

IDENTIFYING AND CONSERVING PACOIMA:  
A HERITAGE CONSERVATION STUDY OF A MINORITY ENCLAVE  
IN THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

by

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## **DEDICATION**

For my parents, David & Teresa Delgadillo,  
who taught me to value and celebrate my heritage.

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the wake of revitalization efforts, the tangible and intangible heritage of many communities can be compromised. One of the greatest challenges facing historic minority enclave communities is the lack of identification and designation of historic community resources. As this thesis will demonstrate, the unique history of Pacoima, a minority enclave within the San Fernando Valley, is worthy of further study and conservation efforts in order to help prevent the loss of valuable historic community resources while the area undergoes multiple revitalization projects.

The tracing of Pacoima's history from its early days to its present condition as an urban community highlights pivotal points of development and population shifts that have had lasting impacts in the culture and built environment, otherwise known as the heritage, of the area. Part of Pacoima's history includes previous revitalization efforts some of which were centered on a stretch of Van Nuys Boulevard, recognized as Pacoima's commercial corridor and hub of the community. A detailed study of a section of the commercial corridor provides examples of historic establishments found on Van Nuys Boulevard that are eligible for local designation.

This study identifies Pacoima's historic establishments, illustrates challenges of heritage conservation within a community like Pacoima, and provides recommendations that inform current and future revitalization and conservation efforts in this community.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2014, Mayor Eric Garcetti, announced his “Great Streets” project through which he designated fifteen roadways within the City of Los Angeles. The corridors selected represent the diversity of modern Los Angeles. One of the designated stretches is Van Nuys Boulevard in Pacoima, between Laurel Canyon Boulevard and San Fernando Road. It is a section of Pacoima’s vibrant and historic commercial corridor that has suffered from disinvestment for decades. Councilman Felipe Fuentes, who has been working in the area for over fifteen years, is optimistic that the Great Streets designation and investment of city funds will attract commercial growth and development. “I think we are just a couple of years away from actually seeing the transformation of this area.”<sup>1</sup> While plans to reinvigorate Pacoima’s commercial corridor through new investment and development is a valid effort, it leaves much of the corridor’s valuable tangible and intangible heritage susceptible to being lost to demolition and redevelopment.

Prior to 1964, Pacoima was one of the few neighborhoods within the sprawling San Fernando Valley where minorities were allowed to purchase land. In the years leading up to World War II, it was already home to minority populations, including Japanese, Mexican, and African American families.<sup>2</sup> In the years after the World War II period, many African

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Orlov, “Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti Paves the Path for ‘Great Streets,’” *Whittier Daily News*, June 3, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1532696053>.

<sup>2</sup> Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010) 55-56.; “Special Edition 1940 Census Records Release,” *Profile America Facts for Features*, February 12, 2012, accessed August 12, 2015, [https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/cb12-ffse01.html](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb12-ffse01.html). The 1940 Census collected race data according to white and black- data on other ethnic groups, including the Hispanic population, was not collected. For this reason, data regarding the various ethnic groups that inhabited Pacoima during the 1940 Census is unavailable.

American veterans purchased homes and settled in Pacoima with their families. The booming employment opportunities in nearby industry and aircraft plants continued to attract settlers to Pacoima. By the 1970s, after the civil rights movement, the community was in transition. During this period, people of color in Pacoima were no longer restrained by the restrictive selling practices reinforced by the Home Owners Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Agency, commonly known as redlining. Many African American families in Pacoima began to sell their homes and moved to other Los Angeles suburbs. As a result, an influx of Latino immigrants new to Los Angeles settled in Pacoima.

Despite its ongoing ethnic evolution, Pacoima remains a vibrant and dynamic community. As the density of the San Fernando Valley continues to shift and climb, the historic building fabric becomes more and more vulnerable to demolition and insensitive development. Original Pacoima buildings, residential and commercial, have been subjected to over sixty years of additions and alterations, leaving very few buildings unaltered and eligible for formal historic preservation designation. The one of a kind valley community of Pacoima presents a challenge for historic preservation professionals who are trained to survey for tangible traces of heritage and history. Through historical analysis, this thesis traces the development of Pacoima and aims to identify both tangible and intangible historic community resources located along the Van Nuys commercial corridor in Pacoima.

## CHAPTER 1: Early History and Development

### *Pacoima Settlement, Gentleman-Farming, and Infrastructure 1887-1940*

Located in the Northeast part of the San Fernando Valley, Pacoima sits approximately twenty miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles and approximately three miles east of the Mission San Fernando Rey de España.<sup>3</sup> (Figure 1.1)



Figure 1.1: Pacoima highlighted in illustration of Greater Los Angeles, circa 1930. Source: Adapted by Sara Delgadillo from "Illustration - San Fernando Valley, early 1930s," accessed April 29, 2015, <http://www.godickson.com/sfmap1.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

Before the arrival of the Spaniards in California, the region was home to native peoples of the Tongva-Gabrielino and Chumash tribes.<sup>4</sup> By the time the Mexican-American War broke out in 1846, the mission had been secularized and the northern portion of the San Fernando Mission lands were owned by Pio Pico, the last Governor of Alta California under Mexican rule. By 1869, the lands surrounding the San Fernando Mission were sold by Pico to Eulogio De Celis to become the Ex Mission San Fernando land grant.<sup>5</sup>

The second half of the nineteenth century brought much change to the San Fernando Valley and the area that was later to become the community of Pacoima. Westward expansion and the building of the railroad through Southern California made the lands in the San Fernando Valley a much-desired commodity. Upon hearing that the Southern Pacific railroad was to reach Los Angeles from San Francisco through the San Fernando Valley, former California State Senator Charles Maclay from Santa Clara became interested in purchasing land adjacent to the rail.<sup>6</sup> After purchasing the lands from De Celis, Maclay filed a tract map for the City of San Fernando with plans to sell several thousand lots.<sup>7</sup> The Ex Mission lands were subdivided and sold by the San Fernando Land and Water Company, formed by C. Maclay and other prominent figures of the time including R.M. Widney, H.L. Macneil, and Geo C. Hager.<sup>8</sup> As the century came to a close,

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<sup>4</sup> Kevin Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley: America's Suburb*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times Books, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Ira Gribin, "San Fernando's History Traced Back to 1846," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1981, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, V\_B1.; *Plat of the Ex Mission de San Fernando [Calif.]* [map/manuscript], 1869, Scale not given, "Maps of private land grant cases of California," UC Berkeley Bancroft Library, <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/hb5t1nb2xh/?order=2&brand=calisphere> (December 12, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Ira Gribin, "San Fernando's History Traced Back to 1846," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1981, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, V\_B1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Display Ad 16 - No Title, *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 1, 1887, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, pg. 23.

most land in the valley was owned by a small group of elite Anglo-American capitalists who speculated in land subdivision or made use of it for sheep grazing or by planting crops such as wine grapes, wheat, or barley.<sup>9</sup> (Figure 1.2)



Figure 1.2: The San Fernando Valley as seen in 1873, view south towards the San Fernando Rey de España Mission in the distance. Source: Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

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<sup>9</sup> Kevin Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley: America's Suburb*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times Books, 2001) v.

In April of 1875, work began on the tunnel that extended the Southern Pacific rail southeast through the San Fernando Valley towards Los Angeles. The work crew, made up of Chinese, Mexican, and Indian workers, lived in camps in the foothills during the construction phase. More than 1,500 non-Anglo men performed the most hazardous labor and made it possible for the tunnel connecting the Santa Clarita and San Fernando Valleys to be completed by September of 1876.<sup>10</sup>

The area that was to become the town of Pacoima was located just south of the City of San Fernando. The land had been purchased from the de Celis family and owned by Charles Maclay east of the Southern Pacific Railroad and by George Porter west of the railroad. Jouett Allen, a lawyer from Chattanooga Tennessee, purchased the land in 1887 to become the town he called Pacoima, which is said to be an Indian word for “rushing waters.”<sup>11</sup> A year prior to Allen’s purchase, R.M. Widney had begun the construction of a dam in the nearby Pacoima Canyon. It was planned that the water from this dam would allow for below ground water mains to provide the town of Pacoima water for irrigation and domestic use.<sup>12</sup> With reference to the subdivision of Pacoima, the Daughters of the American Revolution wrote, “in laying out the new town, Chinamen were hired with mule teams to grade the streets, etc., and white men did all the carpenter and cement work.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Kevin Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley: America's Suburb*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times Books, 2001), 40.; Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 156.

<sup>11</sup> Kevin Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley: America's Suburb*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times Books, 2001), 43.

<sup>12</sup> San Fernando Items, *Los Angeles Herald*, Volume 25, No. 170, September 21, 1886, California Digital Newspaper Collection, <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=LAH18860921.2.41#>, accessed Jan 10, 2015.; Herbert M. Wilson, *Irrigation Engineering*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1905), 332.

<sup>13</sup> Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 83.

Before the turn of the century, very few buildings were built in Pacoima. The newly subdivided townsite only had a rail depot, a schoolhouse, a hotel, and a number of single-family homes that rested on open acres of land. (Figure 1.3) By 1888, it had been discovered that the engineering of the initial dam built in the Pacoima Canyon was not successful; it did not lead to the volume or flow of water needed for the town.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in 1891 severe flooding destroyed most of the few original buildings in Pacoima.<sup>15</sup>

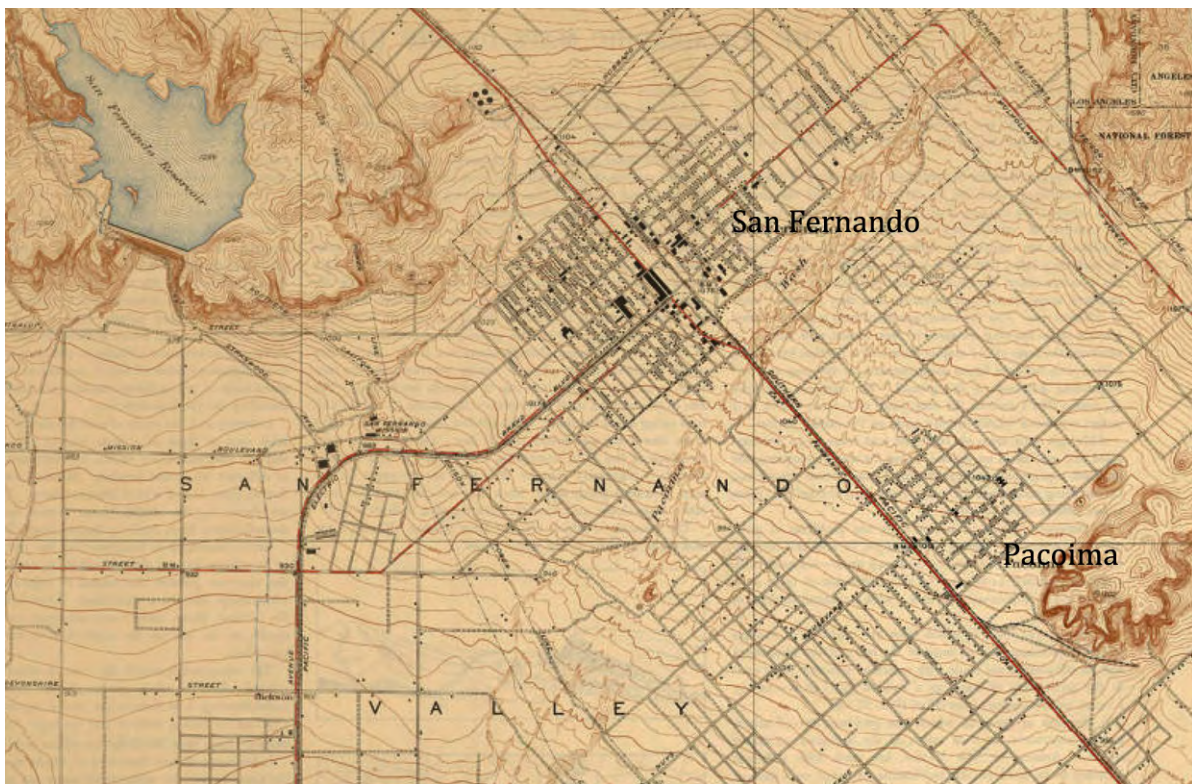


Figure 1.3: Topographic Map of the Northeast San Fernando Valley in 1925, including railroads, the San Fernando Mission, and the towns of San Fernando and Pacoima. Source: Adapted by Sara Delgadillo from original file, Chenoweth, W. R., Topographical map of the Pacoima Quadrangle, 1924-1925, *San Fernando Valley History Collection*, Special Collections and Archives, Oviatt Library, California State University, Northridge.

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<sup>14</sup> William H. Hall, Report of the State Engineer of California: On Irrigation and the Irrigation Question, Vol. 2, (Office of State Engineer, 1886).

<sup>15</sup> Carl A. Maida, *Pathways Through Crisis: Urban Risk and Public Culture*, (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2008), 189.



In 1905, the San Fernando Valley Land Company, presumably formed by Jouett Allen, sold undeveloped lots in Pacoima. Large newspaper advertisements promoted the sale of lots in Pacoima offering excursions to visit the area while anticipating quick sales.<sup>16</sup> (Figure 1.4) According to Frank Keffer, by 1910 there were “millions of dollars budgeted to transfer the valley from a great grain field to the most desirable place in the world for the establishment of suburban farm homes, where settlers might enjoy country life and at the same time have all the conveniences that a city could offer.”<sup>17</sup> Despite previous efforts, it was not until the completion of the Los Angeles Aqueduct in 1913 that small-scale suburban agriculture, also known as gentleman-farming, took off in Pacoima and the once parched lands of the San Fernando Valley.<sup>18</sup> During Pacoima’s agricultural days the community produced crops like oranges, lemons, peaches, apricots, olives, and alfalfa.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Display Ad 27 – No Title, *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Frank M. Keffer, *History of the San Fernando Valley*, mgr. ed. Harold McLean Meier, Arthur Hamilton Cawston, (Glendale: Stillman Printing Company, 1934).

<sup>18</sup> Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 25. Barraclough describes gentleman farming as the practice of small-scale suburban agriculture and combination of rural and urban lifestyles. The “little farms near the city” were “inhabited by economically prosperous, culturally sophisticated, white gentleman farmers.”

<sup>19</sup> “Our History,” *Pacoima Chamber of Commerce*, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://www.pacoimachamber.com/pacoimas-history/>.

LOS ANGELES HERALD: MONDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 18, 1905.

**1000 People**  
Visited the Townsite  
Yesterday and  
Bought or Reserved  
Lots That Have  
Increased  
In Value Over  
Night

# PACOIMA

In the Heart of the  
**SAN FERNANDO VALLEY**

**After Yesterday's Grand Excursion and Sale**

**500 More**  
Anxious People Were  
Unfortunately  
Excluded From the  
Privilege Through  
the Lack  
of Transportation  
Accommodations

## Is the Envy of Her Sister Towns

We owe an apology to the 500 or more people who were disappointed at the Arcade depot yesterday morning when our "special" train carrying 1000 men and women pulled out leaving half as many behind.

**Such a Crowd Was Not Expected**  
and the accommodation of the mass of people struggling to join the excursionists had not been contemplated.

**The Sale Was a Huge Success**  
two-thirds of all the lots having been disposed of to eager buyers who saw the natural advantages of a town laid out in the manner and in the locality Pacoima was found. Business property was very active and residence property sold to people who in most instances will at once build their homes.

**For Investors There Is the Opportunity to  
Make from 100% to 500% in Six Months**  
Every lot that has already been sold by us has already an increased value, and tenders of 25 to 50 per cent advance offered yesterday were refused.

**A Town  
Started With  
Success  
Written on Its  
Banner**

People of the neighboring towns for miles around showed their faith in Pacoima by buying briskly ahead of others and declining to resell at big advances.

Although before yesterday's sale it had been determined to advance prices today to 15 per cent on the unsold lots.

**We Feel Duty Bound to Not  
Advance the Prices**  
on the remainder of the lots until the close of this week, in order to allow those who could not board the crowded trains.

**The Opportunity of Buying  
From First Hands at the  
Same Prices of Yesterday**  
Many as good opportunities as existed yesterday are open to you if you buy today, but don't wait to pay the first investor the profit he is bound to make.  
People who bought yesterday have means and intend at once building business blocks and residences.  
The beautiful surroundings, with orange groves and olive orchards on one side and the grand Sierra Madre mountains on the other, at the foot of which lies the town, inspired everyone with a positive conviction that Pacoima will be a thrifty town in less than ninety days. Saw and hammer are already busy today.

**Don't Allow This Last Chance to Be Passed Up**

**Buy Today**

**San Fernando Valley Land Company**

Main 1808      532 @ 534 Homer Laughlin Building...Third and Broadway      Home 8950

**Tomorrow May  
Be Too Late**

Figure 1.4: San Fernando Valley Land Company advertisement for Pacoima lot sales, 1905. Source: *Los Angeles Herald* [microform], (Los Angeles [Calif.]), Dec. 18, 1905, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress.

