

**National Borders, Neighborhood Boundaries:  
Gender, Space and Border Formation in  
Chinese and Mexican Los Angeles, 1871-1938**

**by**

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For my abuelos,  
Adelina Esquibel Quintana  
and  
Cristoval Daniel Quintana

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## **Abstract**

A study of the plaza area in the city of Los Angeles, this dissertation explores how national borders were mapped onto neighborhood geographies in the making of a racially segregated urban landscape. From the 1870s through the 1930s, the plaza area was home to Mexicans, Chinese and others who played varying roles in the formation of community. Places that came to be known as “Chinatown” and “Sonoratown” became not only sites of racial difference but also locations that were designated “foreign” districts; thus, they were located ideologically outside of the geopolitical borders of the U.S. nation-state despite their location within U.S. territory. I argue that the U.S. conquest of former Mexican territories, deportation campaigns, Mexican repatriation, and Chinese exclusion were simultaneous processes of border formation that affected the social relationships of Los Angeles residents. In the making of what I call the “urban borderlands,” multiracial social and spatial configurations of plaza area neighborhoods were shaped not only by the racialization of places known as “Chinatown” and “Sonoratown” but also by the shifting locations and meanings of U.S. nation-state borders, including at times immigration exclusion.

Linking race, class, gender and nation, this study offers an understanding of community formation in the context of rapid industrialization and modernization. Plaza area residents made meaning of their local geography through conflicts over space, limited resources, exclusion and deportation movements, and industrialization. Through

spatial and material culture analyses of public spaces, home spaces, and city geography, this thesis shows how architecture and street spaces might be used to understand the social relationships of Mexican and Chinese residents. In doing so, it examines the different and sometimes opposing spatial imaginaries of Mexican and Chinese residents, reformers, city officials, and city boosters.

By examining both pivotal events in which Chinese and Mexican bodies were removed from urban space, and the everyday lives of these residents, this study contributes to a new understanding of working-class, immigrant and urban U.S. history, as well as Chicana/o and Asian American Studies. In doing so, it illuminates how U.S. global imperialism took on local manifestations in places such as Los Angeles.

