[53] He contends that the phrase captures the diverse narratives of everyday life while securing community identity and elevating the historical consciousness of the inhabitants of a place, transforming the physical environment into a rhetorical vehicle for understanding a localized human experience. Shifting the vocabulary of place from architectural or aesthetic conditions to community voice and activity within the built environment vastly changes the stakeholders and goals for conservation practices. While individual communities may find that the language of heritage depends greatly upon the unique qualities of a place,

[51] Kaufman, 10.

[52] Ibid., 34.

[53] Ibid., 38-39.

Kaufman's proposal is influential for its public implications. The emphasis on storytelling focuses on the capacity of a single community to communicate its own identity and heritage without the intervention of an outside professional.

The language of other identity movements certainly applies to heritage activism in underrepresented communities. Author and activist bell hooks, who has concentrated much of her work on social and cultural dominance, wrote in her essay "Marginality as a Site of Resistance:"

> This "we" that is us in the margins, that "we" who inhabit marginal space that is not a site of domination but a place of resistance. Often this speech about the "other" annihilates, erases. *No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority.*[54]

hooks, whose work frequently delves into the theory of the subaltern and the imbalanced relationship between author and subject, argues quite fervently that the act of an educated figure of authority seeking to interpret a community from which he or she is disassociated has the inherent effect of denying that community's ability to articulate its own story. The capacity to share and decipher one's own story, for hooks, is a fundamental expression of resistance and empowerment. In certain cases, the absence of a well-recognized method of community-based preservation indicates that the field continues to depend upon the educated expert to assess significance. On the other hand, perhaps that very dearth enables ethnic communities to overcome traditional power dynamics by compelling them

[54] bell hooks, "Marginality as a Site of Resistance," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Cornel West (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990), 343.

to devise unique preservation strategies that meet their distinct needs and wealth of resources, both tangible and intangible. If they hope to meet the evolving challenges of the twenty-first century, preservation professionals must adapt to increasingly collaborative ventures with underrepresented communities.

Chapter 2
Somos Chicanos: Heritage Conservation and Identity in East Los Angeles

> Laguna Park is significant because it is "where the Chicano Moratorium took place. The key slogan was 'Our struggle is not in Vietnam, but in the movement for social justice at home.'"[1]

The complex construction of memory and identity that has characterized unincorporated East Los Angeles in both academic scholarship and the popular imagination for the last several decades raises a number of challenges for activists beyond the obvious absence of a preservation plan or ordinance. Beginning in the 1980s, historians have recognized greater East Los Angeles as "the social, economic, cultural and political center of the heterogeneous Los Angeles Mexican community which in turn is the largest Mexican center among other centers of this population in the United States."[2] As preservationists at the national level struggle to integrate the larger multicultural Latino community into the existing framework, current activism in East Los Angeles presents ideal circumstances for examining the ways in which underrepresented communities, in this case a woven Mexican, Mexican-American and Chicano community, can implement independent, place-based strategies for heritage conservation.

In 2011, a local group known as the Eastside Heritage Consortium began work on a cultural heritage survey with the goal of documenting and protecting significant historic

[1] Yolanda Magallanes, "Who Remembers in East L.A." Survey Results, Eastside Heritage Consortium (2011).

[2] Dr. Juan Gomez-Quiñones, "A Social-Cultural People: The Thematic Beats and Rhythms of a History and Culture" in *Cultural Needs Assessment: Metro Red Line East Side Extension*, Metropolitan Transportation Authority (1995), V-1; Victor M. Valle and Rodolfo D. Torres, *Latino Metropolis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); David Diaz, *Barrio Urbanism: Chicanos, Planning and American Cities*, 73. According to the 2010 United States Census, 97% of the population of Unincorporated East Los Angeles was Hispanic or Latino. See < http://factfinder2.census.gov/>.

and cultural sites in East Los Angeles, continuing the preservation work from decades past with a new community-based methodology. The constantly evolving ethnic and cultural identity of the inhabitants and the surrounding built environment make a compelling case for the development of grassroots heritage conservation practices that enable the community to demonstrate leadership over the interpretation of local history. The rise of this movement to safeguard local heritage coincides with the revival of a decades-long struggle among resident activists to achieve political self-determination for the unincorporated community, a campaign that has long been associated with questions of historic and cultural identity. In this context, the community of East Los Angeles can be understood as a people united by the pursuit of shared history and culture, whose identity is enriched by the many layers of that history and culture, with a communal sense of place and strong connection to that place over time. Understanding scholarly interpretations of resistance, cultural identity, and place-based memory is a critical step in inverting past structures of authority and in activating community agency. This chapter will explore the evolving role of heritage conservation in East Los Angeles within the context of local historiography and preservation practice and will argue for the importance of the built environment and its associated intangible culture in understanding the complex history of identity making in the community.

Scholarship, Identity and Unincorporated East Los Angeles

Historian Ricardo Romo conducted one of the earliest academic studies of East Los Angeles for his 1983 book *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio*. Romo's analysis of

the Mexican-American urban experience defines East Los Angeles according to its broader spatial identity and traditions rather than as a geographically bound place or unit. From the onset, he writes, "The distorted ghetto image of barrios ignored the fact that the majority of Mexican immigrants, for reasons of language, kinship, and folk customs, chose to live together in barrios. These barrios provided a sense of identity with the homeland and a transition into American society. Thus modern ghettos or barrios are not necessarily homes for losers or sinners."[3] Throughout the text, Romo articulates the significance of the barrio in the production of a new form of urban culture that navigated older, cross-border customs and the demands of a new way of life. This "acculturation way station" enabled recent immigrants to form a critical network of social and cultural institutions that could resist rapid Americanization.[4] At the core of his work is the notion that the history of this particular barrio is prototypical among Mexican communities in the U.S., an assumption that many of his colleagues share.[5] In aligning the history of East Los Angeles within a larger study of barrio theory, however, Romo glosses over the social and cultural circumstances of the community that render it distinct, particularly in terms of the function of the built environment.

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[3] Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 9-10.

[4]Ibid., 12.

[5] David Diaz defines "el barrio" as "the reaffirmation of culture, a defense of space, an ethnically bounded sanctuary, and the spiritual zone of Chicana/o and Mexicana/o identity" that defines the "independence and resistance of a culture that predates Euro-American influences on city life and urban form," 3. See also Hillary Jenks, "'Home is Little Tokyo': Race, Community, and Memory in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles" (PhD diss., University of Southern California: 2008) for a study of spatial resistance and memory construction in urban ethnic enclaves.

East Los Angeles can trace its modern development to the 1910s and 20s, when industrial development in Sonoratown, the established barrio in Los Angeles, led to the displacement of nearly 10,000 Mexicans, who mostly settled east of the river due to low housing costs and the availability of jobs.[6] The newly founded community of Belvedere, located just beyond the city limits and known as "La Maravilla" or "the wonderful city" to its inhabitants, grew to approximately 30,000 people by 1930, making it one of the largest urban concentration of Mexicans nationwide.[7] Romo dates the East Los Angeles barrio's position as a centralized hub for Mexican and Mexican-American cultural production to the post Mexican Revolution and World War I era, despite the strong presence of other ethnic groups, including African-Americans, Japanese, Chinese, Russians, and Italians, in the area.[8] The trials and successes of these communities provided the burgeoning Mexican community with preexisting models of assimilation and cultural agency, as the newcomers negotiated a role in the diverse social, commercial and industrial landscape. Of particular influence was the evolving Jewish enclave in City Terrace, a neighborhood in East Los Angeles located north of Brooklyn Avenue, one of

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[6] Marguerite V. Marin, *Social Protest in an Urban Barrio: A Study of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1974*, Vol. 1., (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1991), 22. See also William Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space*, 180-181.

[7] George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 75. See also Sánchez, "'What's Good for Boyle Heights is Good for the Jews': Creating Multiracialism on the Eastside during the 1950s" in *American Quarterly* 56:3 (September 2004), last accessed 18 March 2012 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40068237> and Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 30.

[8] Romo points out that the Mexican Revolution (approximately 1910-1920) transformed seasonal migration patterns, as workers began to settle permanently in the U.S. to avoid violence and economic uncertainty across the border. The majority of immigrants crossed the border in Texas before relocating to Los Angeles.

the main thoroughfares. This community tended to be more affluent and religiously conservative than their neighbors in Boyle Heights, and many owned the properties that Mexican immigrants rented.[9] While many restaurants, shops, and small businesses catering to the Mexican community continued to prosper near the Plaza, a new commercial center arose near First Street and Indiana Street in an area largely reserved for cemeteries.[10]

George J. Sánchez notes that the addition of a Belvedere line to the local interurban railway system made the possibility of movement into Los Angeles both fast and economical for laborers, who favored the barrio's inexpensive housing options. Sánchez, however, disagrees with Romo's perception of a unified community of immigrants in the early stages of the area's development. He writes, "Rather than a "group tightly clustered residentially and socially," the Mexican community would remain a settlement of scattered communities until the demographic changes of the post-World War II era created one cohesive eastside barrio."[11] The knowledge of the existing multiethnic development of the area supports Sánchez's interpretation of Mexican settlement patterns, as newcomers likely would have integrated according to the availability of housing and jobs. The history of certain community sites, such as the Maravilla Handball Court, indicates that residents did not necessarily self-segregate

[9] Romo, 65.

[10] Rudolfo F. Acuña, *A Community Under Siege: A Chronicle of Chicanos East of the Los Angeles River 1945-1975* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center, 1984), 8.

[11] Sánchez, 77. See also Acuña, *A Community Under Siege*, ix.

according to ethnicity.[12] Sánchez argues that this heterogeneous ethnic composition can be contained within the first several decades of the twentieth century due to the rapid migration of European ethnics to other parts of Los Angeles after the war. Racial segregation eventually replaced class segregation as the downtown core and eastside areas became increasingly stratified from the rest of the region.[13] Nevertheless, Sánchez maintains that the Belvedere area attracted laboring families because the predominance of single-family residences allowed for a newfound sense of freedom and privacy.[14]

Historian Eric Avila points out that the status of East Los Angeles as an unincorporated area, however, "limited that community's capacity to improve living conditions" over time due to a lack of political agency.[15] The County of Los Angeles provides basic resources and infrastructure to residents, but the absence of a local form of government denies the community vital decision-making power over policy issues such as development and local services. Supervisor Gloria Molina, who represents East Los Angeles on the County Board of Supervisors and began her career in the area, has not always governed with the support of the community, further inspiring the East Los Angeles Residents Association's current campaign for cityhood. In addition, the area is represented by four different members of the State Assembly, three members of the State

[12] The Maravilla Handball Court, which will be discussed later in this chapter, is an excellent example of early multiethnic development. According to the Maravilla Historical Society, while Mexican laborers are credited with constructing the court, community memories, supported by census records, reveal that an Irish family originally owned the property, which was located in an area populated by a number of Japanese farmers.

[13] Sánchez, 77.

[14] Ibid., 80.

[15] Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 52.

Senate, and three members of the U.S. House of Representatives, further dividing the political voice of the community.

Local leaders lobbied unsuccessfully for incorporation four times, fearing annexation by the surrounding cities of Los Angeles, Vernon, Alhambra, Monterey Park, and Montebello. The first attempt occurred in 1925, which ended when organizers withdrew the petition.[16] In 1931, a revived movement to incorporate collapsed under pressure from county supervisors, and voters rejected yet another incorporation measure in two years by a margin of 8,439-to-462 due to fierce opposition from the business community. A prominent collaboration of attorneys, community leaders, public administrators, and local residents resurrected the incorporation campaign once again in 1959 in response to the successful cityhood bid of neighboring Commerce, which sealed East Los Angeles' fate as an island open to annexation and redevelopment amid a sea of cities. Once more, business and political dissent over taxes led to the failure of the measure, though by a much smaller margin of only 300 votes.

Over the next decade, however, the rising Chicano movement in East Los Angeles elevated awareness over the social, political and land-use inequity that resulted from the absence of self-rule. The incorporation measure of 1974, which relied on the momentum of widespread protests over local educational, housing, and policing policies, more overtly identified East Los Angeles with the Mexican-American community than any of the preceding efforts. Esteban Torres, the founder of The East Los Angeles Community Union (TELACU) and a future Congressman, wrote in the publication *La Luz*:

[16] Acuña, 11.

> A vote for incorporation in the November 5 election will mean a vote for the preservation of East Los Angeles. The new city will not be prey to annexation attempts or spheres of influence legislation designed to get rid of unincorporated islands throughout the state…Incorporation will give an added dignity to an area already rich in cultural and historical heritage. The dream of standing in the great cultural and business center of East Los Angeles, the Zocalo, is worth translating such community objectives as social advancement, planned economic development, equitable taxation, improved land use, and responsive education into visible realities.[17]

For Torres, the historic and cultural identity of East Los Angeles remained at stake alongside the political idea of self-determination. While the linkage between the incorporation measure and the Chicano movement alienated non-Mexican-American residents and older generations of Mexican-Americans, the shift towards the significance of identity marked a critical change in the language of incorporation. Members of TELACU and other community residents formed the Ad hoc Committee to Incorporate East Los Angeles (ACTIELA), which took charge of the efforts to incorporate. The organization argued that cityhood would not only protect the community from further annexation, but that it would ensure that local tax revenues were directed towards fixing inadequate housing, educational facilities, and transportation systems.[18] Despite the petitioning of such estimable local figures as Torres and the determination of ACTIELA, fifty-eight percent of residents voted to defeat the measure, in large part due to homeowner fears over potential tax increases and the threat of urban renewal. Others, however, dissented out of opposition to the Chicano movement, reinforcing the connection between community ideology and identity and the status of East Los Angeles.