In 1915, nearly one hundred seventy square miles of the San Fernando Valley, including Pacoima, became part of the City of Los Angeles.<sup>20</sup> Winter rains often caused the Pacoima Wash, a mostly dry creek bed, to overflow and flood; this flooding caused damage to Pacoima and its neighboring communities. To answer the community's flooding concerns, a series of civic flood control projects over the following decades made the northeast San Fernando Valley a much safer place to live. The first of the projects was a second dam built in Pacoima Canyon, roughly four miles north of Pacoima and 365 feet

<sup>20</sup> *Annexation and Detachment Map*[map], City of Los Angeles, Accessed May 1, 2015, <http://navigatela.lacity.org/common/mapgallery/pdf/annex34x44.pdf>.

above the streambed. Construction for the dam took approximately five years and the Pacoima Dam was dedicated in 1929. At the time it was built, it was the highest concrete constant angle arch dam in the world.<sup>21</sup> (Figure 1.5) In 1930, shortly after the Pacoima Dam was completed, the plan for Hansen Dam was announced. The large dam, dedicated in 1940, sits on the western edge of Pacoima. When it was built, Hansen Dam was the largest earth-filled reservoir in the world, its height is 122 feet above the streambed and is nearly two miles long.<sup>22</sup> In the late 1940s, 1,550 acres surrounding Hansen Dam were turned into recreation areas by the City of Los Angeles. The reservoir area above the dam was to include such amenities like a bathhouse, swimming pool, natural museum, bandstand, boathouse, stable buildings, a parking lot and a gasoline station while the area below the dam was to become a golf course.<sup>23</sup> In the 1950s the lake recreation area of Hansen Dam was divided into three uses: swimming, water skiing, and motor boating.<sup>24</sup> Families from throughout Los Angeles would frequent the recreation areas of Hansen Dam. (Figure 1.6)

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<sup>21</sup> "For Loftiest Dam in the World: Pacoima Flood-Control Project," *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1920, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, II1.; "Work on Pacoima Canyon Dam, \$1,720,000 Flood-Control Project," *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 1926, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, E10.

<sup>22</sup> "Hansen Dam Work Begun: Crowd Sees Turning of First Dirt," *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1930, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, A2.; "Hansen Dam Dedicated: Largest Earth-Fill Reservoir in World," *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 1940, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, A1.

<sup>23</sup> "Hansen Dam Park Plans Disclosed," *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 1948, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, A1.

<sup>24</sup> "Areas Set Aside for Use at Hansen Dam Lake," *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, B15.



Figure 1.5: Pacoima Dam aerial circa 1932. Source: Herald-Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.



Figure 1.6: Recreation at Hansen Dam beach in 1962. Source: Valley Times Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

The rapid growth of the San Fernando Valley, from the implementation of infrastructure to the development of agricultural lands, at the turn of the century would not have been possible without the dispossession of indigenous and Mexican land, and the use of Asians, Mexicans, and Native Americans as laborers to build the infrastructure and farm the lands of the valley. Yet, the claim to the valley's progress remained solely in the hands of Anglo-Americans as nonwhites were not allowed to own land or compete with white farmers.<sup>25</sup>

The construction of railroads in the San Fernando Valley, California, and the West during the late nineteenth century was carried out mostly by Chinese labor. The use of Chinese immigrant labor was essential for the growth of the state. The fears and anxieties that resulted from the reliance on Chinese immigrant labor led to several anti-Chinese laws and ordinances, most importantly the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The act banned all Chinese laborers from entering the United States for ten years and forbid Chinese immigrants from becoming naturalized. Only certain Chinese immigrants were allowed to immigrate into the country; merchants, teachers, students, diplomats, and travelers were exempt from the exclusion act.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 29-46.

<sup>26</sup> Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 2-4. Although the Exclusion Act greatly reduced the amount of Chinese immigrants to the US, later court cases allowed the admission or readmission for the families of merchants and native born citizens. Through this clause some immigrants would pay for an exempt immigrant to claim them as sons, referred to by Lee as the "paper son" strategy. The Exclusion Act marks the first time in American US history that barred a group of immigrants because of its race and class. "The act also set the terms for the first large-scale deportation of an immigrant group. Later legislation renewed and strengthened the original act, and the exclusion of Chinese was made a permanent part of US immigration policy until its repeal in 1943."

As Chinese immigrants were barred to continue in the United States as laborers, Japanese workers took their place and fulfilled the need for low-cost immigrant labor in the San Fernando Valley and throughout the west. “The Japanese, many of whom came from agricultural backgrounds, were more likely than the Chinese to establish themselves as independent farmers, and they soon dominated the berry, flower, and vegetable industries.”<sup>27</sup> Starr and Barraclough argue that the success Japanese immigrants had in landownership and agriculture became an economic and cultural threat that incited envy in white Midwestern migrants who relocated to the San Fernando Valley aiming to settle in one acre and achieve independence.<sup>28</sup> Barraclough states that the perceived threat the Japanese farmers posed on the white settlers not only exposed structural issues of land monopoly, but also encouraged the passage of land ownership restrictions in the form of California’s Alien Land Laws in 1913 and 1920 and later immigration restrictions in the 1920s. These exclusionary regulations which included alien land laws, immigration restrictions, restrictive covenants, and residential segregation, worked together as an intended mechanism to “elevate the production and livelihoods of white gentleman farmers by restricting competition from nonwhites and immigrants.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 51.

<sup>28</sup> Kevin Starr, *Inventing the Dream: California Through the Progressive Era*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 172-173.; Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 52. The success of Japanese immigrants in agriculture and other labor sectors was mostly due to their organization into associations with a central ‘boss’ that negotiated labor terms, these organizations refused to compete with one another or break strikes ultimately leading to monopolization of sectors through interethnic cooperation.

<sup>29</sup> Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 52-53.

Many Mexicans lived and worked in the San Fernando Valley at the end of the nineteenth century. The population of Mexican laborers in the San Fernando Valley grew drastically in 1910, at the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution. At this point in time, ten percent of the entire Mexican population moved north where Los Angeles became the most important gateway for this immigration tide.<sup>30</sup> Laura Barraclough points out that large agricultural interests and gentleman farmers preferred Mexican laborers to Asian ethnic groups because they were thought to show little inclination toward organizing or unionizing. By the 1920s, the picking and packing for all crops was dominated by Mexican workers throughout Southern California and in the 1930s, the population of Mexicans living in the San Fernando Valley reached fifteen hundred.<sup>31</sup>

By the 1930's, Latinos made up most of the state's workforce and permanent Mexican neighborhoods began to form. The development of Latino neighborhoods, barrios or colonias, fostered the formation of community activities, churches, mutual aid societies, sports teams, and small businesses.<sup>32</sup> (Figure 1.7) In Pacoima, Japanese vegetable farmers and flower growers settled in the area alongside the Mexican population that already inhabited the region. By 1924, the Japanese population established the San Fernando Valley Japanese Language Institute in Pacoima for *Nisei* children. At the language institute, children born in the United States to Japanese parents were able to learn the Japanese language and customs.

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<sup>30</sup> *Blackwell Companions to American History: Companion to Los Angeles*, eds. William Deverell and Greg Hise, (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 193.

<sup>31</sup> Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 54.

<sup>32</sup> *Latinos in the Twentieth Century California: National Register of Historic Places Context Statement*, California Office of Historic Preservation (California State Parks, 2015) 1.



Figure 1.7: Group portrait of the Aztecas, a girl's baseball team based in Pacoima, with their manager, 1936. Source: Shades of L.A. Archive: Mexican American Community, Los Angeles Public Library.

Societal hierarchies during the gentleman-farming days that brought diversity and settlement to the San Fernando Valley were distinctly racialized. Barraclough provides an example where white absentee owners leased farmlands to Japanese immigrant tenant farmers who in turn would employ Mexicans for the manual labor needed. The land-use policies, immigration and naturalization laws, and residential segregation were utilized to maintain the hierarchies that would allow Anglo Americans to remain in control of the San Fernando Valley. “The result was a patchwork quilt of sorts that suggests not residential integration, but carefully monitored separation to achieve the twin goals of economic



productivity and white exclusion”<sup>33</sup> The years of small scale farming brought diversity and able laborers to Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley. “By 1930 about 100,000 Mexican immigrants, 30,000 Japanese, Chinese, and Korean immigrants, and 40,000 African Americans had settled in Los Angeles...the majority of the much larger Anglo population of about one million persons were working- and lower-middle-class migrants”<sup>34</sup> Although minority groups were present in the population of Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley, they were still outnumbered by the population of Anglo-Americans. In Pacoima, the concentration of immigrant and minority residents, mostly Mexican, turned it into the unofficial minority district.<sup>35</sup>

As Pacoima was becoming a more populated town, it further cemented itself as the minority district within the San Fernando Valley during the 1930s. It was one of the few town sites that allowed racial and ethnic minorities to own land. Land-use policies, including restrictive covenants, and alien land laws, excluded immigrant groups and non-whites from owning land in parts of the San Fernando Valley. In order for a minority or person of color to be allowed to purchase, the property had to be deemed of least value by the Home Ownership Land Corporation (HOLC), which was established in 1933 and rated property that indicated where racial and ethnic minorities were allowed to purchase land. This practice, better known as redlining, was supported by security maps from the HOLC to serve as guides for real estate transactions. Communities considered of least value, like the

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<sup>33</sup> Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 54.

<sup>34</sup> *Blackwell Companions to American History: Companion to Los Angeles*, eds. William Deverell and Greg Hise, (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 193.

<sup>35</sup> Kevin Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley: America's Suburb*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times Books, 2001), 140-141.

lands in Pacoima, were highlighted in a red tone. (Figure 1.8) Redlining geared the growth of already existing minority districts like Pacoima and other distinctive Mexican communities, also known as Mexican *colonias*. Before redlining was practiced, minority districts within suburban gentleman-farming districts existed haphazardly due to “civic neglect and abandonment rather than deliberate planning” and were “characterized by intra-ethnic leasing and labor.”<sup>36</sup>

The area that was developed as the town of Pacoima, adequately named “rushing waters,” is located on land susceptible to flooding. Though infrastructure projects like the aqueduct, dams, and other flood control works made Pacoima and the northeast San Fernando Valley a safer place to live, the area had been deemed less desirable in comparison to other available real estate within the San Fernando Valley. The redlining of Pacoima by the Home Ownership Land Corporation officially declared the land as having least value, ultimately encapsulating minorities within such redlined districts.

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<sup>36</sup> Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 29, 54-55.

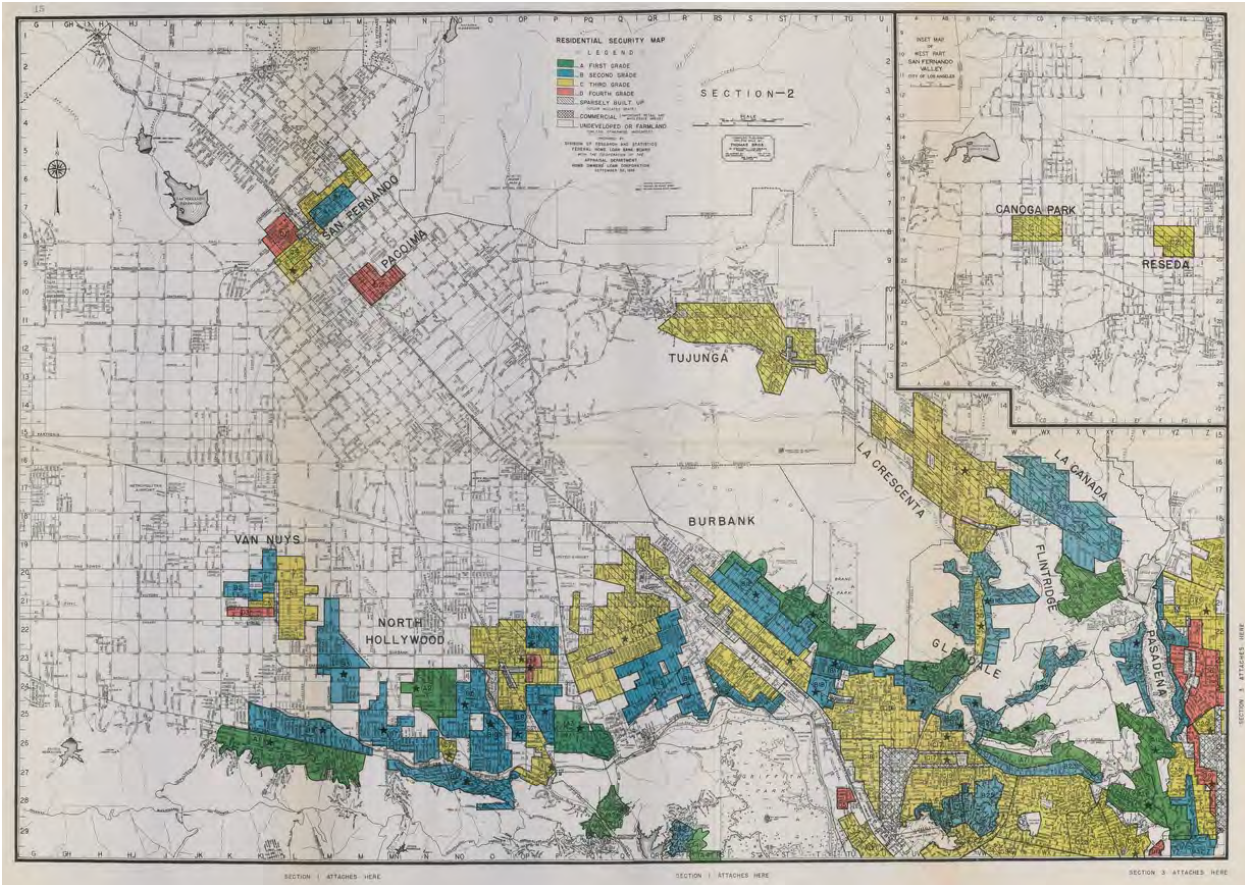


Figure 1.8: Map of redlined districts in Los Angeles North (2). Source: NARA II RG 195 Entry 39 Folder "Metropolitan Los Angeles, California Security Map" Box 101, accessed April 29, 2015, <http://www.urbanosis.org/projects/holc-fha/digital-holc-maps/>.

## Chapter 2: Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Development and Present Day

### *Pacoima WWII, Industry, and Residential Development – 1940-1970*

Leading up to the US involvement in World War II, the population in Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley was increasing. By 1940, the population in the San Fernando Valley exceeded 112,000.<sup>37</sup> Although economic and physical changes were already happening in the mostly undeveloped small ranches and farmlands of Pacoima, the high rate of defense production in Los Angeles and its environs accelerated change and steered the development of whole communities.

During the war “airplanes groaned overhead on incessant training flights, and the occasional crashes into the fields and mountain ridges made the war seem real.”<sup>38</sup> Aircraft plants in the San Fernando Valley employed many Pacoima residents. One of the major employers of this time was Lockheed Aircraft in nearby Burbank.<sup>39</sup> The boom in the aircraft industry led to the establishment of Whiteman Air Park, which also became known as Pacoima Air Park, in 1946. The small airport, with hangars and commercial spaces was developed in Pacoima adjacent to the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks.<sup>40</sup> In its heyday, the small airport served local pilots including the Falcon Air Club, whose members included bartenders, mechanics, and the Hollywood elite. Pacoima Air Park served a select clientele

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<sup>37</sup> Kevin Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley: America's Suburb*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times Books, 2001), 108.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>39</sup> Helen Ponce, *Hoyt Street: An Autobiography*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 22.

<sup>40</sup> “Whiteman Airport,” *Los Angeles County Airports*, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://dpw.lacounty.gov/avi/airports/Whiteman.aspx>.

that often used the small airport as a taking-off place for flights to ranches and beaches.<sup>41</sup>  
(Figure 2.1)



Figure 2.1: Whiteman Airport in Pacoima north of the railroad alongside San Fernando Road, 2010.  
Source: Shane Torgerson.

The arrival of non-agricultural industry and production work to the San Fernando Valley and other parts of Los Angeles soared in the years leading up to United States' involvement in World War II. The San Fernando Valley experienced a rapid increase of blue-collar workers moving to the area. Upon arrival, willing workers were faced with a lack of sufficient middle-class housing. The housing dilemma would only worsen as many

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<sup>41</sup> "Fashion: The California Air," *Vogue* 108 no. 5, September 15, 1946, 220-225, 312, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy1.usc.edu/docview/879242272>.

soldiers returned to the United States after the war looking for a home. Short-term solutions for the housing problem included Quonset hut barrack housing. In the 1940s, city officials relocated a series of Quonset huts that African Americans had been renting at the Roger Young Village in Griffith Park to Pacoima. Meanwhile, the first and only integrated subsidized housing project for veterans, the Basilone Homes, was erected out of surplus barracks near the southwestern edge of Hansen Dam in Pacoima (Figure 2.2).<sup>42</sup> Since the homes were only meant as a temporary solution, the 1,500 housing units that made up the Basilone Homes project were demolished in the late 1950s.<sup>43</sup>



Figure 2.2: Basilone Homes on the southwestern edge of Hansen Dam, 1947. Source: Los Angeles Times photographic archive, UCLA Library, "Basilone Homes Veteran's Housing project in San Fernando Valley, Calif., 1947," Record ID: uclalat\_1429\_b11\_44842-1.