## Introduction

### Segregation in the Urban Borderlands

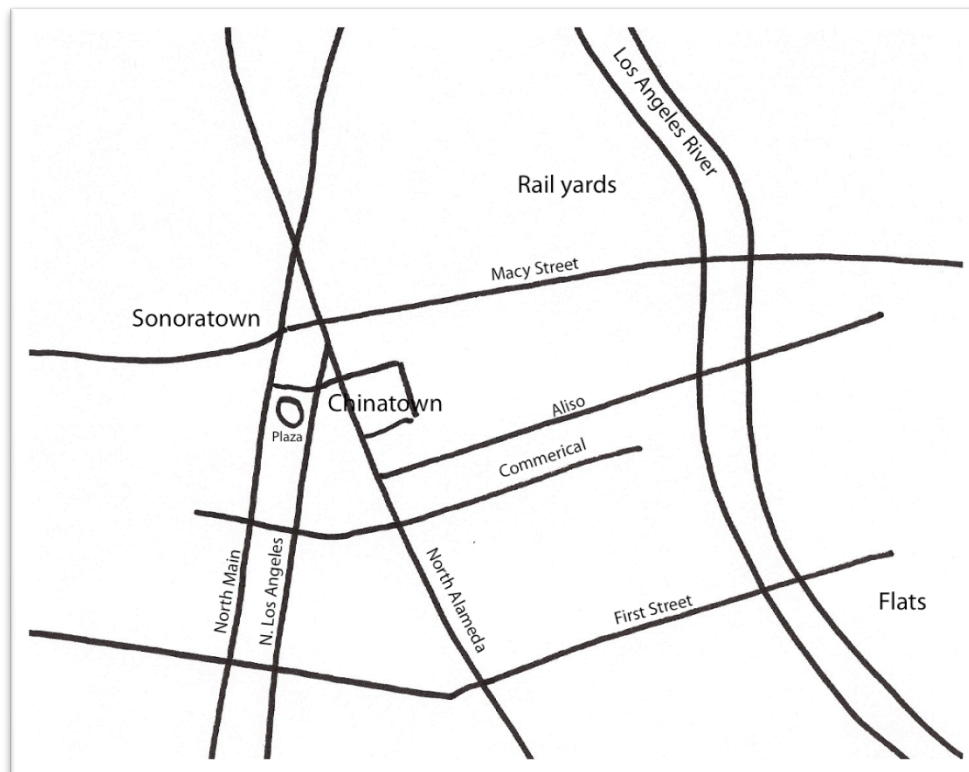


Figure 1: Los Angeles plaza area at the turn of the twentieth century.

On the eve of the Mexican Revolution, Los Angeles newspapers wrested Americans' attention away from events across the U.S.-Mexico border and instead ran a series of stories on Mexicans hiding in Chinatown, a downtown ghetto well within the borders of the city. Inspired by news that a revolution had been set in motion in the

nearby northern states of Mexico, Mexicans—mostly men and boys from the southern California region—had started to gather in the plaza and the surrounding streets of downtown Los Angeles. Thousands of revolutionaries waited in Sonoratown and Chinatown—the city’s Mexican and Chinese districts—to catch the train to the U.S.-Mexico border in Arizona and Texas, where they would cross over and join the Maderistas. Using the U.S. railroads to their own ends, they planned to pass “as railroad laborers,” although surely many of them actually were railroad laborers, and to travel on the rails of the Southern Pacific, which by that time extended into the Mexican interior. As they prepared for the trip, they found refuge with other Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans and with Chinese residents of the plaza area.<sup>1</sup> Chinese Angelenos assisted the revolutionaries by coordinating lodging and travel, likely drawing on community and/or personal knowledge of the U.S.-Mexico border accumulated from smuggling efforts under U.S. Chinese exclusion policy and Chinese Mexican communities and settlements along the Mexican side of the border.<sup>2</sup>

Alarmed headlines in the *Los Angeles Herald* proclaimed, “Rebels Hide in Local Chinatown” and “Mexican Revolutionists Are Quartered in Basements of Oriental

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<sup>1</sup> “Rebels Hide in Local Chinatown,” *Los Angeles Herald*, November 28, 1910. For a discussion of Mexican railroad labor in the United States, see Jeffrey Marcos Garcilazo, ““Traqueros”: Mexican Railroad Workers in the United States, 1870 to 1930” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1995). Significantly, one of the aspects of the Porfiriato that the Maderistas protested was the railroads themselves. Among many related issues, Madero advocated for working-class industrial workers to reclaim land that had been taken by U.S. railroad companies. For more on the relationship between U.S. imperialism and the Revolution see John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), esp. 11-13.

<sup>2</sup> “Rebels Hide in Local Chinatown”; “Fifty Armed Mexicans Await Train for Border,” *Los Angeles Herald*, November 29, 1910. For discussion of Chinese smuggling across the U.S.-Mexico border, see Robert Chao Romero, “Transnational Chinese Immigrant Smuggling to the United States via Mexico and Cuba, 1882-1916,” *Amerasia Journal* 30, no. 3 (2004): 1-16; Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007). Page number for Lee.



District.”<sup>3</sup> Mexican revolutionaries were “hiding” in what journalists thought was a mysterious underground Chinese world. Indeed, with blankets, supplies and arms belted to their bodies, the small groups of Mexican men on street corners and on porches of the adobe buildings of Chinatown did not go unnoticed by local police. Afraid that violence could potentially break out, the Los Angeles police on the Chinatown beat “made a hasty search of all Mexicans encountered on the streets,” especially those who mingled in clusters.<sup>4</sup> Chinatown policeman Pautz stated for the newspapers that the plaza area neighborhoods were regular stopping spots for Mexican revolutionaries who passed through Los Angeles by the “hundreds.” “They come into town in bands at night,” he said, “and sleep either in Chinatown or in the Mexican quarter leaving in the morning by train for Arizona and Texas points.”<sup>5</sup>

