mirARTe: ART, RESISTANCE, AND LIFE IN EAST LOS
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CREATIVE RESISTANCE IN EAST LOS ANGELES CALIFORNIA

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By

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**mirARTe: ART, RESISTANCE, AND LIFE IN EAST LOS**  
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**ABSTRACT**

Latinx communities, like East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights are negatively targeted by external forces that distort how these communities are viewed. This distorted reality or *mental border* is present throughout media outlets. Negative rhetoric towards undocumented immigrants and Latinxs is at the forefront of political debates. Their stories are reduced to numbers, their struggles reduced to “those people,” and their power overshadowed by the criminalization of their dreams. This qualitative project explores how Latinx communities resist the negative labels that are imposed on them by outside forces. By compiling photographs of community art and collecting community narratives, *mirARTe: Art, Resistance and Life in East L.A.*, aims to both, highlight the beauty and diversity of experiences that exists within Latinx barrios, and showcase how creative resistance is used in the community to promote cultura. In this research, creative resistance is used to define art as means of activism. To be labeled as such, creative resistance must a) radically change a physical environment or a community space; b) drastically transform the perception of an individual; and/or c) promote collective and individual healing. In addition, the term creative resistance is used to describe art that is created within and for Latinx barrios. Creative resistance employs artistic outlets.

East Los Angeles is characterized by murals present in the streets of the neighborhood. The murals both, depict Mexican history and serve as a reminder of the common roots that Mexican-American/Chicanxs share. This shared culture provides the basis of an artistic exchange; were activists and artist expose the criminalize reality of living in a barrio from fear of
being undocumented to gentrification. The community of East Los Angeles uses creative resistance to navigate between their Mexican roots and their American reality. Barrio culture is something *ni de aqui ni de alla* (not from here nor from there), but something that exists in between two cultures. Barrio culture in East Los Angeles instigates creative resistance during waves of community activism. Drawing from interviews of community art-activist and archives from the Chicano Movement, this thesis illustrates how residents use creative resistance as a tool to embrace their multi-layered identities, as a source of empowerment, and as a coping mechanism. Ultimately, this project centers narratives of strong spirited residents of East Los Angeles, who refuse to be disenfranchised. By using creative resistance, East Los residents not only resist systematic injustices, but they also reclaim their environment and experiences as Mexican-Americans in the United States—they will endure.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our DREAMs have wings to lift us up
for when our feet are too tired to march.

I dedicate this thesis to my familia,
my friends, my resilient East Los community,
and to the loving memory of my oso carpintero.

This thesis would have not come together without support from the Center for Social Justice David F. Andretta Fellowship, the East Los Angeles Chicano Center, the American Studies Program, Prof. Seamon and Colva Weissenstein, American Studies Librarian Maura Seale and the countless artists, activists, scholars, and community members who met with me during my field research. Gracias.

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Spanish/Spanglish gives my writing integrity. A glossary of Spanish terms is included at the end of the thesis and translation is provided when needed. The definitions of the term Mexican American and Chicanx are provided below, this is how I will choose to define them for the purposes of this thesis. Note that other scholars might use them interchangeably. Thank you.

**Mexican American:** In this thesis Mexican American refers to U.S. born citizens with Mexican ancestry. A distinction is drawn to Mexicans immigrants residing with or without documentation in the United States.

**Chicanx:** For purposes of gender inclusivity, I will use the term Chicanx as opposed to Chín@ or Chicana/o. Chicanx is someone who immigrated or was born in the United States with cultural or ancestral ties to Mexican culture. They must self-identify as a Chicanx. This term was reclaimed by Chicanxs as early as 1940s and was popularizes through the Chicano Movement in the 1960s. This thesis will use Chicano Movement, as opposed to Chicanx Movement, to abide by current academic standards.
INTRODUCTION

Mexican artisans spend months of arduous work creating little clay figurines of mythical animals, colorful flowers, and people to create Árboles de la Vida (Trees of Life). The trees are handcrafted by artists in my home state, Estado de México, México. Using only the visual images artisans share complex and rich literary narratives (Appendix A). The Trees of Life tell stories that are salient to the community. The Trees of Life and their narratives have become icons that preserve cultural memory. These Árboles de la Vida, were one of my first exposures to storytelling through art. To “read” an Árbol de la Vida, you start from the roots, then make your way to the trunk and follow the branches until you reach the leafs that make up the tree. This thesis is my version of an Árbol de la Vida. Its pages will stay true Chicanx aesthetic and embody the spirit present in East Los Angeles. These pages will take you through the narratives of people from East Los Angeles, California. These are their stories of struggle and resistance, but most importantly they are stories of resilience.

“Who tells our stories? How are we remembered?” are some of the questions that I scribbled in my field notes during my field research for this project. In East Los Angeles, it became clear that those stories were told through art that beats through the streets of the barrio.¹ This thesis will attempt to tell those narratives—stories of struggle and resistance of a community that refuses to be disenfranchised. The research question centers on the endurance of art within activism in East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights. At its core the thesis will use the interdisciplinary nature of American Studies to draw from cultural, urban and ethnic studies to analyze how the community of East Los Angeles uses creative resistance to navigate between their Mexican roots and their American reality. The thesis will explore how creative resistance; visual, literary, and performance art, has shaped the Latinx community in East Los Angeles. The

¹ I use East Los Angeles, East Los, and East L.A. interchangeably but they all refer to the same location.
project seeks to explore the changes that the community has undergone by comparing the peak of the Chicanx Movement to contemporary waves of Latinx activism in a post-Dream Act era. In addition, it will aim to illustrate how aspects of Mexican-American/Chicanx/Immigrant identity have endured through the years and how East L.A. residents use creative resistance as a tool to embrace their multi-layered identities and as a form of coping with their criminalized realities. Ultimately, this project is about stories from people in a community that has been historically disenfranchised and yet continues to rise in order to reclaim their environment and experiences as Mexican-Americans in the United States.

BACKGROUND

This thesis draws on my 2016 summer research project, Transcending Fronteras: Art, Activism, and Immigrant Narratives, in East Los Angeles, California. The first event recorded in my field notes took place May 18th in East Los Angeles Renaissance Academy (ELARA), the high school I graduated from. High school seniors had worked on Greetings from East Los Angeles, a yearlong project that showcased their community in a positive light. During the school year, they went out into their community to interview who they considered their heroes, photograph important landmarks, and ultimately gain a deeper appreciation of their community. The final project was a map of East Los Angeles filled with landmarks, murals, and local heroes. In this hands-on creative project, students had the opportunity to document and share their community. That was the first event of many that shaped the project throughout the summer; other community events included art workshops, art walks, open mics, conferences, film screenings, vigils and actions/rallies. On August 18th, Noches de Serenata took place in Boyle Heights; this event gathered local artists, community members, and musicians for a night of live mariachi music. Mariachis in full dress, adorned the intersection of La Primera (First Street) and
Boyle, they played and sang to a cheerful crowd of people. Both events, although different in nature, created a sense of community and made people gain a deeper appreciation for their community. But most importantly, events like those produce outlets of creative resistance in which individuals heal and resist as a community. This qualitative project explored how Latinx communities resist the negative labels that are imposed on them by outside forces using art. By compiling photographs of community art and collecting narratives community members, the research project aimed to highlight the beauty and diversity of experiences that exists within Latinx barrios.

One of the observations drawn from the analysis of interviews and field notes, was the way in which art had historically been used to mobilize the community. This drew my curiosity to further research historical instances in which the community mobilized. Using primary sources from the Chicano Movement, in the form of local newspapers, and photographs, I compiled critical instances in which the community mobilized and creative resistance was employed. Supplementing the primary sources with secondary literature, allowed me to choose two movements for this thesis; The East L.A. Student Walkouts of 1968 and The Chicano Moratorium of 1970. This thesis is a bookend project, meaning that I take two critical instances in which creative art was used in the community and put them in conversation with each other. The Chicano Movement (1968-1970), works as my historical bookend; my 2016 summer research serves as my contemporary bookend. The heart of the thesis lies in the answer of the research question: what characteristics of barrio culture in East L.A. allowed, in particular, forms of creative resistance to proliferate during the early Chicanx Movement (1968-1970) and during the post-Dream Act (2012 and ongoing) community activism in East Los Angeles?

RESEARCH METHODS
This research project is exploratory; therefore, I will be using qualitative approaches to collect information—observation, interviews, field, notes, and analysis of primary/secondary sources. One of the primary sources for this thesis will constitute of a series of interviews that were conducted under Georgetown University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), approval during the summer of 2016 in East Los Angeles under the David F. Andretta Summer Research Fellowship for the project *Trancending Fronteras: Art, Resistance, and Immigrant Narratives*. Under the project semi-structured interviews were held with two groups. Group A, consisted of undocumented artists, activist and residents of East Los Angeles. Group B, consisted of staff members of community organizations and community advocates in East Los Angeles.

Participants were asked to voluntary participate in an interview that lasted between 45-60 minutes in which they were asked about their experience and thoughts on art as means of activism in their community (a copy of the interview protocol is provided in Appendix B). Given the status sensitivity of some of my research subjects, all names were given pseudonyms and there are no direct identifiers. I avoided taking pictures of people for safety concerns. I only photographed individuals who agreed to sign a release waiver, which was provided in Spanish/English. If the individuals were unable to read the waiver for any reason I read it out loud in Spanish or English. The transcripts obtained for those interviews will serve as one of my primary sources for the thesis. Along with the transcripts, there is a collection of photographs from murals, protests, vigils, community events, and workshops that will complement the primary sources to paint a picture of contemporary outlets of creative resistance present in East Los Angeles, California.

In addition, to frame the contemporary sphere the works of scholars like Gabriela Nuñez will be used. In *Renegade Latina Environmentalist Activism in Los Ageless: the Ovarian Psycos*


*Bicycle Brigade and las Mujere de Maiz,* Nuñez follows the steps of two current Chicana led organizations that are mobilizing in East Los Angeles—the Ovarian Psycos and Mujeres de Maiz; both groups have grown to be known widely in the community and through social media. Current community mobilizations are centering their efforts in the fight against gentrification in Boyle Heights and Eat Los Angeles. This new wave of activism draws on similar tactics and organizing used during the Chicano Movement. For primary and secondary sources on the Chicano Movement, I compiled summaries and photographs of newspaper articles from both eras including: *The Eastsider, The Los Angeles Times, The Boyle Heights Beat,* and *La Raza.*

Similarly, I relied on interviews, field notes and newspaper articles from the same publications for contemporary forms of community mobilizations. For secondary sources on the Chicano Movement, I used films, documentaries and books. Those secondary sources framed the research and will be reviewed in the framework section of the introduction. Lastly, two other main groups that are also part of the new wave of mobilizing, are *La Union de Vecinos* (Neighborhood Cooperative) and The East Los Angeles Brown Berets, both groups find their roots in the Chicano Movement. By following the activist efforts of community groups that are currently mobilizing and comparing them with instances of community activism from the Chicano Movement—found in primary documents in the form of community published newspapers, documentaries, and photographs; this thesis will aim to contribute to academic discourse that has been written about East Los Angeles.

**FRAMEWORK**

The new wave of activism that will be studied in this thesis, started to take shape during the summer of 2016, people who were interviewed for the research project had an opinion, were directly impacted by the issue, or were part of the mobilizing efforts against gentrification and
other issues currently impacting the community. On August 4th 2016, The Los Angeles Times ran an article on the anti-gentrification mobilization taking place in Boyle Heights. In it UCLA Professor Eric Avila is featured, he leaves the readers pondering on the following: “if you think about it, the struggle for Mexican American civil rights has always been strongly connected to this idea of turf, territory… Mexican American history is about displacement and dislocation and conquest.”

Avila’s quote informs much of what this thesis will aim to do—it will talk about how art has historically been used to reclaim the urban space and how art continues to be the primary weapon against injustices suffered by the community—but most importantly it will outline the unique characteristics of East Los Angeles that allow this kind of creative resistance to proliferate and endure overtime.

For a historical background on the community I used scholars like Ricardo Romo, who provides a comprehensive history of the formation of East Los Angeles up to the 1930s in his book History of a Barrio: East Los Angeles. However, I argue that Romo’s book leaves out the formative years that shaped East Los Angeles to the activist oriented community that we witness today. To gain a deeper understanding of East Los during the twentieth century I relied on Rodolfo Acuña’s archive in the East Los Angeles Chicano Center and some of his published works. Additionally, I used more recent published works such as Rethinking the Chicano Movement by Marc Simon Rodiguez, who incorporates the usage of art and community space in his analysis of the movement. Given that I was researching a built urban environment through time, I relied on urban scholars like Eric Avila, who addresses projects of Urban Renewal that impacted the community during the 1960s. Avila’s famous essay All Freeways Lead to East Los Angeles, gives us a clear image on how East Los Angeles and surrounded communities were

targeted as blighted neighborhoods that had to be cleared. Avila’s essay concludes with a taste of how the Latinx communities in those areas have reclaim their environment by painting murals in the freeways. Both Simon and Avila, write about the same Latinx communities that Acuña and Romo write about, however, their works are produced later with and with an added artistic argument to them. My thesis enters the stage in this course of analysis; I incorporate the historical production of art and its power to explicate why creative resistance is pivotal for communities like East Los Angeles.

Throughout all the secondary research conducted for this thesis one thing began to emerge. There was a notion of criminality attached to how the community was and continues to be viewed. Those notions of criminalization bleed through the pages of The Revolt of the Cockroach People, a fiction novel by Oscar Zeta Acosta. The novel follows the story of Buffalo Zeta Brown, a Chicano lawyer who defended the indicted students after the 1968 Student Walkouts. The usage of secondary sources in the form of novels, essays, academic articles, and books like the ones mentions above, was crucial to contextualize the thesis and give it both cultural and historical frameworks. However, most of those works rely on spatial politics of a specific instance or time in East Los, and tell the story of the community within their academic frameworks. This is where the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis shines; it is not constrained by a historical period or relies on specific disciplines to frame the analysis of sources, but rather utilizes a myriad of primary and secondary sources to construct a cultural history of East Los Angeles. This history highlights creative resistance as the key feature of barrio culture that creates community solidarity and mobilizes the barrio. Centering the history of the community around creative resistance, and contextualizing new waves of community activism with the Chicano Movement in East Los Angeles, is uncharted territory at this point. In addition, this
thesis will also contribute a new definition to describe art as means of activism by referring to it as creative resistance. The term creative resistance has been use within other academic works to define art-activism, yet this thesis took the definition a step further and uses creative resistance to define art that a) radically changes a physical environment or a community space; b) drastically transforms the perception of an individual; and/or c) promotes collective and individual healing, within an East Los Angeles context. I hope that this thesis will further preserve the memory of East Los Angeles and serve as a link between current forms of creative resistance with those used during the peak of the Chicano Movement in East Los Angeles, California.

THESIS ROAD MAP

I am the artisan of this Árbol de Vida or thesis; as such, I have the privilege of choosing how to tell the story about my community. The answer to the questions: “Who tells our stories? How are we remembered?” written in my field notes are important, because they bring to light the importance of story sharing to create memory, and highlight the equal importance of who tells those stories. As an undocumented student, who calls East Los Angeles home and who lived in both East Los and Boyle Heights, I enter the academic stage bringing my personal perspectives to the work I produce. I approached this thesis and previous field research with the utmost respect and radical love. Each chapter of this thesis has been carefully crafted to display the rich culture and diversity of experiences that exists within my barrio, without undermining or romanticizing the struggles of the people who live in East Los Angeles. I came up with five chapters that provide the necessary historical background, define creative resistance, and provide historical and contemporary examples of creative resistance in the community. In line with storytelling through images present in Árboles de la Vida, each chapter in this thesis is represented by an icon derived from Mexican and/or Chicanx culture.
The first chapter *A Brief History of a Barrio*, will walk you through critical social, spatial, and political moments from the early part of the twentieth century that led to the Chicano Movement. The chapter opens with a historical timeline with key dates and polices that affected the barrios of East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights. Ripple effects of the policies that affected the community during midcentury are still felt today. This chapter is represented by the Sixth Street Bridge (Appendix C), an iconic bridge that connects Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles with Downtown Los Angeles. The bridge crosses the Los Angeles River and connects the barrios with the up and coming Arts District. Built in 1932, the bridge became an iconic part of the community and widely depicted in community produced art. Despite its legacy, the bridge was permanently closed January 2016, to make way for a $482 million development that promises new open spaces for the community called “The Ribbon of Light: The Sixth Street Viaduct Replacement Project,” which is scheduled to open in 2020.3 In February 2016, *The Los Angeles Times* reported that “the night before the bridge closed for good . . . fans [of the bridge] help a spirited impromptu wake, taking one last tour in classic cars, low-riders, motorcycles and bicycles, and on foot.”4 The beloved bridge is testament of the many changes that the barrio had underwent during most of the twentieth century and its “renovation” serves as a cautionary tale of the change that is to come, which will be explored in a later chapter.

Chapter two *Arte de Corazón: Defining the Chicanx Aesthetic*, deconstructs creative resistance and provides the necessary background to understand Chinx Aesthetic. This chapter’s title is inspired by an interview I conducted with a local (un)documented poet, who said that the art that is produced within the barrio is *Arte de Corazón*, art from the heart. This title really

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embodies my definition of creative resistance, as art that enters the heart and transforms the mind. This type of art is not only transformative but is also healing. As such a corazón (heart) was chosen as the icon for this chapter; the heart speaks to both, the love that goes into the production of the art, and the healing qualities the finish product has over the community. The icon was created based on the Sacred Heart or Corazón Sagrado, a revered symbol within Mexican Roman Catholic religion. The Corazón Sagrado is replicated in paintings and figurines through Mexican art. Today, the ornate hearts decorate altars during Día De Los Muertos (Day of the Dead), are replicated in Chicanx style tattoos, or can be found reimagined with Mexican/Mexican-American/Chicanx icons in merchandise tables of local vendors during art walks (Appendix D). The Corazón Sagrado found in this thesis, follows Chicanx aesthetic, as it incorporates traditional Mexican elements and imagery from the Mexican-American experience in the United States. Just as local artists, I reimagined the heart using imagery and landscapes from Los Angeles (Appendix D).