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<sup>42</sup> Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 131.

<sup>43</sup> Ruth Wallach, Dace Taube, Claude Zachary, Linda McCann, and Curtis C. Roseman, *Images of America: Los Angeles in World War II* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2011), 48.

Developers looking to make a profit provided the long-term answer for the housing shortage, they purchased agricultural lots and ranches then subdivided them for tracts of single-family housing.<sup>44</sup> One such housing development in Pacoima was the grouping of Joe Louis Homes that opened in 1950.<sup>45</sup> The development was named after the esteemed African American heavyweight-boxing champion, although the development had no real connection to the boxer. It is believed the tract was named after Louis by developers as a way to steer the African American community to purchase homes in the tract.<sup>46</sup> Many returning African American veterans, along with sons and daughters of the segregated south moving to California for work, chose to settle down in Pacoima after having difficulty finding housing in the overcrowded and segregated districts of South Los Angeles.<sup>47</sup> (Figure 2.3)

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<sup>44</sup> Kevin Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley: America's Suburb*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times Books, 2001), 120-121.

<sup>45</sup> "Joe Louis Home Development Opens in San Fernando Valley," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 16, 1950, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, pg. B6.

<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey Mohan, "Black History Month / Valley Retrospective Perspectives on the Past-and the Future," *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1994, ProQuest.

<sup>47</sup> Kevin Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley: America's Suburb*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Times Books, 2001), 140, 146-47.



Figure 2.3: Historic photograph of Pacoima's African American residential neighborhood in 1958. Source: Zenobia, "Uncle Junior once upon a time in Pacoima," *Flickr*.

With the outbreak of World War II, there was an increase of Mexican and African American residents in Pacoima. The valley's Japanese population was detained at the Santa Anita Race Track and at a California Conservation Corps camp in La Tuna Canyon before being interned at permanent camps throughout the American West. Meanwhile, other minority groups moved in to dominate the low-wage hired labor force in the San Fernando Valley. At the time of internment, 3,177 people of Japanese descent lived in the San Fernando Valley and half were citizens.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 54-55.



In the late 1940s, the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles surveyed Pacoima's substandard housing areas and began plans to build an integrated public housing project in Pacoima in the name of slum clearance and urban renewal, despite community efforts to rehabilitate the area via "private enterprise and individual initiative." In trying to avoid a public housing development in the neighborhood, a group of community members came together to form the Latin-American Chamber of Commerce of Pacoima circa 1950. The group visited homes of key community figures to promote the beautification of the "Spanish-speaking section" of Pacoima that "left much to be desired as a residential community." Community members agreed to enhance their properties through the use of loans and the group sought help from local banks to start a loan program for which they were denied because the streets in the neighborhood were not paved. The group then collected signatures for a proposal to be submitted to the city through which the streets would be paved and homeowners would obtain loan funds for property beautification. Meanwhile, the City Housing Authority continued with its plans to build a public housing project in Pacoima. "When we were able to present them with a clear choice between our program and the possible program of the City Housing Authority, the people signed our street paving petitions." After months of not getting an answer from the City of Los Angeles, the chamber's proposal was partially approved, excluding forty-four acres that were reserved for the City Housing Authority. The chamber group tried to get the forty-four

acres of land restored to the agreement but was unsuccessful.<sup>49</sup> (Figure 2.4) The following is a statement made by the group in a 1952 *Los Angeles Times* article:

We recognize that we have a problem of substandard housing in our community, but we feel that that is a local problem which we can solve through the energies and means of a local private industry.

We feel that we were well on the way to solving that problem in a manner which would have produced proud homeowners rather than substandard tenants. We hope that we will be able to continue with our program.<sup>50</sup>

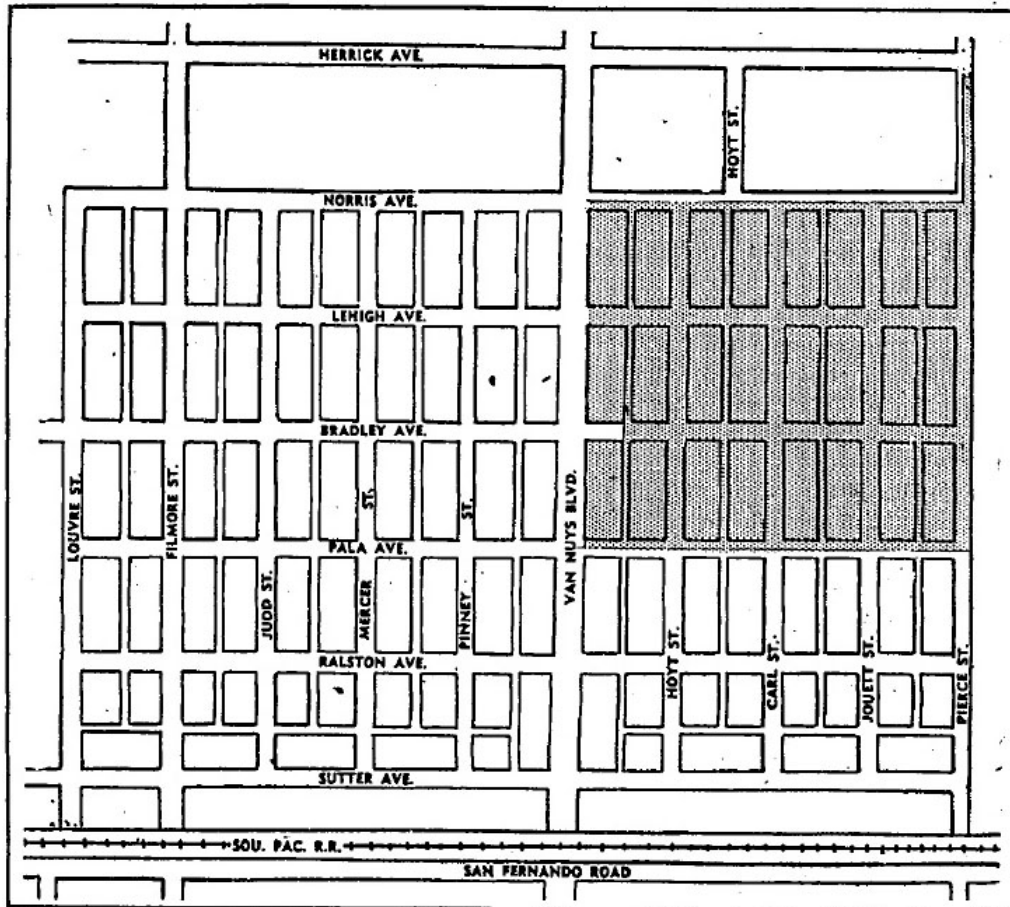


Figure 2.4: Map of the forty-four acre lot reserved for City Housing Authority, 1952. Source: *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), October 29, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times, pg A5.

<sup>49</sup> "How Pacoima's Plans to Improve Were Hexed by Housing Authority," *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, A5.; Ed Meagher, "Pacoima Area Revamped by Awakened Citizenry: Los Angeles Program for..." *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1955, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, A1.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

Author Mary Helen Ponce, who was born to Mexican immigrant parents, wrote about growing up in the Pacoima *barrio* before and during World War II. Ponce's parents were homeowners on Hoyt Street, just south of the forty-four acre area to become public housing, along with many other Mexican families. (Figure 2.4) Her memoir speaks fondly about her upbringing in Pacoima, even though her family and other community members faced segregation and poverty. "The majority of Mejicanos who lived in Pacoima during the 1920s to the 1950s (when some homes were torn down to build the 'projects') were hard-working, decent, and honorable."<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, the community was unsuccessful in its efforts to halt the building of public housing in Pacoima. Many homeowners lost their homes and land to the building of San Fernando Gardens, the public housing project.

For city officials, building public housing in Pacoima was the answer to a city-wide housing crisis. The creation of the Community Redevelopment Agency in Los Angeles in 1948 was intended to help clear the slums and in turn offer those displaced safe and sanitary housing within their economic means. The subsequent passage of the American Housing Act of 1949 pushed for the increase in public housing by 810,000 units by 1955 to help alleviate the shortage in housing.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, city officials garnered support for demolition by exposing slum conditions through photographs, tours, and disseminating disease and crime rates. (Figures 2.5-2.7) It was not until later that planners, sociologists,

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<sup>51</sup> Helen Ponce, *Hoyt Street: An Autobiography*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993) x.

<sup>52</sup> *Garden Apartments of Los Angeles: Historic Context Statement*, Architectural Resources Group (Los Angeles Conservancy, October 2012) 20.

and developers admitted that “slum clearance was not only racially discriminatory but ineffective in removing blight and in creating more vital cities.”<sup>53</sup>



Figure 2.5: Substandard housing in Pacoima, circa 1950. Source: Housing Authority Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

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<sup>53</sup> Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000) 26.



Figure 2.6: Rita Duarte in her kitchen, slum homes, 1948. Source: Housing Authority Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.



Figure 2.7: Duarte family slum home in Pacoima, 1948. Source: Housing Authority Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

Completed in 1955, San Fernando Gardens is the only public housing project in the San Fernando Valley. Notable modernist architects Arthur B. Gallion and Victor D. Gruen designed the buildings while Francis Dean designed the landscaping for the superblock plan complex in the garden apartment style. The site has slightly curvilinear streets with strips of green space and includes approximately ninety buildings with 448 two-story multifamily residential units, a main office, a community center and a gym. More condensed than other public housing projects of this time, the alternating placement of buildings show the amount of space planning that went into the maximization of space all the while attempting to provide as much privacy for residents as possible. Within the boundaries of the site is Guardian Angel Church, a Catholic Church and school established in the 1920s that has longstanding ties to the Latino community in Pacoima.<sup>54</sup>

(Figures 2.8-2.9)

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<sup>54</sup> *Garden Apartments of Los Angeles: Historic Context Statement*, Architectural Resources Group (Los Angeles Conservancy, October 2012).; "How Pacoima's Plans to Improve Were Hexed by Housing Authority," *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, A5.; *Arleta-Pacoima Report, Historic Districts, Planning Districts and Multi-Property Resources*, (Survey LA: Los Angeles Historic Resources Survey, March 2015).



Figure 2.8: Aerial view of San Fernando Gardens. Source: Google Maps by Author.



Figure 2.9: Courtyard and apartment buildings of San Fernando Gardens housing project in Pacoima, circa 1955. Source: Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

Pacoima's rapid development during the 1950s and 1960s was both residential and commercial. During this time a series of approved petitions to widen and rezone parts of Van Nuys Boulevard in Pacoima from residential to commercial led to it becoming Pacoima's unofficial commercial district. The widening and rezoning of Pacoima's main road prompted the building of commercial properties and the implementation of concrete curbs, gutters, sidewalks and all electric lighting.<sup>55</sup> (Figure 2.10) The highest concentration of commercial properties along Van Nuys Boulevard is found between Laurel Canyon Boulevard and San Fernando Road and it included a new modern library and buildings that housed commerce and industry that served and employed the booming population.<sup>56</sup> (Figures 2.11-2.12)

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<sup>55</sup> "Van Nuys Rezoning," *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, N5.; "Van Nuys Blvd. to Become Major Highway," *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1958, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, SF2.; "Nursery Petition," *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1956, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, I14.

<sup>56</sup> Ed Meagher, "Pacoima Area Revamped by Awakened Citizenry: Los Angeles Program for..." *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1955, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, A1.





Figure 2.10: Widening a stretch of Van Nuys Boulevard in newly-rezoned business area of Pacoima is inspected by Ben L. O'Brien, Pacoima Chamber of Commerce president, left; William E. McCann, Los Angeles Board of Public Works; and, D.P. Loomis, banker.  
Source: Valley Times Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.



Figure 2.11: Exterior of the Pacoima Branch of the Los Angeles Public Library, circa 1965.  
Source: Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.



Figure 2.12: 1965 New Plant for Virgil Walker's AAA Drapery Service and Walker Travel Agency, 13460 Van Nuys Blvd. The building would later become the home of the MEND, a community organization providing aid and services to underprivileged community members. Source: Valley Times Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

As Pacoima continued to grow, a socioeconomic separation occurred amongst its residents in the western and eastern parts of the community. The western part of Pacoima counted with a larger population of middle-class and Caucasian residents while the eastern part of Pacoima was home to a poorer and more racially diverse population.<sup>57</sup> The building of Interstates 5 and 210 in the middle of the century and the building 118 Freeway in the 1970s within Pacoima displaced families and further separated the community from other

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<sup>57</sup> George Garrigues, "Pacoima Striving to End Racial Feeling," *Los Angeles Times*, February 13 1966.

parts of the Northeast Valley.<sup>58</sup> The interstate 5, in particular, reinforced the division between the east and west Pacoima. In the 1960s, the affluent residents of the western half successfully led a petition to disaffiliate from Pacoima to become a separate neighborhood named Arleta, the secession became official in 1968. Though the City of Los Angeles Planning Department at times combines the areas, the communities remain separate to this day.<sup>59</sup> (Figure 2.13)

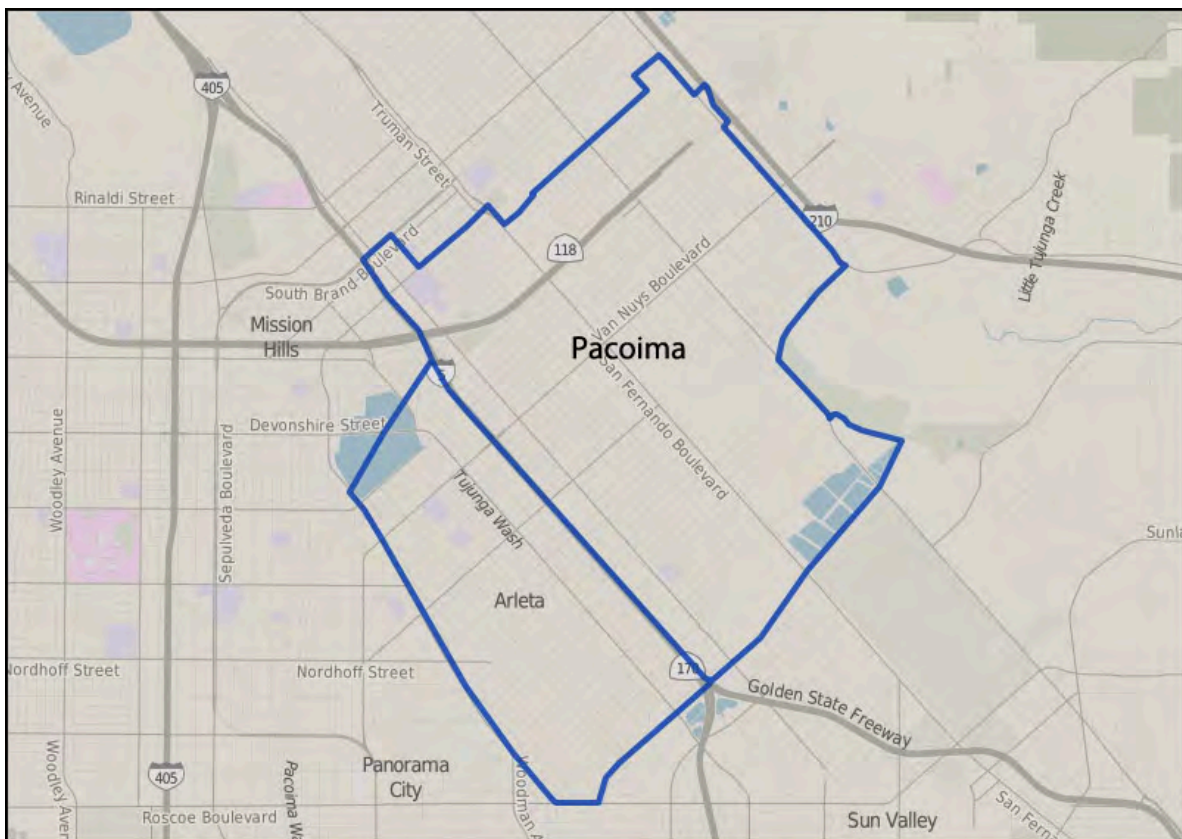


Figure 2.13: Map of Pacoima and Arleta along with the freeway system that cuts and surrounds the community. Source: Adapted by Sara Delgadillo from map images of Pacoima and Arleta, Los Angeles, CA, USA, Mapping L.A., *Los Angeles Times*, Accessed Sep 1, 2015, <http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/pacoima/?q=Pacoima%2C+Los+Angeles%2C+CA%2C+USA&lat=34.2767691&lng=-118.4104684&g=Geocodify>.