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[17] Esteban Torres, "Birth of a City: Incorporation of East Los Angeles" in *La Luz* (Oct. 1974), 13.

[18] Marin, 188-189.

Although Romo's analysis of East Los Angeles focuses on development prior to World War II, his characterization of early community agency and identity as actively countering the exploitative narrative of the dominant class resonates with the nascent colonial themes in Torres's argument for cityhood. Romo writes:

> What is apparent is that a deep gulf separated most Anglos from Mexicanos throughout the first three decades of this century and frequently the latter group was the victim of racial hostility, especially during the war years, when nativists in the Anglo community attempted…to suppress the civil liberties of Mexican residents; nonetheless, the barrio achieved a great deal of social and political maturity during the era.[19]

The persistent movement to incorporate aligns itself with Romo's portrayal of prewar East Los Angeles, where the vibrant social and cultural institutions inherent to the barrio safeguarded the needs of the family and the worker, protected the cultural heritage of the homeland and ensured its adaptation to the new community, and challenged external threats to civil rights, all critical components of the evolving local identity. Edna Acosta-Belén, a scholar of Latin American and Caribbean studies, writes:

> Postcolonial and feminist theories with their emphasis on the subaltern subject, issues of power relations, and the intersectionality of ethnicity/nationality, race, class, gender, and sexuality in the construction of identities are particularly useful in understanding the fundamentally critical stance with respect to U.S. society reflected in a substantial portion of Latina/o cultural production.[20]

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[19] Romo, 128. See also Sánchez, 205 for a discussion of external economic and political control in the barrio.

[20] Edna, Acosta-Belén, "Latina/o Cultural Expressions: A View of U.S. Society Through the Eyes of the Subaltern" in *A Companion to Latina/o Studies*, eds. Juan Flores and Renato Rosaldo. *Blackwell Reference Online* (Blackwell Publishing, 2007), last accessed 9 August 2011 <http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/tocnode?id=g9781405126229_chunk_g97814051262298>. Her discussion of the sublatern relates to theories of internal colonialism, which has relevant ties to the history of the Chicano Movement and arguments made in favor of cityhood in East Los Angeles in terms of external power structures and cultural authority. See also Joan Moore, "Colonialism: The Case of the Mexican Americans" in *Social Problems* 17:4 (Spring 1970), last accessed 18 March 2012 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/799679>

The comparisons that can be drawn between the Mexican urban experience in the Eastside barrio and broader issues of identity and cultural production in formerly subjugated landscapes are significant both for scholars and community activists both in terms of understanding the cultural boundaries of place and revising the structures of community authorship. For the heritage and preservation movement, the bottom-up approach to understanding significance in the built environment counteracts these earlier themes of dominance and cultural authority from outside the community.

As Sánchez points out, Mexican immigrants in the United States assumed a unique ethnic identity upon establishing a new home, which he describes as "a cultural orientation which accepted the possibilities of a future in their new land."[21] He skillfully juxtaposes competing articulations of identity, comparing the dominant Anglo-American culture's picturesque depiction of Mexican heritage in the early twentieth century with the complex process of cultural hybridity that newly arrived Mexicans pursued as they actively preserved significant facets of their established traditions and values. The rise of East Los Angeles, Sánchez argues, was critical in securing the survival of this culture: "The creation during the 1920s of a more concentrated Mexican community east of the river, however, offered an opportunity to reassert certain family practices deemed traditional in a wholly different setting."[22] From the beginning, heritage played a critical role in the placemaking process in East Los Angeles, particularly as the increasing sense

[21] Sánchez, 12. In addition to texts sited in Chapter 1, see also William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) for a discussion of the Anglo-American appropriation of Mexican heritage in Los Angeles for commercial and political gain in the early twentieth century.

[22] Sánchez, 143.

of permanency within this settlement led to a more culturally expressive physical environment. The linkage to a more stable landscape strengthened the cultural agency of the community, and these practices would over time have a significant impact upon the design and use of the built environment.

The social and political identity of Mexican-Americans in East Los Angeles, however, took a turn in the mid-1960s, as activists organized to combat vast local inequity in what would be known throughout the Southwest as the Chicano Movement. John R Chávez, author of *Eastside Landmark: A History of the East Los Angeles Community Union, 1968-1993*, wrote of the growing nationalism: ""This resurgence led to an increasing interest in Mexican-American history and to a revision of the simplistic depiction of Mexican-origin people as immigrants in the region…Chicano activists called the region Aztlán, in reference to the ancient Aztec homeland said to be in the pre-Columbian Southwest."[23] At the core of the myth of Aztlán, as Chávez points out, is the idea of history and place. Though this narrative lacked historical and spatial accuracy, it represented an attempt of the regional Mexican-American population to achieve power and self-determination through the authority of place.

The rise of the Chicano movement in East Los Angeles in the 1960s, bolstered by the East Los Angeles Walkouts in 1968 and the Chicano Moratorium in 1970, further complicated the dual identity that is central to Sánchez's thesis. Arnoldo De León and Richard Griswold del Castillo argue that advocates of a new Chicano identity were torn

[23] John R. Chávez, *Eastside Landmark: A History of the East Los Angeles Community Union (1968-1993)*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 54.

between two ideologically divergent interpretations of what it meant to be Mexican in the United States:

> The cultural nationalists argued that Mexican Americans constituted a nation, one culturally and politically distinct from Mexico, and that their main struggle was to unite Chicanos to achieve self-determination and political power. The revolutionary nationalists, on the other hand, felt that Chicanos were actually Mexicans and, as such, should join with working-class Mexicans to battle their common enemies.[24]

Figure 2: Newlyweds march in the National Chicano Moratorium, 1970
Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection

East Los Angeles, as it had been before the war, served as the experimental grounds for the development of a modern and politically and culturally distinct Mexican-American or Chicano identity, though as the authors point out, the true nature of that identity was fraught with complications. At the heart of the discord was a deep-seated conflict over the meaning of place and community: Were the history and culture of Mexican-Americans in East Los Angeles representative of a broader community seeking to establish roots in a new place, and did that unique heritage amount to a new version of

[24] Arnoldo De León and Richard Griswold del Castillo, *North to Azlán*, 167.

nationhood? Or were these experiences simply an extension of the history and culture on the other side of the border? While scholars have tended to support the pervasiveness of the hybrid or dual theory of identity as opposed to the idea of a new nation, the debate over Mexican-American identity is hardly resolved, even in the present day.[25]

Identity and the Built Environment

Representative of memory and tradition, the physical landscape was a powerful tool in defining the cultural aspirations of the local community. Chávez focuses on the physical manifestation of identity-building through his examination of TELACU, which Esteban Torres founded in 1968 to encourage community empowerment through economic development. Chávez's emphasis on the built environment and heritage in East Los Angeles distinguishes him from many of his colleagues. He writes:

> East L.A. remains the heart of the Eastside and has the monuments to prove it – Soledad Church, Garfield High School, New Calvary Cemetery, and the Roybal Medical Center. Some, like the cemetery, decorated on the Day of the Dead (All Soul's Day), are old Hispanicized sites. Others, like the Roybal Center with its pre-Columbian-style frieze, are much newer.[26]

As Chávez points out, the tangible heritage of East Los Angeles had a significant impact upon the strategies that TELACU employed to build community authority. Existing monuments could be viewed as reinterpreting the history and cultural memory of the

[25] Scholars have long debated the concept of "borderlands" history, which examines the geospatial power structures of place, politics, and culture inherent to negotiating life along the U.S.-Mexico border. See Kelly Lytle Hernández, "Borderlands and the Future History of the American West" in *The Western History Quarterly* 42:3 (Autumn 2011): 325-330 for a discussion of current cross-border and transnational scholarship. Borderland theories could be potentially illuminating in terms of understanding multicultural identity construction and spatial dynamics in East Los Angeles.

[26] Chávez, 5.

ancestral landscape, acting as havens for tradition and, in the case of Garfield High School, acts of dissent. Historical or architectural allusions in the buildings did not necessarily reflect a conscious study of the origins of those elements, but, rather, focused on the broader visualization of the Mexican landscape, reclaiming certain motifs that were already well known in the built environment of Los Angeles.

In 1974, TELACU completed construction on Nueva Maravilla, a comprehensive affordable housing project in the heart of the Maravilla neighborhood. The organization argued that this area, which had been identified for redevelopment due to rampant poverty rates, dilapidated housing conditions, and the area's visibility within the broader Chicano community in Los Angeles, was central to revitalizing the larger community's pride of place. Though residents met the early proposals with suspicion, anticipating yet another attempt at urban renewal, TELACU prioritized the creation of a strong sense of place and communal identity. The 504-unit complex, organized among a handful of modern two-story buildings situated within shared green spaces, simultaneously projected the image of upward social mobility and progress alongside a commitment to community heritage.[27]

Nueva Maravilla marked a critical moment in the movement to define East Los Angeles' historic and cultural identity because it resulted from a highly mediated intervention in the landscape by a visible organization. Rather than being the work of an outside agency, the project originated from within the community. Although

[27] Chávez, 107. Chávez describes the buildings as having adobe-yellow plaster walls and reddish roofs that subtly invoke the vernacular landscapes of the Southwest. The use of murals throughout the complex similarly expresses one local artistic tradition.

incorporation and, therefore, self-determination eluded East Los Angeles, TELACU had devised a new method of achieving power through place, namely, giving residents an innate connection to and ownership over the cultural imprint in the built environment. From a traditional preservation approach, TELACU's interpretive process might not have produced an authentic representation of the cultural identity of East Los Angeles, but its contributions are nonetheless significant in tracing the region's development and relationship to expressions of heritage.

TELACU's efforts to strengthen community identity extended to intangible cultural heritage as well, infusing the landscape with an enduring sense of ritual. Chávez notes that the organization's "interest in preserving and promoting" Chicano heritage manifested itself in entertainment productions as well as in architecture and murals. He explains, "One of the most popular of these programs, "Domingos Alegres," consisted of a live series of performances presented in East L.A.'s Belvedere Park in conjunction with the Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department. Beginning in April 1976 twenty variety shows per year featuring mariachis, *ballet folklórico*, magicians, and comedians – including both local and international talent – were presented free for the community."[28] Belvedere Park, a centralized recreational area near Nueva Maravilla, gave residents a place to gather and to share in time-honored cultural practices, reinforcing the importance of local artistic customs in defining place.[29]

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[28] Chávez, 131.

[29] Belvedere Park is an excellent case for non-traditional interpretation strategies given its ritualistic significance. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of Sarah Kanouse's essay "Marking and Missing: memory-performance and the radical present," which examines active or performative representations of history.

Figure 3: Cinco de Mayo celebration at Belvedere Park, 1957
Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection

TELACU also focused on food as a significant expression of cultural heritage through its designs for Tamayo Restaurant, which was established in a historically and architecturally significant Spanish Colonial Revival building from 1927. Since the building's construction, it had housed a number of different institutions, including the Department of Motor Vehicles, the California Highway Patrol, and the Brown Berets, indicating its layered social and political history.[30] TELACU rehabilitated the building in 1984, which it named after Mexican painter Rufino Tamayo. Chávez comments, the organization "decorated the interior with examples of Rufino Tamayo's own work, which

[30] Chávez, 233. The building now known as Tamayo Restaurant formerly housed La Piranha Café, which functioned as a meeting hall and office for the Young Chicanos for Community Action, also known as the Brown Berets. The Brown Berets formed in the late 1960s to fight discrimination by law enforcement, education inequality, a lack of political representation, and the Vietnam War. While the current use does not reference the building's critical role in the Chicano Movement, the Eastside Heritage Consortium did include it on its preliminary site list for its political significance. This building not only illustrates the challenge in acknowledging certain historical layers of a place when the existing function is not representative of the diversity of its historical themes, but also the need for grassroots activists to devise unique methods of interpreting these kinds of pluralities in a single place and across a greater landscape.

diners could appreciate as they enjoyed distinctive Mexican cuisine, such as *huachinango flameado* (red snapper) and *pavo fumaro en dos salas* (smoked turkey). The interior also contained huge tapestries from Oaxaca and imported tile and marble..."[31] Although the restaurant was intended to attract the small, but growing local middle class, it was an important example of TELACU's comprehensive endeavors to combine history and culture with economic stabilization. In this instance, the organization combined architectural heritage with culinary traditions, an important blending of tangible and intangible heritage in the context of East Los Angeles.

Despite the depth of scholarship on East Los Angeles and identity, these works do not necessarily represent a broad range of topics within the community. Rodolfo Acuña points out, "The history of the general Chicano population in Los Angeles has been pieced together and defined by Chicano male historians. This work, although it helps us to understand the past, does not define gender issues."[32] Indeed, the majority of the texts examined thus far have portrayed the complicated intersection of race, ethnicity, and class in East Los Angeles without accounting for the role of women in shaping the community outside of the workforce, Sánchez's discussion of gender and the family being the lone exception. Accounting for female cultural memory is a critical component in understanding and authenticating local heritage, as Acuña indicates. Similarly, additional work should further evaluate the multiethnic history of East Los Angeles. The

[31] Chávez, 33.

[32] Rodolfo F. Acuña, *Anything But Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1996), 226.

built environment provides an excellent opportunity for examining these cultural layers, as will be discussed later.

Nevertheless, the scholarship masterfully explores the woven identities that developed out of the experience of immigration, assimilation, and individuation. The preservation community, with its traditional focus on architectural heritage, has attempted over the last several years to explore issues relating to public history, though much of the research has centered on manifestations in high culture as opposed to vernacular culture. In 2009, the National Park Service published a document intended to discuss the overarching themes in Latino history that could be relevant to professional preservationists. The author, Brian D. Joyner, argues for an interdisciplinary approach to Latino heritage studies, with connections to anthropology, history, and ethnic studies. While such a methodology is hardly revolutionary to community heritage activists, the profession is only beginning to embrace such tactics in its investigations of the built environment.