Chapter three From Brown and Proud to Undocumented and Unafraid, follows the journey of radical youth in East Los Angeles from the Chicano Movement and from current waves of community activism. This chapter is one of three case studies that showcase how community mobilizations put creative resistance into action. This section explores the role of creative resistance among youth in the barrio—from identity formation to politicization through art. This chapter places the experiences of Mexican-American, Chicanx, and Mexican immigrant youth at its center to highlight their existence in the United States. These narratives are often erased by mainstream U.S. culture. Youth in the barrio employ art to share their stories and make sense of their realities. This section is represented by a monarch butterfly made from solidarity fists. The monarch butterfly is an international symbol of migration, each year thousands of
monarch butterflies cross the México-U.S. Border and as such have become a symbol for migrants and the immigrant rights movement. The solidarity fists within it represent community mobilizations that have occurred and continue to take place in East Los Angeles and the solidarity that they create (Appendix E).

Chapter four, *La Flaca Roams the Streets of East Los*, is represented by a flor de cempasúchil (marigold flower). This yellow flower might be seen as ordinary to the outside observer, but to those who grew up celebrating Día De Los Muertos, this little aromatic flower calls us to remember and honor friends and family who have died. Día De Los Muertos is a Mexican holiday that takes place during the month of November, it is a celebration of life and a time to honor loved ones who no longer roam this earth. During this month, families place decorative altars (Appendix F), filled with food, candles, and marigolds. We believe that the bright yellow color and the scent of the cempasúchil guide the spirits of our loved ones to the altars. This chapter deconstructs how creative resistance is used to combat the criminalization of the barrio and police brutality. Cempasúchil was chosen as the icon for this chapter because it honors those who have died as a consequence of violence in the community. Additionally, it illustrates how the community copes with loss through the production of altars similar to the ones employed during Día De Los Muertos—I argue that the production of those altars is a form of creative resistance. Lastly, “La Flaca” in the chapter’s title is a colloquial Spanish for the embodiment of death or a grim reaper called *La Muerte*. The title would roughly translate to Death Roams the Streets of East Los Angeles.

The fifth chapter, *Barrios and Borders*, analyses how creative resistance is used to reclaim the streets of the barrio; juxtaposing physical take-over via public art and murals to an emotional appropriation. The icon chosen for this chapter is the *Atl tlachinolli*, which is a symbol
taken from an Aztec prophecy. This icon is representative of Chicanx aesthetic, given that Chicanx art often takes Mexican indigenous imagery to recall the common roots that Chicanxs, Mexican-Americans, and Mexican Immigrants share. Atl tlachinolli (Appendix G), represents the ongoing tensions present in the barrio. The story linked to Atl tlachinolli describes the founding of Tenochtitlán in 1325, the capital of the Great Aztec Empire. According to the prophecy the Aztecs founded their city in the place where they saw an eagle, standing on a cactus, devouring a serpent (Appendix G). That serpent is Atl tlachinolli (Nahuac for water/fire serpent and a symbol for war), the Aztecs built an empire and used that image as their emblem. After México gained its independence from Spain, they used the same eagle as their national emblem and today it can be found in our national flag. This image is one of the most important icons of Mexican history, it gave Aztecs a sense of place and belonging, it gave Mexicans a sense of national identity. Similarly, the barrio gives East Los Angeles residents a sense of place and belonging, additionally, Atl tlachinolli, also serves as a constant reminder of the battles that must be fought to maintain those spaces. With the eminence of gentrification and rapid displacement of community members, I thought Atl tlachinolli would be fitting to embody both place and struggle.

This thesis will maintain that barrio culture in East Los Angeles, created out of the historical and systematic disenfranchisement, instigates creative resistance during waves of community activism. At its core, this thesis will center creative resistance as a tool to transcend history and bind the community with a share pathos. This thesis will argue that creative resistance allows East Los residents to a) embrace their multilayered identities; b) preserve their


history and memory; and c) allows them to heal as a collective. The conclusion of the thesis will provide important context about the future of creative resistance in East Los Angeles. Moreover, it will emphasize the importance of creative resistance used as a tool to heal individually and collectively. Creative resistance in East Los Angeles creates resilient people.

The title of the thesis speaks to the importance of outlets of creative resistance present in East Los Angeles. The word *mirarte*, translates into “to see” or “to observe,” as scholars and outsiders looking into the community, we must take this action into account. We are to see or observe the community with love and respect. We must observe the art present in the neighborhood, to be able to understand how the community operates, its culture, and its history.

To answer my research question, I had to observe and study my community. With this thesis, I hope to demonstrate that despite the injustices that East Los Angeles faces, our barrio will endure, because its people are resilient. This thesis is our Árbol de la Vida—our story.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF A BARRIO

**SELECTED HISTORICAL TIMELINE***

#### ➢ 1910
- Mexican immigration to Los Angeles increases as many flee the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution. As downtown is developed, many other Mexican Americans move across the L.A. River into Boyle Heights and East L.A.

#### ➢ 1920
- Significant numbers of Jewish immigrants and their families move to Los Angeles from the East Coast and Midwest, eventually making Boyle Heights home to the largest Jewish community west of Chicago.

#### ➢ 1924
- Immigration Act of 1924, by employing principle of "national origins," effectively prohibits immigration from Asia and limits immigration from Southeastern Europe.

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http://www.janm.org/exhibits/bh/exhibition/timeline.htm
➢ 1931
  o Beginning of deportation and coercive repatriation campaigns targeting Mexican Americans. One-third of those in Los Angeles, including some U.S. citizens and Boyle Heights residents, are encouraged or forced to leave for Mexico.
  o Roosevelt High School students protest administration's suppression of free speech, which began with suspension of peers involved in publishing an independent student newspaper, The Roosevelt Voice.

➢ 1943
  o "Zoot-Suit Riots" explode in the streets of Downtown Los Angeles and surrounding barrios, including Boyle Heights

➢ 1945
  o Roosevelt High School student activists organize hundreds of other students from local schools in protest against the Board of Education.

➢ 1946
  o San Bernardino-10 Freeway opens. It is the first of several that displace over 10,000 Boyle Heights residents

➢ 1949
  o Edward Roybal, with the support of the Community Service Organization (CSO), becomes the first Mexican American elected to the L.A. City Council in the twentieth century. He represents the 9th District, which includes Boyle Heights.

➢ 1950
  o Boyle Heights continues to be Los Angeles's most ethnically diverse neighborhood.

➢ 1952
  o Immigration and Nationality Act (McCarran-Walter Act) establishes a national origins quota system for all immigrants.

➢ 1960
  o East Los Angeles Interchange is built to eventually connect six freeways.
  o Immigration Act of 1965 abolished national origins quota system for immigration.

➢ 1968
  o Eastside student "Blowouts" protest the public education system and call for improved facilities and culturally-relevant school curriculum.

➢ 1970
  o National Chicano Moratorium is organized to protest the Vietnam War and the high rate of Latino casualties. Thousands march through East L.A. Journalist Ruben Salazar is killed by L.A. County sheriffs in police crackdown in area.

➢ 1986
  o Immigration Reform and Control Act is signed into law, creating legalization (amnesty) program and employer sanctions.

➢ 1994
  o Proposition 187, designed to clamp down on undocumented immigrants, is passed by California voters. 25,000 people march through East L.A. to City Hall in protest.

➢ 2001
Assembly Bill 540 signed into law. It created a new exemption from the payment of non-resident tuition.\(^8\)

\(^{2006}\)

- Massive Immigrant Rights marches in response of HR4437 or The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. \(^9\)

\(^{2012}\)

- AB130 and AB131, or the California DREAM Act, passed. They are laws that increase access to financial aid for undocumented students. \(^10\)

\(^{2016}\)

- Boyle Heights community activists heads anti-gentrification and displacement movement. \(^11\)

**EAST OF THE LOS ANGELES RIVER**

What do a Virgen de Guadalupe mural, a traditional Japanese restaurant, and a Jewish Synagogue have in common? They all make up Boyle Heights’ urban landscape and serve as a testament of the diverse migrant groups that swept the East Side of Los Angeles; unincorporated East Los Angeles, El Sereno, Boyle Heights and Lincoln Heights, at the turn of the twentieth century. By midcentury, Boyle Heights was Los Angeles’s most ethnically diverse neighborhood. \(^12\) However, the community rapidly changed when it gained a large influx of Mexican migrants. Per the United States Census, as of 2015, East Los Angeles’ population is composed of 97.1 percent Latinos of which 42 percent are foreign born. \(^13\)

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Read more: [http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=200120020AB540](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=200120020AB540)


Boyle Heights are neighboring communities east of downtown Los Angeles. Both communities have been isolated by physical and natural borders. The Los Angeles River acts as a natural border, and a series of freeways constructed during the early part of the century create an artificial border. The construction of those boundaries not only displaced thousands of people, but also created the Mexican ethnic enclave present today.

This brief history of the East Side, will focus on the communities of unincorporated East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights, to give the necessary historical context to this thesis. This section will analyze urban changes in East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights, during the twentieth century, that affected the immigrant community residing in those neighborhoods. In addition, it will discuss federal and state immigration policies that impacted residents of East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights. Moreover, it will highlight instances of community mobilization in response to both urban planning discrimination and anti-immigration policies; to highlight the systematic issues that led to the emergence of community mobilizations in East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights. This section will conclude by familiarizing the reader with the community’s plight to reclaim their urban space, form a sense of collective identity, and develop a cultural ownership of their communities by using creative resistance.

IMMIGRANTS AND LOWRIDERS: EAST L.A. AND BOYLE HEIGHTS, 1910-1959

At the turn of the 20th Century, El Pueblo De Nuestra Señora La Reina De Los Ángeles, founded in 1781, had become a migrant hub, attracting people from a diverse range of countries.¹⁴ Boyle Heights composed the “first outer ring settlement within the city proper and

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was among the first communities that formed in the East Side.”\textsuperscript{15} Since its founding, Boyle Heights, was characterized by the myriad of immigrants it attracted, it housed a large Jewish population as well as Russian Molokan, Austrian, Japanese, Armenian, and Italian.\textsuperscript{16} By 1910, however, Mexican immigration to Los Angeles increased as many fled the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution.\textsuperscript{17} Mexicans migrated primarily to communities in the East Side, such as, Lincoln Heights, El Sereno, Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles.

The population of Mexicans in Los Angeles tripled during the twenties. Mexican Americans began moving across the L.A. River into Boyle Height and East Los Angeles and by 1925, the city “housed the largest barrio north of Mexico with some hundred thousand Mexican Residents.”\textsuperscript{18} Stephanie Lewthwaite author of \textit{Race, Place, and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles: A Transnational Perspective}, describes that during the 1930s many Mexicans and Mexican Americans were repatriated or deported to Mexico to ease the number of governmental relief offered to “Americans” during the Great Depression. Lewthwaite adds, that despite repatriation and declining immigration, Los Angeles was known as the ‘second largest Mexican city in the world’ by 1938 with a Mexican origin population in excess of 250,000.”\textsuperscript{19}

The increase in the number of first and second generation Mexicans in the area began creating racial tensions among residents of the Los Angeles area. The streets of the barrio

\textsuperscript{15} Stephanie Lewthwaite, Race, Place, and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles: A Transnational Perspective, 1890-1940 (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009), 96.

\textsuperscript{16} Lewthwaite, 96.

\textsuperscript{17} Martin Schies and Mark M. Dodge, City of Promise: Race and Historical Change in Los Angeles (California: Regina Books, 2006).

\textsuperscript{18} Martin Schies and Mark M. Dodge, City of Promise: Race and Historical Change in Los Angeles (California: Regina Books, 2006).

\textsuperscript{19} Stephanie Lewthwaite, \textit{Race, Place, and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles: A Transnational Perspective, 1890-1940} (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009), 184.
witnessed a wave of violence in 1943 during the Zoot Suit Riots. The riots erupted from racial tensions between Latinos and U.S. military officials; uniformed military personnel attacked young Latinos on the streets of East Los Angeles.20 The riots led to a series of community youth mobilizations that demanded equity for the community.21 The generation of young activists from the 1940s, were children of those who had fled the violence of the Mexican Revolution, a period in which 10 percent of the Mexican population immigrated to the United States.22 The new wave of young leaders were ready to take to the streets to demand equity and respect for their families and communities. The community youth had to mobilize or perish in a changing Los Angeles; where society saw them as products of second-generation maladjustment in “urgent need of removal, rehabilitation, and Americanization.”23

Oppression and marginalization from governmental authorities continued to hit East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights. Ripple effects of Operation Wetback reached Los Angeles; in 1954 immigration agents “stopped people on the sidewalks and not only questioned them but also followed them into stores as they did their shopping.”24 Natalia Molina, argues that “such practices demonstrate the process by which not only populations become racialized but also the


22 Martin Schies and Mark M. Dodge, *City of Promise: Race and Historical Change in Los Angeles* (California: Regina Books, 2006).


spaces, neighborhoods, and institutions associated with these groups." Given the magnet power of East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights over Mexican migrants, those communities became a natural target for immigration authorities. Moreover, by targeting neighborhoods in which first and second generation of Mexicans live, these practices made everyone of Mexican descent deportable. Mexicans and Mexican Americans alike lived, and continue to live, in fear of being picked up and having their citizenship questioned. Immigration authority practices on those communities, highlight how immigration patrolling is not tied to the U.S.-Mexico border but transcends into urban areas.

The communities of East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights were transformed; not only by the influx of Mexican migrants, but also by unthoughtful urban planning. In 1953, the Los Angeles Division of Highway unveiled plans to direct the Golden State Freeway to the East Side of Los Angeles, “destroying homes, parks, community centers, and neighborhoods in the process.” Not only was the city of Los Angeles planning huge overhauls without consultation of the residents of Boyle Heights and East L.A., but also saw those changes as positive developments for the city and as a way to clear out the scum. Residents had loudly protested

\begin{itemize}
  \item \cite{Lewthwaite2013}
  \item \cite{Lewthwaite2013a}
\end{itemize}
the plan though in the end, the highway was built. The highway system fractured the community and isolated residents from the greater Los Angeles area.

In 1959, the construction of the Los Angeles Interchange began. The Los Angeles Time, reported that, the East Los Angeles Interchange would “be one of the most complex systems in the world and a key to future solving of freeway traffic congestion in downtown Los Angeles”. The 10.4-billion-dollar structure is pictured below. Eric Avila in his essay, All Freeways Lead to East Los Angeles, asserts that after the construction of the freeway system “East Los Angeles had become a Chicano city within a city—an asphalt-and-concrete labyrinth marked with murals, graffiti, chain-like fence, and cactus.” Avila highlights, that “East Los Angeles got seven freeways and Beverly Hills got none.” In his eyes, the creation of East Los Angeles as an isolated entity from greater L.A. hinted at the lack of institutional support that the community could access. The construction of the freeways, supports the claim of governmental alienation suffered by both Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles. Both communities were seen as disposable. Before the construction of the freeways many residents took to the streets to protest the creation of the freeways. Despite their efforts, the new set of freeways were built, and their community torn apart.

WHOSE STREETS, OUR STREETS: EAST L.A. AND BOYLE HEIGHTS, 1960-1979

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30 Lewthwaite, 136.


33 Avila, 41.

34 Avila, 41.
The 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of a new generation of youth activists, unifying under a shared Chicanx identity. The two social mobilizations that shaped the community the most were, the student Walkouts of 1968 in protest of the underfunding of East L.A.’s schools and the Chicano Moratorium of 1970, which drew thirty thousand anti-war demonstrators and ended with the tragic killing of beloved Los Angeles Times and KMEX-TV journalist Ruben Salazar.\(^{35}\) Construction of the East Los Angeles freeways continued into the sixties, which would eventually connect six freeways.\(^{36}\) Thousands of people continued to take to the streets to demand a halt to the interchange construction. Despite community resistance, the freeways were built and the community was fractured. Considering the blunt disenfranchisement, community members took it upon themselves to resist using new forms of artistic media—zines, murals, prints, music, community newspapers, etc.—that embodied their dual realities as Mexican Americans.

East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights residents grew tired of community marginalization and thus these years were marked by community mobilizations in the streets of the barrio. This community attitude arose from the political awakening amongst Chicanx youth through leadership camps, such as the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference.\(^{37}\) The Chicanx identity emerged from the constant socio-political disenfranchisement that Mexican Americans experienced in their everyday lives. From the lack of resources in their schools, to unjust-immigration policy enforcement, housing discrimination and racial prejudice. Chicanxs were seen as the outsiders and ultimately targeted as misfits. The Chicano Movement during the 60s


\(^{36}\) Eric Avila, “All Freeways Lead to East Los Angeles.” 41.

\(^{37}\) John Ortiz, oral narrative with primary investigator. December 2016.
and 70s, elevated the moral of many Mexican-Americans and both validated their experience in the United States and gave them a sense of ownership over their communities. Through community mobilizations and brown unity, Mexican Americans became empowered to voice their frustrations and fight for fair and equitable resources. The urban and cultural changes that transformed East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights into barrios, ring true to Arlene Davila’s warning that “el Barrio is never the sole product of processes of cultural objectification, but the material inequalities and historical exclusions in housing policies, jobs, and services that have long shaped ethnic and working-class enclaves throughout U.S. cities.”

The 1970 Chicano Moratorium, serves as an example of the objectification that the community faced. It was an anti-war action to raise awareness about the violence and consequences of war. The action was organized by the Chicano Moratorium Organizing Committee; an organization that borrowed their philosophy from the Black Panther Movement. After months of organizing nonviolent actions, older members of the community, called for a halt on the actions because “they were accomplishing little” and most of them have been “followed by violence.” The older generation felt that it was counterproductive to raise awareness about the issues that the community faced like “poor community-law enforcement relations” by having actions that further increase that divide and jeopardized lives in the community. Community mobilizations like the Chicano Moratorium, created a foundation for

38 Arlene Davila quoted in Stephanie Lewthwaite, Race, Place, and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles: A Transnational Perspective, 1890-1940 (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009), 184.

39 Rosalio Urias Muños, oral narrative with primary investigator, December 2016.

40 “Warn Chicano Community on Violence,” Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File), 1971, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

41 “Warn Chicano Community on Violence,” Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File), 1971, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
Mexican American solidarity and empowered the community. The Chicano Moratorium, the East Side Walkouts, and the construction of the East Los Angeles Interchange brought the community together and into the streets. Despite, community organizing during the Chicano Movement, the communities of the East Side, still face many of the same issues today. This lack of tangible policy change reveals how Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans living in East L.A. and Boyle Heights continue to be dismissed by governmental authority. Nonetheless, the Chicano Movement planted seeds of resistance among youth. Chicano stories of struggle and survival continue to inspire many East L.A. and Boyle Heights youth.