<sup>58</sup> Karen Glasgow, "This is/was My Community: A Narrative Inquiry of a Black/Latino Neighborhood in Transition" (PhD diss. Claremont Graduate University, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> Geoffrey Mohan, "Arleta: Boycott of 'Pacoima' Addressers is Urged," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 30 1993.

Pacoima, north of the interstate 5, continued to foster a booming multi-ethnic community well after the war while land-use policies continued to marginalize the population residing there through the continuous building of industry alongside residential neighborhoods. (Figure 2.14) Barraclough explains, “on the basis of existing racial, economic, and political relationships, resources are channeled to some neighborhoods, enabling the accumulation of wealth and power, while environmental hazards and unwanted land uses are channeled to others propelling the concentration of poverty, poor health, and other dangers.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 16.



Figure 2.14: Generalized Land Use Map of Arleta-Pacoima Community Plan Area as of 2009. Source: Adapted by Sara Delgadillo from Los Angeles Department of City Planning map, Accessed Sep 1, 2015, <http://planning.lacity.org/complan/valley/arlpge.htm>.

## ***Pacoima a Community in Transition – 1970-Present***

In the years after the freeway expansion, Pacoima became better connected to other employment centers within the city and it also became a center for employment and industry. By the 1970s Pacoima housed large companies and industrial plants like Price Pfister the manufacturer of water faucets and Carlow Co. the manufacturer and distributor of wooden doors. Industrial parks also built during this time were divided into smaller commercial spaces that housed smaller companies. Industrial building types continued to be built in Pacoima into the 1980s along the community's main roadways, railroad, and freeway corridors.<sup>61</sup>

During this time, Pacoima's physical appearance and its population was changing too. By 1960, ninety percent of all African Americans living in the San Fernando Valley lived in the Pacoima/Arleta area, reaching a population figure of roughly 9,000. By 1990, "just fifteen percent of the valley's total population of 73,851 African Americans resided in Pacoima-Arleta."<sup>62</sup> (Figure 2.15) As the population of African Americans in Pacoima declined, the population of Mexican immigrants was increasing. As in decades before, economic opportunity was the force behind Mexican immigration during the second half of the century. Industries within the San Fernando Valley and in Greater Los Angeles saw a spike in low-wage, low-benefit, non-union jobs in informal employment areas while there

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<sup>61</sup> "Second Plant Completed in Center," *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1963, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, P10.; "Price Pfister Moves Into Pacoima Plant," *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1965, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, N2.; "Industrial Park Completed," *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, N16.; "Ground Broken for Paper Plant," *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 1980, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, J26.

<sup>62</sup> Geoffrey Mohan, "Black History Month / Valley Retrospective: Perspectives on the Past and the Future," *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1994, [http://articles.latimes.com/1994-02-22/local/me-25833\\_1\\_african-american](http://articles.latimes.com/1994-02-22/local/me-25833_1_african-american).

was a decrease in high-wage and benefit union jobs in manufacturing. “Mexicans, both sanctioned and unsanctioned, filled many of these new positions in California and continue to do so, as expanded globalization has contributed significantly to continued outsourcing of high-wage U.S. jobs and insourcing of low-wage workers.”<sup>63</sup>



Figure 2.15: Historic photograph of an African American family at home in Pacoima circa 1964. Source: Zenobia, “having fun outside,” *Flickr*.

The passing of the 1968 Federal Fair Housing Act allowed upward social mobility for African American homeowners in Pacoima. Many African American homeowners were motivated to sell their already paid off properties in order to move to other suburban

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<sup>63</sup> *Latinos in the Twentieth Century California: National Register of Historic Places Context Statement*, California Office of Historic Preservation (California State Parks, 2015) 11.

communities within Greater Los Angeles.<sup>64</sup> The influx of Latino immigrants into Pacoima during this time also influenced the population shift that occurred in Pacoima. In her thesis, *This is/was My Community: A Narrative Inquiry of a Black/Latino Neighborhood In Transition*, author Karen Glasgow examined the phenomenon that impacted Pacoima as African Americans moved out and Latinos moved in. “The pattern of urban space ‘flooding’ has become common in California where Hispanic/Latino barrios have expanded to encroach on the inner cities that were once populated by Blacks.” Glasgow points out that this was the case with Pacoima. The change in the racial makeup of the neighborhood encouraged African Americans to move, especially those with means, and considered middle-class. Their decision to leave Pacoima was “intended to avoid problems associated with poverty such as high rates of crime, the lack of physical upkeep of neighborhood housing, and inadequately funded government services.”<sup>65</sup> Glasgow suggests that a non-poor African American neighborhood, like Pacoima, often does not stay non-poor; instead it loses its non-poor population and gains poor residents during such transition. The moving patterns of middle-class African Americans lead them to avoid neighborhoods with moderate to high rates of poverty. For this reason, middle-class African Americans left Pacoima and moved to Los Angeles’ other suburbs in the San Fernando Valley and others more distant like the Antelope Valley.<sup>66</sup>

By the late 1970s, much of Pacoima had fallen into disrepair. Many of the commercial storefronts on its Van Nuys Boulevard commercial strip were vacant, boarded

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<sup>64</sup> Steve Carney, "Pacoima Struggles with Changes," *Daily News*, February 14, 1999, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/281844641?accountid=14749>.

<sup>65</sup> Karen Glasgow, "This is/was My Community: A Narrative Inquiry of a Black/Latino Neighborhood In Transition" (PhD diss. Claremont Graduate University, 2001), 30-31.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*



up, and covered in graffiti. As with many poor neighborhoods in large metropolitan cities during the 1980s, crime, gangs, and drugs became the face of the community. To answer a need, Councilman Bob Ronka formed Pacoima Revitalization Inc., a short-lived nonprofit redevelopment organization, which aimed to rehabilitate the image of Pacoima. The focus of the organization was a low interest loan program that would provide residents and business owners access to property rehabilitation funds.<sup>67</sup> (Figure 2.16) Though the organization was successful in leading a community farmer's market and mural program, accounting issues and disagreements between the directors, board, and community plagued its survival. (Figures 2.17-2.18) Ultimately very few loans were processed and much of the rehabilitation the organization had set out to complete did not take place before the organization was disbanded in 1981.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Mark Stein, "5-Year Plan Aimed at Reviving Pacoima," *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1979, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, SF1.

<sup>68</sup> Sandy Banks, "Pacoima Renewal Unit Hit, May Close," *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 1981, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, V1.



Figure 2.16: Crisp's Billiard Parlor, 13226 Van Nuys Blvd, one of the few buildings (that was) to receive a face-lift through Pacoima Revitalization Inc., circa 1980. Source: The Papers of Pacoima Revitalization, Inc. Collection, Oviatt Library Urban Archives Center, California State University, Northridge.



Figure 2.17: Mural funded by Pacoima Revitalization Inc., on San Fernando Garden's Van Nuys Blvd facing Façade, circa 1980. Source: The Papers of Pacoima Revitalization, Inc. Collection, Oviatt Library Urban Archives Center, California State University, Northridge.



Figure 2.18: Mural funded by Pacoima Revitalization Inc., on the side of a San Fernando Garden's residential building, circa 1980. Source: The Papers of Pacoima Revitalization, Inc. Collection, Oviatt Library Urban Archives Center, California State University, Northridge.

In the 1990s, as awareness of environmental hazards grew, Pacoima began to fight against pollution and hazardous chemicals that had been actively hurting its residents due to the concentration of industrial plants alongside its residential neighborhoods. Pacoima Beautiful, a grassroots environmental justice organization, began voicing the environmental concerns of the community through localized efforts that geared member-led community beautification initiatives. Among Pacoima Beautiful's first victories was helping residents identify sources of pollution within the community, including the triggers of asthma and the dangers of lead within the home.<sup>69</sup> Pacoima Beautiful was also successful

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<sup>69</sup> "History," *Pacoima Beautiful*, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://www.pacoimabeautiful.org/about-us/history>.

in stopping unsafe cleanup and helped contribute a community voice for soil remediation at the former site of Price-Pfister's manufacturing plant.<sup>70</sup>

Leading up to the 2000s, Pacoima continued to endure disinvestment, though active community members, community organizations, and establishments helped foster a strong sense of community and community identity. By the year 2000, eighty-three percent of Pacoima's population was Latino and five percent was African American.<sup>71</sup> The subsequent housing crisis of 2008 left one in every ten houses in Pacoima in foreclosure and the economic downturn that accompanied it further depressed the impoverished community.<sup>72</sup>

As the economy improved, so did activism within the community. As of 2012, mural projects along the Van Nuys Boulevard commercial corridor once again had a place in the community. Local young muralist, Levi Ponce, took matters to beautify Pacoima into his own hands; he created unofficial agreements with business owners, neighbors and graffiti crews that would allow him to paint murals on the exterior walls of commercial buildings along Van Nuys Boulevard.<sup>73</sup> That same year, Ponce and other like-minded artists established Mural Mile in Pacoima, which now boasts more than twenty murals focused on the arts, culture and history of the Northeast San Fernando Valley. In the years since its creation, Mural Mile received international acclaim and brought the arts to a community in need of revitalization.<sup>74</sup> Tours of Mural Mile are offered to the public through a partnership

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<sup>70</sup> "Stop: Pacoima," *Invisible-5*, accessed August 12, 2015, <http://www.invisible5.org/index.php?page=Pacoima>.

<sup>71</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Report prepared by Social Explorer, accessed July 27, 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Frank Shyong, "Art of Paint and Persuasion; Muralist Levi Ponce is helping to Reclaim Pacoima's Image," *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 2013, A.1.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> "About Us," *Mural Mile of the San Fernando Valley*, accessed July 27, 2015, [http://www.muralmile.org/#!about\\_us/csgz](http://www.muralmile.org/#!about_us/csgz).

with the Museum of the San Fernando Valley and The Public Art Initiative.<sup>75</sup> (Figures 2.19-2.20)



Figure 2.19: "The Day the Music Died" by Levi Ponce and assistants, a Mural Mile project and tribute to Pacoima's Ritchie Valens and the musicians who died alongside Valens in 1959. Painted at 13433 Van Nuys Blvd. Source: Ian Robertson-Salt, Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles, <http://muralconservancy.org/murals/day-music-died>. Permission pending.

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<sup>75</sup> "Tours," *Mural Mile of the San Fernando Valley*, accessed July 27, 2015, [http://www.muralmile.org/#!about\\_us/csgz](http://www.muralmile.org/#!about_us/csgz).



Figure 2.20: “Freedom Fighter” by Kristy Sandoval, a Mural Mile project and tribute to Assata Shakur. Painted in 2013 on the exterior wall of Pacoima’s historic African-American family-owned and operated barbershop. Source: Tapatio Flores, Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles, <http://www.muralconservancy.org/murals/freedom-fighter>. Permission pending.

## Chapter 3: Study of Pacoima's Business District and Main Street

### *Revitalization in Pacoima*

Pacoima has been the focus of multiple revitalization efforts geared towards economic and community development. In 1986, Pacoima was named one of thirteen "Enterprise Zones" in the state, and one of three in greater Los Angeles, alongside Watts and the area east of USC. The designation provided businesses tax breaks and incentives to hire the unemployed. Over the course of fifteen years the program was to create five to eight thousand new jobs in the Los Angeles area.<sup>76</sup> In the 1990s, a section of Pacoima that included San Fernando Gardens, two schools, and commercial strips along Van Nuys, Glenoaks, and Foothill Boulevards, was named the Northeast Valley Empowerment Zone. The empowerment zone designation was part of a federal program that sought to promote reinvestment and job creation within the nation's poor communities through tax credits, low-interest financing and other incentives. The 1.9-square mile section in the Northeast Valley was to share \$100 million in social service grants and give businesses within the zone's boundaries tax incentives for hiring people living there.<sup>77</sup> The revitalization efforts in Pacoima, including those of the Pacoima Revitalization Inc. mentioned in the previous chapter, underscore the importance and history of industry, commerce, and employment in the community. Furthermore, they recognize Van Nuys Boulevard's commercial corridor as

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<sup>76</sup> Mark Gladstone, "They're Among 13 'Enterprise Zones' Chosen: State Moves to Assist 3 L.A.-Area Communities," Los Angeles Times, February 19, 1986; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, pg. B1.

<sup>77</sup> "Zone of Hope Section of Pacoima Pushing for Empowerment Zone," Los Angeles Times, April 10, 1994, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/282244107>.

Darrell Satzman, "Valley Focus; Pacoima; Chamber to Discuss Empowerment Zone," Los Angeles Times, Mar 26, 1998, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/421226368>.

the community hub for commerce and as the face for the community of Pacoima. (Figure 3.1)



Figure 3.1: Photo of Van Nuys Boulevard looking north towards Foothill Boulevard. Source: San Fernando Valley Historical Society.

The Van Nuys Boulevard commercial strip was the focus of a noteworthy main street revitalization effort too. The business strip in Pacoima was named a Main Street through Mayor Richard Riordan's Targeted Neighborhood Initiative (TNI) in 1997. This designation targeted the Van Nuys Boulevard business district to receive a share of \$3 million in federal funds for the makeover of a 1.5-mile stretch.<sup>78</sup> As a commitment to transforming Van Nuys Boulevard into an economically healthy commercial district, a group of Pacoima merchants, community organizations, and public officials formed

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<sup>78</sup> "Community Profile / Pacoima," Los Angeles Times, Feb 1, 1998, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/421240671>.



Pacoima Partners, which organized the revitalization project that came to be known as the Pacoima Town Center. The project utilized the funds allocated by the Targeted Neighborhood Initiative “to develop, implement, and maintain public improvements such as planted medians, stamped asphalt crosswalks, and street trees on Van Nuys Boulevard between Glenoaks Boulevard and the Golden State (I-5) freeway and between Pierce and Filmore Streets.”<sup>79</sup> (Figure 3.2)

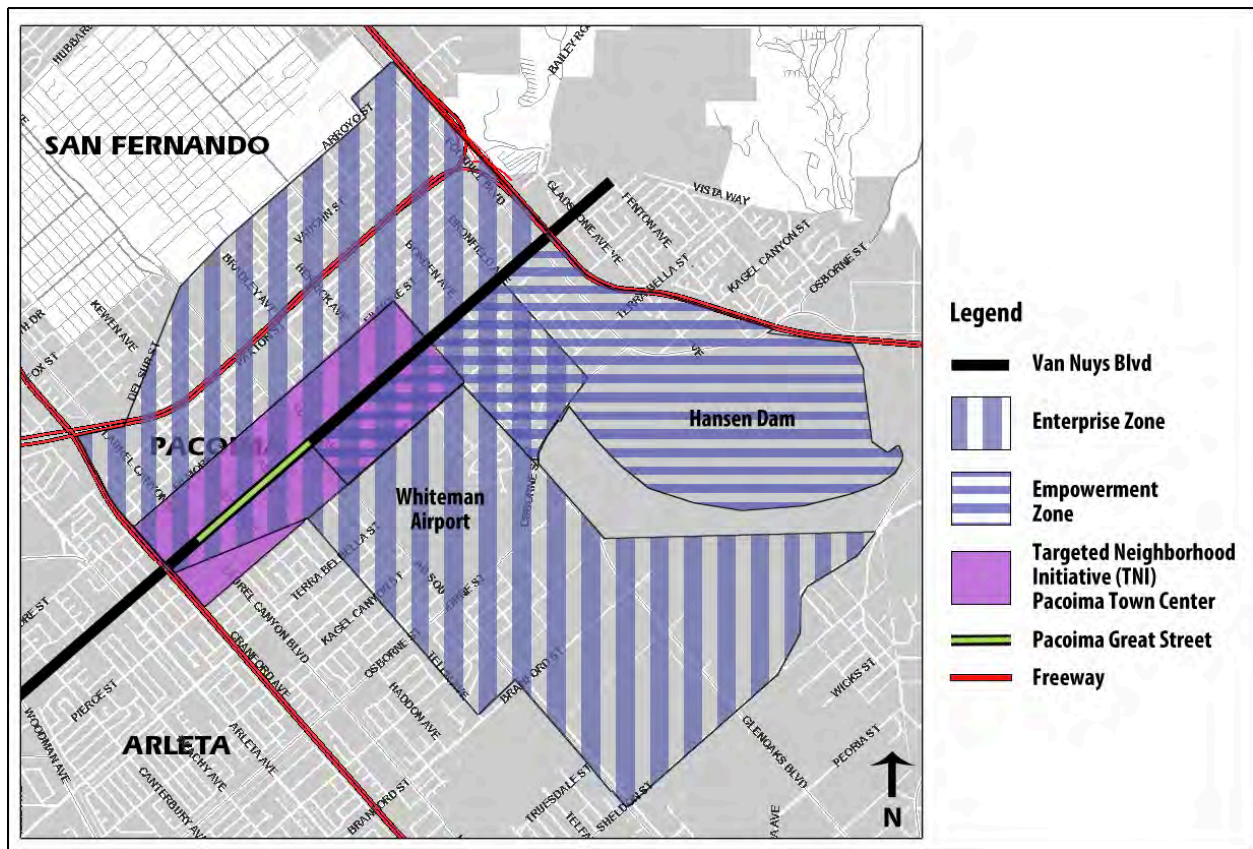


Figure 3.2: Overlay diagram of revitalization efforts in Pacoima. Diagram by Sara Delgado, 2015.