Of particular note is Joyner's provocative use of the term "Hispanic" in his attempt to unite the distinct cultures in his study. He writes:

> In the U.S., the depiction of Hispanic culture is dominated by Mexican/Chicano Americans, particularly west of the Mississippi River, with Puerto Ricans/ Cubans/Caribbean Americans on the East Coast. Linkages through common religious beliefs and the overarching colonial Spanish culture and language (although not in all cases) create the image of a pan-Hispanic identity. However, national loyalties, transnational residence, and a multiplicity of cultures and ethnicities make a pan-Hispanic culture difficult to define.[33]

[33] Brian D. Joyner, *Hispanic Reflections on the American Landscape: Identifying and Interpreting Hispanic Heritage* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 2009), 20.

While Joyner acknowledges the difficulty inherent to producing an overarching framework for representing these various ethnic and cultural groups, the emphasis on the Hispanic heritage of the United States adopts a hierarchical model for interpreting significant sites, where connections to the high European culture of the Spanish are preferred to the history and culture of the everyday people who continue to inhabit these landscapes today. The analysis does not ignore the importance of material or intangible culture, and Joyner notes that current research on immigration and labor history is likely to contribute to the preservation field, but the overwhelming emphasis on the word "Hispanic" as the identifier for a large, often disparate community overlooks the methods that scholars such as Sánchez posit on the subject of identity and place. The different ethnic groups that compose the "Hispanic" community - Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Central and South Americans - have widely disparate histories and cultures in terms of their migration to and settlement in the United States. Where some relocated due to political or economic circumstances, others, such as Mexican immigrants, settled in the US amid ambiguous claims to land.[34] What unites these groups is a shared history of conquest, and the NPS, in emphasizing that narrative structure, fails to represent the distinct experiences of those groups in their history of living and working in the US.

The publication includes an inventory of properties associated with Hispanic heritage that have been documented by at least one of the National Park Service's cultural resources program (National Register of Historic Places, National Historic Landmarks,

[34] As Chicana artist Judith Baca points out, "We didn't cross the border; the border crossed *us*." See Diaz, 78.

and the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscape Survey). Of the nine sites listed in California, only two are located in Los Angeles County: Padua Hills Theatre in Claremont and the Lopez Adobe in San Fernando.[35] Both properties are significant for their connections to elite culture. Padua Hills Theatre, which opened in 1930, exemplifies the early twentieth century fascination in California with the Spanish fantasy past through its Spanish Colonial Revival architecture and its position as a Mexican and Mexican-American culture house for a largely Anglo audience. The Lopez Adobe, constructed in 1883 by Geronimo Lopez, is an architecturally significant residence owned by an influential family in the history of the San Fernando Valley. It was built during the transitional period that followed the secularization and decline of the missions and preceded the widespread development of the region. Both properties, while historically and culturally significant in the development of Southern California, fail to encompass the vast history of Los Angeles in terms of its connection to those of Hispanic or Latin American descent. While the terminology used to identify this large community is as complex as the history it represents, the alignment of the National Park Service with the dominant national narrative undermines the preservation community's ability to evaluate vernacular culture.

One of the more place-based interpretations of the Latino social and cultural environment in East Los Angeles is planner James Rojas' analysis of what he calls the "enacted landscape." To Rojas, the innate ritual of the Latino urban environment distinguishes otherwise anonymous streetscapes. He writes: "Latinos bring a rich practice

[35] Joyner, 73.

of public life to Los Angeles that can be seen by the way they retrofit the urban street design. Street vendors carrying their wares, pushing carts, or setting up temporary tables and tarps; vivid colors, murals, and business signs; clusters of people socializing on street corners and over front yard fences; and the furniture and props that makes these front yards into personal statements all contribute to the vivid unique landscape of the city."[36]

Because the housing stock and commercial buildings in many instances predate the arrival of the substantial Mexican and Mexican-American population, they undoubtedly reveal the negotiation of the dual identity of the newcomers. Seemingly simple social practices, such as street vending and outdoor leisure, had a significant impact upon the nature of the local environment. The proliferation of food trucks in the car-centric culture of greater Los Angeles, a mobile representation of the original Mexican taco cart or stand, is an important example of how the intangible enacted geography of East Los Angeles has extended beyond its traditional borders. In adapting to a new urban living space, the Mexican community integrated its customs into the existing framework of the developing city, creating a highly flexible environment that satisfies immediate needs. Rojas argues:

> Every change, no matter how small, has meaning and purpose. Bringing the sofa out to the front porch, stuccoing over the clapboard, painting the house vivid colors, or placing a statue of the Virgin in the front yard all reflect the struggles, triumphs, and everyday habits of working-class Latinos. The front yards in East Los Angeles are not anonymous spaces but personal vignettes of owners' lives.[37]

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[36] James Rojas, "The Cultural Landscape of a Latino Community" in *Landscape and Race in the United States*, ed. Richard H. Schein (New York: Routledge, 2006), 177-178.

[37] Ibid., 182.

From a traditional preservation perspective, these alterations to the existing buildings represent a deterioration of their integrity and authenticity. Yet these changes, which may seem the result of neglect or indifference, are significant in understanding the social and cultural patterns of the local inhabitants over the last several decades. As Rojas implies, the cultural and urban production of the Latino community in East Los Angeles requires a different aesthetic sensibility than the surrounding Los Angeles environment.

Rojas, too, concerns himself with identity and agency in his analysis. He comments, "The enacted environment of East L.A. is not planned; the props and vendors reflect the nature of the people. The enacted environment is made up of individual actions that are ephemeral but nevertheless part of a persistent process."[38] For Rojas, the inherent ritual embedded in the evolving built environment represents an important form of asserting power within the community. In the absence of formal authority, residents and workers have transformed the physical landscape through a constant negotiation of past and present, where the space of the yard or street corner reflects the ongoing process of establishing a sense of place and belonging in East Los Angeles. Rojas astutely points out that the influence of built space is not contained solely within the walls of the buildings, but that it extends out into the landscape as well, infusing the whole of East Los Angeles with the living history and culture of the inhabitants.

[38] James Rojas, "The Enacted Environment of East Los Angeles" in *Places* 8:3 (1993), 53, last accessed 28 February 2012 <www/places/designobserver.com/feature/los-angeles----the-enacted-environment-of-east-los-angeles/570>

Heritage Conservation in East Los Angeles

This notion of understanding and empowering East Los Angeles as a cultural landscape permeates the work of the Eastside Heritage Consortium. In the fall of 2010, the National Trust for Historic Preservation sponsored a day long diversity session known as L.A. Conversación in downtown Los Angeles, which focused on pressing current issues relating to Latino heritage and preservation. Over sixty activists, preservation professionals, business owners, local government officials, and community members attended the event to discuss the changing role of preservation, or heritage conservation, in local Latino neighborhoods. The Conversación, which was only one of several gatherings held nationally in that fall, emphasized the goals of "honoring stories, respecting the "hands" of the builders, and enriching American culture through preservation and more formal recognition of the intangible aspects of heritage."[39]At the core of this discussion was the complexity of the Latino identity in Los Angeles, particularly in terms of its role in preservation and the interpretation of built heritage.

The Eastside Heritage Consortium, a collaboration of community members and representatives from the Los Angeles Conservancy, the Maravilla Historical Society, and Persona Anima, grew out of the Conversación with the goal of documenting and preserving significant historic and cultural resources in unincorporated East Los Angeles. While SurveyLA, the City of Los Angeles' comprehensive historic and cultural resources survey, proposed to document the architectural and cultural heritage of properties within

[39] Christine Madrid French, "Latino in Los Angeles: Preserving and Celebrating Diverse Histories" in *Preservation Nation* (October 2010), last accessed 10 December 2011 < http://blog.preservationnation.org/2010/10/19/latino-in-los-angeles-preserving-celebrating-diverse-histories/>

the City using input from professionals and community members, East Los Angeles was not included within that program, and it continues to lack a preservation framework due to its unincorporated status. The County of Los Angeles, at present, does not have a preservation ordinance in place to protect significant resources, although the County Historical Landmarks and Records Commission, which makes recommendations to the State on sites or properties that have been nominated to the California Register of Historic Resources or the National Register of Historic Places, has recently heard nominations for two sites in East Los Angeles. Activists, however, face great difficulty in obtaining state designation for sites with largely localized social significance.

Coupled with the lack of a formal plan, which leaves sites open to development or demolition by neglect, preservation activity in the community struggles to address existing narratives of conflict, including gang activity, systemic racism, confrontation with law enforcement, and political and economic inequality. Because of East Los Angeles' complicated and sensitive history, outsiders, including those within the preservation community, often assume that the area is too dangerous to venture a visit or that the area lacks significant historic or cultural landmarks. Developing a place-based preservation plan, then, remains one of the Consortium's main goals as it works to achieve internal and external respect for local heritage and community empowerment.

The Consortium's survey of East Los Angeles is the third attempt to document historic and cultural resources in the community. In 1979, TELACU commissioned Community Resources Group to perform an extensive survey of the Eastside, which included properties in East Los Angeles, Boyle Heights, El Sereno, Highland Park, and

Lincoln Heights. Many of the challenges that arose in the recent evaluation of East Los Angeles concerned the same issues of accessibility and proper documentation were present in the 1979 survey. In the introduction to their report, the consultants revealed an imbalance in their findings between identified architectural and historical resources. Citing the unincorporated status of East Los Angeles, they argued that the lack of available documentation from local public agencies undermined attempts to understand the social history of the built environment, leading them to depend heavily upon evidence solicited from the community and visual evaluations.[40] In acknowledging the importance of tracking down data relating to social and cultural themes in the built environment, they identified the key issue in heritage conservation in East Los Angeles, namely that architecture alone cannot serve as the basis for meaningful preservation practices. In the intervening decades, as many of these monuments have fallen into disrepair or have been demolished, the historical and cultural links have become even more significant. The consultants also highlighted the necessary dependency on community participation as compensation for insufficient formal documentation. In many ways, they set the stage for a heritage movement that occurred at the behest of the community.

The consultants also pinpointed a number of important themes for assessing the complexity of the built environment. First, they noted the resonance of historical ethnic diversity within the community, which was most evident through the many extant

[40] Community Resources Group, "Greater East Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Survey," 1979, TELACU Papers, Special Collections, John F. Kennedy Memorial Library, California State University, Los Angeles, 7.

churches and cemeteries.[41] They also pointed out the relevant patterns of residential development and styles that revealed the labor history of the community. The close proximity of residential, commercial, and industrial buildings indicated changing zoning regulations over time, and the importance of the automobile in the rise of the commercial strip, the largest of which was Whittier Boulevard, was readily apparent in the many gas stations, viaducts, and bridges. Lastly, the consultants argued that the cultural and artistic production of the local Mexican-American population had the most visible impact upon the built landscape and that a thorough understanding of those varying forms of expression would be critical to future work in the area.[42]

Although the links between tangible and intangible heritage were not particularly well defined in the late 1970s, one can conclude this connection was vital to the process of evaluating East Los Angeles, although any concrete effects of this survey on local preservation remain unknown. The consultants listed among their goals the creation of a self-guided tour of the Eastside as well as the preparation of National Register nominations, but neither of these objectives ever translated into concrete action in unincorporated East Los Angeles. The consultants likely understood the limitations of their survey, however, given the scarcity of published research and access to public records relating to the local built environment, and they indicated that the overarching goal of the report was to "stimulate and encourage others to investigate further the

[41] Community Resources Group, 7.

[42] Ibid., 8.

cultural heritage of the environs of East Los Angeles."[43] While the history of East Los Angeles has made its way into scholarly works published since the 1980s, the legacy of the TELACU survey is still in progress, and its methodology, particularly regarding the interdependence of primary and secondary research and oral histories, remains pertinent in the current work of the Consortium.

In 1995, nearly twenty years after the TELACU survey, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) produced its own cultural resources analysis in anticipation of the proposed expansion of the light rail system in the Eastside. The consultants for this survey produced a list of significant places broken down by resource type, although, like their predecessors, their list reflected the geography of the broader Eastside as opposed to focusing solely on unincorporated East Los Angeles. In addition to the list, the consultants included corresponding historical narratives to illuminate significant social and cultural patterns. Chicano historian Juan Gómez-Quiñones wrote the section entitled "A Social-Cultural People: The Thematic Beats and Rhythms of a History and Culture." In the text, he divides the history of East Los Angeles and the associated resources into thirteen themes: economy, labor, immigration, social structure, culture, family, religion, education, youth, media, arts, politics, and organizations. Throughout his analysis, he focuses on the intangible qualities and practices of the Eastside rather than singling out individual monuments to illustrate his argument. He writes about the visibility of Mexican public culture through events such as holiday festivals, religious gatherings, performing arts, and organized sports: "Even political

[43] Community Resources Group, 10.

gatherings are cultural affirmations as are types of public and commercial rhetorics. Mexican commercial entertainment impacts heavily in Los Angeles and is part of self-identification, family life and social styles for many."[44] The ritualistic quality of the public space, for Quiñones, distinguishes the Eastside from the rest of Los Angeles. The vernacular styles of the local built environment might not be architecturally distinct, but the ways in which they communicate the essence of the community render them essential components of a living culture.