In 1986, Congress passed and the president signed into law the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), the result was the first major revision of America’s immigration laws in decades. The law wanted to preserve jobs for those who were legally entitled to them—American citizens and immigrants who were authorized to work in the United States. IRCA prohibited employers from knowingly hiring, recruiting, or referring for a fee any immigrant who was unauthorized to work. This policy reflects the nations’ concern for unauthorized immigration given that the policy calls for greater control and stronger enforcement mechanisms by the federal government. As a result of this law, all employers were required to verify the identity and employment eligibility of their workers and make them complete the INS Form 1-9. Despite its announced intention of restricting immigration, IRCA had the opposite effect, it lowered wages, and working conditions. Unauthorized immigrants suffered as a consequence

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of IRCA, however, many others were able to find a pathway to citizenship as a result of IRCA’s 
amnesty program.

At a state level, California was leaning towards a less forgiving bill for unauthorized 
immigrants. In 1994, Governor Pete Wilson led a campaign to pass Proposition 187, a voter 
initiative to deny millions of Latino children access to a public education and medical care. At a state level, California was leaning towards a less forgiving bill for unauthorized immigrants. In 1994, Governor Pete Wilson led a campaign to pass Proposition 187, a voter initiative to deny millions of Latino children access to a public education and medical care. At a state level, California was leaning towards a less forgiving bill for unauthorized immigrants. In 1994, Governor Pete Wilson led a campaign to pass Proposition 187, a voter initiative to deny millions of Latino children access to a public education and medical care. At a state level, California was leaning towards a less forgiving bill for unauthorized immigrants. In 1994, Governor Pete Wilson led a campaign to pass Proposition 187, a voter initiative to deny millions of Latino children access to a public education and medical care. At a state level, California was leaning towards a less forgiving bill for unauthorized immigrants. In 1994, Governor Pete Wilson led a campaign to pass Proposition 187, a voter initiative to deny millions of Latino children access to a public education and medical care. At a state level, California was leaning towards a less forgiving bill for unauthorized immigrants. In 1994, Governor Pete Wilson led a campaign to pass Proposition 187, a voter initiative to deny millions of Latino children access to a public education and medical care. At a state level, California was leaning towards a less forgiving bill for unauthorized immigrants. In 1994, Governor Pete Wilson led a campaign to pass Proposition 187, a voter initiative to deny millions of Latino children access to a public education and medical care. At a state level, California was leaning towards a less forgiving bill for unauthorized immigrants. In 1994, Governor Pete Wilson led a campaign to pass Proposition 187, a voter initiative to deny millions of Latino children access to a public education and medical care. At a state level, California was leaning towards a less forgiving bill for unauthorized immigrants. In 1994, Governor Pete Wilson led a campaign to pass Proposition 187, a voter initiative to deny millions of Latino children access to a public education and medical care. At a state level, California was leaning towards a less forgiving bill for unauthorized immigrants. In 1994, Governor Pete Wilson led a campaign to pass Proposition 187, a voter initiative to deny millions of Latino children access to a public education and medical care.

Residents of Boyle Heights and East L.A. reacted to this anti-immigrant bill by taking to the 
streets once again and mobilizing. March organizers said more than 100,000 participated, but 
police estimated that 60,000 to 70,000 took part, read the front page of the Los Angeles Times. According to the local newspaper, it was the largest protest gathering here in decades, surpassing 
Vietnam War-era demonstrations including the historic 1970 Eastside march for Chicano rights 
that turned violent and left three dead. The march took place on October 17, it was “one of the 
largest mass protests in the city's history,” demonstrators marched from the Eastside to 
Downtown Los Angeles. The Center for American Progress, expressed that proponents of the 
"Save Our State" petition, or Prop 187, blamed [unauthorized] immigrants for the poor economy 
and crime, for draining state and federal tax dollars and services, and for committing injustices

45 Ruth Milkman, L.A. Story: Immigrant Workers and the Future of the U.S. Labor Movement, (New York: 

46 Martin Schies and Mark M. Dodge, City of Promise: Race and Historical Change in Los Angeles 
(California: Regina Books, 2006), 177.

47 “L.A. March Against Prop. 187 drew about 70,000 protesters to condemn Wilson for backing initiative 
that they said promoted racism and scapegoating,” Los Angeles Time, Oct 17, 1994, accessed on April 12, 2017, 

48 “L.A. March Against Prop. 187 drew about 70,000 protesters to condemn Wilson for backing initiative 
that they said promoted racism and scapegoating,” Los Angeles Time, Oct 17, 1994, accessed on April 12, 2017, 

49 “L.A. March Against Prop. 187 drew about 70,000 protesters to condemn Wilson for backing initiative 
that they said promoted racism and scapegoating,” Los Angeles Time, Oct 17, 1994, accessed on April 12, 2017, 
against citizens.\textsuperscript{50} Many Latinxs voted for the Republican Party prior to Prop 187, especially after IRCA passed under a Republican President. However, as the chart below illustrates many Latinx voters began voting democrat.\textsuperscript{51} The power of the Latinx voters was heard and as California entered the new century, the state became immigrant friendly.

The capacity to mobilize large numbers of Latinxs was crucial for the actions or “Mega Marchas” that swept Los Angeles in 2006. Those actions were direct response of HR4437—a bill that passed the U.S. House of Representatives on December 16, 2005.\textsuperscript{52} The bill introduced the construction of a 700-mile fence along the Mexico-USA border; and significant penalties for employers of undocumented workers and criminalization of undocumented immigration and of aid to undocumented immigrants.\textsuperscript{53} This included service-providing community organizations, such as churches and immigrant groups.\textsuperscript{54} The passing of this bill created an uproar among immigrant rights activist and immigrant communities. Major mobilizations took place in major states across the United States; the Los Angeles immigrant marches however, were among the largest marches in US history; the first march on 25 March drew 500,000 participants and the march on May 1\textsuperscript{st} drew 650,000 participants.\textsuperscript{55}


\textsuperscript{53} Cassandra Engeman, Social Movement Unionism in Practice: Organizational Dimensions of Union Mobilization in the Los Angeles Immigrant Rights Marches, 445.

\textsuperscript{54} Cassandra Engeman, 445.

\textsuperscript{55} Cassandra Engeman, 445.
Once again the people took to the streets to fight against discriminatory policies, this time their numbers were larger and their presence resonated throughout the country. This era was marked by unafraid and unapologetic.\textsuperscript{56} youth of the barrios who were unafraid to achieve their DREAM by any means necessary. Undocumented activists took the stage and began to advocate for a state and federal DREAM Act.\textsuperscript{57} The California DREAM Act passed in 2011, it allows students who qualify for the 2001 AB540, to apply for state funded financial aid.\textsuperscript{58} It is unlikely that a federal DREAM Act or Comprehensive Immigration Reform will pass under the current administration, but the people of Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles will continue to unapologetically fight for the benefit of their community.

In addition, community activists from Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles, have continued the fight for educational and housing equity. Vincent Brook asserts that past struggles [for equity] continue to inspire generations of ‘LAtinos’ to assert their own sense of place and their own landscapes of citizenship and belonging.\textsuperscript{59} For instance, after sixty years of community activism for better founding of the East Side high schools; Esteban E. Torres High

\textsuperscript{56} Phrase from the Undocumented Movement “Undocumented, Unafraid, Unapologetic”

\textsuperscript{57} The DREAM Act would permit students to get LPR if they: (a) entered the United States before the age of sixteen and are under thirty-five on the date the bill is enacted, (b) have been continuously present in the country for at least five years, (c) have obtained high school degree and lastly demonstrate a good moral character.\textsuperscript{57} The Migration Policy Institute—a nonpartisan organization that analyzes international migration policies; in 2010, published DREAM vs. reality: An Analysis of Potential DREAM Act Beneficiaries. They estimated that 2.1 million undocumented children and young people would qualify for legalization through the DREAM Act. Despite large effort from members of Congress, families, students and communities; the DREAM Act has failed to pass on multiple occasions, as argued in The American DREAM, failure to pass such provisions wastes the investment that the American educational system has made through the years.\textsuperscript{[a]}


\textsuperscript{59} Vincent Brook, Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 234. Note Brook uses the term “LAtinos” to refer to Latnxs from Los Angeles.
School opened to alleviate the overcrowding of students in Garfield and Roosevelt. In addition, the presence of the Chicano Movement is still felt in the streets of the barrio; many of the institutions founded during the 70s are still present, like the Brown Berets and United Students. In the sixties, they lost the battle against the freeways, but a new generation of activist has taken to the streets under the slogan “Gente SI Gentrify NO” to demand a stop to gentrification in Boyle Heights.

Organized under Boyle Heights Alianza Anti Artwashing and Desplazamiento (BHAAD) their main mission is to stop art galleries from moving into the community. Their online platform reads, “if people trace the steps of the gentrification process — the conversion of a neighborhood of working class communities into one designed for and populated by wealthier classes, they will find a distinct pattern: development and real estate speculators have their eyes trained on the arrival of artists as the moment to start accumulating property.” In other words, as art galleries enter Boyle Heights, rent prices go up and residents are pushed out by the incoming wave of mostly white middle class folks. As articulated in this paper, Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles, are testament of the resiliency of Mexican migrants and Mexican-American residents, who faced constant oppression by outside forces that pushed for urban development displacing and ignoring community members. Today, community members who have lived there for years are being displaced:

“They need to see what they’re displacing. We here, we’ve worked really hard to create this community. We’ve done marches, masses, protests, meetings after meetings after meetings with our neighborhood, with the city council, with the police. There are families who have lost their

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children. We’ve fought to create the community as it is now today. We’ve given the best years of our life to this fight. And this is what it’s cost us.”
– Boyle Heights Resident for 30+ years

Residents of both communities worked hard to build solidarity through mobilization to create a sense of barrio pride—they did so with what was left of their freeway divided community and it is being taken away through gentrification. One thing is clear, as gentrification sweeps through the East Side, mobilizations against ‘gentrifiers’ will unapologetically continue. The fight against gentrification will eventually become another chapter in the plight for equity and access in East L.A. and Boyle Heights.

CONCLUSION

Judith Baca, a muralist who has dedicated her career to empower the streets of Los Angeles with her murals, painted a mural in an East L.A. freeway that depicted a Chicano family divided into two halves with the freeway writhing between them entitled Division of Barrios (Appendix C1). Eric Avila suggests that “this creative work is more than the expression of class struggle; it is also the vital means by which people strive to write the wrongs of malicious or misguided policy decisions, or by which they simply make themselves at home in L.A.’s expressway world.” Through the years, the freeways have become an extension of the community as artist-activists, like Baca, have taken up the mission of reclaiming the freeways through muralism. Avila adds that, “[those] expressions of spatial struggle in contemporary Los Angeles are the residue from conflict born sixty years ago.” Boyle Heights and East L.A. have endured many changes throughout the years, but one thing remained constant in every fight, in

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63 Avila, 44.
64 Avila, 46.
65 Avila, 46.
every interchange, and in every struggle—the resiliency of the barrio and the “ganas” to fight for justice.

This section set the historical foundation necessary to understand the continued struggle that both communities have faced. The influx of Mexican migrants during the first half of the twentieth century united both communities under a same culture. The disenfranchisement of Mexican-Americans/Chicanxs and Mexican undocumented/documented immigrants led to the fight for Chicanx Civil Rights and fuels current waves of community activism. Positive ripple effects are still present in the community as it continues to both fight for equity, and nurture a strong sense of community pride. The following sections will explore how Boyle Heights’ and East L.A.’s shared Mexican roots and collective struggles developed a shared identity. They will delve deeper into the role that creative resistance played and continues to play in the streets of the barrio. Furthermore, the following sections will examine how creative resistance is used as a tool to uplift both communities, reclaim their freeway divided streets, and fight against the injustices suffered by residents of East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights.

**ARTE DE CORAZÓN**

**RASQUACHISMO: THE CHICANX AESTHETIC**

Walking down Whittier Boulevard on a Sunday morning in East L.A. is like traveling back in time. Local business owners’ open shop, some stores have been in the community since the sixties, which is evident by their old storefronts and vintage furniture. There is a very particular aesthetic unique to barrios; the presence of murals, street vendors, Spanish phrases bouncing of cars, and loud music are just some examples of what is found in Latinx communities. Dorie Goldman in her article, *Down for La Raza*, describes that a drive through a Mexican American community may reveal a 1960 Chevrolet low rider . . . elaborate altars
containing saints, plastic flowers, and candles; a mural depicting pre-Columbian deities, the Mexican flag and farm worker activist. In the 1960-1970s, Chicanxs developed an identity that negotiated their Mexican roots and American realities, which is still present in East Los Angeles and is expressed through outlets of creative resistance.

Today, almost 50 years later, all those elements are still present in the streets of the Eastside barrios visited for this thesis. It is as if time stops in barrios; people come and go but the culture and the barrio aesthetic remains. Goldman, points out that those elements may seem unrelated “yet they all depend on a Mexican aesthetic of montage and excess known as rasquachismo.” Rasquache is a negative term used as a derogatory insult to refer to someone from a lower class with poor education. Colin Gunckel’s article The Chicana/o Photographic: Art as Social Practice in the Chicano Movement, delves into the popularization of the term during the Chicano Movement. Per Gunckel, the Chicano Movement reclaimed it to refer to their barrio aesthetic. This first section will focus on deconstructing the rasquache aesthetic in the. The later sections of this chapter will explore how Chicanx identity relied on rasquache aesthetic to produce politically charged art and will provide examples of such manifestations of creative resistance in East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights.

There are two main things to point out about rasquache aesthetic: first, it is informed by Chicanx self-identity; and second, it is expressed through creative outlets that draw from barrio culture. Juan Gómez-Quiñones and Irene Vázquez write about the creation of Chicanx identity through popular barrio culture, as something that was “unequivocally non-white mestizo, brown or indigenous identity and highlighted ethno-racial unity, cultural self-validation, Chicanx

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67 Goldman, 123.
nationalism and self-determination.” Chicanxs created rasquache art to call attention to issues that impacted their communities and to urge the community to mobilize. With this in mind, I propose that barrio culture led to the formation of Chicanx aesthetic or rasquachismo, and in turn Chicanx art provided an outlet for identity self-expression that manifested itself in forms of creative resistance.

Rasquache, closely translates into scruffy, but there is no word that truly embodies the full meaning that rasquache has acquired within Chicanx culture. Scholar Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, in his essay, Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility, grapples with the many forms that the word takes. Ybarra-Frausto, states that rasquachismo is neither an idea nor a style, but more of an attitude or a taste. Rasquachismo is the action of utilizing one’s resources to their full extent; it’s the action of being able to manipulate one’s environment and transform it by using elements already present in that space. It is the attitude of rethinking how objects operate and repurposing to suit new needs. Rasquachismo, elevates an ordinary object to make it into something that is extraordinary. This metamorphosis of ordinary objects can only occur within barrios because the context in which the objects are created gives them power and attitude. However, this taste and attitude exist only within barrio culture and sensibility, they are dependent on each other. Outside barrio context in both Mexico and the United States, rasquachismo suggests vulgarity and bad taste, a sense of being cursi (tacky). Ybarra-Frausto, adds that this condition emanates from those in control, who proclaim and enforce their own aesthetic norms as standard and universal.

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70 Ybarra-Frausto, 156.
In the barrio, rasquachismo breaks these norms and crushes hierarchical powers; “propriety and keeping up with appearances—el qué dirán—are the codes shattered by the attitude of rasquachismo.” Anyone can create art out of whatever materials they have at hand that reflects and informs the lived realities of people in the barrio.

In *Chicano, Chicana Art: ProtestArte*, Carlos Francisco Jackson states that to “be rasquache,” or to practice rasquachismo, is to be unpretentious and resourceful, to use what is accessible for artistic creation. In addition, rasquachismo is a capacity that can only be tapped by those in working-class barrios because it is a “method of approaching the world that does not allow a lack of resources to stop a person’s creative development or contribution.” As such, rasquachismo, speaks to those in working-class barrios, because it is the action to take advantage of the resources present in the lived environment to effect barrio change. Raúl, an East Los based muralist, shared in his interview, that he empowered the walls of the barrio with his art to make the community envision the possible future. His murals do not create immediate change but they impact those living within the barrio, thus they can imagine a better future for their neighborhood. Jackson adds that rasquachismo is rooted in Chicano structures of thinking, feeling, and aesthetic choice. This speaks to the sentiment that Raúl puts into his murals, he transforms the physical environment of the barrio and transforms people’s way of thinking about their neighborhoods. He does so by evoking what is available to him—his immediate

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71 Ybarra-Frausto, 156.

72 Ybarra-Frausto, 156.


community. Calling upon the rasquache tradition to obtain ideas and materials, Raúl reclaims the streets of the barrio by creating murals on the streets of Boyle Heights and East L.A. giving them their unique barrio aesthetic (Appendix D).

Ybarra-Fausto, argues that rasquachismo is an underdog perspective—a view from los de abajo, an attitude rooted in resourcefulness and adaptability, yet mindful of stance and style. This rings true to the communities of East L.A. and Boyle Heights, they are resourceful people with entire networks ready to spring to action when needed. They have what Ybarra-Fausto refers to a “rasquache attitude of survival and inventiveness.” They do with what they have, however, rasquachismo is not meant to romanticize people and art in the barrio, to the contrary it is a stance, the community—regardless of the historical disenfranchisement—still retains authenticity and character. Life in the barrio is not easy, as Brenzy shared with me, “if people only knew how hard it has been to remain here and the resistance that we have put to have this space, to have a place where we can be rich in culture.” This resilient attitude in the face of adversity is a manifestation of rasquache attitude, people use movidas as “coping strategies to gain time, to make options, to retain hope. Resilience and resourcefulness spring from making do with what is at hand. In the streets of the barrio, we are rich in culture and in stories; so we draw form those narratives to create something new—something that speaks to the community and unites us. All our poderosas narratives come together in the rasquache tradition within the

76 Ybarra-Frausto, 156.
77 Ybarra-Frausto, 156.
78 Clara Mejía Orta, Trancending Fronteras: Art, Activism, and Immigrant Narratives, 2016.
79 Ybarra-Frausto, 156.
80 Ybarra-Frausto, 156.
“world of the tattered, shattered, and broken: *lo remendado* (stitched together)” to create resilient art.  