During its existence, Pacoima Partners managed Pacoima’s state-recognized Main Street program. California’s Main Street Programs focus on “enhancing the economic,

<sup>79</sup> Pacoima Street Plan, A Part of the General Plan – City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles City Planning, 2004.

social, cultural, and environmental well-being of historic and traditional commercial districts located in California's diverse cities, towns, and neighborhoods” through grassroots efforts led by committees made up of community members.<sup>80</sup> Pacoima Town Center Partners aimed to use the Main Street approach in the creation of a management strategy for the Pacoima Town Center. The committee, which was made up of public office representatives, administered the TNI funds with the help of a community manager through their fiscal agent, which was San Fernando Valley Neighborhood Legal Services. The completion of the Pacoima Town Center project, which included the planting of trees, installation of street furniture, painted crosswalks, and street post markers, marked the end of Pacoima’s Main Street program. Pacoima Town Center Partners became inactive when the program was defunded in the early 2000s.<sup>81</sup> Soon after it was defunded, Pacoima’s Main Street status, which provided business and marketing assistance, was revoked by the California Main Street Alliance.<sup>82</sup> With Pacoima Partners inactive and Pacoima’s Main Street status revoked shortly after the completion of its inaugural project, Pacoima’s Van Nuys Boulevard never reached its full potential as a California Main Street.

Most recently, in 2014, Mayor Eric Garcetti designated the commercial district on Pacoima’s Van Nuys Boulevard’s commercial corridor, between Laurel Canyon and San Fernando Road, as one of Los Angeles’ Great Streets. The Great Streets initiative is “a concept developed in smaller cities in which local government pitches in to attract

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<sup>80</sup> “California Main Street Program,” *California Office of Historic Preservation*, accessed May 16, 2015, [http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=23484](http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=23484).

<sup>81</sup> Yvette Lopez-Ledesma (Pacoima Beautiful) in discussion with author, Sep 1, 2015.

<sup>82</sup> Laura Cole-Rowe (California Main Street Alliance) in discussion with the author, May 5, 2015.; “Community Revitalization Project: Neighborhood Legal Services of Los Angeles County,” *LSC Resource Information*, September 11, 2002, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://lri.lsc.gov/about/archives-0/lri-archive/community-revitalization-project-0>.

businesses that reflect the unique character of a neighborhood and help define it as a destination.”<sup>83</sup> The fifteen corridors, one within each council district, selected by Garcetti are to receive the resources and facilities that would help reposition them as resourceful parts of their communities.

In a 2014 Daily News article, Pacoima’s Councilman, Felipe Fuentes is quoted as working towards creating more sustainable economic development and walkability for his district as a way to provide the “opportunity for stores to be successful.”<sup>84</sup> Also mentioned in the article is the need of mixed-use developments within Pacoima, ones “where residents benefit by living above or next to stores and restaurants, while the area serves as a draw to neighboring communities as well.”<sup>85</sup> Fuentes is not aiming for large ambitious mixed-use developments like those found in upscale neighborhoods such as Old Town in Pasadena, 3<sup>rd</sup> Street Promenade in Santa Monica, or The Grove near West Hollywood. He is looking to turn his district into a destination and draw people from neighboring communities by utilizing Pacoima’s unique qualities.<sup>86</sup> Though the article suggests that the existing building stock on Van Nuys Boulevard is challenged for not having the appeal of high style architecture, the lack of high style architecture could be seen as an opportunity.

Pacoima Beautiful sees the Great Streets designation as an opportunity to recognize the rich cultural legacy along found along the Van Nuys corridor. Even though the Great Streets program is open-ended, Pacoima Beautiful aims to utilize the Great Streets

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<sup>83</sup> Rick Orlov, "Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti Paves the Path for 'Great Streets,'" *Whittier Daily News*, Jun 3, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1532696053>.

<sup>84</sup> Rick Orlov, "'Lifestyle Centers' Proposed to Boost Pacoima's Livability," *Daily News*, Oct 26, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1616620895?accountid=14749>.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

challenge grant funds it was awarded to help achieve one of its goals, which is the preservation of the rich sense of place along Pacoima’s Great Street by working with local businesses.<sup>87</sup>

In 2015, Pacoima Beautiful and Councilman Felipe Fuentes unveiled Pacoima’s “People Street Plaza,” now known as Bradley Plaza. The public square sits adjacent to the San Fernando Gardens housing complex and was designed with the help of community members as part of a citywide movement to create public spaces out of seldom used streets by turning them into car-less plazas. The intent is to create a space for neighbors to gather and participate in organized physical activities or simply “hang out among chaise lounges, tables and planters – free of cars.”<sup>88</sup> (Figure 3.2-3.3)

Just a year before the unveiling, Pacoima Beautiful hosted a workshop in the public square to inform its Urban Greening plan, which includes water infiltration and efforts to improve the bicyclist and pedestrian experience in Pacoima.<sup>89</sup> James Rojas, the East L.A. native and city planning consultant who coined the term and concept of “Latino Urbanism,” was invited to lead the workshop in the plaza to activate the site and create an avenue for community feedback. Through Rojas’ interactive exercise, adults and children envisioned enhancements to their community with the use of toys and large-scale models of their neighborhood.

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<sup>87</sup> Yvette Lopez-Ledesma (Pacoima Beautiful) in discussion with the author, Sep 1, 2015.

<sup>88</sup> Dana Bartholomew, “Pacoima celebrates new People Street Plaza,” *Daily News*, July 30, 2015.

<sup>89</sup> Kris Fortin, “Pacoima2050: Party at the Plaza, Envisioning the Community’s Future,” *StreetsBlog LA* (blog), May 1, 2014, accessed July 27, 2015, <http://la.streetsblog.org/2014/05/01/pacoima2050-party-at-the-plaza-envisioning-the-communitys-future/#more-94467>.



Figure 3.3: Bradley Plaza, July 2015. Source: Pacoima Beautiful.



Figure 3.4: Bradley Plaza unveiling event, July 2015. Source: Pacoima Beautiful.

Current and pending efforts to revitalize Pacoima work off of the Great Street designation and include Pacoima Beautiful’s Complete Streets Initiative and Pacoima Wash Vision Plan. The Complete Street initiative aims to educate the community with regard to street safety while promoting walkability and advocating for street-level improvements that will improve the pedestrian, bicyclist, and public transit experience along Van Nuys Boulevard and Pacoima’s roadways. Through the Pacoima Wash Vision Plan proposes the creation of a “greenway” along the existing Pacoima Wash that includes a bike path that would connect Pacoima to other communities in Los Angeles.<sup>90</sup>

### ***Study of Pacoima’s Business District***

In order to study the Van Nuys Boulevard business corridor to identify historic and culturally significant resources and businesses, an investigation was conducted. The investigation included a sidewalk survey of current businesses, a review of existing surveys, building permits, and interviews with local business owners and community members.

The most recent revitalization effort, started in 2014 by Mayor Garcetti, is focused on a smaller portion of the business corridor, which is the Pacoima Great Street portion of Van Nuys Boulevard from San Fernando Road to Laurel Canyon Boulevard. The boundary used for the investigation is larger than that suggested by the Pacoima Great Street and is slightly smaller in length than that of the Targeted Neighborhood Initiative revitalization

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<sup>90</sup> “History,” *Pacoima Beautiful*, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://www.pacoimabeautiful.org/about-us/history>.

effort led by the Pacoima Town Center Partners. The boundary for this study's survey is along Van Nuys Boulevard from Norris Avenue on the north and Laurel Canyon Boulevard on the south. (Figure 3.5) The study survey area was reduced from that suggested by the TNI initiative due to the presence of single family residences and non-commercial buildings north of Norris Avenue; Pacoima Elementary School and residential buildings visibly mark the end of the commercial corridor along Van Nuys Blvd. Additionally, the area investigated is greater than the Pacoima Great Street boundary to the north in order to capture the commercial buildings adjacent to the San Fernando Gardens public housing project.



Figure 3.5: Diagram illustrating study boundary alongside the boundaries of previous Van Nuys Blvd revitalization efforts. Diagram by Sara Delgadillo, 2015.

A survey of the buildings and establishments found within the study boundary further revealed the significance of the businesses and services found along the corridor. Among these establishments were a number of nonprofit organizations, municipal offices, religious institutions, and small businesses that provide services and goods to the community. Among the establishments found within the study boundary there are: eighteen barber/beauty salons; thirteen faith-based organizations; over ten institutions



offering financial services including loans, check cashing, and money transfers; six establishments offering immigration and law services; and over ten businesses offering insurance and income tax services. A full diagram of the establishments inventoried through this study, with building construction dates per the Los Angeles County Office of the Assessor's Property Assessment Information System, can be found in Appendix A.

### ***Heritage Conservation in Pacoima***

In 2014, the City of Los Angeles surveyed the Arleta-Pacoima Community Plan Area through the citywide survey project, SurveyLA. The survey found that there are no formally designated historic resources within the Arleta-Pacoima planning area listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historical Resources, or designated as Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments. Although not designated, the survey found the following properties to be eligible for formal designation and consideration in the planning process: eight intact single-family residences that date to the 1910s and 1920s with character-defining features of the Craftsman style; one residential historic district (San Fernando Gardens); one residential planning district (the Joe Louis tract); three intact commercial properties built between 1950s and 1960s in Arleta; four institutional properties (two fire stations, one police station and one church); eight institutional districts (two school campuses, three religious campuses, one dam, one municipal airport and one groundwater retention facility); one industrial property (grouping of Quonset huts); one Department of Water and Power facility; and four non-

parcel resources (two air raid sirens, one mature oak tree and one 1920s bridge).<sup>91</sup> Of the significant individual resources listed in SuveyLA's final report as eligible for designation, only the following can be found within Pacoima's commercial corridor: the Department of Water and Power facility; one fire station; and San Fernando Gardens. Although not listed in the final report, the following two properties are listed in Appendix A: Tresieras Market and Lenchita's Restaurant. Both Tresieras and Lenchitas are commercial buildings named eligible for local designation through criteria A/1 based on their association with events that have made a significant contribution to the local and regional history and heritage of the area. Both are significant for their association with Commercial Development from years 1850 to 1980 (context) and the area's Commercial Identity, 1850-1980 (theme). The survey appropriately describes each as "a long-term location of a business important to the commercial identity of Pacoima, with longstanding ties to the area's Latino community."<sup>92</sup> While the description within the survey is correct, it merely touches the surface of the cultural significance of the many businesses found within this commercial corridor. To a local, the fact that very few commercial resources along Van Nuys Boulevard were found to be significant to the development and history of the area can be difficult to believe, especially as SurveyLA reports that "Pacoima and Arleta are awash in businesses and cultural institutions that serve the area's sizable Latino population, interspersed among

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<sup>91</sup> City of Los Angeles, Department of City Planning Office of Historic Resources, *Historic Resources Survey Report: Arleta-Pacoima Community Plan Area*, Prepared by Architectural Resources Group, accessed April 2014, [http://www.preservation.lacity.org/files/Arleta-Pacoima%20Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.preservation.lacity.org/files/Arleta-Pacoima%20Report_Final.pdf).

<sup>92</sup> City of Los Angeles, Department of City Planning Office of Historic Resources, *Historic Resources Survey Report: Arleta-Pacoima Community Plan Area, Appendix A*, Prepared by Architectural Resources Group, accessed April 2014, <http://www.preservation.lacity.org/files/Arleta-Pacoima%20Individual%20Resources.pdf>.

these are those that offer tangible links to the area's long history as the center of multiculturalism and racial diversity in the valley.”<sup>93</sup>

### ***Examples of Significant Historic Establishments Eligible for Designation***

The SurveyLA results for the Van Nuys Boulevard commercial corridor in Pacoima are a good starting point in identifying other businesses that have served the area and ultimately helped shape the history of the community. Through further research and in-depth surveying, which included conversations with local residents and business owners, additional businesses have been found to be eligible for local designation as Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments for their direct association with Pacoima’s history and development in addition to the resources identified by SurveyLA. These resources are considered to have high significance and integrity as they have been in continuous operation by Pacoima residents, and families since the commercial development of Pacoima’s business district. The businesses profiled here are also considered legacy businesses whose intangible heritage is just as significant, if not more, than the buildings they occupy. Although the individual resources differ from one another, they reflect the character, service and commercial needs of the community. The following study documents a number of historic establishments found within the boundaries of the survey conducted for the purpose of this study, along with information regarding the business owners and those that now operate these Pacoima landmarks that tell the history of the area.

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<sup>93</sup> City of Los Angeles, Department of City Planning Office of Historic Resources. *Historic Resources Survey Report: Arleta-Pacoima Community Plan Area*. Prepared by Architectural Resources Group, accessed April 2014, [http://www.preservation.lacity.org/files/Arleta-Pacoima%20Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.preservation.lacity.org/files/Arleta-Pacoima%20Report_Final.pdf).

The trends in business and commerce trailed the population growth and settlement patterns during the twentieth century. As the population of minority and underrepresented groups grew in specific geographic areas, like the Northeast San Fernando Valley, so did the demand for goods and services. Entrepreneurial community members who established their own businesses often met the community's needs. Most of the businesses established during that time "were small, neighborhood, family-owned operations serving basic community needs. Often they remained with the same family for multiple generations and became important community institutions."<sup>94</sup>

#### Tresierras Market - 13158 Van Nuys Boulevard

Tresierras Market is an example of a longstanding Latino family-owned business in Pacoima. Entrepreneurs Pilar Canchola Tresierras and her husband Frank Tresierras opened Tresierras Market at its first location on Kalisher Street in the City of San Fernando in 1944. The market was later moved to its current location Pacoima in the late 1950s. (Figure 3.6) Pilar and Frank's sons Dan, Richard, and James worked at the market as teenagers and adopted their parents' entrepreneurial spirit, growing the family enterprise by 1994 to include four markets greatly valued by their surrounding communities.<sup>95</sup>

Tresierras markets serve as cultural resource for Latino immigrants and families. In markets like Tresierras the services and goods are specialized to better serve their

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<sup>94</sup> California Office of Historic Preservation, *Latinos in Twentieth Century California: National Register of Historic Places Context Statement*, (California State Parks, 2015) 135.

<sup>95</sup> Jeff Schnauffer, "Pacoima Family Market Celebrates 50th Year of Success," *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1994.; City of Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, Document number 1957VN02464, Recorded February 3, 1959.

customer base, even the meat counter is modeled to be like grocery stores in Mexico and Central America, they offer cheeses, chorizo, marinated meats, and specialized cuts like flap steak and pork butt.<sup>96</sup>

Immigrant Latino families would travel to family-run stores each week for their grocery shopping but also found them to be cultural havens. "They would cash their checks there, get to know the butcher, make friends," said Steve Soto of the Mexican American Grocers Assn. Soon immigrant families started opening more *carnicerias*, and the stores became neighborhood staples with their helpful *carnicereros*. Also known as mini-markets or convenience stores that specialize in *cortes latinos*, or Latin cuts, the meat shops have flourished in heavily Latino neighborhoods.<sup>97</sup>

As other supermarket chains like Kroger, Vons, and Albertson's began offering Latino products and specialized butcher services at lower prices, smaller community market chains like Tresieras were unable to compete and ultimately closed their doors. Though they have had to close the doors to their other locations in the San Fernando Valley, Tresieras' location on Van Nuys Boulevard is one of the few remaining businesses on the corridor that has served the Pacoima community for over fifty years. Presently, the family-owned chain has markets in Oxnard, Santa Paula and Pacoima with corporate headquarters in San Fernando.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Jeff Schnauffer, "Pacoima Family Market Celebrates 50th Year of Success," *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1994. Elena Gaona, "Grabbing a Slice of Latino Sales; Food: Butcher Shops are Part of a Tradition for Millions in the Southland. Market Chains are Moving in and Want a Prime Cut," *Los Angeles Times*, July 08, 2002.

<sup>97</sup> Elena Gaona, "Grabbing a Slice of Latino Sales; Food: Butcher Shops are Part of a Tradition for Millions in the Southland. Market Chains are Moving in and Want a Prime Cut," *Los Angeles Times*, July 08, 2002.

<sup>98</sup> "Locations," Tresieras Supermarkets, accessed August 19, 2015, <http://tresieras.com/locations.aspx>; Elena Gaona, "Grabbing a Slice of Latino Sales; Food: Butcher Shops are Part of a Tradition for Millions in the Southland. Market Chains are Moving in and Want a Prime Cut," *Los Angeles Times*, July 08, 2002.



Figure 3.6: Photo of Tresieras Supermarket on the southern corner Van Nuys Boulevard and Pala Avenue. Photo by Author.