The Consortium, mindful of the drawbacks of consultant-based historic resources surveys, developed its own community-based survey that depended upon the responses of local citizens rather than on professional evaluation.[45] Surveys were distributed at local schools, libraries, coffee shops, senior centers, and online over a four month time period, during which approximately 170 surveys were collected in total. The primary goal of the project was to develop a list of significant sites or resources that could serve as a basis for developing local preservation practices, though the content, in many cases, influenced the overall objectives. Although the East Los Angeles Residents Association is currently promoting a cityhood initiative, which would enable the adoption of a local ordinance, the absence of a formalized preservation plan for the area led the Consortium to seek non-traditional routes for conserving local heritage. Current proposals include the establishment of a heritage trail or heritage area that focuses on East Los Angeles as a cultural landscape, the development of a high school curriculum track that integrates

[44] Quiñones, V-13.

[45] Although concurrent SurveyLA includes an award-winning public participation program, critics maintain that the survey's methodology favors architectural resources over social or cultural resources.

local history, and the creation of an interactive website and database to house the survey data and to continue to generate interest in local preservation.

Figure 4: Our Lady of Guadalupe procession, 1962
Our Lady of Solitude Catholic Church is visible in the background
Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection

While the initial goals were clearly stated before the survey was conducted, the Consortium developed the following criteria for evaluating the survey data after the formal collection period ended:

- Sites must reveal significant social or cultural themes in East Los Angeles or are representative of an important architectural style.
- Sites must be mentioned more than twice in community surveys.
- Sites that are mentioned only once or twice may be included on the list if the respondent cited compelling evidence for their significance.
- Sites must be representative of a variety or building or landscape types.
- Sites must be located within the boundaries of unincorporated East Los Angeles or otherwise associated with its development.
- Sites should be representative of a multiethnic interpretation of local history.

- Sites should be referenced in the scholarly literature of the area.
- Sites should be at least twenty-five years of age.

The selected criteria were left intentionally broad so as to account for a diverse selection of resources. While the survey emphasized history over present time, it did encourage participants to list sites that might one day have historic or cultural significance. While the majority of the responses reflected Mexican-American cultural memory, and, in fact, all of the members of the Eastside Heritage Consortium identify as Chicano or Mexican-American, the area where the survey looked to elicit the greatest depth of responses concerned the multiethnic heritage angle. This particular criterion proved to be the most challenging due to the demographic changes after World War II. While older respondents could identify the presence of other ethnic communities from previous decades, they struggled in most cases to identify extant resources that could illuminate the history and culture of those communities in East Los Angeles.

The determination of a group driven largely by Chicano heritage to document the multicultural identity of East Los Angeles over time raises a number of questions about authenticity and agency. While the existing scholarship has attempted to document the dynamic cultural exchange among residents in the decades leading up to World War II, the history of resistance and identity theories in the 1960s and 70s focused solely on the authority of an underrepresented community in its mythic ancestral landscape. The movement to establish the self-determination of Chicanos in East Los Angeles excluded these complex portrayals of the neighborhood as a diverse ethnic enclave, changing the language of identity and memory as it defined this specific place. The Chicano Movement reconstructed heritage in order to legitimize the resistance of a community of

politically active Mexican Americans, not to document complex patterns of history. The present movement, then, with its multidimensional approach to heritage reflects a transformation in the perception of local identity, where community empowerment depends upon an inclusive interpretation of the landscape, regardless of ethnicity. Although the assumption that one group or culture can produce a truly authentic and sensitive interpretation of a multicultural past raises further questions about the problem of what should be preserved for whom, this approach also enables the possibility of collaborations that transcend a single ethnic population and grounds the history of the enclave in the broader patterns of the Los Angeles region. While the initial results of the survey certainly favored Chicano or Mexican American heritage, this question of whose history and culture ought to be represented remains critical in determining the integrity of the project.

After much debate, the Consortium produced a preliminary list of sites that balanced the criteria established during the summer of 2011:

#	**Name of Site**	**Date of Construction (Approximate)**
1	El Mercado de Los Angeles	1968
2	Los Cinco Puntos	N/A
3	Former Self Help Graphics Building	1927
4	Anthony Quinn Library	1973
5	El Gallo Bakery	1926/1949
6	La Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Soledad	1926
7	Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery	1923/1945
8	Belvedere Community Regional Park	N/A
9	Garfield High School	1925
10	Golden Gate Theater	1927
11	La Piranha Café	1928/1960

Table 2: Preliminary List of Significant Sites in East Los Angeles

#	Name of Site	Date of Construction (Approximate)
12	Eddie Heredia Boxing Club	1977
13	Site of the former Silver Dollar Bar	1922/1930
14	Whittier Boulevard Arch	1986
15	The Strand	1929
16	Calvary Cemetery	1920s
17	Ruben Salazar Memorial Park/Laguna Park	1938
18	St. Lucy Catholic Church	1970
19	"The Wall that Cracked Open" (Willie Herrón)	1972

Table 2: Continued

While not every site perfectly matched the criteria, the list in its entirety reveals the direction of heritage conservation in East Los Angeles. The emphasis on diversity of building or landscape type and the role of intangible culture in shaping the significance of the sites indicates the desire to produce a comprehensive plan for understanding and protecting the history and culture of the community. Based on the survey responses and supplemental secondary research, the Consortium produced a short narrative document to accompany the site list, though it acknowledges that a great deal of work remains to be accomplished in the process of uncovering the true meaning of these places in the community. For example, dates of construction were retrieved from the County Assessor's website, but the ambiguity of that data reveals the process of guesswork that underlies community-based heritage activism. The difficulty in obtaining narrative information from those community members who can remember the development of East Los Angeles remains one of the greatest challenges to the Consortium, particularly when that information does not exist in any published form.

Figure 5: Exterior, Golden Gate Theater and shops on Whittier Boulevard, 1980
Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection

As mentioned earlier, two of the sites on the list have recently been nominated to the California Register. In May of 2011, the State Historical Resources Commission voted unanimously to determine the former Self Help Graphics and Art building eligible for listing on the Register, offering the property vital protections under the scope of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Los Angeles Conservancy, which submitted the nomination, and the consulting agency Historic Resources Group determined that the building was significant for its role in the development and revival of Chicano art and culture. Self Help Graphics and Art, founded in 1970 by Sister Karen Boccalero, nurtured the talent of such renowned Chicano artists as Gronk, Patssi Valdez, and Frank Romero.[46] The building was originally constructed as a bank in 1927, but the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) purchased it in 1944 and opened a community

[46] Historic Resources Group, LLC, "Self-Help Graphics California Register Nomination," (March 2011), 2.

center intended to encourage community empowerment through educational programs and social and cultural gatherings. These efforts formed, in part, as a response to local social unrest after the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943, which had promoted widespread violence and revealed a culture of systemic racism in Los Angeles. CYO also stimulated the rise of the Chicano/East Los Angeles rock and roll sound of the 1950s and 1960s. The distinctive mosaic façade is the work of local Chicano artist Eduardo Oropeza, who completed the installation in 1990.

As the nomination states, the Self Help Graphics building functioned as an important place of cultural affirmation: "To this day, SHG&A is a place where people congregate and interact with one another and reflects, in part, the residents' religious and cultural background, and social and economic status. The building's contribution to the East Los Angeles community is matched by the importance placed on it by residents, whose loyal patronage over the years has secured its status as a community landmark."[47] Although the organization relocated to Boyle Heights in 2008, the nomination upholds the long-lasting significance of the building in the articulation of local identity. While the building is certainly aesthetically interesting, it depends heavily on social and cultural themes for its overall power within the community. In determining the property eligible for listing on the California Register, the State Commission upheld the importance of intangible culture in understanding the development of the physical environment in East Los Angeles.

[47]Historic Resources Group, 7.

Figure 6: Unidentified woman dressed as "La Catrina" in the Dia de los Muertos celebration at Self Help Graphics, undated
Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection

In October of 2011, the County Historical Landmarks and Records Commission voted to recommend a State hearing for the nomination of the Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery. The nomination, produced by consulting group ASM Affiliates, identified the adjoining buildings as "the most important social center for the multi-ethnic Maravilla community from 1928 through 1989."[48] Handball, an inexpensive and accessible recreational activity, has appeared in many different cultures worldwide for centuries. The only extant handball court in the Los Angeles area, the Maravilla court underscores the connection of the practice to Mexican heritage, as the tradition can be interpreted as a hybrid between ancient Mesoamerican and Basque games. According to community oral reports, local citizens used bricks from the nearby Davidson Brick Yard to build the handball court in 1928.[49] In the early 1940s, Michi and Tommy Nishiyama

[48] ASM Affiliates, Inc., "Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery Nomination" (September 2010), 2.

[49] Ibid., 8.

purchased the land following Michi's return from internment at a Japanese relocation camp. They opened El Centro Grocery next door to the court and transformed the property into a community haven for the local Mexican-American residents, overcoming social and cultural boundaries that often prevented harmony among different ethnic communities in Los Angeles. The nomination focuses on the model of multiethnic heritage, arguing for the enduring significance of this site as an example of the complex, layered history of East Los Angeles.

As sites like the former Self Help Graphics and the Maravilla Handball Court reveal, the layered landscape of East Los Angeles and the various manifestations of the identity that it represents produce an ideal setting for experimenting with heritage conservation practices. The interdependence of tangible and intangible culture reveals a distinct local interpretation of geography that is reminiscent of Kevin Lynch's discussion of memory and place, where he refers to "public images" as those "common mental pictures carried by large numbers of a city's inhabitants: areas of agreement which might be expected to appear in the interaction of a single physical reality, a common culture, and a basic physiological nature."[50] As an analysis of the historiography and the practice of preservation in East Los Angeles reveals, the history and cultural memory of the East Los Angeles community extend beyond the boundaries of the unincorporated area. Although the current cityhood initiative would establish clear borders around the community that might limit the scope of heritage conservation through the adoption of traditional preservation practices, such as local designations and tax incentives, the

[50] Kevin Lynch, *Image of the City*, 7.

continuation of community-based heritage activism would enable the safeguarding of customary cultural boundaries.

As preservationists nationwide begin to engage with the idea of layered social and cultural histories embedded in significant architectural or vernacular landscapes, the complex Mexican-American identity identified in the scholarship of East Los Angeles and within the community itself stands to set a powerful precedent for changing the nature of the heritage movement. The following chapter will not only examine successful place-based strategies for heritage conservation, but it will also consider the essential question of how communities can interpret and protect local heritage through the ritual of everyday life without fully-defined standards or policies.

Chapter 3
The Future of Cultural Heritage Activism, Policy and Leadership

> El Mercado "was like a small part of Mexico, authentic Mexican food, music, clothes with[out] having to be in Mexico."[1]

The relevance of the historic preservation movement in the United States over the next century will depend upon its adaptation to diversifying social and cultural trends in placemaking and memory. As was explored in the previous two chapters, existing preservation strategies either do not adequately address the problems of agency and identity in underrepresented communities or have not yet been extended to those communities. While governing bodies outside of the U.S. have, in recent years, based revised conservation practices on localized historic and cultural contexts, the U.S. continues to designate significant places according to a top-down structure, favoring the highest tier of architectural or historical monuments over more ordinary, but no less significant, places.

Regardless of the shortcomings of American preservation practice, certain communities have devised place-based methods for documenting and interpreting local heritage, progressing beyond the existing national preservation dialogue and creating innovative models for change within the field. This chapter will examine international precedents for heritage conservation that incorporate community-based procedures, setting the stage for change within existing policies within the U.S. It will also consider

[1] Savanna Lopez, "Student Respondents," Community-Based Survey of East Los Angeles, Eastside Heritage Consortium, 2011.

current initiatives based on integrated grassroots activism in the U.S., including the creation of National Heritage Areas, community museums, and memory-performance.

International Standards for Heritage and Community Conservation

As discussed in Chapter One, the U.S. has ratified UNESCO's Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972, but not the more recent Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003). Because the goals of heritage or cultural conservation depend upon the interrelated significance of built, natural, and intangible resources, the National Park Service and its related agencies should reevaluate the adoption of formal procedures for managing a more diverse range of resources, beyond the existing results of the 1983 study on cultural conservation. While legal protections could be extended to intangible heritage through a strategic partnership between federal, state, and local governments, which is the same model employed to preserve the built environment, formal recognition of the 2003 Convention should also be an urgent objective. Such an act would strengthen the breadth of the heritage movement in the U.S. by focusing not only on a more inclusive American narrative, but also on how that narrative fits into a more global interpretation of history and culture, an idealistic yet worthy goal given the ties that many residents have to the cultural memory of other nations. The U.S., however, is unlikely to ratify the Convention in the near future due to recent funding withdrawals from UNESCO over the admission of Palestine as a member state. Nonetheless, the tenets of the Convention on Intangible

Heritage set an important precedent for those working to enact similar legislation in the U.S and warrant review.