**CHICANX BARRIO ART**

In the realm of art history, art can stand in by itself and does not need a higher meaning or purpose, art is allowed to exist as just art. Chicanx art does not have that privilege; it cannot exist for “art’s sake” because of the context that it is produced in. *Rasquachismo* then, “forces us to rethink the concept of art all together and puts the viewer in an uncomfortable position in trying to make sense of it, rasquache art collapses the boundaries between art and life by rejecting ‘art for art’s sake.’”  

Chicanx art by default has a calling or goal; it must resist mainstream culture, be used as a tool to link the past and the present, and in turn create memory of the many struggles that the Chicanx community has endured over the years. By focusing on those goals, Chicanx artists succeeded in opening a space between social functional aesthetics. Chicanx art became functional because it had to be a tool of memory, resistance, and community celebration/healing. Art in the barrio has the power of becoming a unifying force and a weapon against the criminalization of the community.

In his chapter on Chicano Posters, George Lipsitz, argues that Chicanx art, unlike art created primarily for the approval of critics or for display in galleries and museums, functioned as crucial components of a Chicanx public spheres created by community–based artists and activist. Chicanx artist employed rasquache aesthetic by using the tools available to them and

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81 Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, 156.  
by creating new spaces to display their art. Lipsitz expands his argument by pointing that Chicanx activist artists created forms of agitation and education through creative use of silkscreen and photo-offset images, at a time when their enemies controlled almost all the major mechanisms of public sphere—radio and television stations, newspapers, advertising agencies, schools, museums, conservatories, and art galleries. Meaning that Chicanxs took it upon themselves to not only create the art but also the medium for its display and dispersal. To further this point, in 1971, *La Raza*, a community based publication, ran an article written by Edward E. Garcia titled “Chicano Art” in it, he asserted that Chicano art had “no place in today’s art world.” Garcia argued that Chicanxs had to “divorce ourselves completely from Anglo-European patters and establish our own. The Chicano artist must stop pleasing the Anglo audience and concentrate on developing his own style. The art we develop must be unique as our people.” It would follow that, Chicanx art must not please main stream American culture but remain true to its barrio roots and audience.

In addition, Chicanx artist were reacting to the failure of major art institutions to incorporate Chicanx culture or art into their collections or exhibitions. If the art world could not make room for Chicanxs then Chicanxs would make their own art world—and they did. This mentality is still present today; East Los Angeles and Boyle heights both have community based

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86 La Raza, Vol 1, No.6, (Courtesy of the East Los Angeles Public Library, no date available).

87 La Raza, Vol 1, No.6, (Courtesy of the East Los Angeles Public Library, no date available).

galleries and pop-up monthly art-walks.\textsuperscript{89} It fell upon Chicanxs to create their own art spaces in the community. Chicanx art is deeply tied to the community, Gunckel describes this key tendency within early Chicanx art that worked most persistently to “rethink the practice and function of art as social or community-based practice, it would.”\textsuperscript{90} The Chicano Movement took art and transformed it into something resourceful that had a purpose and captured the essence/sentiments of the movement. Chicanx art takes on this “do it yourself” rasquache aesthetic, that draws from, elements present in the community—art does not have to look pristine or have a sense of high art. The only requirement is that it falls within the rasquache tradition to make a statement about living conditions in the barrio (Appendix D).

**ARTE DE CORAZÓN**

“I needed to understand that our stories are poetry and that they are relevant and that they are beautiful and that they are healing. So, you need to share them, you know, because someone else out there relates and that is how we become one and again that is how we are art… our existence is art in some sense. And not like your typical art that you see at a fancy gallery but \textit{arte de corazón}, you know from the struggle…” —Brenzy\textsuperscript{91}

Art is understood by the heart and changes the mind. This type of art that, a) radically \textit{change} a physical environment or a community space; b) drastically transform the \textit{perception} of an individual or group; and c) promote collective and individual \textit{healing}, is the main focus of this thesis—creative resistance. Artist use creative resistance to plant seeds of liberation through the streets of L.A. barrios. Creative resistance is used as a coping mechanism that lifts the spirit of the community. Outlets of creative resistance function as cultural, artistic expressions of ethnic

\textsuperscript{89} Clara Mejía Orta, Field Notes, Summer 2016.


\textsuperscript{91} Clara Mejía Orta, \textit{Trancending Fronteras: Art, Activism, and Immigrant Narratives}, 2016.
identity and as expressions of resistance against the dominant Euro-American culture.” 

Barrios created by common Mexican roots function as cultural spaces where artistic expressions of ethnic identity can proliferate. In turn, those elements are used to resist the dominant Euro-American culture and help the community navigate between their Mexican roots and American reality. George Lipsitz, adds that movements, such as the Chicano Movement, have to create spaces for social change—figuratively by using memory and imagination to expand the realities and possibilities of the present, but also literally by creating physical places, institutions, and events where the hoped-for future makes itself felt in the present. 

East L.A. muralist, Raúl shared echoed Lipsitz sentiments; in an interview conducted summer of 2016, Raúl said that his murals envisioned a prosper future for the community. For Raúl the duties of murals went beyond reclaiming community space or recalling shared Mexican roots, sure those elements were important, but leaving a message of hope for the community was pivotal.

Creative resistance is arte de corazón or “art from the struggle” as Brenzy beautifully described it. Creative resistance is capable of transforming more than a physical landscape, as seen in this chapter, this type of art is able to reaffirm the Chicanx identity and existence of Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants’ a like. Creative resistance in practice creates a bond between the artist and audience which allows them to heal as a collective through sharing their stories. The following chapters, will give examples of creative resistance in action, by juxtaposing current waves of activism with mobilizations during the Chicano Movement. As


95 Clara Mejía Orta, Trancending Fronteras: Art, Activism, and Immigrant Narratives, 2016.
outlined in this chapter creative resistance is art that challenges mainstream perceptions of a group of people or individual, changes physical built urban landscapes, and promotes community healing. Creative resistance in East Los Angeles flourished from community struggle, this type of art is a vital feature of barrio life in East Los Angeles. Creative resistance is created out of love for the community, for its history, and for the mixture of Mexican and American identities in the United States.

FROM BROWN AND PROUD TO (UN)DOCUMENTED AND UNAFRAID
RADICAL YOUTH IN EAST LOS ANGELES

East Los Angeles has been marked by long history of student activism. The most iconic form of student activism are school walkouts. Even today, eastside high schools continue to use the legacy of the walkout or blowout to call attention to injustices within their schools. This rooted sense of pride in activism, is felt walking through the hallways of Garfield High School and Roosevelt High School. Walls of empowerment make up the colorful landscape of the school, Chicanx history and struggle adorns the hallways. Youth react to this imagery not only because they are impossible to avoid, but because they carry a message of strength. For instance, when entering Roosevelt High School, youth are welcomed by a mural honoring the 1968 East Los Angeles Blowouts (Appendix E). The mural is an outlet of creative resistance; it is plastered with signs that read: “Mi Vida Mi Futuro,” “Si Se Puede!” “A beautiful Day to be a Chicano!” “Chicano Power,” and “La Raza Unida;” behind the protest posters the Los Angeles skyline is visible under the silhouettes of students marching—taking over the streets they call home. The mural is accompanied by a rendition of Rodolfo Corky Gonzales’ poem “I am Juaquin” the rendition reads:

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96 Poster translations: “My Life, Future,” “Yes, We Can,” “La Raza United”
“I A AM YOU!”
I am the masses of my people
I refuse to be absorbed
The odds are great
My spirit is strong
My faith unbreakable
My blood is pure
I shall endure!
I will endure!
I AM YOU…97

The purpose of the mural is to empower the students who walk through those doors every morning. It validates their experience while honoring the deep internal and external struggles that they face. The mural and poem are a message of hope for the students that reminds them that *despite all odds they will endure.*

Barrio youth awaken their political awareness and sense of justice from the sum of lived experiences in East Los Angeles. Barrio life and culture are essential to direct youth to critically approach the community they live in. Imagery and lived experiences are accompanied by student led and community facilitated organizations, in which Mexican, Mexican American, Chicanx youth become politicize. Organizations like Inner City Struggle, whose mission is to work with youth, families, and community residents to promote safe and non-violent in the Eastside.98 In the spirit of the 1968 student movement, Inner City Struggle runs United Students a group dedicated to organizing community youth. Their goal is to “build student power and develop young leaders with the aim of transforming the quality of public education in the Eastside.”99

Through groups like United Students, youth becomes aware of the erasure of the Mexican American experience in the United States. In those spaces, youth’s narratives are placed front ____________________________

97 For the full version of the original poem by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales “I Am Juaquin” please refer to Appendix E.


and center, they become empowered by the victories of youth that came before them, and end up cultivating a deep sense of pride for the community.

To reclaim those roots and to express discontent with conditions in the neighborhood, community youth utilizes forms of creative resistance. This section will argue that creative resistance is used to empower youth and allow them to embrace and accept their Mexican/American/Chicanx identity; and in turn radicalized youth use employ outlets of creative resistance to reaffirm their existence and fight for equity. Using the 1968 East Los Angeles Blowouts and the current plight for equity for undocumented youth, as reference points this chapter will explore the role that creative resistance plays in radicalizing youth and calling them to action. The chapter will bridge the stories of undocumented youth, who chant Undocumented and Unafraid with those who became politicized through the East Los Angeles Blowouts chanting Brown and Proud.

WALLS THAT EMPOWER: YOUTH CHICANX IDENTITY FORMATION

Youth come to age in the streets of East Los, their experiences are directly tied to their sense of duty and pride. Youth’s political consciousness is tied to the build environment that they are exposed to while growing up. Therefore, the built environment in which youth come to age is important, surrounding students with murals that depict their shared roots and history is essential for their socio-political development. As such, high schools become the headquarters for identity formation and political awareness. Marcos Pizarro in his book Chicana and Chicanos in School: Racial Profiling, Identity Battles, and Empowerment, explores the internal and external factors that Chicanx youth, from East Los Angeles, undergo during their academic formation.\textsuperscript{100} His

\textsuperscript{100} In Chicana and Chicanos in School: Racial Profiling, Identity Battles, and Empowerment, Marco Pizarro defines Chicana/o as young people of Mexican descent who revealed that they are political subjects in their schools and communities.
book opens by reacting to the school’s aesthetic, “the walls of the school are covered with murals, many of which are student creations and most of which have indigenous and Chicana/o themes.” Pizarro’s studies East Los Angeles’ schools thirty years after the East Los Angeles Blowouts. One of the themes that becomes evident in his research, that still rings true today, is that “students demonstrated that their identities were largely shaped by the unique contexts in which they lived.” In his quest to define youth’s identity formation in school, Pizarro claims that the two main factors that shape the Chicanx student population are political and culture:

“Not all students have both, however. Furthermore, as students describe themselves and their identities, they reveal that, in their eyes, their ethnic-cultural identity is that part of their experience as Chicanxs that is local and embedded in the lives of all Chicanxs, and so it is an assumed facet of identity. Therefore, it is the racial-political identity that is the most dominant in the self-perceptions of Chicanxs. Their sense of social self evolves from experiences with, and observations of, discrimination in their communities and schools. It is also reinforced through the life experiences of their families and their own experiences with racial confrontation.”

As such, the culture and lifestyle that exists within East Los Angeles affects youth in a personal level. Youth cannot control external factors that impact their community, however, they are able to process those experiences internally and develop a racial-political identity.

Additionally, Pizarro points that “for many Chicanx students, not only is identity a pivotal issue to their school experience, but it is also bound to their motivations in school.”

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102 Pizarro, 43.

103 Pizarro, 51.

104 Pizarro, 62.
Constantly being reminded of the success and strength of students that came before them gives students *ganas*, to stride for a better future.\(^{105}\) However, this positive reinforcement environment is not always cultivated in Eastside high schools. It is not only about the built environment that the students find themselves but also with who they interact on their day to day. If teachers are not invested in the future of the youth, or if teachers mistreat the students, then students become at risk. For example, in his book *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice*, Haney López points out that in 1968, the year of the walkouts, “three percent of the teachers and 1.3 percent of the administrators at the East L.A. schools bore Spanish surnames.”\(^{106}\) The lack of teachers that can relate to their students on a racial basis was still present thirty years after the walkouts when Pizarro was conducting his field research, as he sets forth that “racial political climate in each community shaped and the way teachers understood and interacted with Chicanx students and how the students understood themselves and their schooling.”\(^{107}\) If students are not receiving positive reinforcement form educational authorities and are mistreated, they become less likely to excel in school. Similarly, in the 1960s, bigoted views of the Mexican students distorted how teachers and administrators conceived of their roles as educators.\(^{108}\) This absence of institutional support and affirmation of their complex identities, caused community youth in 1968 to employ outlets of creative resistance to manifest their identity and make sense of their targeted realities.

EDUCATION, NOT ERADICATION: THE EASTSIDE CHICANX BLOWOUTS

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\(^{105}\) “Ganas” roughly translates into *to win*. However, the term connotes more than *to win*; it is the sentiment of happiness when an individual obtains when finishing a hard-impossible task. It is the energy that overtakes an individual to finish a task. It is the state of mind that engulfs an individual with the desire to stride for a (un)reachable goal. It gives an individual a deep sense of urgency and desire to move forward in a positive direction. “With ganas” is a phrase that invites an individual to give a task their undivided attention and whole heart.

\(^{106}\) López, 17.

\(^{107}\) Pizarro, 250.

\(^{108}\) López, 17.
In 1966, tired from conditions in schools and their community high school students formed a group called Young Citizens for Community Actions.\textsuperscript{109} The community began mobilizing and newspaper outlets like \textit{La Raza}, began to take an active role in organizing and calling students and parents into action. \textit{La Raza}’s 1967 message for the community and authorities was clear, “It is apparent that our voices are not being heard. . . so to hell with it. Merry Christmas brother, 1968 will be different. Next year our voices will be heard one way or another.”\textsuperscript{110} Indeed, 1968 marked the year of the East Los Angeles Blowouts, a tipping point in Chicanx led activism that continues to inspire new generations of youth across the nation. In 1968, the residents of East Los Angeles, then and now the heart of the largest Mexican community in the United States, took to the streets to fight for better schools and to protest police brutality in their community.\textsuperscript{111}

Social and political awareness enabled youth to mobilize for change. In 1968, during a single week in March, “ten thousand East Los Angeles students shared into the streets to protest abysmal conditions in the local high school.”\textsuperscript{112} Local community newspapers, like \textit{The Eastside Journal} and \textit{The Belvedere Citizen}, reports on the walkouts included the list of demands from the students. Other media outlets like \textit{The Los Angeles Times}, blamed “brown power” increase militancy for the walkouts. For the outside observer, the walkouts, seemed out of place and revealed and further criminalized the barrios of Los Angeles. However, the student walkouts, known as the East Los Angeles Blowouts, “drew the largest Mexican community in the United

\textsuperscript{109} Løpez, 18.


\textsuperscript{112} Løpez, 1.
States onto the turbulent field of popular protest.”

Inspired by the radicals during the Civil Rights Movement, “militant Mexicans increasingly thought that social change depended on confronting the institutions that they considered directly responsible for inequitable community conditions. Chicano Power! Echoed through the streets of East L.A. that week, the walkouts gave youth a sense of belonging; the walkouts, signs, chants, music, and print media utilized to mobilize the youth are examples of creative resistance.

As pointed out by Pizarro, teachers and/or mentors, really make the difference in a student’s experience. In 1968, the student movement found a strong ally in Sal Castro, a civics teacher from Lincoln High School. The students formulated thirty-six demands (Appendix E), including reduced class size, expanded library facilities, and an end to the requirement that students contribute to janitorial services. On March 1, 1968, when the principal form Wilson High School canceled the senior class play, students at Wilson staged an unplanned walkout. The walkouts escalated and a few days later 2,000 students from Garfield high School stormed out “yelling at the top of their lungs, “Education, not Eradication,” “Walk Out Today, Or Drop Out Tomorrow,” “We are not ‘Dirty Mexicans,” “Teachers, Si, Bigots, No,” and as both proclamation and demand, they also shouted “Chicano Power.” Students from the five Eastside high schools continued to walkout for a week. Sal Castro recalls the emotionally charged protest “wave upon wave, they came . . . I was out there in the rain, my face wet. The kids didn’t know it, but I was crying. This transformative moment, during the East Los

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113 López, 1.
114 López, 18.
115 López, 40.
116 López, 21.
117 López, 22.
Angeles Chicano Movement, not only empowered students who took a stance, but also continues to empower new generations of students who know they can make a difference.

Almost fifty years have passed since the East L.A. Blowouts, the legacy of the young Chicanxs who mobilized has been embedded in the history of the barrio. Additionally, many of the Chicano Movement veterans are still active in the community, they are records of living history willing to share their experiences with those who ask. I had the privilege to sit down with John Ortiz, a student who helped organize the walkouts in Garfield High School (Appendix E). His perspective, along with Sal Castro’s emotional reflection, gave me a deeper understanding about the emotional impact that the walkouts had in people’s lives on a personal level. John Ortiz, walked me through familiar streets of our community, we drove down Whittier Boulevard and by Garfield High School, I saw those streets in a new light. Things that never stood up before, acquired a stronger significance after learning that those spaces were used for the walkouts. The conversation came organically, we exchanged narratives—I shared my story as an undocumented student, he shared his as a Chicano student activist—both products of the streets we were cruising. But, what does an undocumented person and a Chicano activist have in common? In the next section, I will weave together the experiences of two young Chicanx poets, one from the Chicano Movement and an (un)documented poet, to explore the answer.

*SIN PAPELES, SIN MIEDO!

The first one, is the story of an undocumented Chicana, who immigrated to the United States at the age of nine. This young Chicana found her voice through performing her poetry in community events and open microphone nights. She is an unafraid (un)documented poet that uses her story and poetry to empower others. She is unapologetic about showing her Chicanismo through her style, her mannerisms and her speech. She finds inspiration in other *homegrils* and
Chicana feminists like Sandra Cisneros. She is a daughter, a sister, and an artist. She loves her community and has a deep sense of pride in her Mexican roots but calls East Los her home.

Clara: “Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?”

Brenzy: “I am nineteen years old, Chicana, poet, community organizer, story teller, and an activist from Boyle Heights.”

Clara: How would you tell the story about your community?