Although the revolutionaries also found temporary lodging in Sonoratown, it was the fact that thousands of Mexicans would find shelter in Chinatown with the assistance of Chinatown residents that seemed to baffle journalists. The *Herald* reported that Chinese merchants had “banded together,” clearing “basements and buildings formerly occupied by the [O]riental to make room for the bands of armed Mexicans.”<sup>6</sup> Such evidence of transracial intermingling—and the possibility that Mexicans and Chinese could potentially unite surreptitiously and quite rapidly for political action—destabilized the ideological association of race with place, and more specifically, the spatial imaginaries that often characterized the urban spaces that came to be known as Chinatown and Sonoratown. Newspapers much more typically

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<sup>3</sup> “Rebels Hide in Local Chinatown.”

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> “Fifty Armed Mexicans Await Train for Border.”

<sup>6</sup> “Rebels Hide in Local Chinatown.”

imagined and portrayed Los Angeles as a city with designated Chinese geographical spaces and Mexican geographical spaces as racially discreet districts tied to “foreign” nations—China and Mexico—and thus as racialized spaces ideologically located outside of the U.S. nation. Perhaps the presence of Mexicans within the socially constructed boundaries of Chinatown was an anomalous moment of interracial rapport. Then again, the history of Chinese settlement in the long-standing and increasingly immigrant Mexican neighborhood known as Sonoratown indicates the possibility that interracial interaction may have been more common than not. What does the surprise over Mexican revolutionaries seeking shelter in Chinatown, rather than exclusively amongst the Mexicans and Mexican Americans who lived in Sonoratown, tell us about how people made sense of the places commonly known as Chinatown and Sonoratown?

This dissertation describes and analyzes the spatial, political and economic conditions that could produce this series of events in Los Angeles and these newspaper stories about the plaza area. It explores nation-building through the synchronized tasks of U.S. territorial expansion and the exclusion of Mexican and Chinese bodies, and how both affected people in their everyday. U.S. conquest of former Mexican territories, along with deportation campaigns, Mexican repatriation, and Chinese exclusion were simultaneous processes of border formation that took place in the daily lives of Los Angeles residents. In this urban borderlands context, multiracial social and spatial configuration of plaza area neighborhoods, were shaped not only by the racialization of places, but also by shifting meanings and restrictions of U.S. nation-state borders. This study centers on a set of related inquiries that link race, class, gender and nation in the context of urban segregation and border formation. How were national borders mapped

onto neighborhood geographies in the making of a racially segregated urban landscape in Los Angeles' plaza area? How did these borders function in the neighborhoods similarly and differently for Mexican and Chinese residents? As U.S. geopolitical and ideological borders shifted in relation to changing economic and political structures, what were the material, spatial and cultural consequences for the everyday lives of plaza area residents themselves?

### **Theorizing and Historicizing the Urban Borderlands**

In Los Angeles, these Mexican and Chinese residents of the plaza area lived in extremely close proximity from the 1870s through the 1930s. In fact, when Chinese first settled on the eastern edge of the plaza in the late 1860s, Los Angeles was still largely a “Mexican” town, and so a place called “Chinatown” developed in a portion of a space that was also known as “Sonoratown.” Chinatown was known as “Chinatown” not simply because there were Chinese people who lived there, whether of their own volition or because they were restricted from living elsewhere in the city. More importantly, it was, as Kay Anderson has argued, a socially constructed geographical space, created and (re)created “with a cultural history and a tradition of imagery and institutional practice that has given it a cognitive and material reality in and for the West.”<sup>7</sup> The same could be argued of Sonoratown with regard to Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Significantly also, they both confronted simultaneous and overlapping U.S. border formations that manifested through anti-Chinese and anti-

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<sup>7</sup> Kay J. Anderson, “The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77, no. 4 (December 1987): 581.

Mexican violence, neighborhood segregation, employment limitation, immigration restriction, and deportation campaigns.