Of particular import are the interdisciplinary measures that the Convention established for safeguarding intangible culture. In addition to authorizing participating nations to produce resource inventories and to form appropriate supervising bodies, the Convention directs its members to support scientific, technical and artistic research in order to produce innovative conservation models, to adopt procedures for transmitting heritage practices, to develop educational programming for the public, and to ensure access without disrespecting customary boundaries regarding heritage practices.[2] Any proposals for new legislation in the U.S. concerning historic preservation or cultural conservation should aspire to generate unique partnerships within the field, enabling the meaning of heritage and place to evolve through atypical interpretations. Of equal weight and influence is the stipulation that the Convention sets for community engagement, whereby member states must guarantee "the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management."[3]

In addition to UNESCO, several countries have successfully implemented this kind of interdisciplinary, community-based approach to cultural conservation. Four years before the final draft of the Convention on Intangible Heritage was published, the Australian chapter of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)

[2] UNESCO, *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Articles 13-14 (October 2003), last accessed 15 January 2012 < http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00006>

[3] Ibid., Article 15.

completed the Burra Charter, a governing document for the management of cultural heritage in Australia. The authors of the Charter framed it as a balance between traditional preservation and cultural conservation, writing: "The Burra Charter advocates a cautious approach to change: do as much as necessary to care for the place and to make it useable, but otherwise change it as little as possible so that its cultural significance is retained."[4]

Of exceptional interest is the inclusivity of the Charter's definitions, particularly for understanding the meaning and practice of conservation. The authors state, "*Conservation* may, according to circumstance, include the processes of: retention or reintroduction of a *use*; retention of *associations* and *meanings; maintenance, preservation, restoration, reconstruction, adaptation* and *interpretation*; and will commonly include a combination of more than one of these."[5] Rather than separating these activities and interventions with detached procedures, the Charter maintains that conservation, the perpetuation of the cultural significance of a place, requires a different combination of treatments depending on the unique conditions of each place. Like UNESCO's Convention, the Burra Chater empowers groups or individuals with significant associations with a place to participate in its management, conservation, and interpretation.[6]

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[4] Australia ICOMOS, *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance* (1999), 1, last accessed 3 January 2012 < http://australia.icomos.org/publications/charters/>

[5] Ibid., Article 14, 6.

[6] Ibid., Article 26, 8.

The success of the Burra Charter in safeguarding Australian cultural heritage led to its reception as a model for future legislation in other countries. In 2002, a partnership between China ICOMOS, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH), and the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) published the *Principles for the Conservation Heritage Sites in China* to establish a legal framework for administering China's vast number of culturally significant places. Although contemporary heritage conservation in China dates to the 1930s, the Principles reflected a shift away from a mitigation approach to preservation, which focused on the protection of important sites from natural or manmade destruction, towards the interdisciplinary approach of the Burra Charter. What distinguishes the Principles from other documents is its emphasis on the global effects of heritage conservation:

> Peace and development are central themes in contemporary society. Mutual understanding of one another's heritage promotes cultural exchange among countries and regions and serve the interest of world peace and common development. China's magnificent sites are the heritage not only of the various ethnic groups of China but are also the common wealth of all humanity; they belong not only to the present generation but even more to future generations.[7]

While the Principles do reflect the unique heritage of China, with the subject matter shaping the scope and integrity of the guidelines, the authors consciously framed the document according to international sensibilities, raising the stakes on national folklife and history. Although China ICOMOS, SACH and the GCI turned to examples within Australia and the United States to frame these authoritative guidelines, the final draft of

[7] Neville Agnew and Martha Demas, eds., *Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China*, English-language text, second edition (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2004), 59, last accessed 3 January 2012 <www.getty.edu/conservation/our_projects/field_projects/china/china_publications.html>

the Principles contains a valuable context for expanding the interpretation of cultural significance, regardless of the nationality of place.

On the question of significance, the Principles state: "The fundamental significance of a heritage site resides in its inherent values. Inherent values are a site's historical, artistic, and scientific values. Recognition of a site's heritage values is a continuous and open-ended process that deepens as society develops and its scientific and cultural awareness increases."[8] This simple statement – that significance changes over time as greater perspective is acquired on history and tradition – is crucial in acknowledging that heritage conservation practices can hardly afford to remain fixed upon a single moment or layer in history. The Principles also clearly express the need to maximize the social and cultural utility of a place, even if the most rational function is no longer the original. Heritage sites, the document affirms, contribute positively to scientific research, social purposes, such as education, tourism, and recreation, aesthetic purposes, and economic development.[9]

While the Principles include detailed procedures for professionals relating to the technical requirements for conservation, they also incorporate strategies for interpretation. Although different sites have individual needs regarding access and capacity, the authors determined that the objectives and content of interpretation plans should contain "a conceptual plan for revealing the overall site and its associated artifacts; a plan for the use of the site to exhibit artifacts and historical themes; methods

[8] Agnew and Demas, Article 2.3, 71.

[9] Ibid., 73-76.

proposed to interpret and explain the site and highlight specific elements therein; [and] a plan for promotion and tourism."[10] What this emphasis on site interpretation does not represent is the historic or cultural significance of more extensive landscapes, and it leaves itself open to outside commercial forces, a practice that concerns Frits Pannekoek for its community consequences (See Chapter 1). The methodology of the Principles, while inclusive in terms of defining heritage, does not necessarily anticipate the challenges posed by communities equivalent to East Los Angeles, where the daily lives of the present inhabitants directly impact the integrity and the authenticity of the significant landscape. Instead, the system devised implies a preference for monuments over vernacular culture or spaces.

While amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act and the extensive publications of the National Park Service have succeeded in broadening the role of cultural significance in evaluating the built environment and accommodating intangible heritage, the United States lags behind other nations in terms of widespread acceptance of the need for more inclusivity, particularly among underrepresented communities, within the field. What remains unclear is whether or not legislative changes, along the lines of the Burra Charter or the China Principles, would succeed in meeting the needs of grassroots efforts or in empowering communities to manage place-based history and culture. As this chapter will demonstrate, certain localized communities, when given the proper tools, have succeeded in developing customized plans for the interpretation and safeguarding of significant places that far exceed the guidelines established at the federal

[10] Agnew and Demas, Article 9.2.5, 81.

level. Should federal, state and local governments formally adopt policies to encourage and to safeguard community-based conservation efforts, or is heritage authenticity better protected from the ground-up?

Grassroots Heritage Activism: Top-Down or Bottom-Up?

While the aforementioned international charters demonstrate an evolution in the ways in which governing bodies approach the role of local communities in heritage conservation, they ultimately conform to a top-down management model. As communities like East Los Angeles illustrate, residents and cultural practitioners are capable of offering ingenious leadership to vital questions of what should be conserved and how that conservation should occur.

New strategies in cultural conservation will require greater grassroots mobilization in previously untapped communities. Sociologists G. Lachelle Norris and Sherry Cable argue that the socioeconomic dynamics of grassroots movements reveal important relationships between elites and non-elites within a given community, particularly when issues of empowerment are at stake. They write, "In the initial stage of mobilization and recruitment, the grassroots [social mobilization organization] emerges from the lower ends of the local status hierarchy, that is, from those citizens whose social position makes them the most vulnerable to a variety of inequalities or injustices."[11] While preservation began as a grassroots women's movement in the nineteenth century, it

[11] G. Lachelle Norris and Sherry Cable, "The Seeds of Protest: From Elite Initiation to Grassroots Mobilization" in *Sociological Perspectives* 37:2 (Summer 1994), 248, last accessed 31 May 2011 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1389322>

has remained a largely upper class, highly educated phenomenon. While the conceptualization of the early movement as "grassroots" differs greatly from contemporary understandings of that term in that the participants belonged to an elite class, engagement with the protection of national heritage did activate the cultural authority of the women involved. Unlike many other social and cultural movements, however, its original goals did not include the empowerment of underrepresented populations, making them critical stakeholders in present discussions about the future of preservation in America.

Norris and Cable contend that the second stage of grassroots mobilization involves the petitioning of group members to elites, such as elected officials, to ameliorate the problem.[12] While the goals of heritage activism depend upon empowerment from within a chosen community, where community members decide for themselves the best practices for commemorating their history and culture, the existing system for designating and protecting significant resources still has an important role to play. Although the Standards set by the Secretary of the Interior and the criteria for designation on the National Register have favored elite culture for several decades, they have also secured a high level of integrity for the field itself, one that can be used to legitimize the heritage activities of underrepresented populations among the broader American public. The success of community-led cultural conservation will rest upon the prudent combination of place-specific initiatives and a reinterpretation of current policies.

[12] Norris and Cable, 248.

There have been a number of documented successes in applying aspects of public history and cultural memory to community revitalization. In an essay in *The Public Historian*, Andrew Hurley examines the methodology of inner-city activists in St. Louis who achieved economic and cultural reinvigoration by honoring the community's complicated, yet unique history. The St. Louis waterfront along the Mississippi River is largely African American today, and, much like East Los Angeles, it has a difficult history, in this instance in terms of its industrial development and its role in Western expansion. St. Louis, for much of the twentieth century, was one of the most racially polarized cities in the country.[13] Several decades worth of attempts at revitalizing the obsolete river facilities, such as warehouses and factories, after World War II culminated in the foundation of a plan to designate a "heritage corridor" in the early 2000s, which combined the tactics of environmental conservation with public history and economic development.

Hurley, in his evaluation of grassroots heritage activism in St. Louis, notes that the initial work surrounding the creation of the waterfront corridor succeeded because it remained loyal to the authentic experiences of living and working in that section of the city. While these activities had an important economic revitalization component attached, they primarily occurred within the African American community for the sake of self-empowerment. From the beginning, the project required a nuanced respect for social and cultural motifs within the physical environment. Hurley observes that the historical

[13] Andrew Hurley, "Narrating the Urban Waterfront: The Role of Public History in Community Revitalization" in *The Public Historian* 28:4 (Fall 2006), 30, last accessed 31 May 2011 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/tph.2006.28.4.19>

themes selected to interpret the landscape differed greatly from traditional narratives describing the significance of place. These narratives not only comprised a larger geographical area, but they also embraced a wider range of historical stakeholders, adopting controversial aspects of history as means of pursuing community empowerment.[14] The emphasis on social and cultural history within the community environment not only renders the narrative approach more inclusive, but it also strengthens the connections between localized historical benchmarks and the broader narrative of the city. Much like the interdependence of East Los Angeles and the development of surrounding cities, the history of a single geographic area in St. Louis is hardly self-contained, requiring a meaningful examination of the links that can be understood through larger patterns of history.

At the time the article was published, local community organizers, social service workers, conservationists, and civic groups were still pursuing the National Heritage Corridor designation from the National Park Service, building upon successes from the late 1990s. In 1997, a partnership consisting of public, private and nonprofit organizations implemented a plan for the creation of Confluence Greenway, a system of interconnected parks and trails along the convergence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. In addition to the goals of environmental conservation and recreation, the Greenway was intended to recognize the role of the river in the local heritage. One particularly controversial feature of the trail is the Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing, which commemorates the 1855 journey of nine fugitive slaves across the river boundary

[14] Hurley, 32.

between Missouri and Illinois.[15] Mary Meachum, a reputable free African American abolitionist, assisted the escaped slaves in their crossing of the river, but authorities apprehended the group upon their arrival in Illinois, arresting Meachum and selling at least one of the fugitives back into slavery.

For supporters of the Freedom Crossing, the site not only recounted a harrowing story of local significance, but it also belonged to the broader history of Missouri as a border state with a difficult role in the national slavery debate.[16] To ignore the emblematic quality of the site in the more extensive history of antebellum politics and everyday life would trivialize the similar struggles of other individuals or communities that lacked a material representation of their experiences. Nonetheless, the dual nature of the site as a memorial and a tourist destination naturally created friction, as did the problem of defining an official interpretation for the site that suited both local and national needs and expectations. The project thus far has taken a multifaceted approach to interpretation and display, combining educational strategies such as murals, explanatory panels, dramatic re-enactments, and public performances.

In another component of the riverfront revitalization project, community activists have sought to apply historic preservation tactics to the area known as Old North St. Louis, focusing on the rehabilitation of the historic, nineteenth-century building stock. Like many inner-city communities, Old North St. Louis was characterized by white suburban flight and urban renewal projects in the postwar period, leaving much of the

[15] Hurley, 34.

[16] Ibid., 36.

neighborhood in decay. Local preservationists organized a district nomination for the National Register, and, in 2000, the homeowners collaborated with the University of Missouri-St. Louis on a $400,000 Community Outreach Partnership grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.[17] The grant enabled students, faculty and residents to perform neighborhood research and to develop a plan for circulating the findings. Ultimately, they produced a video documentary, a self-guided walking tour of the neighborhood, a booklet, and a community museum.

While the integration of social, cultural and architectural history within preservation projects ideally leads to a more complete and diverse interpretation of place, the process is not without its detractors. In some instances, as Hurley points out, critics may discourage the public history approach to urban conservation because it threatens the notion of a unified, easily legible national narrative. Yet such fears rely upon the incorrect assumption that the official American narrative is wholly representative of the vast experiences and memories contained within the geographic boundaries of the states. Hurley rightly argues that, in fact, the opposite is true of thoughtful interrogations of the history of the American landscape. Exposing a range of historical perspectives in the built environment is more likely to create connections among fragmented urban communities, encouraging heightened social and political cooperation.[18] As Hurley notes, "A messier past may turn out to be a more usable one if it provides more residents of the multicultural metropolis with an understanding of how they arrived at their present

[17] Hurley, 43.

[18] Ibid., 49.

situation and where they might choose to go in the future."[19] The protection of this shared sense of belonging and ownership over the products of local history is particularly urgent in the twenty-first century, when political discourse treats difference as a permanent barrier rather than an opportunity for cultural understanding and social progress.

Even within a clearly defined community, deciding which narrative themes have social or cultural significance is fraught with tensions about the identity of a place in the past and its relationship to the present. The revitalization efforts along the riverfront depended upon the willingness of the local community to engage critically with all aspects of the area's history, both good and bad. In some instances, residents were reluctant to include themes relating to urban decline and social hardship because they feared the perpetuation of negative stereotypes that stigmatized inner city life.[20] This hesitancy to engage with painful components of cultural memory is a common challenge in a public history approach to preservation or cultural conservation.

In the case of East Los Angeles, important parallels can be found in neighboring Boyle Heights in terms of managing stereotypical representations of history. In 2002, the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles hosted an exhibition entitled *Boyle Heights: The Power of Place*, which documented the multiethnic history and culture of the eastside community. Boyle Heights, much like East Los Angeles, is largely Mexican American today, but it was also home to a number of different ethnic populations during the twentieth century, including Jewish, Japanese

[19] Hurley, 49.