Brenzy: “… how would I tell that story, uhm… I want to describe it in words, I feel that it’s hard because we come from so many places… [but] we share the same little recipes within us which is strength, resistance and resilience!”

The second story, is of a young Chicanx, an eighth grader who wrote a poem for his English class in 1971. The poem was sent to the editor of the LA RAZA, a newspaper whose goal was to “highlight the Chicanos’ struggle, to raise their personal consciousness, to cause them to ‘stop apologizing,’ and to spur them into social and political action.” The poem was sent with a letter that read; “I wrote the poem ‘BROWN’ as an assignment for my English class. My English teacher liked it a lot and said she would put it in the school newspaper. She went to the principal of our school to ask permission to have it put in. He did not approve it.”

“BROWN”
Brown is the sound you hear when somebody yells “Chicano Power!!” Brown is the taste you


120 La Raza, Notes to the Editor, Vol 1, No.4, January, 9, 1971.
get when you taste home made beans. Brown is what you see when you look at burned down Whittier Blvd. Brown is what you feel when you touch a brown person (Chicano). Brown is beautiful!

This young Chicanx was censured. He was deprived from an outlet, in which he could express what it meant for him to be brown. The poem speaks about struggle, love, and pride in Chicanismo. It is important to note the dynamic at play between the school’s newspaper and La Raza magazine. The eighth grader was ignored and silenced by his school—a place where his accomplishments should be praised. He was left feeling like an outcast, La Raza, celebrated his identity and praised his words. This dynamic also, highlights the need for publications like, La Raza, which empowered young Chicanxs to share their stories and promoted Mexican American/Chicanx culture. For the Chicanxs, La Raza, became the outlet where they could express themselves without being censured.

With almost fifty years between them, both Chicanx poets came to age in the streets of East LA and Boyle Heights. Both wrote poetry about identity and both experienced a form censorship when attempting to share their poetry. Brenzy, didn’t see her words censured by a newspaper, her words were censured by the dominant American culture. In her interview, Brenzy shared that “[she] worked so hard to erase who she was, to become this person to fit into something else and pretend” so she could fit in. This self-censorship, speaks to inner conflicts that arise in undocumented immigrant youth. Brenzy felt the need to integrate into main stream American culture and reject her duality. It was until she found Chicanx Culture, through an all Chicana Feminist Collective, that she began embracing her dual identities and began “documenting herself” through her poetry. Today, Brenzy writes and preform poetry because she
“wants to make [herself] present, [she] wants people to hear [her] and [she] wants to inspire other people.”

Poetry, is an outlet of creative resistance among Chicanxs that is still used today. Many young Chicanxs, like the Brenzy, produce self-published *zines* to share their poetry. Brenzy describes that “you make zines out of nothing, like a paper and pencil you fold it together, you make something out of whatever you have,” this type of ‘do it yourself’ zine making follows within the rasquache Chicanx aesthetic. Zines have a long history in the community, and much like LA RAZA, they become printed outlets of creative resistance. Through this type of community publications, Chicanx stories are no longer censured, but celebrated among the community. In turn, Chicanx poetry as means of creative resistance has a purpose and rejects “arts for art sake;” Brenzy acknowledges this role, thus she affirms that with her poetry she “creates brave and safe spaces where people can feel like they can be themselves and therefore be relevant, or feel empowered.” Creative resistance is used to create temporal solidarity among the movements and humanize their experiences. Both Chicanx poets used their poetry to reclaim their identity and similarly to murals, poetry is used to document their experiences. Ultimately, Chicanx poetry, is *arte the corazón*, because it is used as a story telling weapon to reaffirm the Chicanx and/or immigrant identities and highlight the similarities “strength, resistance, and resilience” amongst the resident of the barrios.

There is a uniqueness of growing up in a Mexican barrio, youth acquire both cultures, this creates a dual identity. There are added social and political disadvantages if the youth are undocumented. Not only is their existence is erased by the dominant U.S. culture but they are dismissed by the socio-political realm. Their existence is not acknowledged in a cultural or political realm. Yet, youth battle those erasures through the usage of creative resistance. For
instance, Brenzy uses creative resistance to document and claim a rightful space in the political realm for (un)documented folks. In her poem, Brenzy rejects the political label of *undocumented*, because the immigrant experience, is documented in many ways. Being (un)documented does not limit her but inspires her to achieve a life with no barriers. Brenzy’s poem *Respuesta* (answer), provides us with the answer to the question “what does it mean to be undocumented?”

**Respuesta**

Undocumented.
What does it mean to be undocumented?
To understand the meaning of being undocumented,
We first have to know what it means to be documented.

In the middle of this Trump-ass mess and raids,
Who do you see in the news fighting for their rights?
What are the faces you see working on that 9 to 5 so this city could function?
Who got you to work on time this morning?
Who picked the veggies that are on your dinner plate Mr. and Mrs. Vegan?
Who runs this city? Who runs this country?
Check your resources, your surroundings; I am documented in every one of them.

Y carnal, why are you of all the people the one constantly capping?
Calling me beaner, mojada, indocumentada;
Don’t you know better? Don’t we wear the same uniform?
Piel canela, ojos negros, nopalotes en la frente.

You call me Indocumentada but,
Jokes’ on you!
Have you not seen your facebook, your Instagram, and all your social media, your local newspaper, your T.V?
Who do you see?
We are taking over again and again,
Because we’ve been here.

Catch me in your history books real soon
Because I am Documented.
I am here.

Mr. Trump,
You say go back to your country.
I say I’ve been in my country,

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121 Poem provided by Brenzy, May 18, 2016.
Where is yours?
And Before your name grimes up my poem I just want to let you know
That I am not freeloading off your fucking government,
Because as far as I’m concerned,
If I’m going to school,
And I’ve never gone to bed without a meal in my stomach,
And I still have a roof over my head,
That’s because I’ve earned it all by myself.

Un papel that legally “documents” my existence written by a pinche gobierno corrupto that doesn’t
even know where it stands don’t mean a thing to me;
I don’t care too much for being documented under that type of system.

Who’s undocumented?
Do you not see me?
I am here.
Maybe I won’t stay for too long,
Maybe I will.
But all that matters at this very moment is that I am here,
And what I’m doing while I am.

My mind has no barriers.
Mexico, China, Paris, under a bridge, in a mansion,
It doesn’t matter.
I am still someone
I am still creating, organizing, doing, breathing, existing, living,
I am still here.
And that is all that matters,
That is all that matters.

So maybe if you saw beyond what’s in front of your eyes you’d understand
that there is no such thing as being undocumented.
That boarders only exist because we create them.

I choose to have a mind with no barriers,
A heart with no barriers,

A soul with no barriers.

To be documented is to exist,
to choose to live,
To dream,
To fight,
And aspire with no barriers.
That’s why I am here
I am documented. 
And no one, 
No one, 
Could take that from me.

Through her poem, Brenzy reclaims her roots, her identity and experiences as (un)documented in the United States. She makes her narrative her own, and dismisses mainstream media portrayal of undocumented immigrants. Her story speaks to the community and resonates with others that have similar shared lived experiences. Her status as (un)documented, is recorded within the hearts and minds of people with whom she shares her poetry. Creative resistance is embedded in the hope that sparks within those who listen to her experience; creative resistance lies in the action of writing the poem; creative resistance transforms the spaces in which she performs.

I was fortunate to be in the room the first time that Brenzy performed this piece, after she finished the room showered her with snaps and claps, everyone in the room was cheering reaffirming her words and experience. Brenzy was documented by all of us. In a moment of uncertainty where the country was being trampled with anti-immigrant rhetoric, we had Brenzy, rejecting those labels and making a stance for her future, her identity, and undocumented peers. Her poetry is creative resistance. Later that summer her poem was picked up by Mitú, an online Latino media outlet, and since has been heard by thousands of people around the globe. Her poetry transcended the streets of East L.A. with an unapologetic message of resistance.

Being Undocumented and Unafraid or Brown and Proud are salient identities acquired through the shared experiences of living in the barrio. Barrio culture embodied through outlets of creative resistance that empowers youth and celebrates their experiences in the community. Creative resistance ignites East Los Angeles youth to fight for equity and access for their community. The 1960s and today are linked through those shared experiences, generation after
generation youth continue to rise and fight for equity. Youth are the future; their experiences and narratives will endure throughout the years. East Los Angeles youth are linked by a strong sense of solidarity, pride in their communities and roots. Creative resistance will continue to be used to further *La Causa* and document their struggles. Undocumented youth, fight for their right to belong every day, our current administration targets them and their families. However, this criminality is not new to community residents of East Los Angeles. The Chicano Movement witnessed multiple violent encounters with the police. The next section of this thesis will explore police brutality and criminalization of brown bodies in East Los Angeles.

**LA FLACA ROAMS THE STREETS OF EAST LOS**

**SAY THEIR NAMES**

Jose Mendez, 16. Jesse Romero, 14. Fred Barragán, 35. Are the disclosed names of six fatal officer-involved shootings in Boyle Heights in fourteen months.\(^{122}\) Death roams the streets of the barrio; in East Los Angeles seventeen people have been killed in the past twelve months.\(^{123}\) In Boyle Heights sixteen have been killed in the past twelve months.\(^{124}\) That makes for a total of thirty-three deaths, which is equivalent to one death per week-and-a-half of the year. Those alarming numbers are accepted by the community because they must reconcile with human loss, however, those numbers are not normalized—the community acknowledges that violence present in the barrio is an issue that needs to be addressed. In the midst of violence, the


barrio does not develop a blasé attitude towards human loss, to them the number of deaths in police reports represent the stories of people in the community whom they called family, friends, and neighbors.

After a riot, police descended on the approximately twenty thousand to thirty thousand peaceful protestors gathered in Laguna Park in East Los Angeles on August 29, 1970, this event is now known as The Chicano Moratorium. Mainstream media and the Country Sheriff’s Department framed the day’s event as a riot instigated by violence-prone Chicana/o activist. Activist in turn argued that the police reponse to a minor provocation was unjustifiable and extreme in its disproportionate use of violence. East Los Angeles was criminalized by authorities and the media, yet they fought back with photographs taken by community members that proved that violence was started by police—as such, those photos become examples of creative resistance. Those photographs, never made it to main stream media but did make into self-publications and community newspapers like La Raza. Photography as a form of creative resistance, serves as evidence in favor of Chicanx activist. The images taken during that day empowered the community to fight against the accusation of the Sheriff’s Department. In addition, such images replaced one dimensional villains and exotic fiestas with the complexity, diversity, and texture of life in the barrio. Today, those photographs serve as a window into the past and as visual evidence for the barrio history of East Los Angeles.


126 Ibid, 382.

127 Ibid, 382.

Amid violence and suffering, the communities of Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles come together to heal as a collective, this is possible because such barrios utilize creative resistance that draws from their shared culture, in the form of altares and other media, to mourn human loss. This chapter will explore how both communities are over policed and marginalized by authorities. This long legacy of over policing and criminalization has been part of the community since the Zoot Suit Riots during the 40s. Militancy against the community augmented during the Chicano Moratoriums. The moratoriums drew in large crowds of people. The Los Angeles Police Department grew weary of the rallies. The second moratorium, which was one of the least attended, still was able to draw four thousand “rain soaked, and committed members of la raza” who “demonstrated their opposition to the high rates of Chicano casualties in Vietnam” reported La Raza. Today, violence is still strongly felt in the community. Residents employ outlets of creative resistance to both combat this oppression, and mourn community loss.

THE CHICANO MORATORIUM

In the 1960s and 1970s, a new social movement emerged among Mexican Americans across the nation; “fighting for civil rights and celebrating distinct ethnic identity, the Chicano Movement had a lasting impact on the United States.”\textsuperscript{129} The Chicano Moratorium non-violent marches were planned to raise awareness about the rate of Mexican American and Chicanx deaths in The Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{130} Mexican American casualties in Vietnam were coming in disproportionate number to their population—twenty percent of the causalities when they comprised ten percent of the U.S. population.\textsuperscript{131} At the time Mexican Americans accounted for

\textsuperscript{129} Marc Simon Rodriguez, \textit{Rethinking the Chicano Movement}, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 1.

\textsuperscript{130} Clara Mejía Orta, \textit{Transcending Fronteras: Art Activism, and Immigrant Narratives}, 2016.

five percent of the U.S. population, yet accounted for twenty percent of the of soldiers who died in combat. Rosalío Muñoz, the first UCLA Chicano student body president, was one of the lead organizers of the Moratorium. He recalls that the moratoriums, although planned to call attention at the disproportion people lost in combat, were also being used to promote and advance equity for the Mexican American community. Issues like immigrant rights and housing rights were being raised. Yet all three moratoriums planned resulted in police violence.

Rosalío Muñoz, joined the cause by burning his draft card on September 16, 1969, coinciding with Mexican Independence Day. When asked about creative resistance being used for the moratoriums, Rosalío recalled that one of the rallies, was used to mourn the lives of the Chicnaxs who were dying in alarming numbers abroad. Many of the families and community did not have a space to mourn the loss of life that the Mexican American community was experiencing, so the planning committee proposed a symbolic funeral procession to mourn this loss of life (Appendix H). Ramses Noriega, an artist part of the planning committee, who also created the poster for the August 29, 1970 Chicano Moratorium featuring Rosalío (Appendix H), painted an image of dead Chicano—the image was carried during the rally. In front of the painting, carried by four Chicanxs, stood a life size casket. The powerful image sent a clear message—Chicanxs are dying in the war. This manifestation of creative resistance enabled Chicanxs to call attention to the issue and hand while also honoring the loss of life. This is one of


133 Clara Mejía Orta, Transcending Fronteras: Art Activism, and Immigrant Narratives, 2016.


135 Clara Mejía Orta, Transcending Fronteras: Art Activism, and Immigrant Narratives, 2016.

many examples of creative resistance outlets that proliferated during this wave of community activism. The Chicano Movement acted as incubator for Chicanx art and creative resistance. Music or *corridos*, posters, chants, displays, and popular theatre—were used to illustrate and advance the Chicanx *causa*.

Muñoz was the co-chair of the Chicano Moratorium in Los Angeles and during a national conference proposed a National Chicano Moratorium on August 29th, 1970. The moratorium aimed to highlight proportion mortality rated during the Vietnam War, their cry backfired and violence erupted in the streets of East Los Angeles. On August 29, 1970. Los Angeles Police Department took the lives of three demonstrators among them *Los Angeles Times* journalist Ruben Salazar (Appendix H). “Call for Peace, Unity in East Los Angeles” read the front page of the *Belvedere Citizen* (Appendix H), “what began as a peaceful march against the war in Vietnam ended last Saturday night with a ‘renowned Mexican-American journalist and once other person dead, 60 persons injured, 250 arrested and a million dollars in property damage.” Salazar was beloved by the community because he used his career for the pursuit of “long overdue reforms for the Spanish-speaking community in the United States.” Salazar’s death was immortalized by artists and documented by photographers. Jesus Sanchez, dedicated a *corrido* to Don Salazar; *corridos* are Mexican folk songs that became popular during the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Sanchez’ *corrido*, acts as a form of creative resistance, it takes a

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painful event that marked the community and redirects it, creating the image of a fallen hero. The
second stanza of the corrido says “Al componer estos versos, yo les quiero demostrar, el odio pa
los sherifes, y respeto a Salazar.”\textsuperscript{142} Meaning that, Sanchez, and the majority of the Mexican
American community blamed the sheriffs for the death of their beloved journalist. Salazar’s
corrido was published in \textit{La Raza} magazine on a special issue that ran after the moratorium
(Appendix H).\textsuperscript{143}

Prior to Salazar’s death, The Chicano Moratoriums didn’t get media coverage from
prominent publications like the \textit{Los Angeles Times}, “on February 28, 1970 thousands of
Chicanos demonstrated to protest the out of proportion mortality rates of Chicanos in Vietnam . .
. these people mostly young, marched for miles in downpour. Your newspaper (The Los Angeles
Times) however, chose to virtually ignore this important event, giving it only four lines.”\textsuperscript{144}
After Salazar’s death the Chicano Moratoriums were covered thoroughly. However, major media
outlets of Los Angeles, depicted the action as a riots and blamed Chicanos for the violence that
erupted the day Salazar died.\textsuperscript{145}

The \textit{Los Angeles Times}, reported that the organizers of the moratorium claimed that
“overreaction by law enforcement agencies to their demonstrations and organizing efforts [was]
responsible for their reputation as a militant group.”\textsuperscript{146} The article outlines the various vigils,

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\textsuperscript{142} Translation: With this verses, I want to demonstrate, hatred towards the sheriffs, and respect to Salazar.

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{La Raza}, Vol. 1 No. 3, Special Issue, 1970.

\textsuperscript{144} Irving Sarnoff, Chairman of the Peace Action Council of Southern California, quoted in \textit{La Raza}. For
full letter reference Appendix H.


\textsuperscript{146} “Moratorium Unit Blames Violence on 'Repression'” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, January 27, 1971.
\end{flushright}
marches, and rallies that the Moratorium hosted, all of which culminated in some type of police brutality, despite all of them being peaceful-nonviolent actions. Moreover, the rallies and marches had the support of local clergy, political figures, and public non-violent statements.\textsuperscript{147} Rosalío shared that despite all efforts made to have peaceful rallies, Chicano activist were beat, tear gassed and threaten at gun point. Chicanxs were labeled as militant and violent—a narrative that was difficult to change, given the power hierarchy that existed between authority and residents, and the power of media to frame the story.

Photographs captured during the Chicano movement became visual evidence for the way in which Chicanxs were treated by police and governmental authorities. Chicanx practices became visual evidence, as counter representation, as documentation of artistic process, as the conceptual basis for other artworks, as an aesthetic influence, as an archive or creative resource, and as a re-imagination of self-community.\textsuperscript{148} Photographs taken during the moratorium, serve as examples of creative resistance, in which the community was combating the negative reputation the Chicano Movement was getting by media.

One of the photographs taken during the August 29\textsuperscript{th} Moratorium (Appendix H) depicts two young Chicano activists holding a sign for the Chicano Moratorium. The image fades out to the upper left corner blurring out the river of people who are taking the streets of East Los. The crowd is made up by many families and people of all ages. No signs or acts of violence can be seen from this picture; it looks like a peaceful march. From it we can assume that the march was open to the community and that many families and young activist participated in the day of action. Colin Gunckel, author of \textit{The Chicano/a Photographic: Art as Social Practice in the}

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\textsuperscript{147} Clara Mejía Orta, \textit{Transcending Fronteras: Art Activism, and Immigrant Narratives}, 2016.