From the 1870s through the 1930s, the region underwent rapid industrialization and modernization that drastically transformed the cultural, social and political landscape under U.S. rule. While Reconstruction and the subsequent Jim Crow era divided societies in other regions of the United States along black-white lines, the presence of multiple non-white and non-black residents in rising industrial urban centers in the West demanded a different configuration of the racial order, as the United States sought to instill state control after the U.S.-Mexico War. As scholars have argued, U.S. conquest of former Mexican territories was a process that did not end with the U.S.-Mexico War (1846-1848), but which continued well into the twentieth century. The arrival and creation of new markets in Los Angeles beginning in the 1870s, along with the insertion of U.S. dominant cultures, ideologies, methods of governance and claims to territorial sovereignty, created new patterns of social relationships and new imaginaries that shaped what those relationships meant.<sup>8</sup>

The arrival of railroads in the 1870s and 80s fostered the growth of multiple industries near the plaza, and fueled not only the boom of the city's general population,

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<sup>8</sup> For an insightful discussion of “the unending Mexican War,” see William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 11-48. For discussions of U.S. conquest, see for example, Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Stephen J. Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). See also Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

but also the formation of an immigrant industrial working-class district. Industrial labor recruitment practices, along with anti-Chinese violence in outlying areas, contributed to the growth of Mexican and Chinese neighborhoods near the plaza. By the turn of the twentieth century, the plaza area, no longer a home to Californio elites or Anglo American elites, had become associated with Chinatown and Sonoratown as well as Los Angeles' bustling industrial zone. (See Figure 1) However, from 1933 through 1938, neighborhoods known as Chinatown and Sonoratown were displaced with the construction of a civic center, a new railroad depot and tourist destination that served to represent Los Angeles' particular brand of modernity.

In this context, racial formation and segregation in the plaza area were shaped not only by economic forces, but also by residents' relationships with shifting locations and definitions of U.S. borders. I use the framework of *urban borderlands* to understand how Chinese and Mexican residents negotiated both place-based neighborhood boundaries that gave shape to experiences of mobility across urban terrain, and global geopolitical borders that were used to define the U.S. nation through inclusion and exclusion. Controlled by people and nations, geopolitical borders map the geographical boundaries of the nation-state in order to claim political sovereignty over land. I draw on anthropologist Robert Alvarez's definition of borderlands "as a region and a set of practices defined and determined by this [U.S.-Mexico] border that are characterized by conflict and contradiction, that are material and ideational."<sup>9</sup> To this definition I would add that the region known as the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, located on the Pacific Rim, was and is situated at the nexus of multiple U.S. nation-state borders, both by land and

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<sup>9</sup> Robert R. Alvarez, Jr., "The Mexican-U.S. Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 447-470.

by sea. California and Los Angeles in particular were located not only on the edge of the continent claimed by the United States as sovereign territory. They were also on the edge of the United States' larger global empire that sought to tap into Pacific markets in China, Japan and Asia more generally. Migrants from China who settled in Los Angeles crossed into the United States via the U.S.-Mexico border as well as via ship at various ports on the California coast, notably the ports at San Pedro and San Francisco. Where Chinese exclusion laws of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made Chinese border-crossing into the United States illegal, border-crossing for Mexican migrants was much more flexible. While post-1848 Los Angeles was not located directly on the U.S.-Mexico border, or at a U.S. port (the nearest being San Pedro), it was and is part of a region in which everyday culture and practices are defined in relation to the boundaries of the U.S. nation-state.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, borders were social, spatial and ideological constructs that were marked by race, class and gender. In order to examine the relationship between geopolitical borders and daily life near the plaza, I find useful the concept of "spatial imaginary," which scholars have proposed as way to analyze how people construct their realities. Mexican and Chinese residents and city authorities (reformers, officials, boosters, etc.) had varying spatial imaginaries that linked together material configurations (architecture, street layout, location in relation to resources and power), daily practices