[20] Ibid., 46-47.

American, and African American populations. The emphasis on interethnic relationships and placemaking, while constructed in order to present a more complete and authentic portrayal of Boyle Heights, had the important secondary effect of counteracting negative perceptions of the neighborhood, which was often viewed from the outside as being a haven for undocumented immigrants, criminals, and transients.[21] The exhibition text panels and images adopted the language of community and citizenship in order to integrate the history of Boyle Heights into broader themes relating to middle and working class values, creating commonalities with other regional and national narratives through a shared belief in the work ethic of the American Dream.[22]

The Boyle Heights exhibition, much like the St. Louis riverfront heritage trail, contextualized its depiction of place within a set of social and cultural themes familiar to a diverse audience, such as family life, religion, commerce, military involvement, and education. On the other hand, the exhibition did not shy away from more complicated issues such as Japanese American internment during World War II, the Zoot Suit Riots, and postwar urban renewal. In elucidating both the positive and negative trends in history, the exhibition avoided suppressing the widespread experiences of hardship that characterized each of the populations within Boyle Heights that might have otherwise presented a simple and entirely affirmative image of the neighborhood. Instead, the focus on community experiences and storytelling adopted the bottom-up approach of grassroots heritage activism at an institutional level.

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[21] Su-Shuan Chen, "History in the Making: The Construction of Community Memory and Racial Subjects in the *Boyle Heights* Exhibition," Master's thesis, University of California, San Diego (2010), 2.

[22] Ibid., 21.

While JANM carefully considered the balance between a public history approach to storytelling and the authority of an esteemed cultural center in this instance, the role of the heritage institution in capturing authentic community memory has not always been clear. Curators and folklorists Olivia Cadaval and Brian Finnegan explore the inherent difficulties with interpreting immigrant and minority communities at an institutional level in their essay on the development of the Latino Community Heritage Center at the Latin American Youth Center in Washington, D.C. They argue that the impulse of practitioners in the field of ethnic and cultural studies to characterize these communities as "other" or "subaltern" over-accentuates the enclave statuses, both voluntary and imposed, of these populations.[23] While the nature of the ethnic enclave is a critical part of composing certain community histories, to restrict the retelling and interpretation of that history to the boundaries of the enclave ignores the essential connectivity of one community to another within an urban environment. As has been investigated in previous chapters, the tendency of the history and preservation professions to perpetuate unintentionally the imbalance between elite authority and interpretation rights and the agency of a subjected community undermines grassroots strategies of determining heritage and significance. As Cadaval and Finnegan point out, this disparity readily extends to institutions that aim to render accessible the history and culture of a specific community to both insiders and outsiders.

[23] Olivia Cadaval and Brian Finnegan, "Our Voices in the Nation's Capital": Creating the Latino Community Heritage Center of Washington D.C." in *The Public Historian* 23:4 (Fall 2001), 80. Last accessed 21 September 2011 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10/1525/tph.2001.23.4.73>

While the two previous examples of the St. Louis riverfront and the JANM exhibition have directly and indirectly used museum or institutional settings to convey community history and place-based significance through tangible and intangible resources, the essential questions regarding the goals of heritage and cultural conservation (the protection of what, for whom, and by whom?) remain unsettled. First of all, the strategies employed in these instances, while impactful in considering the interpretation of both positive and negative historical trends, do not account for the enduring significance of places that embody a "living culture." Furthermore, while these programs offered important avenues for combining the knowledge of professionals with the experiences of community members, they do not resolve the question of audience and beneficiaries. Should community-based conservation exist primarily for the sake of the producers of a given tradition, or should these efforts attempt to contribute to an all-inclusive experience of the fabric of American life? Can these two goals coexist without sacrificing the needs and wishes of the most vulnerable members of the American public?

The National Park Service has several protective and designation measures outside of the scope of the National Register that address the issue of safeguarding living cultures with broad historic contexts. The National Heritage Area (NHA) program represents and interprets "natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources [that] combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography."[24] While Congress has the power to designate a Heritage Area, also known as Heritage Corridors, the inhabitants of each individual area are

[24] National Park System Advisory Board, "Charting a Future for National Heritage Areas," National Park Service (2006), 2, last accessed 14 January 2012 <http://www.nps.gov/policy/advisory/NHAreport.pdf>

responsible for developing unique management plans to supervise the conservation of the significant identified resources within the auspices of the area. The federal government supplies technical and limited financial assistance, but it does not regulate land use or assume ownership, leaving the power to ensure authenticity and integrity to local residents. There are currently forty-nine NHAs designated, but only a handful of those areas are located in the Western region of the country. None of the present NHAs are located in California.

The goals of the NHA program are well suited to the protection of ethnographic landscapes, which the NPS defines as "a landscape containing a variety of natural and cultural resources that associated people define as heritage resources. Examples are contemporary settlements, religious sacred sites and massive geological structures. Small plant communities, animals, subsistence and ceremonial grounds are often components."[25] At the core of the NHA program is the idea of intertwining nature and culture through an integrated conservation approach in order to define the importance of place in illuminating shared heritage, storytelling, and economic growth.[26] The goals of conservation, education, and community partnerships are intentionally vague to account for a diverse range of resources, both tangible and intangible. By placing residents in charge, the program focuses on persisting cultural traditions rather than nostalgia for the past.

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[25] Charles A. Birnbaum, "Preservation Brief 36: Protecting Cultural Landscapes," National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services (1994), last accessed 14 January 2012 <http://www.nps.gov/hps/tps/briefs/brief36.htm>

[26] National Park System Advisory Board, 5-6.

The Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, which extends from Wilmington, North Carolina to Jacksonville, Florida, is a particularly pertinent example of how the NHA program weaves tangible and intangible cultural resources into a single management plan. Designated in 2006, the heritage corridor includes approximately eighty barrier islands in addition to adjacent coastal counties inland and is administered jointly by the NPS, local community organizations, the North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida SHPOs, and a federal commission comprised of local residents.[27] The area is significant for the longstanding relationship of the Gullah (North and South Carolina) and the Geechee (Georgia and Florida) people, who are the descendants of West and Central African slaves, to the coastal landscape. Like many non-white communities, the case for conserving such a vast stretch of land attests to both the strength and the fragility of the traditional resources of the community. First of all, the traditions interpreted within the corridor are largely impalpable, as the Gullah and Geechee share enduring social, linguistic, and artistic characteristics that have a high level of integrity due to the relatively isolated geography of the coastal region. The area is an exceptional representation of the ways in which Africans adapted to life in America under formidable circumstances, maintaining strong cultural ties to their native land

[27] National Park Service, "Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor," last accessed 29 January 2012 <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/cultural_diversity/Gullah_Geechee_Cultural_Heritage_Corridor.html>. In addition to this NHA, the Lower Rio Grande Heritage Corridor along the U.S.-Mexico border and the African American Heritage Trail in Washington, D.C. are excellent examples of inclusive heritage plans. See *A Shared Experience: The History, Architecture and Historic Designations of the Lower Rio Grande Heritage Corridor*, ed. Mario L. Sánchez (Austin: Texas Historical Commission, 1994) and "African American Heritage Trail, Washington, D.C.," last accessed 12 March 2012 <http://www.culturaltourismdc.org/things-do-see/tours-trails/african-american-heritage-trail-washington-dc>

while concurrently absorbing fragments of newly encountered traditions both during and after enslavement.[28] The dual nature of this cultural identity, balanced between deeply rooted connections to a distant place and a determination to negotiate the changes required in a new place, draws important linkages to the assimilation and placemaking process that has occurred in East Los Angeles.

While the Gullah and Geechee communities within the NHA include important examples of low-rise vernacular buildings and structures, the sense of place depends heavily upon the perpetuation of rituals, such as ring shouts, and artisan crafts, such as sweet grass basket weaving. Local oral and folkloric traditions are extraordinarily place-based, given that the Gullah and Geechee are the sole speakers of the only African-based Creole language in the United States, which combines elements of English and over thirty African dialects.[29] While the specific demographic and economic structures of the region have shifted over the last century, particularly under threat from development and ecological changes, the survival of a cohesive sense of community and cultural memory enables the capacity for knowledge to be preserved and communicated over time.[30]

[28] National Park Service, "Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor."

[29] Ibid.

[30] See also Zachary Hart, Angela Halfacre and Marianne Burke, "Community Participation in Preservation of Low Country South Carolina Sweetgrass" in *Economic Botany* 58:2 (Summer 2004): 161-171, for a discussion of the coastal community's response to habitat destruction and its impact upon cultural traditions and rituals.

Figure 7: Example of traditional Gullah sweetgrass basket
Photo by Kenneth Breisch

Female residents are particularly immersed in the process of defining and sustaining cultural traditions, although their activities are not necessarily overtly preservationist. Sociologist Josephine Beoku-Betts, in her article entitled "We Got Our Way of Cooking Things," discusses the ways in which the food culture of the Gullah coastal region constitutes a critical component of the collective memory and the role of feminine agency in that process. For Beoku-Betts, the intergenerational networks among Gullah women are powerful mechanisms for preserving cultural authenticity and resisting the forces of change from the outside. She argues:

> By claiming these features of the food system [such as seasonings and preparation techniques] as their own through daily cooking practices, and by situating this knowledge in the community through the use of such words as "we" and "strictly ours," the Gullah women maintain the credibility and validity of a familiar and recognizable tradition in resistance to pressure to conform to dominant cultural practices.[31]

While the food culture of the Gullah and Geechee is not explicitly protected under the jurisdiction of the NHA, the protections afforded to the coastal territories, such as natural resource conservation and security from outside development, indirectly enable the perpetuation of simple, everyday rituals. As a result, Gullah women not only ensure the continuance of a particular practice, in this case food preparation, but they also maintain the process of conveying knowledge and skill across generations.

Beoku-Betts also found that preservation was not an accidental or secondary goal of the Gullah women in her study. Rather, the act of retaining these skills and rituals appeared as an intentional gesture designed to persevere over time. She writes:

> Gullah women devise and transmit alternative ways of understanding their culture by relying on African-derived systems of knowledge, which promote motherhood, women-centered networks, self-reliance, extended family, and community-centeredness. Reliance on these values has enabled Gullah women to resist negative images of their past; they use common but resourceful strategies such as everyday practice, teaching by example, and providing constant recollections of their past through storytelling and other oral traditions.[32]

Beyond the intangible traditions of food and oral traditions, the Gullah women preserve through cultural production the more abstract concept of community-based values. While these values do not necessarily depend upon place, they are woven into the traditions that define a given place, in this instance the coastal regions of the South. While the NPS and other community and governmental organizations can enact policies that protect the physical and even ritualistic aspects of a place, the preservation or conservation of

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[31] Josephine A. Beoku-Betts, "We Got Our Way of Cooking Things: Women, Food, and Preservation of Cultural Identity among the Gullah" in *Gender and Society* 9:5 (Oct. 1995), 547, last accessed 23 January 2012 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/189895>

[32] Ibid., 553.

identity and cultural values cannot stem from the stipulations of a management plan. The survival of these kinds of intangible principles, such as knowledge or family, can only transpire through the simple acts of living or doing, pointing once more to the unwavering importance of a community taking ownership over the maintenance of its own history and culture.

Figure 8: Demonstration of traditional Gullah fishing net and boat making
Photo by Kenneth Breisch

Though unrelated geographically and in cultural specifics, the Gullah/Geechee people and the Mexican American residents of East Los Angeles share critical challenges and experiences in the process of defining their relationship to place and determining conservation practices. James Rojas' characterization of the enacted landscape of East Los Angeles, discussed in depth in Chapter 2, emphasizes the intrinsic ritual rooted in everyday urban spaces, where ordinary acts of labor and leisure convey important social and cultural values. Unlike Beoku-Betts' argument for the intentionality of certain Gullah

preservation efforts, Rojas' does not describe residents as maintaining these spatial traditions out of a desire to preserve significant cultural patterns. Although the practices differ greatly, both communities represent the notion of a living culture, where the fabric of the place depends greatly upon the ongoing activities, such as the labor, arts, crafts, and food preparation, of the local inhabitants. Furthermore, both communities offer particularly keen insights into the challenges facing the conservation of transnational heritage, where existing interpretive strategies fail to capture sufficiently the memory of the homeland and its various recapitulations in the physical environment of the United States.

While the prosaic rituals of daily life found in communities like East Los Angeles are not necessarily interpretive in their own right, the idea of using ritual or performance to recognize heritage, if only momentarily, is particularly compelling under the circumstances of evolving urban environments. Artist and critic Sarah Kanouse argues that commemorative strategies based on artistic practices "intentionally and self-consciously complicate the governing spatial metaphors of memory in order to articulate memorial space as something dynamic, fluid, productive and critical."[33] The goal of these methods of interpreting and honoring cultural memory is to shift the focus from "the 'mark' made to the action of 'marking,' from representa*tion* to represent*ing*."[34] The ephemeral quality of performative expressions of history and culture is in many ways at odds with the efforts of the preservation community to memorialize built heritage over

[33] Sarah Kanouse, "Marking and Missing: memory-performance and the radical present," *Association of American Geographers*, Conference paper (San Francisco, 2007), 3, last accessed 30 January 2012 <www.readysubjects.org/writing/markingmissing_conferencefinal.pdf>

[34] Ibid., 3.

time. Yet as community-based activism infuses the traditional field with the principles of cultural conservation, performance-based interpretive practices can play a valuable role in reevaluating definitions of significance and safeguarding. Preservation itself can be intangible if it suits the specific demands of a unique place.