#### Lenchita's Restaurant – 13612 Van Nuys Boulevard

Angelita Alvarez Renteria was like many Mexican immigrant women living and working in Pacoima in the 1970s. She walked to and from work and often worked long laborious shifts at one of Pacoima's Mexican eateries. Her goal was to own a restaurant which she was able to accomplish with the help of her father Candido Alvarez. On March 25, 1977, Lenchita's Restaurant opened its doors with just two tables and three employees. Named after Angelita's daughter, Lenchita's Restaurant has grown to be more than a restaurant since it was established thirty-eight years ago. Lenchita's Restaurant has become a valued community resource and a Pacoima landmark.<sup>99</sup> (Figure 3.7)

Latinos within the community and from elsewhere in Los Angeles frequent Lenchita's to eat authentic Mexican dishes that remind them of home and to purchase

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<sup>99</sup> Javier Romero in discussion with the author, May 26, 2015.; Patricia Garcia and Jorge Morales, "The Woman Who Strove for Success," *El Popo News Online*, March 18, 2014, accessed Sep 1, 2015, <http://elpopo.org/?p=324>.

freshly made corn tortillas and *masa*, dough, made especially for tamales, an item that makes Lenchita's especially popular during the holiday season. It is not uncommon to experience a long wait and line at the restaurant during peak meal hours and on dates that coincide with traditional Latino holidays.

In 2014, Angelita was named Woman of the Year by Pacoima's Chamber of Commerce for her continued service and for her entrepreneurial spirit. Angelita thanked God, her husband, children and loyal customers, she said, "*muchos han puesto su granito de arena en la historia de Lenchita's Restaurant,*" meaning many have contributed to the history of Lenchita's Restaurant.<sup>100</sup>



Figure 3.7: Lenchita's Restaurant. Source: Historic Places LA, <http://www.historicplacesla.org/reports/2a8b7a5f-c965-4961-ada1-cb2bd89ed70f>.

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<sup>100</sup> Patricia Garcia and Jorge Morales, "The Woman Who Strove for Success," *El Popo News Online*, March 18, 2014, accessed Sep 1, 2015, <http://elpopo.org/?p=324>.

## Romero's TV & Video Service - 13687 Van Nuys Boulevard

Javier Romero was born in Mexico City and was working as a silversmith when he immigrated to the United States at the age of thirteen along with his eight brothers and sisters. Romero, and his family, were brought to the United States by his uncle, who owned a mechanic shop and gasoline station in Hollywood. Romero's extended family lived in Pacoima where he went to school. Romero remembers walking lunch over to his dad when he was working on the construction of the freeways that transect Pacoima.

As a young adult, Javier Romero would work after school at a home-based TV repair shop on Haddon Avenue where he learned how to repair electronics, especially television sets. After an approximately four year period of working for the home-based shop, Romero decided to open his own business selling and repairing television sets. Javier Romero's business, Romero's TV & Video Service, opened in May of 1957 in a 1940s single-family dwelling-turned storefront on 13687 Van Nuys Boulevard.<sup>101</sup> (Figure 3.8) For many years he has been a member of the Pacoima Chamber of Commerce and has served as the Vice President of the Chamber as well. Javier Romero has been involved in the community as a little league coach, he recalls having coached young Alex Padilla, the Pacoima native politician currently serving as California Secretary of State.<sup>102</sup>

Since its establishment at this location, Javier Romero has operated the repair shop, becoming owner of the building by 1973.<sup>103</sup> Romero has repaired and sold television sets,

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<sup>101</sup> Parcel Details for 13687 Van Nuys Blvd, Property Assessment Information System, Los Angeles County Office of the Assessor, accessed May 28, 2015, <http://maps.assessor.lacounty.gov>.

<sup>102</sup> Javier Romero in discussion with the author, May 26, 2015.

<sup>103</sup> City of Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, Permit VN 85447/72, Recorded January 4, 1973.



radios, and video players for a multitude of households in Pacoima and its neighboring communities. Romero’s business reflects the entertainment interests of the community he served, it also reflects the trust his repeat clients have in his bilingual service and technical expertise. Having been in business over fifty-five years in Pacoima, Romero’s TV & Video Service is both a local landmark and a legacy business representative of the culture and heritage of the community.



Figure 3.8: Photo of Romero’s TV & Video Service. Photo by author.

### Styles Ville Barbershop & Beauty Salon - 13161-13163 Van Nuys Boulevard

Styles Ville is the oldest black-owned barbershop in the San Fernando Valley. Freddy Carter, along with his wife Ollie, opened the long-time Pacoima establishment in 1958 across the street from its current location. The two had moved to Pacoima from South

Central Los Angeles upon purchasing a home. In 1977, after over a decade of business, Carter bought the building where the barbershop is now located. (Figure 3.9) It is the former location of The Dew Drop Inn, a bar known to have played music by Chuck Berry and Little Richard, among others, on a jukebox. Upon moving in, the Carters renovated the interiors and had a partition built into the space in order to have two hair parlors, one for women and one for men, because state regulations did not allow for men and women to get their hair done in the same place. Although regulations now allow for mixed-sex salons, Styles Ville remains partitioned and open for business. For decades, it has served people from the community, including those that have moved away, but return to the area to get their hair cut and styled at the barbershop. The Carters' notable clientele include former USC football player Anthony Davis and jazz musician Billy Eckstine, who would travel to the Pacoima barbershop from Encino to get his hair cut. In the late 1900s, when both Freddy and Ollie Carter retired, Nella and Gregory, their daughter and grandson began to manage the barbershop.<sup>104</sup>

Over the course of more than 55 years, Styles Ville and the Carters have served the community of Pacoima, becoming a legacy business reflective of the community's heritage and a local landmark visited by clients from other communities throughout Greater Los Angeles. Like many African American barbershops throughout the nation, it is an integral part of the community it serves. Fred Carruthers, a longtime barber at Styles Ville said,

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<sup>104</sup> Kurt Streeter, "Keeping in Touch With Roots at Styles Ville," *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1999.; Gregory Faucett in discussion with the author, May 5, 2015.

“black folks do some of their best communicating while getting their hair cut, we’re just comfortable here. We talk about anything and everything.”<sup>105</sup>



Figure 3.9: Photo of Styles Ville Barbershop and Beauty Salon. Source: Photo by author.

The establishments profiled in this section are examples of valued historic-cultural resources within Pacoima’s commercial district and Main Street as discovered by the author of this paper. The above listed resources are not to be considered a definitive list of significant historic-cultural resources in Pacoima, instead the list of profiled establishments is meant to facilitate the starting of a conversation regarding heritage conservation by the community for the community, a topic that will be further explored in the next chapter.

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<sup>105</sup> Kurt Streeter, “Keeping in Touch With Roots at Styles Ville,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1999.

## **Chapter 4: Significance, Challenges, and Recommendations**

In *Place, Race, and Story*, Ned Kaufman proposes the use of the term “story site” to broadly and inclusively describe a “place that supports the perpetuation of socially useful or meaningful narratives.” The historic businesses identified through this study are “story sites” that have contributed to the development and history of Pacoima. Their longstanding ties and contributions to Pacoima’s sense of place add to the areas sense of community pride. This chapter will address the purpose of identifying and preserving Pacoima’s historic commercial buildings and legacy businesses beyond the examples profiled through this study. It will also address the challenges of preserving Pacoima’s “story sites.” Finally this chapter will provide recommendations to preserve the Pacoima sites identified through this study and others not yet identified.

### ***What is the purpose of identifying and conserving Pacoima’s historic resources?***

The identification of historic community resources is necessary to inform pending development and re-investment in all of Pacoima. In many communities throughout the nation, the lack of identified historic community resources has led to insensitive urban/community planning, development, and in some cases unwarranted demolition of meaningful community “story sites.” Pacoima is no stranger to this scenario, the building of the freeways in the late 1960s split the community and claimed many homes through eminent domain.

In February of 2015, Pacoima was once again presented with a large-scale threat by the California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA). The CHSRA proposed three routes for

the voter approved high speed train that is to connect Los Angeles with San Francisco. One of the proposed routes runs above ground alongside existing railroad tracks located along San Fernando Road. Considered the worst route proposed by the Northeast San Fernando Valley community, it would include a massive twenty-foot sound wall, dubbed a “death wall,” that would permanently divide and affect Pacoima and all other railroad adjacent communities in the San Fernando Valley.<sup>106</sup> Identifying and designating historic community resources can help defend “story sites” from large-scale developments that would negatively impact the community, but it can also guard the historic small-scale built environment from more common threats like that of oversized commercial or residential buildings that disregard the history and built character of the community.

In the state of California, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) passed in 1970 makes it a policy to “develop and maintain a high-quality environment now and in the future, and to take all action necessary to protect, rehabilitate, and enhance the environmental quality of the state.”<sup>107</sup> As a legal tool, CEQA helps in the protection of the natural and historic built environment, including places deemed as historic by the community. “Historical resources are considered part of the environment and a project that may cause a substantial adverse effect on the significance of a historical resource is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment.”<sup>108</sup> Before projects are granted approval, CEQA requires those proposing the projects to provide approvers with information regarding the environmental impacts the project will have. Additionally, CEQA

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<sup>106</sup> Michael Gonzales, “High-Speed Rail Proposes A ‘Death Wall,’” *The San Fernando Sun*, Feb 5, 2015.

<sup>107</sup> Los Angeles Conservancy, *Using CEQA to Protect Your Community: A Brief Guide to the California Environmental Quality Act*, 2010.

<sup>108</sup> “CEQA Basics,” California Environmental Quality Act, *California Office of Historic Preservation*, Accessed July 20, 2015, [http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=21721](http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=21721).

allows the public to comment on the impacts the proposed project will have in the community. Though CEQA will not automatically prevent projects that cause a significant environmental impact from happening, it greatly informs decision makers and provides a platform for community members to define the environmental impacts they consider tolerable versus intolerable. CEQA, however, does require that state and local public agencies identify the environmental impacts of the proposed projects, “determine if the impacts will be significant, and identify alternatives and mitigation measures that will substantially reduce or eliminate significant impacts to the environment.”<sup>109</sup>

If the significant historic built environment in Pacoima is identified and designated as historically significant, any future projects that may impact historic resources will be required to go through the CEQA process which will determine their impact, identify alternatives, and provide methods to mitigate adverse impacts. Overall, historic designation provides the community the protection that permits Pacoima’s built heritage and community stakeholders to be at the forefront of future development.

The modest historic commercial buildings and legacy businesses along Van Nuys Boulevard have the ability to express the history and culture of the community and the people that make Pacoima the San Fernando Valley’s historic minority enclave. During its development as one of Los Angeles’ suburbs, Pacoima was the center of diversity in the San Fernando Valley; it was surrounded by a large Anglo population living in what is often referred to as America’s most beloved suburb. Pacoima’s history is unique, it is special, and

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<sup>109</sup> “CEQA Basics,” California Environmental Quality Act, *California Office of Historic Preservation*, Accessed July 20, 2015, [http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=21721](http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=21721).

it is worth conserving. The establishments profiled in Chapter 3 reflect the spirit of determination and success of African American and Latino business owners on a commercial strip that predates the civil rights movement that allowed more accessibility and opportunities for people of color.

Growing up in Pacoima, I learned about the history of the San Fernando Mission and the historic adobe homes in San Fernando. These were the nearest culture and architecture treasures to my hometown. I was not aware that my community had also made history through its unique development and population growth, though I was aware that the sense of place in Pacoima could not be found anywhere else, not in other valley communities or elsewhere in Los Angeles.

The designation of Pacoima resources not only helps in the protection of the built environment but also provides an avenue for education and community pride. Programs centered on the importance of culturally significant resources already have a place in Los Angeles. Historian and professor of architecture, urbanism and American studies, Dolores Hayden, was inspired to do something about the lack of “local background” and representation of “working women and men of diverse ethnic groups” in books on history and design of American cities. In 1984 Hayden started a nonprofit organization called “The Power of Place,” to “situate women’s history and ethnic history in downtown, in public places, through experimental, collaborative projects by historians, designers, and artists.”<sup>110</sup> Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s the organization worked on several projects in Los Angeles that focused on urban conservation and public installations of art to

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<sup>110</sup> Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995) xi.

create a more equitable urban environment. One of the projects was the public art park that neighbors the Bradbury Building commemorating Biddy Mason who was a pioneering African-American business woman and founder of the First AME Church of Los Angeles in the nineteenth century.

Because of the work of historians and conservationists, present-day Angelenos are being exposed to the multi-layered history of Los Angeles and are encouraged to explore it. University courses like “L.A. Stories” at Woodbury University in Burbank, California encourages students to observe, research, and engage with neighborhoods like Boyle Heights, Koreatown and Leimert Park. “The interdisciplinary nature of the course provided the perfect platform to equally examine the physical, historical and literary landscapes of Los Angeles,” in a way that simplifies the complexity of Los Angeles. The course has exposed students, most of whom grew up in Greater Los Angeles, to “narratives of the city that have either been unheard or are out of plain view.”<sup>111</sup>

Pacoima is equally deserving of investigation and discovery by Angelenos as other ethnic enclaves in Los Angeles. Pacoima also has a history that is worthy of celebration. Conserving legacy businesses and protecting the historic built environment within Pacoima in conjunction with re-investment and development will help sustain a strong sense of community and connection to its history. Pacoima’s Latino market, television repair shop, and barbershop are places where community members have established strong emotional ties. These places tell stories of culture and tradition while they depict what Pacoima was

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<sup>111</sup> Mike Sonksen, “L.A. Stories from Woodbury University,” *D Columns: LA Letters, KCET*, Accessed July 23, 2015, <http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/columns/la-letters/la-stories-from-woodbury-university.html>.



like decades ago. Through identifying significant historic resources and bringing to light the unheard narrative of this minority enclave, Pacoima can celebrate its history and the establishments that have survived the economic hardship the Van Nuys Boulevard commercial strip has endured for decades.

### ***What are the challenges?***

Attaining heritage conservation in an ethnic enclave, such as Pacoima, can prove to be challenging due to various factors. This section will discuss historic preservation of culturally significant resources, traditional historic preservation surveying practices, and the professionalization of historic preservation, all of which affect the possibility of putting heritage conservation in practice within Pacoima.

The historic resources identified through this study are significant mostly as cultural and community resources. Although the businesses are housed within Pacoima's historic commercial building stock, they are most important to the community for their history and culture rather than the aesthetics of the buildings they inhabit. In the case of the identified establishments the architecture, style, and design of their respective buildings is secondary to their cultural and otherwise intangible heritage.

Community-based histories that focus on everyday social and cultural practices of local residents have begun to gain consideration in the field of preservation. It has been preservationists and historians who have taken the lead in redefining the practices in place used to interpret a wide and diverse range of themes that include tangible and intangible historic resources. Thus far, existing national preservation laws have successfully protected the architectural heritage of the United States. However, the laws have not yet been

adapted to address the preservation needs of community-based histories that are often overlooked.

Currently, the California Register of Historical Resources utilizes the same four criteria for historic designation as the National Register of Historic Places.

(Figure 4.1) Though emphasizing that the most effective tools for managing historic resources are at the local level, in her thesis “Este Lugar Si Importa: Heritage Conservation in Unincorporated East Los Angeles,” Laura Dominguez suggests that the use of national and state criteria for designation that “emphasizes monuments over community history” can be a disservice to California, a state that has a “multicultural identity in the popular knowledge and imagination of the nation.” She also points at traditional research and documentation methodologies as not always being able to capture the true essence of a community or place partly because of their reliance on the observations of preservation professionals who are often not part of the community they are surveying and “who may be influenced by certain preconceptions due to experience and the traditions of the field” which are deeply rooted in architecture.<sup>112</sup> Yet, historic resource surveys prepared by professional historic preservationists are the basis of preservation in all levels of government, local, state, and national.

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<sup>112</sup> Laura Dominguez, “Este Lugar Si Importa: Heritage Conservation in Unincorporated East Los Angeles” (Master thesis University of Southern California, 2012), 1-16.

## Criteria for Designation

- Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history or the cultural heritage of California or the United States (Criterion 1).
- Associated with the lives of persons important to local, California or national history (Criterion 2).
- Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region or method of construction or represents the work of a master or possesses high artistic values (Criterion 3).
- Has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California or the nation (Criterion 4).

Figure 4.1: California Register of Historical Resources Criteria for Designation. Screenshot by author.

The Los Angeles Historic Resource Survey, also known as SurveyLA, started in 2010 as the largest and most ambitious historic resources survey in the nation. While it was developed to meet state and federal professional standards for survey work, it also includes the development of a custom-designed GIS database and a community outreach and participation program. “The program considers multi-lingual needs, inclusion of traditionally underrepresented groups, and focuses on resources of social and cultural significance.”<sup>113</sup> The outreach program was designed to incorporate community input for the project via an online form and downloadable PDF form. Workshops were scheduled throughout the city and community members were encouraged to complete the MyHistoricLA Historic Resources ID Form to provide surveyors suggestions for places that may be architecturally significant. The participation from community members ranged throughout the survey areas. There was no participation from community members in Pacoima identifying important Latino resources in the community through SurveyLA’s

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<sup>113</sup> “SurveyLA: Project Description,” Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources, accessed July 22, 2015, <http://preservation.lacity.org/survey/description>.

established methods. The majority of the community members, including the leadership at Pacoima Beautiful, were not aware of the historic survey conducted in Pacoima.<sup>114</sup>

The survey team for the Arleta-Pacoima Community Plan Area and leadership at the Los Angeles Conservancy were shocked at the underwhelming number of resources identified in connection to the African American and Latino community in Pacoima. The team reached out to me, a student in the Heritage Conservation program at the University of Southern California's School of Architecture and a Pacoima native, for potential leads to identify resources that could be easily missed through traditional survey practices. With limited time for further research, I mentioned Tresieras Market, and Lenchita's Restaurant, and Guardian Angel Church. Having grown up a Latina in Pacoima I knew these were longstanding community resources valued by community members, and my family. While I was not shocked at the lack of identified resources, the experience emphasized the necessity and challenge of community input, as well as the necessity of educating community members about the history of Pacoima, community historic resources, and the field of historic preservation.