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*Chicano Movement*, states that this type of photographic practice was oriented explicitly toward countering images of Chicano/as in the mainstream media and promoting solidarity with and sympathy for the broader goals of the movement.\(^{149}\)

The second image (Appendix H), accentuates the claim that police was overreacting and overusing their authority. The only thing in the frame is the police officer in position to shoot followed by two other officers. The imminent threat of police is felt in this photograph; police are armed and ready to fight back. This photograph freezes a space in time and aids the claim made by Chicanos that officers were inflicting violence in their nonviolent actions. There is room to speculate if police were reacting to a possible threat or act of violence by a community member. However, from my charla with Rosalio and community based articles, we can assume that Chicanxs were seen as social pariahs and prayed on by the police. Those photographs serve as evidence to understand the deep history of distrust against the Los Angeles Police Department and local sheriffs. This relationship has shapes the community’s interaction with authority and ultimately “police weariness” becomes embedded in barrio culture.

Photographs during the Chicano Movement were crucial to counter the pariah narrative. As mentioned in the chapter *Arte de Coraz(o)n*, self-identity was crucial in the creation of art during the Chicano Movement. Viewers could connect to the subject they saw, as such they could connect to the struggles depicted about them, and form a sense of community empowerment through the *self*. Artist interviewed for this project spoke about this sentiment. Many of them also talked about community memory; they felt frustrated by the lack of Chicanx, Mexican-American, Mexican history known by the youth in their community. Artists felt that,

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their role was to depict Mexican/Mexican-American/Chicanx history, so that the youth could learn from their collective struggle and imagine their collective liberation.

Colin Gunckel, speaks to this notion when describing the of Chicanx photographers. Gunckel positions that, photographers used their cameras in service of activism and social justice. He explains that photographers “were using documentary photography that was oriented explicitly toward countering images of Chicano/as in the mainstream media and promoting solidarity with and sympathy for the broader goals of the movement.” Similarly to Chicanx photographers, Mexican-American and Chicanx artist, interviewed for this project, felt as though their duty was to be community activist and used their artistic abilities to paint the true story of the barrio. Moreover, when it comes to violence and death, creative resistance warriors (artists) are in a unique position to create art that allows the community to honor the memories of the fallen ones, as illustrated in this section.

WE REMEMBER: ALTARS AND VIGILS

Every event hosted by community organizations or groups that uplifted the spirit of the community; from open mics to vigils, are examples of how the community resists and endures over time. This resiliency is a characteristic of barrio culture and allows the proliferation of outlets of creative resistance. East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights refuse to be targeted and express their disenfranchisement through art. Creative resistance is produced in a myriad of ways within Latinx barrios; this section explores two examples of creative resistance that took place in Boyle Heights, California during the summer of 2016 in response to violence. The first one was written from field notes of a community vigil to honor the lives of those lost during the Orlando Pulse shooting. The second one, is of an altar that was built on the site.

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Police Department officer shot and killed Jesse, a fourteen-year-old boy. Both events are different in nature but have one common aspect—the usage of creative resistance as an outlet to combat violence.

The Pulse vigil started in the evening, the sunset drew in people who began to congregate around Mariachi Plaza located on La Primera (Appendix H). As people crowded, Mujeres De Maíz—a local all women ran organization that focuses on indigenous teachings, brought out a self-care table with activities that included a drawing corner, sage, oils and Mexican pan dulce with hot herbal tea. Mujeres De Maíz ran the event and as queer Latinxs started to gather, Mariachi Plaza began to be covered by rainbow flags and candles (Appendix H). The Immigrant Youth Center took the stage—they are a local organization with undocu-queer members. The spokesperson for the organization welcomed everyone and identified himself as undocu-queer. He blasted some Selena and encouraged everyone to dance or go to the self-care table. He highlighted the importance of dancing to remember the victims of the shooting, because in way dancing—an outlet of creative resistance—was a form of reclaiming the sanctuary that gay clubs create for the queer community.

The event went on and those who spook self-identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Some community parents who had lost loved ones to gun violence spoke about their experiences. No one was scheduled to speak, people walked up to the microphone and spoke in a very organic manner. By the end of the vigil, three self-identified trans women of color, were taking turns saying the names of the victims followed by a “rest in power” collective response (Appendix H). When a name was called, a community member lit a candle and held a picture (Appendix H). Once everyone’s name was called, Amor Eterno—a song in Spanish that speaks of love, loss, and remembrance was played. A wave of sadness took over the participants and
most people were in tears. Everyone was open, vulnerable and unafraid to express their suffering and frustration. The community was practicing self-care and collective healing—this is a radical act of creative resistance. But most importantly, the microphone, a symbol of power, was dominated by those who were most affected—queer and trans Latinxs (Appendix H).

Mujeres De Maíz, one of the organizations that ran the event, was founded by the daughter of Chicano activist and Brown Beret, Carlos Montes.\textsuperscript{151} The Brown Berets, were a self-proclaimed militant group that emerged in the community during the Chicano Movement. The group has reemerged in the last two years with a new chapter called The Foco Berets. This chapter was formed as a result of a new wave of activism in the post DREAM Act era. Today, there are two groups of Brown Berets serving the community of East LA; the “La Causa” Brown Berets founded during the Chicano Movement and the Foco Berets formed during the post DREAM Act Era. The original Brown Berets of East Los, were formed by radical politicized Chicanx youth in the 60s. They helped organize the East L.A. Walkouts and played a key role during the Chicano Moratoriums (Appendix H). One of the founders of the Berets was Carlos Montes (Appendix H), is still very active in East Los Angeles by supporting the new generation of activists. Montes, serves as a direct link to the past bridging time periods and demonstrating that the collective struggles of East L.A. continue.

As a member of the original Chicano Movement, Montes does not impose over the new wave of activism but rather plants and continues to nurture seeds of resistance in the community. He encourages youth and non-traditional voices to take the center stage of the activism. This idea of “passing on” the torch or lifting one another is a characteristic of barrio culture in East Los Angeles. During my field research I encountered two murals that depict this notion of lifting each other (Appendix H). Rodrigo, an artist interviewed for this project, describes that this

\textsuperscript{151} Clara Mejía Orta, \textit{Transcending Fronteras: Art Activism, and Immigrant Narratives}, 2016.
collective power of lifting each other is “essential to heal from our community wounds” thus his role as an artist is to promote “healing in his community by helping [them] see [their] own beauty, even if society tells [them that they] are not enough, or lazy, or inferior.”

Through creative resistance the community is reminded of its shared struggle and collective power.

During my field research, East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights residents took to the streets to fight against police authority and the criminalization of their barrios. The mobilizations were prompted after the death of Jesse Romero. A fourteen-year-old, who was shot and killed in Boyle Heights by Los Angeles Police Department on August. Following the incident, community members and artist employed outlets of creative resistance to call attention to the injustice surrounding Jesse’s death. An altar was built in his memory; a mural was erected in his honor and vigils took place at the site of his murder (Appendix H). Those collective artistic practices are examples of how the community employed creative resistance to heal as a collective.

Alatares, are derived from the Mexican pre-Columbian tradition of Day Of The Dead, today they are still widely used through Mexico and the United States. During the Chicano Movement, Chicanx artists, placed “emphasis on reclaiming the history and cultural heritage of the Chicano people” which meant “not only using images and forms from a pre-Columbian, colonial, and revolutionary past but also recapturing and preserving a more recent personal and familial past.” In addition, “the Movimiento enabled these artist to reclaim these traditions and

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152 Clara Mejía Orta, Transcending Fronteras: Art Activism, and Immigrant Narratives, 2016. Excerpt from interview conducted by the primary investigator under IRB guidance on 7/18/16.


to rework them in ways that expanded their meaning beyond the personal and private realm into the public arena.”\textsuperscript{156} Altaires, which are used to honor family and loved ones during the Dia De Los Muertos celebration, a very intimate and private act, is now widely used to publically to honor those who are killed in the streets of barrios. Altaires are a loving act of creative resistance, that along with vigil, allow the community to mourn and remember.

The community mourned with Jesse’s family and together they marched demanding an end to police brutality and end to the criminalization of their communities. Jesse Romero’s name was engrained in the community’s memory, he has not been the only teenager killed by LAPD, but he has been one of the youngest. His name was place in the wall of The Lost Ones, a community mural started by the clothing company IPE (Appendix H). IPE’s mission is to provide inspiration, hope, and peace to the oppressive environments around the planet where People of Color are striving to be free.\textsuperscript{157} The mural records names of those who the community lost like Jesse’s but it is also used to stand in solidarity with other communities, thus it bears the names of Sandra Bland, Oscar Grant, and Alex Nieto, among others (Appendix H). Jesse’s death did not make it into national news, like Chicano Moratoriums years before, incidents like Jesse’s are picked up by local media and sometimes make it onto the \textit{Los Angeles Times}. That is why it is up to community members to remember the victims of police brutality.

Jesse’s mom is still searching for justice, “I want justice,” his mother, Teresa Dominguez, told reporters. “He didn’t deserve to die the way that they killed him.”\textsuperscript{158} No one deserves to die

\textsuperscript{156} CARA “Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation,” (California: Wight Art Gallery, University of California, 1991), 314.

\textsuperscript{157} IPE Website, accessed on April 25, 2017, https://www.ipeclothing.com/about

like that. Not Jesse nor Fred Barragán, LAPS’s most recent victim. On Saturday March 25, Barragán was shot and killed by LAPD officers; Caro Vera, a rally organizer was quoted in the Boyle Heights Beat, "so then again we're seeing another person, another Latino male, shot by police. It's interesting this person was also shot dead in the same way that 14-year-old Jesse Romero was shot. They were running away from the police and they were shot in the back." Following Barragán’s death, Boyle Heights residents and community activists organized a “rally and march that ended with a vigil at the site of the shooting –an alley behind the Metro Gold Line Soto station– where an altar in Barragán’s memory has been erected (Appendix H).” After the loss of human life, the barrios are left to mourn and remember. Creative resistance in the form of murals, altars, and vigils, helps ease the wound that police brutality inflicts; it does not heal it fully, but allows community members to reconcile and cope in unity.

This is the second straight year that Los Angeles has outpaced all other cities in the country for the number of officer-involved killings. The legacy of marginalizing and targeting the community, on the basis of race and class, is still felt in the community. Those stigmas or mental borders emerge when barrios are criminalized by outsiders who paint those communities as dangerous. This mentality leads to unjustified fear of the other. The Chicano Moratorium, and deaths in the barrios from police brutality, are examples of how damaging those mental borders can be. In addition, the Eastside is made up of primarily working class Latinxs. Given its Latinx


population, a mental border is created by the tension of the outsider looking in to these communities. It is a misguided perception of the people who live within the barrio—which results in an unfounded fear of the other. These mental borders, become tangible through socio-political disenfranchisement that affects the Eastside. This concept will be further explored in the next section.

**BORDERS AND BARRIOS**

**RECLAIMING THE BARRIO**

“...they want our culture and what’s on our walls but they don’t want what is in them”\(^{162}\)

Boyle Heights is undergoing a battle with gentrification. This thesis will not explore the root causes of gentrification, but rather, will focus on ways that community members are resisting those efforts from a creative resistance lens. Boyle Heights is made up of mainly working-class Latinx families. The neighborhood is being rapidly gentrified by an influx of white residents and art galleries. In the past, Eastside residents reclaimed their urban environment after their communities were fractured by the Los Angeles Freeway System. Artist played a pivotal role in reclaiming those spaces through the Chicano mural Movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Today, artists, community members, and youth are employing outlets of creative resistance to fight gente displacement. East Los Angeles is an activist oriented barrio, the community reclaims their physical space through the usage of creative resistance and organizes under acts of creative resistance.

Boyle Heights is seen by outsiders as a run-down neighborhood; however, both incoming residents and county authorities are ignoring the rich barrio culture that exists in Boyle Heights. Its residents are fighting back and are defining gentrification as the new form of colonization. As a result, the word gentrification in Boyle Heights, has a negative connotation that includes the

loss of culture that displacement brings. This definition of gentrification is imperative, because it acknowledges the displacement of people and the loss of culture that occurs in gentrified neighborhoods. The connotations of the term gentrification serve as a reminder of the people displaced and evicted in Boyle Heights, given this the term gentrification, is not overused, and necessary for this discourse. In this thesis, the term gentrification will refer to, the systematic displacement of people of color, in this case Latinxs, by incoming residents of a higher economic class. This displacement is being perpetuated by governmental policies and “new” businesses that are moving-into the community such as art galleries. This definition of gentrification, dovetails that of Ruth Glass, who defines it as “the process of displacement of the working class by the middle class who invest and refurbish a run-down neighborhood.”163 Gentrification defined in this thesis, also addresses collective systematic injustices that further alienate the existing community—including but not limited to—unjust housing/urban policies, over policing, and displacement. Community members are not only fighting against displacement, or over policing; they are fighting against the holistic systematic issue. As such, it is necessary to use a term that encompasses all the actions that leads to the displacement of people by a wealthier class and the loss of culture in an urban space.

GENTEFY DON’T GENTRIFY

In 2016, a group of activists took to the streets under the slogan “Gente SI, Gentrify NO” (Community members YES, Gentrification NO), to demand a stop to gentrification in Boyle Heights.164 Organized under Boyle Heights Alianza Anti Artwashing and Desplazamiento


(BHAAD), their main mission is to stop white art galleries from moving into the community. Their online platform reads, “if people trace the steps of the gentrification process—the conversion of a neighborhood of working class communities into one designed for and populated by wealthier classes, they will find a distinct pattern: development and real estate speculators have their eyes trained on the arrival of artists as the moment to start accumulating property.”

In other words, as art galleries enter Boyle Heights, rent prices go up and residents are pushed out by the incoming wave of mostly white middle class folks.

Bianca Barragan, a journalist for LA CURBED, describes artwashing as the “practice of using artists’ presence in a neighborhood as a way to dress up a formerly neglected area and rebrand it as highly desirable. It’s the name given to what many already hold to be anecdotally true: Artists are often the first wave of new residents in tomorrow’s over-priced, cool neighborhoods.”

It would follow that gentrification through art galleries and the presence of artists, not only is threatening to wash out the barrio culture in Boyle Heights but it also leads to further displacement of community residents. Community members are weary of the newcomers, a community activist who has lived there for over thirty years shared that:

“they [gentrifiers] need to see what they’re displacing. We are here, we’ve worked really hard to create this community. We’ve done marches, mass protests, meetings after meetings after meetings with our neighborhood, with the city council, with the police. . . We’ve given the best years of our life to this fight.”


Residents have worked hard to build solidarity through mobilization and to create a sense of barrio pride—they did so with what was left of their freeway divided community and it is being taken away through gentrification.

Community artist are tapping into their creativity to produce prints, poems and shirts with anti-gentrification messages. Those methods of creative resistance are ways in which artists have chosen to express their frustration in midst of eviction notices and displacement (Appendix G). Outlets of creative resistance, further illustrate the rich culture that exist in Boyle Heights and highlights the impact that gentrification will have in the future as we see those artistic outlets extinguish. Additionally, local groups and organizations are joining the fight against gentrification; among them are the Ovarian Psyco-Bicycle Brigade or Ovas (Appendix G). They are an all women of color bicycling brigade, who reclaims the streets of the barrio by riding in them as a collective. They create a space for the empowerment of women of color and enter an environment that is male dominated; by doing so, they assert their presence in the streets of their barrio. It is clear that Eastside won’t leave the community without a fight, “rebellion is in the area’s DNA,” as noted by Rolly Carol a journalist for The Guardian, both communities have a long history of resilience and resistance.  

The resilient spirit of Boyle Heights and East Los forges community activism and proliferates outlets of creative resistance, in instances where the community is targeted.

SPATIAL ENTITLEMENT & THE CHICANX MURALISM MOVEMENT

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Murals are another form of creative resistance in which individuals reclaim space in their neighborhoods through art, muralism proliferated during the Chicano Movement. From 1968 to the mid 1970s, “murals sprang up almost overnight in Chicanx neighborhoods throughout the country.” In his book, *Chicana and Chicano Art: ProtestArte*, Jackson argues that “murals created by Chicanx artist reclaimed public spaces, encouraged community participation, and aided community development.” In addition, since the beginning of the muralist movement, mural teams were “supported by neighborhood residents and local merchants,” most importantly artist often were not compensated for their work, “their reward was the satisfaction and pride they felt in organizing the community to produce symbols of cultural affirmation and unity.” The entire process of creating a mural is an act of creative resistance and the final product is testament of the power that creative resistance has to transform physical spaces.

Furthermore, murals are a creative resistance outlet that tells the story of the community and links Chicanx history and struggle with Mexican heritage/culture. Murals root the community, they give residents a sense of belonging, a level of comfort, and familiarity. Murals in East Los Angeles, “project new visions of justice and democracy that take up space, figuratively and literally. By inflecting familiar places and spaces with new meanings,” Gaye Theresa Johnson, describes that the role of murals is to transform spaces into geographies of democracy. Thus, murals not only recall the memories and history of the community, they also

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allow room to envision a hopeful future. Whittier Boulevard (Appendix G), a popular Boulevard in East Los Angeles famous for Low Rider Cruise Nights and the Latino Walk of Fame, is covered with murals. One of the most eye-catching murals of the boulevard is “Muro que Habla, Canta y Grita” (“The Wall That Speaks, Sings, and Shouts”) located in Salazar Park. The lead artist for the mural was Paul Botello and it was donated in 2001 to the City of Los Angeles by Fonovisa and the beloved band Los Tigres del Norte—whose songs narrate the immigrant struggle. As the title of the mural would suggest, the wall screams the history of migration, bridges Mexican indigenous roots with Chicanx struggles, and envisions an empowering future for the communities youth (Appendix G).