Kanouse illustrates her concept of memory-performance through a retelling of San Francisco artist Ledia Carroll's "Mission Lake Project," in which Carroll traced the outline of Lago Delores, a former marshland and the site of the first Spanish mission in the area that would eventually become San Francisco, using chalk. The project included several site-specific events, including a community barbeque and a "shoreline" bike race, but the greater significance of the act came from its commentary on the temporality of physical landmarks. While a local historical plaque references the vanquished lake, located within the largely Mexican American Mission District, the project focused in large part on the ways in which monuments and associated memories are lost to the demands of city-making and economics. Though rooted in the founding and evolution of San Francisco, the site is not particularly significant in terms of associations, at least by the standards of traditional preservation. Meant to be impermanent, the chalk eventually washed away. Kanouse remarks:

> Carroll is clearly uninterested in designating a permanent memorial space, either via a built monument or some sort of preserved trace, and her gesture of spatial marking seems meant to produce a context for a commemorative sociality – the barbeque and bike races. In turn, these performative acts transform Carroll's piece from a line designating a (past) space and into a vital, lived space in which the past mingles with present-day social life.[35]

[35] Kanouse, 7.

Kanouse's commentary poses radical possibilities to the preservation field in terms of community-based strategies of cultural conservation. The idea of articulating heritage through new forms of creative production cannot necessarily be translated into preservation policy, but, in fact, the spontaneity and transience of those expressions are perhaps more loyal to the spirit of grassroots activism than any existing proposal for conservation. These kinds of projects, in allowing the subject matter to determine the mechanism or medium for interpretation, necessitate community engagement in identifying and understanding meaning. Following this model, the conscious performance of everyday rituals secures community agency in the act of participating in conservation.

The sites identified by the Eastside Heritage Consortium through the community survey encompass, in large part, the intangible values of the local heritage, as well as the ritualistic practice of those values in everyday life. El Mercado, for example, is an authentic representation of the traditional Latin American community marketplace, where locals gather to purchase customary Mexican foods and other goods while Mariachi bands entertain restaurant patrons on the third level of the building, fully embodying the social and cultural spirit of the inhabitants. The Anthony Quinn Library, notable for its association with actor Anthony Quinn and for its elaborate exterior mural, remains an active community educational institution in the immediate proximity of several schools. The former Self Help Graphics and Art Building, in addition to symbolizing the strong legacy resistance against local trends of violence and systemic racism, honed the talents of countless emerging artists and musicians, a mission the organization maintains today at its new location in neighboring Boyle Heights. While certain buildings naturally lend

themselves to exploring these kinds of connections, other forms of heritage require higher levels of interpretation, along the lines of Kanouse's observations, that may not follow contemporary social conventions.

One of East Los Angeles' most conspicuous cultural rituals is cruising, a controversial leisure activity of postwar suburban youth. As Jerry Gonzalez noted in his dissertation "A Place in the Sun: Mexican Americans, Race, and the Suburbanization of Los Angeles, 1940-1980," the rise of Chicana/o car culture coincided with the out-migration of large numbers of working and middle class Mexican American families to the suburbs of the San Gabriel Valley, including Whittier, Montebello, and Pico Rivera.[36] Central to the spatial geography of cruising culture was the eleven-mile stretch of Whittier Boulevard, known as "The Boulevard" to generations of cruisers, that extended from East Los Angeles to the outer incorporated suburbs, delineating a large, but complex Mexican American community. Although the act of cruising did not begin as a political gesture in the urban experience of suburban youth, from the mid-1960s to the 1980s the practice led to the negative stereotyping of the Chicano population among law enforcement and suburban homeowners.[37]

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[36] Jerry Gonzalez, ""A Place in the Sun": Mexican Americans, Race, and the Suburbanization of Los Angeles, 1940-1980," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Southern California, 2009), 195-196. See also David Diaz, *Barrio Urbanism: Chicanos, Planning, and American Cities*, where Diaz discusses the enduring cultural and symbolic significance of Whittier Boulevard in the history of East Los Angeles: "In relation to youth culture, Whittier Boulevard retained its social significance as a place to meet. It was the center of Chicana/or car culture on weekends, a cultural practice that had begun in the 1940s. Each weekend thousands of youth cruised the boulevard in a social ritual that transformed Whittier Boulevard into a culturally important social space that was internally developed and nurtured," 211.

[37] Ibid., 197-198.

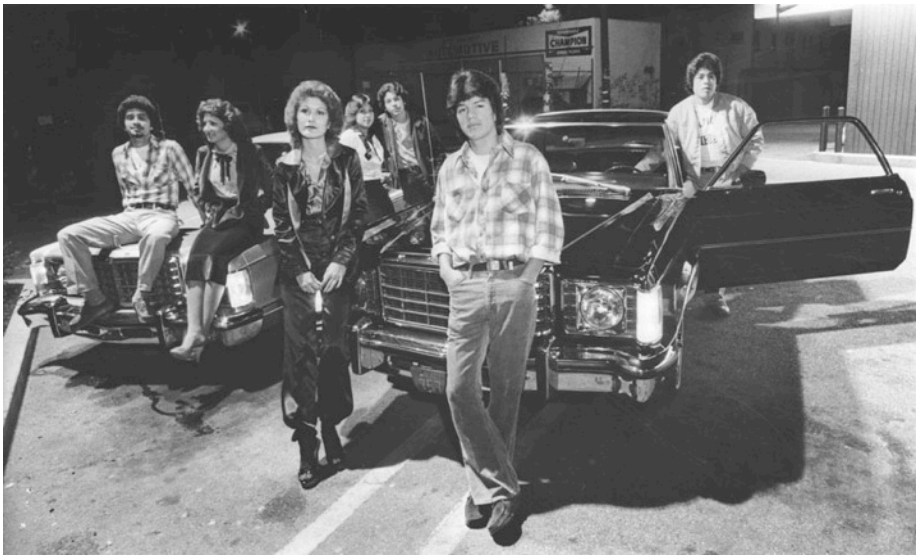

Figure 9: Whittier Boulevard cruisers, 1979
Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection

The reactions against cruising occurred in large part as a result of heightened police activity and surveillance of Whittier Boulevard in the wake of the East Los Angeles Blowouts in 1968, when students and teachers took to the streets to protest educational injustice. In 1969, young Chicanas and Chicanos protested against the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's decision to enforce strict curfew laws and to escalate citations issued to cruisers.[38] What began as a peaceful protest led to complete disorder as sheriff deputies arbitrarily clubbed demonstrators and made mass arrests. In the wake of this unrest, opponents of cruising frequently linked the recreational activity to rising gang-related crime and violence. Within East Los Angeles, the Sheriff's Department placed strategic barricades along the Boulevard during the weekends to stop the flow of traffic and attempted to block off connecting side streets.[39] Although the

[38] Gonzalez, 199-200.

[39] Wendy Thermos, "Makeover of a Legendary Boulevard Gets Into Gear" in *Los Angeles Times* 6 July 2005, last accessed 5 February 2012 <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/jul/06/local/me-whittier6>

enforcement of such restricted practices has diminished in recent decades, cruising is hardly a neutral ritual in contemporary East Los Angeles.

Unlike other forms of intangible culture, such as food and the arts, the conservation of cruising poses a challenge both in terms of cultural memory and physical representations. While the Whittier Boulevard Arch appears on the Consortium's list of significant sites, the landmark was constructed during a redevelopment project in 1986, long after the height of the cruising era. Today it is recognized as a marker of the vibrant commercial life of the Boulevard and a symbol of community pride. Cruising, an integral component of the district's heritage and identity, is difficult to integrate into a cultural conservation plan because of the polarizing political implications related to its history. In part, it is emblematic of the often-antagonistic relationship between the community and law enforcement, with its practice still restricted. On the other hand, it is an indispensable expression of postwar spatial trends in East Los Angeles, including the relocation of families to the San Gabriel Valley suburbs, the dominance of the automobile, and the rise of a public youth culture. Yet the complex nature of cruising makes it a fascinating study for the appearance of memory-performance in East Los Angeles and the sensitive treatment of controversial history. Once an everyday occurrence, the dynamic recreation of this spatially defined ritual would not only contribute to the notion of heritage conservation as an expression of resistance, but it would also explore Kanouse's provocative call for greater emphasis on the act of representing over the form of representation. Within the community, cruising as an act of heritage expression would reclaim the practice from its associations with gang-related activities while illustrating

the spatial geography of local memory, revealing the connectivity of outlying Mexican Americans to the history and culture of East Los Angeles.

Optimism at the National Level

While heritage conservation at the local level leads to greater experimentation in place-based techniques, certain initiatives at the national level indicate that the mainstream preservation movement has slowly begun to recognize the need for greater inclusivity and partnerships with grassroots activists in underrepresented communities. In 2011, the National Trust for Historic Preservation unveiled the "Field Guide to Local Preservationists," which revealed that nearly seven percent of Americans are effectively engaged in preservation activities without formally joining the movement.[40] These like-minded individuals, characterized as "Young Activists," "Green Go-Getters," "Community-Conscious Parents," "History Buffs," and "Architecture Lovers," are affiliated with allied social and cultural causes, such as environmentalism, and are committed to change at the community level. Having identified these untapped populations, the Trust has indicated its intention to revise its approach to community engagement, reaffirming the relevance of preservation within the context of contemporary social movements.

Stephanie Meeks, the current President of the National Trust, further avowed her support for changing trends within preservation in her keynote speech at the 2011 California Preservation Foundation Conference in Santa Monica, CA. Addressing the

[40] National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Field Guide to Local Preservationists," (2011), last accessed 5 February 2012 <http://www.preservationnation.org/about-us/fieldguide/LP_FieldGuide_Partners.pdf>.

need for more advanced, community-based preservation tactics, she noted that 2010 census data reveals that the country will soon cease to be characterized by a single ethnic majority, a milestone already achieved in California.[41] Preservationists in the Golden State, she argued, already face the challenges of changing demographics that will soon test communities and professionals nationally. While she focused on change from within existing institutions, such as the National Register, through more comprehensive scholarship and the further development of diverse theme studies, Meeks paired the existing framework with a call for "meet[ing] people where they are." She identified the Eastside Heritage Consortium as a leader in community-based heritage activism for its unique approach to survey work, emphasizing the protection of community stories over the preservation of architecturally significant buildings or sites.

Above all, Meeks carefully articulated the new language for speaking about significance, highlighting the demands of a public history approach:

> Recognizing a handball court or a playground as a historic resource challenges traditional ideas about preservation. It remains a tough sell in many circles. But for the preservation to be relevant to diverse communities, we must find a way to recognize and affirm such sites and landmarks…[We] need to reconsider our definition of what is worth protecting. We need to look again at sites and landmarks from the recent past – places like Maravilla…that might not have architectural significance in the traditional sense, but which represent important movements or milestones in the life of diverse communities and therefore deserve recognition. We also need to find a way to recognize and value the layers of history – even when those layers affect the original character of the building.[42]

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[41] Stephanie Meeks, "Sustaining the Future," California Preservation Foundation Conference: *Preservation on the Edge*, 16 May 2011, last accessed 5 February 2012 <http://www.preservationnation.org/about-us/press-center/sustaining_the_future_foremail.pdf>

[42] Ibid.

Although she spoke of "diverse communities" in reference to traditionally underrepresented populations, Meeks reinforced the inadequacy of existing protocols for preserving significant buildings or places and acknowledged the resistance among traditional preservationists towards ordinary expressions of history and community narrative. In framing her discussion around the "layers" of history, a phrase embraced by many heritage activists, she upheld the idea that a single place can contain a multitude of stories and memories from vastly different communities and that prevailing standards have so far failed to accommodate these complexities. Despite this praise for heritage conservation in East Los Angeles, however, the National Trust has yet to follow through with concrete proposals for encouraging conservation in underrepresented communities.

In the summer of 2011, the National Park Service announced its intent to produce an American Latino Theme Study as part of the Department of the Interior's larger American Latino Heritage Initiative. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar emphasized the imbalance in the present representation of Latino or Hispanic communities that favored sites reflecting Spanish colonial heritage, expressing his intent to focus on the extensive contributions of the multicultural Latino community to the historic and cultural fabric of the U.S.[43] Acknowledging the scarcity of significant Latino places in the various NPS designation programs, the theme study initiative aims to apply recent scholarship in Latino history to the more public discussion of place and conservation, which will most likely serve as a model for future theme studies in other ethnic populations. While

[43] Department of the Interior, "Secretary Salazar Announces American Latino Heritage Theme Study as Part of Important Initiative to 'Tell America's Story,'" 16 June 2011, last accessed 9 February 2012 <http://www.doi.gov/news/pressreleases/Secretary-Salazar-Announces-American-Latino-Heritage-Theme-Study-as-Part-of-Important-Initiative-to-Tell-Americas-Story.cfm>

respected scholars and professionals will conduct the majority of the written work, the study was also formulated to include stories from individual communities on a wide range of topics, further developing the authenticity and integrity of the eventual outcome. Although this project is currently in its early stages, the attempt to balance expert perspectives with community agency, if successful, is an important step in overcoming longstanding interpretive inequalities.

The challenge of creating place-specific methods of interpreting community history is that simply altering existing policies to include a wider range of cultural or historic resources will not sufficiently change the more ideological discussion of meaning and significance in underrepresented urban landscapes. In places such as East Los Angeles, the built environment offers critical insights into questions of identity and resistance, weaving together larger historical themes through the physical fabric of the community. While legislative changes can offer important protective tools or financial incentives to conserve significant resources, ultimately interpretive strategies rest upon function and need in everyday life. How communities choose to engage with the ritualistic or storytelling capabilities of the physical environment depends upon the unique qualities of a specific place, so that the interpretation reveals as much about the community as the resource does itself. The established preservation field, therefore, has as its greatest responsibility in community advocacy the support of this process of identity and heritage exploration.