The challenges are: to successfully designate resources via a historic preservation movement that is just starting to embrace the preservation of culturally significant resources; to educate the community and generate interest in historic preservation, which has become more and more limited to historic preservation professionals; and to establish a survey process that is more flexible and thorough in its examination and identification of

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<sup>114</sup> Yvette Lopez-Ledesma (Pacoima Beautiful) in discussion with the author, Sep 1, 2015.

a community's historic cultural resources than the processes used by SurveyLA. Surveyors must begin reaching out to active local organizations and engage community members.

### ***Recommendations***

Historic preservation can be problematic in minority enclaves. This statement is especially true when the preservation of community resources is seen as an intervention by outside professionals and planners, rather than an internal effort initiated by the community in question. This section provides recommendations that could be put in place in Pacoima in order to foster sense of place, neighborhood pride, and ultimately a community that embraces historic preservation.

As argued by scholars Clarke, Rodriguez, and Alamillo, traditional approaches aimed at increasing Latino participation in unknown programs and practices lack “authentic efforts that invite, involve, and include in ways that develop genuine *confianza* (trust) and *respeto* (respect).”<sup>115</sup> Creating an outreach program that included workshops and an online form to engage all Angelenos in SurveyLA was not enough to attract Pacoima community members to participate in identifying historic community resources. In order to develop the trust and respect needed to create interest by community members, the community members need “access to information, education, and assistance to actively participate in decision-making; standing or civic legitimacy, which builds trust and translates into

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<sup>115</sup> Tracylee Clarke, Donald Rodriguez, and Jose Alamillo, “Engaging Latino/a Communities in National Park Programs: Building Trust and Providing Opportunities for Voice,” *Environmental Management and Sustainable Development* Vol. 4, No. 1 (April 2015): 136-148, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/emsd.v4i1.7109>.

respect; and influence, the authentic ability to influence decisions.”<sup>116</sup> Historic preservation and related programs need to provide community members the opportunity to learn, they need to be accessible, be facilitated, and should allow community members to participate alongside trained professionals. This in turn can create the trust and respect that will lead to engagement and involvement.

Educating the local community about the unique history and development of Pacoima is an important component to achieve engagement, community pride and interest in historic preservation. Tours of Pacoima’s Mural Mile provide locals and mural enthusiasts a window to Pacoima’s history, inspirational figures, and culture.<sup>117</sup> Historically, murals like those found along Pacoima’s Mural Mile function as vehicle for reclaiming history and tell the stories that perhaps have not been covered in the mainstream media; they assert community consciousness and identity.<sup>118</sup>

The collection of murals and the tour could be used as a jumping off point and an educational program could be established that introduces community members to Pacoima’s history while linking heritage conservation and community identity to the large works of art and the built environment, businesses and establishments that make up Mural Mile, which runs along the Van Nuys Boulevard commercial corridor.

For nearly twenty years, Pacoima Beautiful has fostered civic engagement through grassroots community organizing with the goal of improving the quality of life of Pacoima

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<sup>116</sup> Tracylee Clarke, Donald Rodriguez, and Jose Alamillo, “Engaging Latino/a Communities in National Park Programs: Building Trust and Providing Opportunities for Voice,” *Environmental Management and Sustainable Development* Vol. 4, No. 1 (April 2015): 138, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/emsd.v4i1.7109>.

<sup>117</sup> “Tours,” Mural Mile of the San Fernando Valley, accessed August 7, 2015, <http://www.muralmile.org/#!/tours/c8k2>.

<sup>118</sup> California Office of Historic Preservation, *Latinos in Twentieth Century California: National Register of Historic Places Context Statement*, (California State Parks, 2015) 59.

residents, reaching over 100,000 community members in the Northeast San Fernando Valley.<sup>119</sup> An organization like Pacoima Beautiful, with an established reputation in fighting for social justice, has the potential to lead efforts in historic preservation and community pride within Pacoima. Its current initiatives to improve environmental conditions in Pacoima alongside its goal of creating “Complete Streets” that are attractive and pedestrian friendly run parallel to the goals of fostering community pride that historic preservation often encourages in communities. Organizations like Pacoima Beautiful must be leading partners in the surveying of historic community resources.

In 2010, an East Los Angeles group, the Eastside Heritage Consortium, created a simple survey geared towards engaging the community in a discussion about the places that matter most in the history and culture of East Los Angeles. In her thesis, Laura Dominguez explains that the initial objective of the survey was to establish a list of significant sites yet it “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.”<sup>120</sup> Though the conservation of local heritage has the potential to affect specific groups within the community like educators, small businesses, and civic leaders, “the fundamental goal of this project [was] to achieve recognition for the vibrant cultural heritage of the community as a whole for the primary sake of that community.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> “History,” Pacoima Beautiful, accessed August 7, 2015, <http://www.pacoimabeautiful.org/about-us/history>.

<sup>120</sup> Laura Dominguez, “Este Lugar Si Importa: Heritage Conservation in Unincorporated East Los Angeles” (Master thesis University of Southern California, 2012), 6.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Conducting a community survey about places that matter to the history and development of Pacoima through organizations and groups that have established trust and respect in the community can greatly aid in the preservation of significant historic resources in the community. Through this method, historic preservation professionals and active community members willing to participate in the preservation efforts could reach higher levels of participation through which significant sites could be identified and possibly designated as Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments. The lack of such partnership through SurveyLA's methods missed the identification of the last black-owned barbershop in the San Fernando Valley and Romero's TV & Video Service which remains owner owned and operated since the late 50's. A well organized survey and an established list of resources identified by the community for the community's sake can guide future development and preservation efforts in the unique community of Pacoima. Community-guided preservation efforts would also allow the community to consider the revival of Pacoima's Main Street program.

Upon building a historic preservation movement in Pacoima that is built on trust and respect, the community can also consider and propose a legacy business program similar to San Francisco's Legacy Business Registry and Preservation Fund. The program stabilizes and protects longstanding businesses through listing them in the Legacy Business Registry and by making grant monies available to building owners and business owners through the Legacy Business Historic Preservation Fund. Since "historic preservation is not always feasible or appropriate, nor does it protect against rent increases, evictions, challenges with leadership succession, and other factors that threaten longtime institutions," considering a program that helps protect local resources beyond the limits of



landmarking can arm a community like Pacoima with the proper tools that guard vital community businesses from known threats including gentrification.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> San Francisco Heritage, *Sustaining San Francisco's Living History: Strategies for Conserving Cultural Heritage Assets*, (September 2014).

## **Conclusion**

Through tracing Pacoima's unique history and development as one of the few neighborhoods within San Fernando Valley where minorities were allowed to purchase land, the community's valuable history is highlighted. Now surrounded by communities that boast a minority majority, the significant history of diversity in Pacoima can be easily dismissed and overlooked. The continuous change within the community due to population shifts, disinvestment and revitalization efforts provides perspective and further underscores the vulnerability of the historic resources that can still be found within the community's most important thoroughfare and commercial center on Van Nuys Boulevard.

This one-of-a-kind valley community presents a challenge for historic preservation. The professionals in charge of assessing significant resources are not armed with the tools, nor legislation, to identify and secure the fate of significant historic resources in communities like Pacoima. Furthermore, community members, in similar communities, are not entirely aware of the ways through which vital establishments and businesses can be protected for the sake of celebrating these communities' heritage.

It is paramount that current organizations and community planning efforts take into consideration and lead the discussion of heritage conservation within Pacoima. Established grassroots organizations working toward bringing social justice and sustainability to the community are best positioned to lead such preservation efforts. Heritage conservation is yet another avenue to achieve sustainability and social justice.

Organizations that have built trust and respect within the communities they serve are more likely to successfully engage their constituents in efforts and programs that protect cultural resources like those detailed through the examples of historic

establishments eligible for designation. It is suggested that active grassroots organizations lead historic preservation education programs, community historic resource surveys and formal designation efforts. Ultimately, establishing a heritage conservation movement within Pacoima will be the most beneficial if it is community led, answering an essential consideration in preservation which is: preservation by whom and for whom?

During the research process undertaken for this thesis, the following topics related to historic preservation in Pacoima and the San Fernando Valley were identified and merit further study: the other historic resources identified through SurveyLA in the Arleta-Pacoima Community Plan Area; vital religious organizations and churches, particularly those that served early African American and immigrant residents; sites associated with Pacoima's early Chinese, Japanese, and African American population; sites associated with the car and cruising culture; sites associated with the community's struggle for social rights and social justice, including the site of the Rodney King beating. Additionally, there is a great need for oral histories of early Pacoima and San Fernando Valley non-white residents. The development of the San Fernando Valley, from infrastructure to its ever-growing industry, would not have been possible without this working-class population, yet there is an underwhelming amount of scholarly contributions regarding this pioneering population. The study and scholarly contributions pertaining to minority and underrepresented groups is crucial to the documentation and telling of the inclusive history of not only the San Fernando Valley, but the United States.

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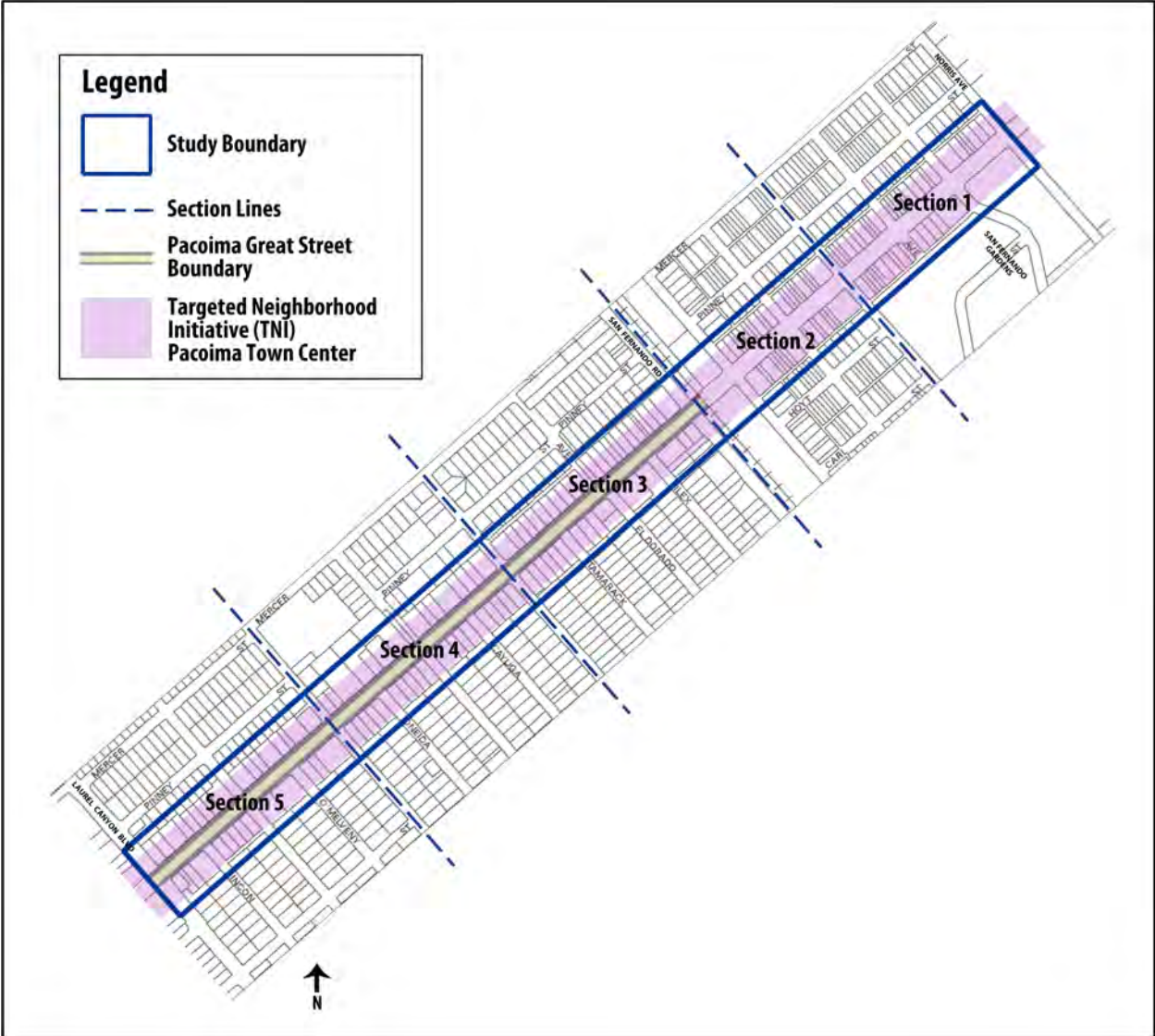
## **Appendix A:**

### ***Survey of Businesses and Establishments along Van Nuys Boulevard's Commercial Strip***

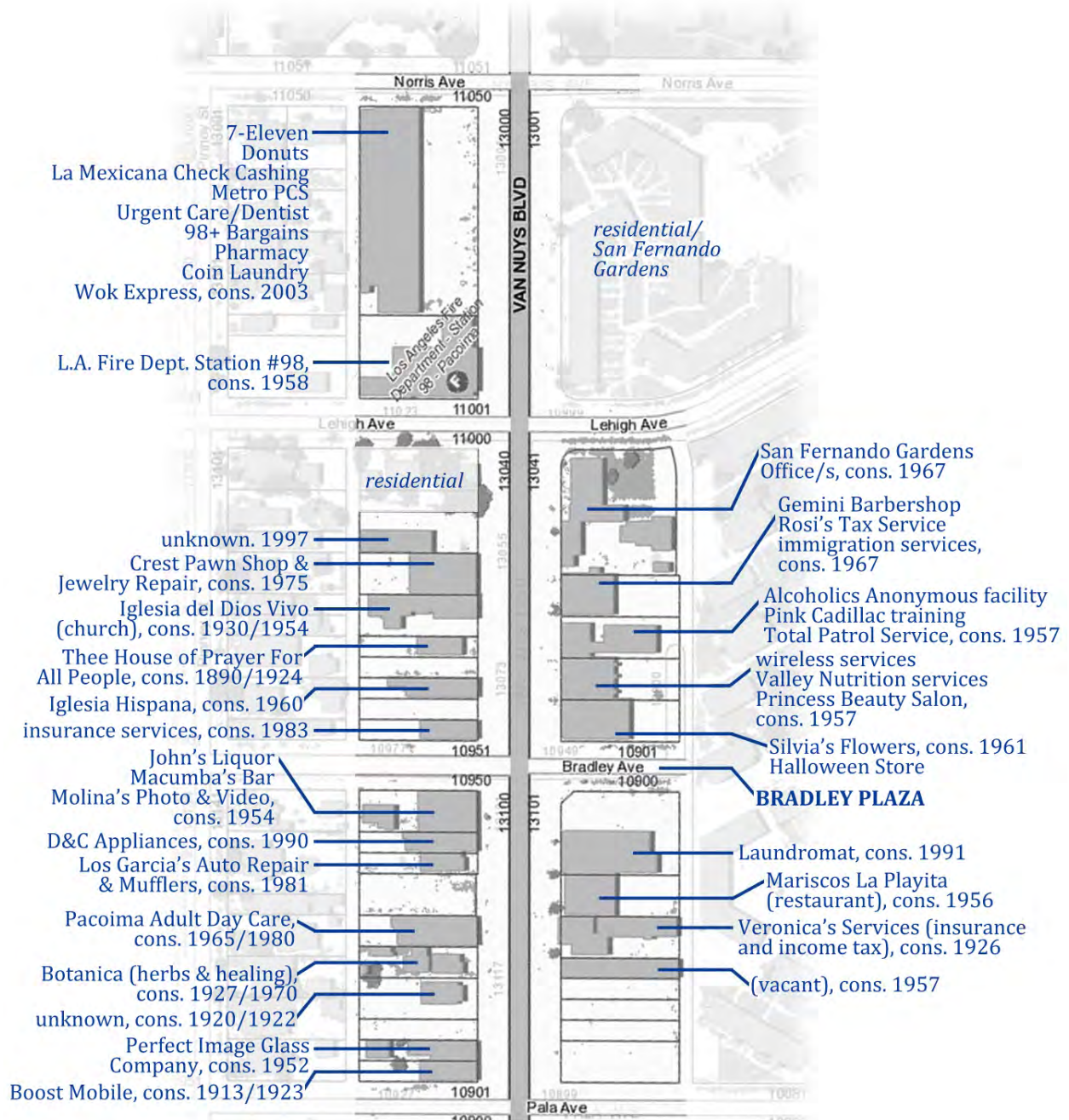
The following pages make up a diagram of the establishments inventoried within the boundary area set up for the purpose of studying Pacoima's commercial corridor, from Norris Ave to the north and Laurel Canyon Boulevard to the south. The diagram is split into five sections and is presented in order from north to south. The text that stems from the mapped areas lists the name of the business or the type of service/goods available at the establishment along with the first construction date, and other major construction dates if available, as listed within the Los Angeles County Office of the Assessor's Property Assessment Information System. In cases where a commercial building counts with more than one storefront, the establishments are listed in order as found from north to south.