Murals effectively reclaim the barrio, as a result, community members have special entitlement over their neighborhoods. However, communities require more than physical space to survive. They also need the culture, history, and memory that the murals depict. One does not work without the other, again this form of creative resistance challenges the notion of “art for art’s sake,” the mural is powerful because it is about the community that surrounds the wall; it is not an arbitrary image that exists outside the culture and history of the neighborhood, rather it is a product of barrio life and culture. Johnson argues, that “spaces have social meaning too, they function to maintain memories and to preserve practices that reinforce community knowledge

173 On September 17, 1970, East Los Angeles’s Laguna Park was renamed in honor of noted journalist Ruben Salazar, one of three individuals killed during the National Chicano Moratorium march on August 29, 1970. Nearly 30,000 people marched that day in protest of the disproportionate number of Chicanxs who were dying in the Vietnam War. To learn more about the history of the park please visit the Los Angeles Conservancy Website, https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/ruben-salazar-park


and cohesiveness.” Murals in East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights, claim those spaces for the community. Historically the spaces within those neighborhoods have been contested areas; it has taken generations to make those streets to feel like home. One can only speculate the future of the community with a new wave of “urban renewal” projects coming to the Eastside; yet drawing from history can give us a potential outcome of what is to come.

Between the passage of Housing Acts of 1949 and 1967, a total of 400,000 residential units were demolished in urban renewal areas across the nation.Los Angeles emerged as one of the most visible examples of spatial hegemony: Black and Brown neighborhoods were demolished, even erased from maps as if no one had ever lived there. Chapter one, A Brief History of A Barrio, delved into the construction of the five freeways—the San Bernardino, the Santa Ana, the Long Beach, The Golden State, and the Pomona. That freeway system cut through and effectively destroyed the primarily Mexican neighborhood of Boyle Heights. The asphalt and concrete structures scarred the community and “revel the history and effects of long-term racial and economic discrimination.” Urban renewal projects during the 1950s and 1960s effectively fractured the neighborhood and created geographical borders meant to break down the community—those effects are still felt in the today. Muralism is a way in which community members use creative resistance to reclaim and repurpose those spaces. However, community

176 Johnson, 48.


members will have to double their efforts to maintain those spaces with the eminence of
gentrification looming the streets of Boyle Heights.

EL BARRIO NO SE VENDE, SE AMA Y SE DEFIENDE181

The barrios of East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights are safe spaces for community
members. This is not to say that community members are not at risk in these spaces, as the
previous chapter discloses, these communities are over policed and criminalized. Barrios are safe
in the sense that residents do not have to feel like outsiders or misfits, like many of us do once
we leave our barrio streets. Gentrification, brings people who sees community members as the other, and inevitably creates a power and social hierarchy—with white folks holding the most
power. In light of this new wave of oppression and displacement, the community has organized
and publically commenced an unapologetic battle against gentrification.

On April 19, 2016, The Guardian, ran an article that quoted Xochitl Palomera, an activist
with the group Corazón Del Pueblo, she said “Boyle Heights is not going down without a fight.
We know what we're up against and we’re not afraid. Our roots run deep here.”182 Corazón Del
Pueblo (Heart of the People), is a community based organization who has joined the fight against
gentrification aware that outsiders will fears “drive up rents, drive out residents and erase a
cradle of Chicano identity.”183 Additionally, my charlas with community members, some of
which form part of organization like Defend Boyle Heights and the Ovas, were vocal about their
distrust towards gentrifiers. Carol’s article validates this distrust, given that “community groups

181 “The Barrio is not for sale, it must be loved and defended” Phrased printed in posters, t-shirts, and other
media by Espacio 1839.
182 Rolly Carol, “Hope everyone pukes on your artisanal treats: fighting gentrification LA style,” The
la-gentrification-resistance-boyle-heights
183 Rolly Carol, “Hope everyone pukes on your artisanal treats: fighting gentrification LA style,” The
la-gentrification-resistance-boyle-heights
who carried on that spirit [of not going out without a fight] could not stop city authorities sandwiching the neighborhood between freeways.”184 Since April, the fight against gentrification in Boyle heights has escalated and currently BHAAAD is calling for the elimination of art galleries and other venues that further advance gentrification:

"We have one pretty simple demand," says Maga Miranda, an activist with the group Defend Boyle Heights, "which is for all art galleries in Boyle Heights to leave immediately and for the community to decide what takes their place."185 It is important to note, that the battleground around gentrification is tied to the art. It gives the neighborhood a sense of irony, given the long legacy of creative resistance in the barrio. An article published by ReMezcla reference this irony by stating that “Boyle Heights is in jeopardy of getting a new coat of paint that strips it of its history.”186 The community is discontent with art galleries, because it is bringing “artists who didn’t grow up in Boyle Heights, they look at Boyle Heights as a blank canvas and they don’t realize they are painting over another work of art,” Josefina López, a playwright and screenwriter (best known for “Real Women Have Curves) told the Los Angeles Times in an interview.187 John Arroyo, an urban planner and East L.A. native added that “it used to be that art was regarded as something homegrown.”188 There is a new influx of artists that do not have roots in the community or understand its struggle—they do not


188 Carolina Miranda, October 14, 2016 ‘Out!’ Boyle Heights activists say white art elites are ruining the neighborhood...but it’s complicated,Los Angeles Times, http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-etcam-art-gentrification-boyle-heights-20161014-snap-story.html
understand their power over the community and in turned do not feel welcome by it and further criminalize it.

In November 2016, a white own art gallery “PSST…” was vandalized, which sparked controversy given that the Los Angeles Police Department was investigating it and referring to it as a hate crime. The façade of the gallery was defaced with the words “F*ck White Art,” The Los Angeles Times reported (Appendix G).189 PSST… open its doors during the summer of 2016, on February 22, 2017, they announced that they would be leaving in response to the “communities harassment and online trolling.”190 Anti-gentrification activist saw this as a win. However, other community entities are taking different approaches to address gentrification. One of them is taking place in my high school, East Los Angeles Renaissance Academy (ELARA), a school focused on Urban Planning and Design. Without a doubt, they would have a say on the issue. ELARA works with Public Matters, a Los Angeles-based social enterprise that designs and implements long-term, place-based, socially engaged art, media, education, and civic engagement projects that advance social change.191 Public Matters engages high school seniors in a project called Greetings From East L.A. which “empowers students to turn a critical eye on their surroundings, with the knowledge that their opinions matter and they have the ability to effect change.”192 The project encourages students to rethink their urban space, and as it turns out


“the students have their own expertise and perspectives that are too often ignored by planners”

Mike Blockstein, the Principal for Public Matters told *Educator Innovator* in an interview.¹⁹³

For my field research, I partnered with Public Matters, given that as an ELARA alumni, I had the opportunity to work with the project as a high school student. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, one of the components of the project was the creation of a map (Appendix G), which showcased the community from the student’s perspective. The innovative ideas and tangible materials that come out of projects like this are outlets of creative resistance that can potentially shift the rhetoric around gentrification. It became clear to me that students can engage with topics like gentrification and want to have a say in their communities—they understand their barrio. As Mike Blockstein puts it “they know exactly which bus stop is underused because it lacks shade. They proposed adding bus shelters adorned with murals like those they love in their neighborhood.”¹⁹⁴ Students are conceptualizing the future of their urban environment, by taking into account their lived experiences in the community. Creative resistance oriented projects like *Greetings from East L.A.*, helps youth develop pride in their communities; it allows them to discover their roots, history, and ultimately reclaim their neighborhood.

ROOTED

Boyle Heights is a vibrant community, as expressed throughout this chapter, art is the heart of the community. Boyle Heights has rich culture that gravitates around art which has attracted white own art spaces to the community. For Boyle Heights residents, these new spaces


are problematic because they come with the promise of gentrification. Moreover, art galleries that are moving in claim that they “bring culture” with them. However, they are ignoring the rich culture that already exists within the community of Boyle Heights. Gentrification, as defined by the neighborhood, connotes the loss of culture and displacement of people. Additionally, it calls attention to historic urban renewal projects, like the construction of the freeways, fractured the neighborhood and created geographical borders meant to break down the community.

Both East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights employed outlets of creative resistance to reclaim their neighborhoods during the Chicano Movement. Today, both neighborhoods continue to employ similar outlets of creative resistance to secure such spaces. The most prominent outlet of creative resistance present in the neighborhoods are murals. Murals functions in two ways: first, they allow people to have ownership of their community and depict how they envision their community. Secondly, they physically claim a space in their built environment and thus justifies the communities’ presence within their changing barrio. One thing is clear, as *gentrification* sweeps through the Boyle Heights, mobilizations against ‘gentrifiers’ will unapologetically continue. The fight against *gentrification* will eventually become another chapter in the plight for equity and access in East L.A. and Boyle Heights.

CONCLUSION
LA CULTURA CURA

During Winter break 2016, I was walking down Cesar Chavez Avenue in East Los Angeles, taking photographs of street signs and murals for this thesis. Before reaching Mednik Avenue, my phone rang, it was Rosalio Muños, the co-chair for the Los Angeles Chicano
Moratorium. After a brief conversation on this project, he agreed to meet me the following day in The Church of The Epiphany in Lincoln Heights (Appendix H). I was thrilled, not only was I going to spend my day learning about the Chicano Moratorium, but I was going to be learning about it from someone who helped organize it. Moreover, I was going to be in the same space where the Chicano Moratorium and the East L.A. high school walkouts were planned. The Church of The Epiphany, was an important space during the 1960s and 1970s, and I was going to be able to experience that history. I spent almost twelve hours in the basement of the church with Rosalio and John Ortiz; they shared with me anecdotes, gave me insights into art that was used during the movement, they joked around, and reminisced about the past.

My day in the past, allowed me to ask them about things that newspapers and books cannot tell me. We ate lunch together and by the end of the day we sat listening to music from their youth. I listened to *Chicano Power* by Thee Midniters, learned about Huggy Boy, a Los Angeles based radio host, and found a new love for Chicano Rock. I gained so much from both of them. This experienced allowed me to understand that the Chicano Movement is not stagnant in the past. The Movimiento continues to be present through people’s stories of struggle and resistance—it is an emotion that transcends time. However, Shirley Trevino, in a letter to the editor of *La Raza*, published in 1971, reminds us that “emotion is not enough” (Appendix H).

“Why is it that we feel proud when 10,000 Chicanos walk together? Where do we walk? . . . Why is it that we shout LA REVOLUCION? . . . I love that emotion which Chicano, Movimiento, La Causa, has instilled in me. This has been the better parts of my life. But once that emotion dies, what do we have?”

My answer to Shirley is cultura, culture. The culture created by the Chicano Movement allows new generations to unapologetically embrace our Chicano, Mexican American, and Mexican roots. Creative resistance is a vehicle to preserve that culture. Mexican Americans and

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Chicanxs find pride in their shared Mexican roots; that pride manifests itself in the form of art, food, and language present in the community, all of which are forms of creative resistance. Sharing a similar culture and experience brought Latinxs together to develop communities like East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights. Those unique communities are marked by many struggles, yet the people within those spaces resist. That resistance can be seen through the production of art within those environments. Barrio culture plays a key role in the creation of art. Many murals, spoken words pieces, and events root themselves in Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicanx culture. At the same time, many events that are created for the community are intentional about being spaces that promote communal healing and empowerment. This type of collective healing happens organically without healing being the primary goal of the event. Moreover, a community that heals together is able to resist as a cohesive unit.

By the end of the evening, John Ortiz offered to drive me home, and as we drove through the streets of our barrio—I turned to him and asked about his favorite moment during the movimiento. John said that two moments came to mind, the first one was when he met Robert Kennedy in his youth (Appendix H). The second moment had occurred recently; when he watched the film Walkout, a dramatization of the Eastside Chicano Blowouts, with his then eleven year old son. “When the film ended,” he said, “my boy turned to me with teary eyes and a fist in the air, and proclaimed ‘Papí yo también soy Chicano’ (Dad, I too am a Chicano).” He extended his arm towards me for a fist bump, and said “that is what it is about.” I was deeply moved by John’s story, but at the same time I was cognizant of the many struggles that the Chicano Movement fought for that still affected the community—high rates of high school drop outs, police brutality, among others. This thesis, however, did not aim to set forth a solution to

those issues, nor outline potential ways in which creative resistance can advance sustainable change. Those are two ways in which this research project can grow in the future.

When I first began the process for this project, I wanted to record how art in the community was used to humanize the stories undocumented immigrants living in criminalized barrios. However, through my field and archival research and subsequent analysis, I uncovered a deep sense of pride and resiliency within East Los and Boyle Heights. But most importantly, I found that creative resistance promotes spaces for self-care and community healing—culture heals. This culture is breaking borders and bridging experiences among barrios throughout the United States. On February 12, 2017, the 59th Annual Grammy Awards took place, and the internet broke over Beyoncé’s performance. Yet, the performance that made me sprint from my chair did not even make it to the actual show. During the commercial break, “This Land Is Your Land” began to play in a familiar voice, my heart began to beat faster as images of my community were juxtapose with a Spanglish version of this American classic.197 The song, that prior to this moment had little effect to me, brought tear to my eyes as I saw it reclaimed by Chicano Batman, a band from East Los, it became the “immigrant anthem this country needs” reported the Huffington Post.198 The new version of the song includes a line in Spanish that translates into “there’s no one that can stop me on the way to liberty. There’s no one who can make me go back, this land is for you and for me.”199 Chicano Batman’s rendition of “This Land Is Your Land” showcased the transformative power of creative resistance to promote culture.

197 ‘This Land Is Your Land’ performed by Chicano Batman, accessed April 25, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Hva8tS5C1U


made an *all American song*, relatable to the Mexican-American, Chicanx, and immigrant experience.

Moreover, the ad had a national viewership, Latinxs across the United States had access to this form of creative resistance. It would follow that, in the midst of our technologically driven era, creative resistance is not exclusive to the barrios of East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights. Barrios across the nation hold unique manifestations of creative resistance, and have their own unique histories and struggles. Future research of creative resistance could include a similar project that centers creative resistance outlets of another barrio, like Pilsen in Chicago or The Mission in San Francisco. Additionally, a comparison of creative resistance across barrios and the impact that shared forms of creative resistance, like music, has on them would be a way to further study creative resistance in Latinx communities. Ultimately, as set forth by this thesis, creative resistance is about justice not victory; it is about truth, in a place where you are criminalized based on the brownness of your skin and aesthetic; it is about memory in a country where our culture and history are dismissed, and it is about love in the face of oppression. The barrios of East Los and Boyle Heights have endured many conflicts throughout the years, but one thing remains constant in every fight and in every struggle; the barrios’ *resiliency* and its “*ganas*” to fight for justice.

**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

*Cultura*—Culture

*Barrios*—Neighborhood/community

*Fronteras*—Border/frontier

*Mujerez*—Women

*Vecinos*—Neighbors

*Marchas*—Actions/Protests
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Secondary Sources:


**Primary Sources:**


La Raza  


APPENDIX A-B
Appendix A—Cover image Árboles de la Vida
https://s-media-cacheak0.pinimg.com/originals/16/bd/ce/16bdce6d7006b9e9c6c680e1bc429d7f.jpg

Appendix B—Interview Protocol, IRB approved.

Georgetown University
Group A - Interview Questions
Research Project on Transcending Fronteras: Art, Activism, and Immigrant Narratives

Questions:
  1. Could you tell me about where you were born?
  2. What is your favorite tradition/food from your country?
3. Why did you make the journey to the U.S.?
   a. Why did you choose to come to the U.S.?
4. What was your perception of the border before commencing the trip?
5. Now that you have crossed the border, Did your original perception change?
   a. How so?
6. What did you expect when you arrived here?
7. Do you have a favorite artist, musician, actor...
8. Show the participants pictures of the art along the border and ask them to comment on them.
   a. What do you think the purpose of the art is?
   b. How does it make you feel?
9. Before crossing or getting did you know that such art existed in the border?
10. Now that you are here, and after seeing the art, How do you feel about your experience of crossing the U.S.- Mexican border?
11. Are there any services you are having trouble accessing? (Lawyer, community orgs, etc)
12. Do you have a word of advice or something you would like to share with other immigrants?
13. How would you like them to be viewed?

Georgetown University
Interview Questions - Group B
Research Project on Transcending Fronteras: Art, Activism, and Immigrant Narratives

1. Please describe the general mission of your organization
2. Please describe your experience in working with this community.
   a. Could you tell us a story or an anecdote about your time in the community/org?
3. Does your organization hold programming that includes artistic or creative elements?
4. Do you think art has an impact on the community? If yes, how so?
5. How do you perceive border art?
   a. What do you think the purpose of it is?
   b. Do you have a favorite piece? why?
6. Who do you think is the intended audience for border art?
7. Thinking of the border as a canvas, what message or image would you depict?
8. How would you tell the story about your community?
9. If you could change something about how immigrants or/and border towns are depicted; what would you change?

APPENDIX C

Figure 1: Sixth Street Viaduct, photo from Los Angeles Mayor’s Office
Figure 2: Judith Baca, *Division of Barrios*, photo taken 2011. 
http://www.flickriver.com/photos/tags/judybaca/interesting/

Figure 3: “You are NOT a Minority Mural” by Mario Torero, 1978 
http://www.muralconservancy.org/murals/we-are-not-minority
Figure 4: Eastside Map by Eric Brightwell, 2012
**Figure 7**: East Los Angeles Interchange, 10.4 billion dollar structure.

https://futureworldcreation.wordpress.com/2013/12/31/east-los-angeles-interchange/
Figure 8: Chicano Power, Photo by Artenstein, Isaac, 1970. 
https://sectiona4spring2014.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/ss7729485_7729485_682129.jpg?w=1000

Figure 9: Ruben Salazar, *Los Angeles Times*, 1970. 
Figure 10: Greetings from East Los Angeles, Print. Photo by Clara A. Mejía Orta

Figure 11: Noches de Serenata, August 2016. Photo by Clara A. Mejía Orta
Figure 12: Noches de Serenata, August 2016. Photo by Clara A. Mejía Orta
APPENDIX D

Figure 1: Corazón Sagrado
http://vsemart.com/sacred-heart-art/
Figure 2: Corazón Sagrado de Los Angeles, created by Clara A. Mejía Orta

Figure 3: Low Rider, photo by Clara A. Mejía Orta
**Figure 4:** Mitlán Murals, Raúl G. photo by Sal Rojas.

![Image of Mitlán Murals](image)

**Figure 5:** Mural in Cesar Chavez Avenue, photo by Clara A. Mejía Orta

![Image of Mural in Cesar Chavez Avenue](image)
Figure 6: Roosevelt High School Mural, photo by Clara A. Mejía Orta

Figure 7: Chicano Poster, anonymous.
Figure 8: La Raza Cover. Courtesy of East Los Angeles Chicano Center

Figures 9-11: East Los Angeles Art Walk, photos by Clara A. Mejía Orta
Viva Los Cupcakes, display.
Figure 10: Zine by the Backyard Brigade Collective.