Conclusion

As this thesis demonstrates, the creation of a comprehensive approach to heritage or cultural conservation in unincorporated East Los Angeles is an essential step in the community's pursuit of self-reliance. Despite a history of civil unrest, the legacy of the civil rights and identity activism of the 1960s and 70s, combined with the dynamism of the local culture, continues to act as a unifying force among community members, inspiring much of the determination to document the area's heritage before it disappears. Furthermore, the dependence upon oral storytelling to safeguard that heritage produces an even greater urgency to communicate and entrust those stories to a younger generation.

The movement to investigate local cultural heritage has shared valuable links with the East Los Angeles Residents Association's plan to establish cityhood. On February 8, 2012, the Los Angeles County Local Agency Formation Commission denied the proposal to incorporate East Los Angeles on the grounds of economic viability, rejecting the pleas of residents for additional time to explore possibilities for increasing revenue.[1] Although advocates maintain that the cityhood efforts will continue until successful, the commission's ruling perpetuates a long-standing imbalance of authority in East Los Angeles, leaving residents and significant resources vulnerable to outside decision-making. This setback in the cityhood movement reinforces the importance of developing localized, community instigated strategies for protecting cultural heritage. On a more optimistic note, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously on

[1] "East L.A. cityhood plan rejected; advocates weigh options" in *Los Angeles Times* 8 February 2012. Last accessed 12 February 2012. <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2012/02/east-la-cityhood-plan-rejected-advocates-weigh-options-.html>

February 14, 2012 to create a countywide program for safeguarding historic resources, signaling a turning point for preservation in unincorporated areas.[2] As the county moves forward, communities such as East Los Angeles will be important models for drafting comprehensive conservation plans in these traditionally underrepresented areas.

The nominations of the former Self Help Graphics and Arts and the Maravilla Handball Court to the California Register reflect a growing support for the community's history in traditional preservation circles. As the Eastside Heritage Consortium has moved into the implementation phase of its survey project, it has experienced growing recognition for its role in broader issues relating to advocacy in East Los Angeles. Most recently, a group of teachers affiliated with Facing History and Ourselves, a Massachusetts-based organization dedicated to creating classroom curriculum designed to combat racism and prejudice, attended a Consortium-led tour of East Los Angeles, visiting sites related to the Chicano Movement as well as the broader cultural heritage of the area.[3] Several residents, including noted muralist Paul Botello and artist/altar maker Ofelia Esparza, met with the group at Laguna Park and Self Help Graphics, respectively, in order to bear witness to the notion that the area's vibrant social, cultural and artistic heritage endures in today's living community. The tour, in large part, revealed the consequences of the absence of a preservation plan. Critical sites, such as the former Silver Dollar Bar, have lost their historic uses and character, making them unrecognizable

[2] Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, "Board Votes to Preserve Architectural Landmarks in Los Angeles County," Press Release, 14 February 2012. Last accessed 12 March 2012 <http://ridley-thomas.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/2-14/12-Architectural-preservation-FINAL.pdf>

[3] Marvelia Alpizar, "Touring Teachers Learn About East L.A. History" in *Eastern Group Publications News* 1 March 2012. Last accessed 12 March 2012 <http://www.egpnews.com/2012/03/touring-teachers-learn-about-east-l-a-history>

without prior knowledge of their significance. Nonetheless, the success of this event has prompted further consideration of the viability of a heritage trail, which might consist of physical markers at each site detailing that place's significance in relationship to the broader social and cultural history of East Los Angeles. It has also reinforced the demand for integrating local heritage studies into primary and secondary education curriculum.

Beyond the immediate efforts of the Consortium, other community members are currently working towards the goal of recognizing the unique heritage of the area through various media. As a separate project, Consortium co-founder, filmmaker and East Los Angeles native Manuel Huerta produced a short film entitled "Maravilla Handball Court: A Place that Matters," which was featured on the websites of the Los Angeles Conservancy and the National Trust and on Los Angeles area Metro buses' Transit TV in late 2011. East Los Angeles resident Victor Felix has also gained acclaim for his popular Facebook site "Who Remembers in East LA," which celebrates cross-generational storytelling relating to the history and culture of the community.[4] With nearly 12,000 fans, the site captures the broad geography of the collective memory of East Los Angeles by bringing together current and former residents in an attempt to reformulate a heritage that is not necessarily visible from the streets. The members of this online community constitute what the National Trust considers to be an important emerging population, that of the local preservationist, which has crucial implications for the growing heritage

[4] Christine Madrid French, ""Who Remembers in East LA?" Building a Preservation Community through Social Media," *Preservation Nation*, 5 April 2010, last accessed 22 February 2012, <http://blog.preservationnation.org/2010/04/05/who-remembers-in-east-la-building-a-preservation-community-through-social-media/>

movement in East Los Angeles. Any future successes, for the Consortium or any other likeminded community group, will depend on the mobilization of these individuals.

As this thesis has shown, the current activist climate in East Los Angeles has made it an excellent case for evaluating the evolving field of heritage conservation. As the foundational place for a broader understanding of Mexican American and Chicana/o memory and geography in Southern California, a discussion of the appropriate methods for safeguarding heritage in East Los Angeles has extensive opportunities for applications in surrounding landscapes. As the national dialogue shifts to accommodate issues relating to Latino heritage, the community in East Los Angeles is poised to offer important leadership in terms of structuring grassroots documentation and outreach. Rigorous study of the social and cultural histories of these kinds of neighborhoods is essential to enriching the field of preservation beyond the traditional realm of architectural history. Greater emphasis on focused and critical scholarship, among both academics and preservation professionals, will lead to a keener awareness of the complex patterns of spatial development and cultural production, representing with greater authenticity the everyday life of urban places. Ultimately, the authoritative voice in a discussion of local heritage must reside within the community. Storytelling and memory must play an equal role in defining the significance of a place, and community members should take the lead in choosing how to act upon the knowledge gained through academic study. While official preservation practices should progress to meet the challenges that these communities present, place-based conservation can persevere without an overarching, generalized framework.

In the case of East Los Angeles, the movement to protect local heritage benefits tremendously from the role that heritage plays in day-to-day life. Current residents continue to inhabit the places that tell their stories, even as the functions of those places change over time, and they sustain the social and cultural rituals that strengthen the meanings of those places. In such cases, heritage conservation should not detract from the vibrant and protective nature of a living culture. In embracing the identity and heritage of place, the community of East Los Angeles will have intrinsically gained an essential piece of the cultural and political agency for which it has struggled for decades.

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Appendix A: Photo Inventory of Significant Sites

El Mercado de Los Angeles
3425 East First Street (photo by the author)

Los Cinco Puntos
3300 East Cesar E. Chavez Avenue (photo by the author)

Former Self Help Graphics and Arts
3802 East Cesar E. Chavez Avenue (photo by the author)

Anthony Quinn Library
3965 East Cesar E. Chavez Avenue (photo by the author)

El Gallo Bakery
4546 East Cesar E. Chavez Avenue (photo by the author)

La Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de Soledad (Our Lady of Solitude)
4561 East Cesar E. Chavez Avenue (photo by the author)

Maravilla Handball Court and El Centro Grocery
501 Mednik Avenue (photo by the author)

Belvedere Community Regional Park
4914 East Cesar E. Chavez Avenue (photo by the author)

Garfield High School
5101 East Sixth Street (photo by the author)

Golden Gate Theater
5170 East Whittier Boulevard (photo by the author)

La Piranha Café
5300 East Olympic Boulevard (photo by the author)

Eddie Heredia Boxing Club
5127 East Olympic Boulevard (photo by the author)

Former Silver Dollar Bar
4945 Whittier Boulevard (photo by the author)

Whittier Boulevard Arch
Whittier Boulevard and Arizona Avenue (photo by the author)

The Strand
4232 Whittier Boulevard (photo by the author)

New Calvary Cemetery
4201 Whittier Boulevard (photo by the author)

Ruben Salazar Memorial Park/Laguna Park
"The Wall that Sings, Speaks, and Shouts" (Paul Botello)
3863 Whittier Boulevard (photo by the author)

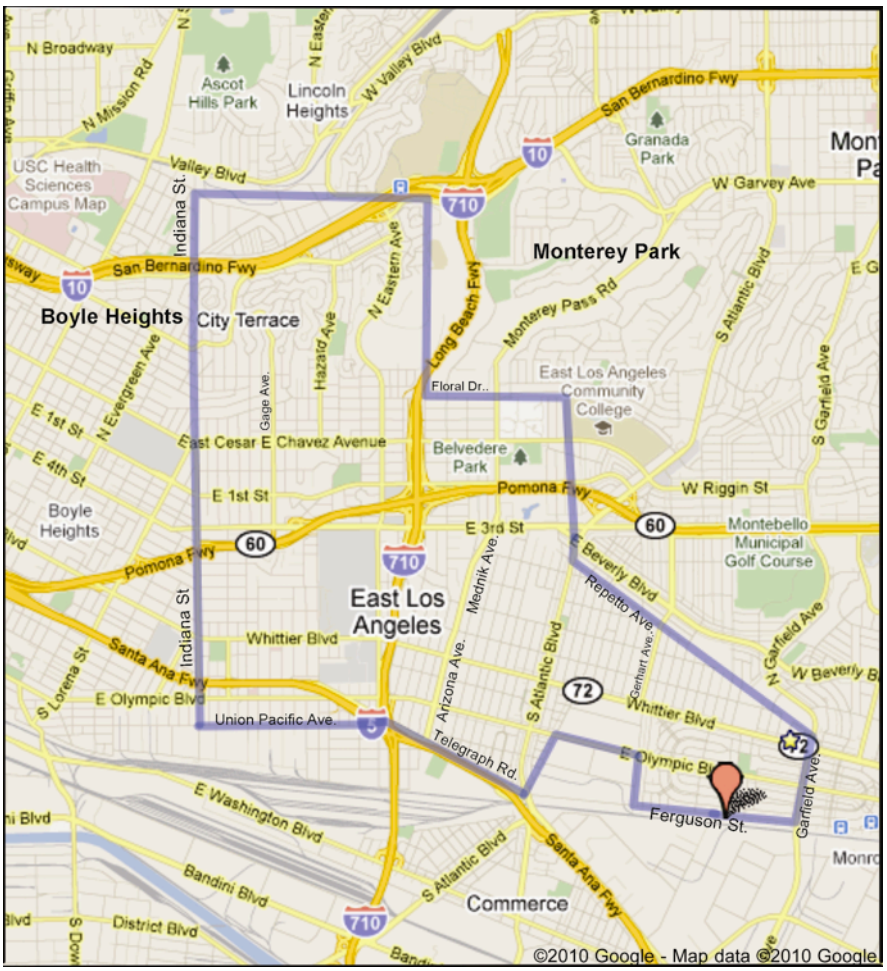
Saint Lucy Catholic Church
1419 North Hazard Avenue (photo by the author)

"The Wall that Cracked Open" (Willie Herrón)
4125 City Terrace Drive (photo by the author)

Appendix B: Sample Survey

SURVEY OF SIGNIFICANT PLACES IN EAST LOS ANGELES

The purpose of this survey is to create a list that will bring attention and increased visibility to significant historical, cultural and present-day places in the unincorporated area of East Los Angeles. Places/sites that are significant to the East LA community are not always acknowledged by the powers that be. That is why it is up to the community to document and legitimize these places/sites for ourselves and for future generations. **Members of the unincorporated area of ELA and those who have strong ties to this area: please help us by identifying significant historical, cultural or present-day places in unincorporated ELA (see map) and by writing the requested information below. *Before filling out the survey, please look at the attached map to get a sense of what area this survey focuses on.***



PLACE A

1. Name of place/site (if any)

   _____

2. Address or location of place (or nearest cross streets)

   _____

3. Why is this place significant?

   _____

4. On the attached map, please mark the letter **A** for where this place is located.

PLACE B

1. Name of place/site (if any)

_____

2. Address or location of place (nearest cross streets)

_____

3. Why is this place significant?

   _____

4. On the attached map, please mark the letter **B** for where this place is located.

PLACE C

1. Name of place/site (if any)

   _____

2. Address or location of place (or nearest cross streets)

   _____

3. Why is this place significant?

   _____

4. On the attached map, please mark the letter **C** for where this place is located.

PLACE D

1. Name of place/site (if any)

_____

2. Address or location of place (nearest cross streets)

   _____

3. Why is this place significant?

   _____

4. On the attached map, please mark the letter **D** for where this place is located.

PLACE E

1. Name of place/site (if any)

   _____

2. Address or location of place (or nearest cross streets)

   _____

3. Why is this place significant?

   _____

4. On the attached map, please mark the letter **E** for where this place is located.

Do you know more significant sites but you ran out of space above? Then please use the blank space on the back of the first sheet and write about those additional sites. If you have any pictures for any of the sites described above, you can email them to elaheritagetours@gmail.com. Please include your name and the name of the site in the email message. If you have any questions, please call this same number and ask for Manuel or Amanda.

Deadline: February 28, 2010. Please return completed surveys to the mailbox at: Maravilla Historical Society, 501 Mednik Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90022

The following information is optional, but useful for us to collect the best information possible:

Name _____ Phone # _____ Email: _____

Age _____

Thank you very much for contributing to the preservation of the rich heritage of East Los Angeles, CA.

This survey is a project of the Eastside Heritage Consortium, Persona/Anima Productions, The Maravilla Historical Society, and the Los Angeles Conservancy.