The survey of the buildings and establishments found within the study boundary underscore the importance of the businesses and services found within the corridor. Among the restaurants, Laundromats, discount stores, medical offices, car washes, and auto repair businesses there are a number of nonprofit organizations, municipal offices, religious institutions, and other small businesses that provide services and goods that are equally telling of the community's heritage. There are three *botanicas* (herb and healing specialty shops), eighteen barber/beauty salons, thirteen faith-based organizations, more than ten businesses offering financial services like loans, check cashing, and money transfers, six establishments offering immigration and law services, and over ten businesses offering insurance and/or income tax services. The inclusion of the construction date is telling of the date that the site was developed and provides initial information

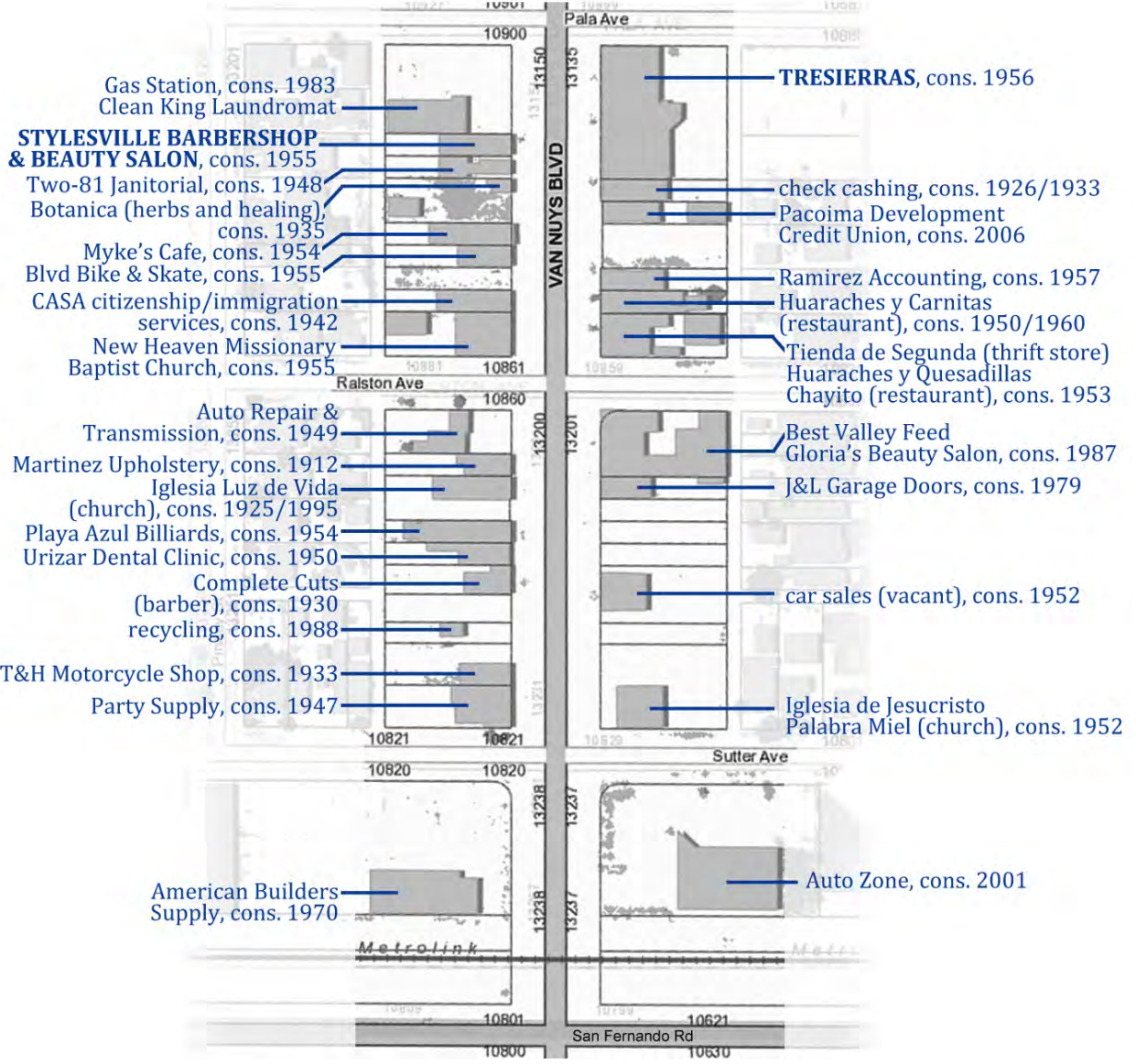
regarding the amount of time the property has been either neglected or subjected to additions and alterations.



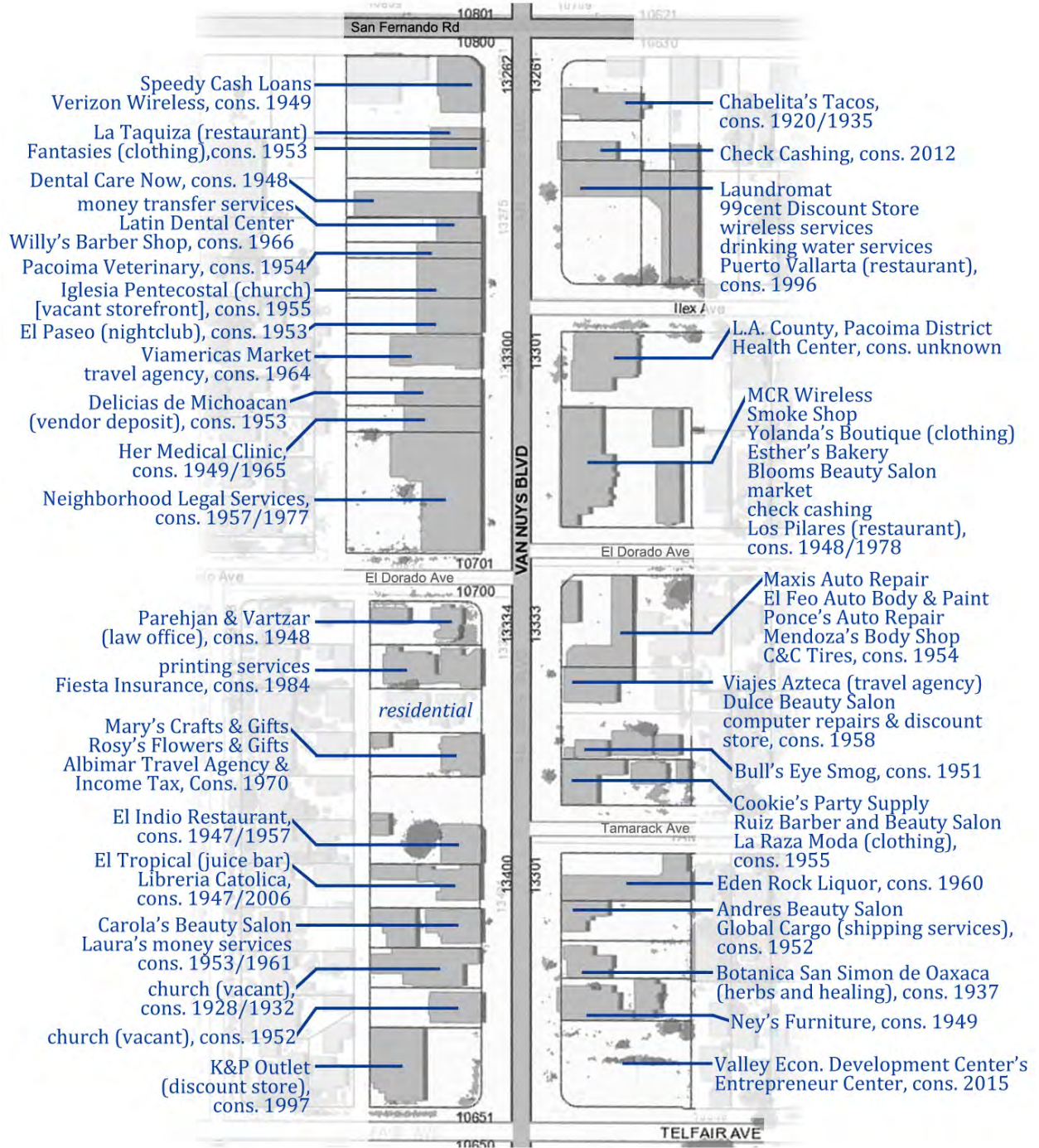
Map of Study Boundary and Diagram Sections



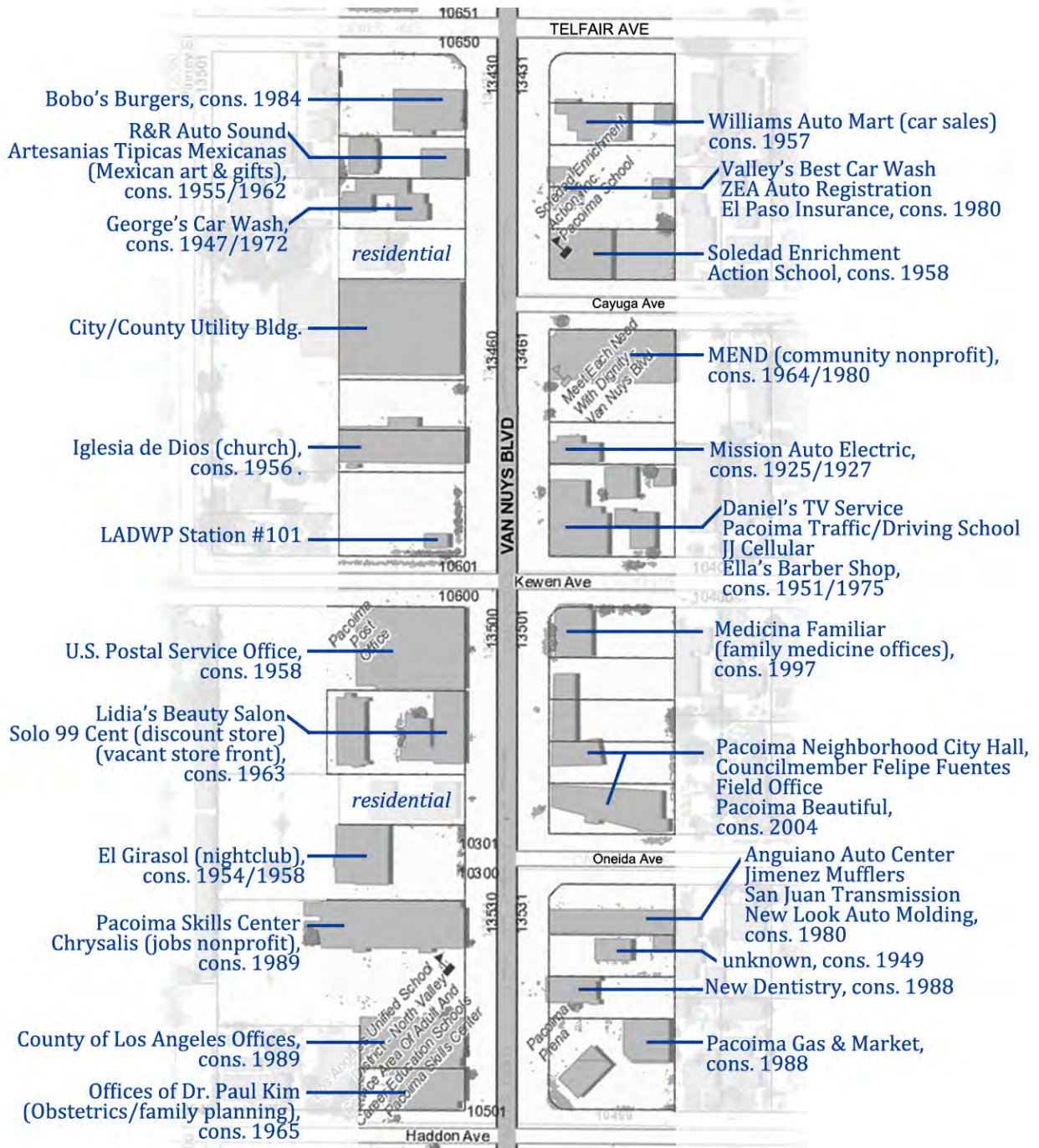
Section 1



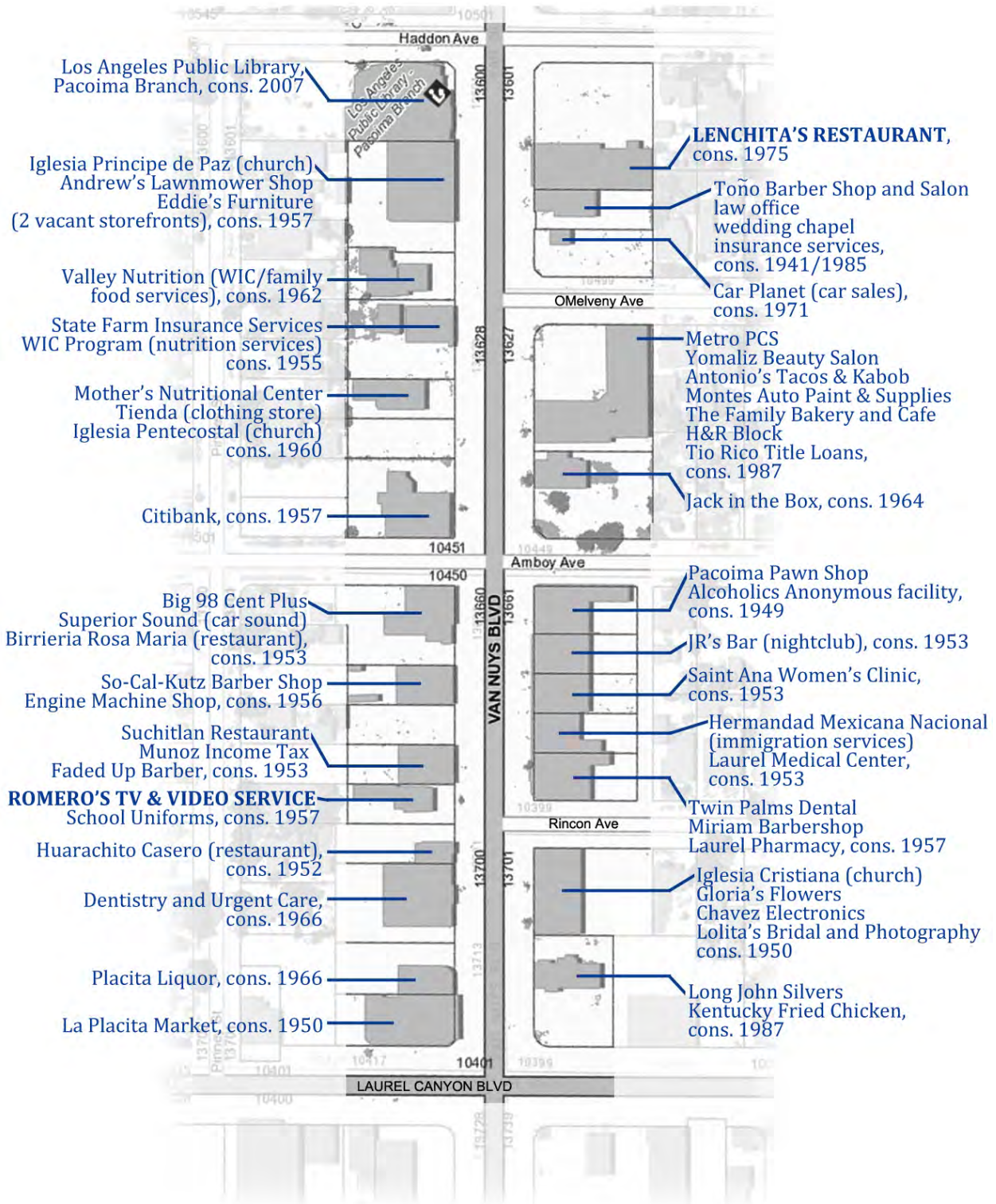
Section 2



Section 3



Section 4



Section 5