Figure 1: Butterfly by Cesar Maxit
I Am Joaquin

by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales

Yo soy Joaquín,
perdido en un mundo de confusión:
I am Joaquín, lost in a world of confusion,
caught up in the whirl of a gringo society,
confused by the rules, scorned by attitudes,
suppressed by manipulation, and destroyed by modern society.
My fathers have lost the economic battle
and won the struggle of cultural survival.
And now! I must choose between the paradox of
victory of the spirit, despite physical hunger,
or to exist in the grasp of American social neurosis,
sterilization of the soul and a full stomach.
Yes, I have come a long way to nowhere,
unwillingly dragged by that monstrous, technical,
industrial giant called Progress and Anglo success....
I look at myself.
I watch my brothers.
I shed tears of sorrow. I sow seeds of hate.
I withdraw to the safety within the circle of life --
MY OWN PEOPLE
I am Cuauhtémoc, proud and noble,
leader of men, king of an empire civilized
beyond the dreams of the gachupín Cortés,
who also is the blood, the image of myself.
I am the Maya prince.
I am Nezahualcóyotl, great leader of the Chichimecas.
I am the sword and flame of Cortes the despot
And I am the eagle and serpent of the Aztec civilization.
I owned the land as far as the eye
could see under the Crown of Spain,
and I toiled on my Earth and gave my Indian sweat and blood
for the Spanish master who ruled with tyranny over man and
beast and all that he could trample
But...THE GROUND WAS MINE.
I was both tyrant and slave.
As the Christian church took its place in God's name,
to take and use my virgin strength and trusting faith,
the priests, both good and bad, took--
but gave a lasting truth that Spaniard Indian Mestizo
were all God's children.
And from these words grew men who prayed and fought
for their own worth as human beings, for that
GOLDEN MOMENT of FREEDOM.
I was part in blood and spirit of that courageous village priest
Hidalgo who in the year eighteen hundred and ten
rang the bell of independence and gave out that lasting cry--
El Grito de Dolores
"Que mueran los gachupines y que viva la Virgen de Guadalupe...."
I sentenced him who was me I excommunicated him, my blood.
I drove him from the pulpit to lead a bloody revolution for him and me....
I killed him.
His head, which is mine and of all those
who have come this way,
I placed on that fortress wall
to wait for independence. Morelos! Matamoros! Guerrero!
all companeros in the act, STOOD AGAINST THAT WALL OF INFAMY
to feel the hot gouge of lead which my hands made.
I died with them ... I lived with them .... I lived to see our country free.
Free from Spanish rule in eighteen-hundred-twenty-one.
Mexico was free??
The crown was gone but all its parasites remained, and ruled, and taught, with gun and flame and mystic power.

I worked, I sweated, I bled, I prayed, and waited silently for life to begin again. I fought and died for Don Benito Juarez, guardian of the Constitution. I was he on dusty roads on barren land as he protected his archives as Moses did his sacraments. He held his Mexico in his hand on the most desolate and remote ground which was his country. And this giant little Zapotec gave not one palm's breadth of his country's land to kings or monarchs or presidents of foreign powers.

I am Joaquin. I rode with Pancho Villa, crude and warm, a tornado at full strength, nourished and inspired by the passion and the fire of all his earthy people. I am Emiliano Zapata.

"This land, this earth is OURS." The villages, the mountains, the streams belong to Zapatistas. Our life or yours is the only trade for soft brown earth and maize. All of which is our reward, a creed that formed a constitution for all who dare live free!

"This land is ours . . .
Father, I give it back to you. Mexico must be free. . . ."
I ride with revolutionists against myself. I am the Rurales, coarse and brutal, I am the mountain Indian, superior over all.

The thundering hoof beats are my horses. The chattering machine guns are death to all of me:

Yaqui
Tarahumara
Chamala
Zapotec
Mestizo
Español.

I have been the bloody revolution, The victor, The vanquished. I have killed And been killed. I am the despots Díaz
And Huerta
And the apostle of democracy,
Francisco Madero.
I am
The black-shawled
Faithful women
Who die with me
Or live
Depending on the time and place.
I am faithful, humble Juan Diego,
The Virgin of Guadalupe,
Tonantzin, Aztec goddess, too.
I rode the mountains of San Joaquín.
I rode east and north
As far as the Rocky Mountains,
And
All men feared the guns of
Joaquín Murrieta.
I killed those men who dared
To steal my mine,
Who raped and killed my love
My wife.
Then I killed to stay alive.
I was Elfego Baca,
living my nine lives fully.
I was the Espinoza brothers
of the Valle de San Luis.
All were added to the number of heads that in the name of civilization
were placed on the wall of independence, heads of brave men
who died for cause or principle, good or bad.
Hidalgo! Zapata!
Murrieta! Espinozas!
Are but a few.
They dared to face
The force of tyranny
Of men who rule by deception and hypocrisy.
I stand here looking back,
And now I see the present,
And still I am a campesino,
I am the fat political coyote—
I,
Of the same name,
Joaquín,
In a country that has wiped out
All my history,
Stifled all my pride,
In a country that has placed a
Different weight of indignity upon my age-old burdened back.
Inferiority is the new load . . .
The Indian has endured and still
Emerged the winner,
The Mestizo must yet overcome,
And the gachupín will just ignore.
I look at myself
And see part of me
Who rejects my father and my mother
And dissolves into the melting pot
To disappear in shame.
I sometimes
Sell my brother out
And reclaim him
For my own when society gives me
Token leadership
In society's own name.
I am Joaquín,
Who bleeds in many ways.
The altars of Moctezuma
I stained a bloody red.
My back of Indian slavery
Was stripped crimson
From the whips of masters
Who would lose their blood so pure
When revolution made them pay,
Standing against the walls of retribution.
Blood has flowed from me on every battlefield between
campesino, hacendado,
slave and master and revolution.
I jumped from the tower of Chapultepec
into the sea of fame—
my country's flag
my burial shroud—
with Los Niños,
whose pride and courage
could not surrender
with indignity
their country's flag
to strangers . . . in their land.
Now I bleed in some smelly cell from club or gun or tyranny.
I bleed as the vicious gloves of hunger
Cut my face and eyes,
As I fight my way from stinking barrios
To the glamour of the ring
And lights of fame
Or mutilated sorrow.
My blood runs pure on the ice-caked
Hills of the Alaskan isles,
On the corpse-strewn beach of Normandy,
The foreign land of Korea
And now Vietnam.
Here I stand
Before the court of justice,
Guilty
For all the glory of my Raza
To be sentenced to despair.
Here I stand,
Poor in money,
Arrogant with pride,
Bold with machismo,
Rich in courage
And
Wealthy in spirit and faith.
My knees are caked with mud.
My hands calloused from the hoe. I have made the Anglo rich,
Yet
Equality is but a word—
The Treaty of Hidalgo has been broken
And is but another treacherous promise.
My land is lost
And stolen,
My culture has been raped.
I lengthen the line at the welfare door
And fill the jails with crime.
These then are the rewards
This society has
For sons of chiefs
And kings
And bloody revolutionists,
Who gave a foreign people
All their skills and ingenuity
To pave the way with brains and blood
For those hordes of gold-starved strangers,
Who
Changed our language
And plagiarized our deeds
As feats of valor
Of their own.
They frowned upon our way of life
and took what they could use.
Our art, our literature, our music, they ignored—
so they left the real things of value
and grabbed at their own destruction
by their greed and avarice.
They overlooked that cleansing fountain of
nature and brotherhood
which is Joaquín.
The art of our great señores,
Diego Rivera,
Siqueiros,
Orozco, is but another act of revolution for
the salvation of mankind.
Mariachi music, the heart and soul
of the people of the earth,
the life of the child,
and the happiness of love.
The corridos tell the tales
of life and death,
of tradition,
legends old and new, of joy
of passion and sorrow
of the people—who I am.
I am in the eyes of woman,
sheltered beneath
her shawl of black,
deep and sorrowful eyes
that bear the pain of sons long buried or dying,
dead on the battlefield or on the barbed wire of social strife.
Her rosary she prays and fingers endlessly
like the family working down a row of beets
to turn around and work and work.
There is no end.
Her eyes a mirror of all the warmth
and all the love for me,
and I am her
and she is me.
We face life together in sorrow,
anger, joy, faith and wishful
thoughts.
I shed the tears of anguish
as I see my children disappear
behind the shroud of mediocrity,
ever to look back to remember me.
I am Joaquín.
I must fight
and win this struggle
for my sons, and they
must know from me
who I am.
Part of the blood that runs deep in me
could not be vanquished by the Moors.
I defeated them after five hundred years,
and I have endured.
Part of the blood that is mine
has labored endlessly four hundred
years under the heel of lustful Europeans.
I am still here!

I have endured in the rugged mountains
Of our country
I have survived the toils and slavery of the fields.
I have existed
In the barrios of the city
In the suburbs of bigotry
In the mines of social snobbery
In the prisons of dejection
In the muck of exploitation
And
In the fierce heat of racial hatred.
And now the trumpet sounds,
The music of the people stirs the Revolution.
Like a sleeping giant it slowly
Rears its head
To the sound of
Tramping feet
Clamoring voices
Mariachi strains
Fiery tequila explosions
The smell of chile verde and
Soft brown eyes of expectation for a
Better life.
And in all the fertile farmlands,
the barren plains,
the mountain villages,
smoke-smeread cities,
we start to MOVE.
La raza!
Méjicano!
Español!
Latino!
Chicano!
Or whatever I call myself,
I look the same
I feel the same
I cry
And
Sing the same.
I am the masses of my people and
I refuse to be absorbed.
I am Joaquin.
The odds are great
But my spirit is strong,
My faith unbreakable,
My blood is pure.
I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ.
I SHALL ENDURE!
I WILL ENDURE!

Figure 4: 1968, Belvedere Citizen Cover, courtesy of the East Los Angeles Chicano Center Archive
Item 5: List of Proposals made to the Board of Education Academic, 1968.

POSALS MADE BY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS OF EAST LOS ANGELES TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION ACADEMIC

- No student or teacher will be reprimanded or suspended for participating in any efforts which are executed for the purpose of improving or furthering the educational quality in our schools.
- Bilingual-Bi-cultural education will be compulsory for Mexican-Americans in the Los Angeles City School System where there is a majority of Mexican-American students. This program will be open to all other students on a voluntary basis. A) in-service education programs will be instituted immediately for all staff in order to teach them the Spanish language and increase their understanding of the history, traditions, and contributions of the Mexican culture. B) All administrators in the elementary and secondary schools in these areas will become proficient in the Spanish language. Participants are to be compensated during the training period at not less than $8.80 an hour and upon completion of the course will receive in addition to their salary not less than $100.00 a month. The monies for these programs will come from local funds, state funds and matching federal funds.
- Administrators and teachers who show any form of prejudice toward Mexican or Mexican-American students, including failure to recognize, understand, and appreciate Mexican culture and heritage, will be removed from East Los Angeles schools. This will be decided by a Citizens Review Board selected by the Educational Issues Committee.
- Textbooks and curriculum will be developed to show Mexican and Mexican-American contribution to the U.S. society and to show the injustices that Mexicans have suffered as a culture of that society. Textbooks should concentrate on Mexican folklore rather than English folklore.
- All administrators where schools have majority of Mexican-American descent shall be of Mexican-American descent. If necessary, training programs should be instituted to provide a cadre of Mexican-American administrators.
- Every teacher’s ratio of failure per students in his classroom shall be made available to community groups and students. Any teacher having a particularly high percentage of the total school dropouts in his classes shall be rated by the Citizens Review Board composed of the Educational Issues Committee.

ADMINISTRATIVE

- Schools should have a manager to take care of paper work and maintenance supervision. Administrators will direct the Education standards of the School instead of being head janitors and office clerks as they are today.
- School facilities should be made available for community activities under the supervision of Parents' Councils (not PTA). Recreation programs for children will be developed.
- No teacher will be dismissed or transferred because of his political views and/or philosophical disagreements with administrators.
Community parents will be engaged as teacher's aides. Orientation similar to in-service training, will be provided, and they will be given status as semi-professionals as in the new careers concept.

FACILITIES

The Industrial Arts program must be re-vitalized. Students need proper training to use the machinery of modern day industry. Up-to-date equipment and new operational techniques must replace the obsolescent machines and outmoded training methods currently being employed in this program. If this high standard cannot be met, the Industrial Arts program will be de-emphasized.

New high schools in the area must be immediately built. The new schools will be named by the community. At least two Senior High Schools and at least one Junior High School must be built. Marengo Street School must be reactivated to reduce the student-teacher load at Murchison Street School.

The master plans for Garfield High School and Roosevelt High School must go into effect immediately.

Library facilities will be expanded in all East Los Angeles high schools. At present the libraries in these high schools do not meet the educational needs of the students. Sufficient library materials will be provided in Spanish.

Open-air student eating areas should be made into roofed eating malls. As an example, Los Angeles High School.

STUDENT RIGHTS

Corporal punishment will only be administrated according to State Law.

Teachers and administrators will be rated by the students at the end of each semester.

Students should have access to any type of literature and should be allowed to bring it on campus.

Students who spend time helping teachers shall be given monetary and/or credit compensation.

Students will be allowed to have guest speakers to club meetings. The only regulation should be to inform the club sponsor.

Dress and grooming standards will be determined by a group of a) students and b) parents.

Student body offices shall be open to all students. A high grade point average shall not be considered as a pre-requisite to eligibility.

Entrances to all buildings and restrooms should be accessible to all students during school hours. Security can be enforced by designated students.

Student menus should be Mexican oriented. When Mexican food is served, mother from the barrios should come to the school and help supervise the preparation of the food. These mothers will meet the food handler requirements of Los Angeles City Schools and they will be compensated for their services.

School janitorial services should be restricted to the employees hired for that purposes by the school board. Students will be punished by picking up paper or trash and keeping them out of class.

Only area superintendents can suspend students.
Figure 6: Police handcuff a Brown Beret and photographer from the Free Press outside Belmont High School, March 8th 1968. Photo Courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library https://www.kcet.org/shows/departures/east-la-blowouts-walking-out-for-justice-in-the-classrooms
APPENDIX F

Figure 1: Georgetown Day of the Dead Altar by MeCHA, Photo by Clara A. Mejía Orta

Figure 2: Altar, Photograph by Clara A. Mejía Orta
Figure 3: Jesse Romero
http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2016/08/12/479614/vigil--Jesse-Romero-LAPD-shot

Figure 4: Jesse’s Altar and Mural
Figure 5: Chicano Moratorium
https://www.kcet.org/shows/departures/the-chicano-moratorium

Figure 6: Funeral Procession, La Raza, courtesy of the East Los Angeles Chicano Resource Center
Figure 7: Rosalio’s Poster by Ramses Noriega

Figure 8: Silver Dollar, Moments before Ruben Slazar’s death, La Raza, courtesy of the East Los Angeles Chicano Resource Center
Item 9: Corrido de Ruben Salazar, *La Raza*, courtesy of the East Los Angeles Chicano Resource Center
Figure 10: Letter to La Raza editor from Irving Sarcoft, courtesy of the East Los Angeles Chicano Resource Center

Los Angeles TIMES
Times Mirror Square
Los Angeles, Cal. 90012

Gentlemen:

On February 28, 1970, thousands of Chicanos and some others demonstrated to protest the out of proportion mortality rates of Chicanos in Vietnam. They marched to protest the American involvement in Vietnam which distorts our priorities and diverts our resources, primarily human, from life to those of killing and death.

These people, mostly young, marched for miles in a downpour. Your newspaper (The Los Angeles Times) however, chose to virtually ignore this important event, giving it only four lines.

This attitude, which was even stated by a press person, seems to be “Call us when something really exciting happens or if there is some violence.”

I wonder what kind of coverage you would have given if thousands marched in the rain to support the war (an absurdity).

One week earlier, the Peace Action Council action received much more coverage although only some 500 people participated. This was because a small insignificant scuffle occurred with uniformed Nazis. Some have suggested forming a rent-a-Nazi business to secure mass-media coverage. The reaction of other mass media was similar to that of the Los Angeles TIMES, if that is any consolation to your paper.

I am constantly reminded by this type of media response to peaceful actions of the words of President Kennedy, when he said that “by preventing peaceful revolution we make violent revolution inevitable.”

Very truly yours,
Irving Saroff, Chairman
Peace Action Council of Southern California
Figure 11: Chicano youth in the moratorium.
https://www.kcet.org/shows/departures/the-chicano-moratorium
Figure 12: Police presence during the moratorium.  
https://www.kcet.org/shows/departures/the-chicano-moratorium

Figure 13-15: Vigil in honor of Pulse victims  
Figure 14: The Wall of the Lost Ones, photo by Clara A. Mejía Orta

Figure 15: Barragán’s Community Altar
http://www.boyleheightsbeat.com/date/2017/03
APPENDIX G

Figure 1: Mexican Flag
https://www.shutterstock.com/video/search/mexican-flag

Figure 2: Eagle detail.
http://www.proyectodiez.mx/el-aguila-sobre-el-nopal-origen-del-escudo-nacional/
Figure 3: Gente Sí, Gentrify No! created by Espacio 1839. Photo by Nico Avina. 
Figure 4: El Barrio No Se Vende, T-Shirt by Espacio 1839.

Figure 5: Ovas, mic night and movie screening, photo by Clara A. Mejía Orta.
Figure 6: La Pared Que Canta, Habla y Grita Mural, photo by Clara A. Mejía Orta.

Figure 7: F**K White Art Vandalism.  
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/04/boyle-heights-art-gallery-vandalism-hate-crime-gentrification#img-1
Figure 8: ELARA, *Greeting from East L.A.* Map  
[https://publicmattersgroup.com/projects/greetingsfromeastla/](https://publicmattersgroup.com/projects/greetingsfromeastla/)

Figure 9: Sixth Street Project  
[http://www.sixthstreetviaduct.org/parcproject](http://www.sixthstreetviaduct.org/parcproject)
APPENDIX H

FIGURE 1: Church of the Epiphany
https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/church-epiphany

FIGURE 2: Letter to the editor of La Raza, “Emotion is not Enough.” Courtesy of the East Los Angeles Chicano Resource Center.

FIGURE 4: John Ortiz, Kennedy, and other Chicanx Youth. http://coachfogs.blogspot.com/2014/08/blowouts.html