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<sup>10</sup> In his book on the United States' relationship with the Pacific world, Bruce Cumings provides an insightful discussion of the ways in which "manifest destiny" and continental expansion were always linked to the expansion of global markets into the Pacific. See Bruce Cumings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), esp. 55-93. For a discussion of the historical relationships between Pacific World and California, see also Rudy P. Guevara, "Mexipino: A History of Multiethnic Identity and the Formation of the Mexican and Filipino Communities of San Diego, 1900-1965" (University of California, Santa Barbara, 2007).. On Chinese border-crossing at the U.S.-Mexico border, see Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*, 151-188; Chao Romero, "Transnational Chinese Immigrant Smuggling to the United States via Mexico and Cuba, 1882-1916."

(the knowledge that arose through everyday making and usage of space), and ideology (ideas and representations about what the space means).<sup>11</sup> In his foundational work Henri Lefebvre argued that space is socially constructed through ideologies and representation, as well as through knowledges and social relationships that emerge through everyday practice.<sup>12</sup> Drawing on this theoretical framework, Edward Soja and others have noted the importance of understanding multiple, sometimes opposing, visions of space that link “real and imagined places.”<sup>13</sup> I use the concept of “spatial imaginary” as a way to understand the meanings residents attached to space and how these meanings were inextricably linked not only to dynamic material form of the homes themselves, but also to their differential power relationships with regard to race, class, gender and nation.

In this study, I sometimes use nation-state borders and geopolitical borders interchangeably to refer to the geographical division between nation-states. I refer to geocultural borders as the geographical, spatial boundaries that were made through the social and spatial construction of gender, race, class, and nation. This construction was about meaning-making regarding the everyday practices that created and recreated distinct geographical delineation between racialized communities.<sup>14</sup> In the plaza area,

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<sup>11</sup> Antoine Bailly argues for a complex understanding of the relationship between representation and geography. Significantly instead of representation, Lipsitz extends this idea, by pointing out how ideology and geography are marked by power. In the context of racial segregation, he posits that exclusion and capitalism place different values on city space that are based in the intersection of race, place and power. Antoine S. Bailly, “Spatial Imaginary and Geography: A Plea for the Geography of Representations,” *GeoJournal* 31, no. 3 (1993): 247-250; George Lipsitz, “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race,” *Landscape Journal* 26, no. 1 (2007): 10-23.

<sup>12</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1974).

<sup>13</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Janet G. Townsend, “Towards a Regional Geography of Gender,” *The Geographical Journal* 157, no. 1 (March 1991): 25-35.

the blurriness of geocultural borders meant that despite racial differences, the confinement of segregation created moments of interaction, sharing and intimacy. Still, local spatial imaginaries among reformers, city officials and boosters, and plaza area residents alike, geocultural borders designated Chinese geographical spaces and Mexican geographical spaces, within which residents and visitors participated in gender and race specific activities.

The gender and race politics of geopolitical border formation shaped border-crossing as well. Chinese immigration restriction and Mexican labor recruitment also had a hand in the creation of racialized gender dynamics in plaza area neighborhoods and their eventual expansion in the 1910s and 20s. Chinese women, in particular, were banned from entering the United States at varying times in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the legality of their border crossing was determined largely by their marital relationship with Chinese merchant men.<sup>15</sup> Thus, it was not until the first decades of the twentieth century that a sizable U.S.-born Chinese American youth population—commonly the children of the merchant class—developed in the city. Likewise, industrial labor recruitment often created conditions in which Mexican men traveled to Los Angeles as “solos”—men alone—regardless of whether they were married or not. Because of this, male lodging houses and all-male units were common in both Sonoratown and Chinatown. Thus, the mediation of U.S. borders as well as the migration across them was shaped not only by race and class, but significantly by gender as well. Along with race and class, gender is an important lens with which to

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<sup>15</sup> On the gender politics of Chinese exclusion, see George Anthony Pepper, *If They Don't Bring their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration Before Exclusion* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Sucheng Chan, “The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870-1943,” in *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 94-146.



analyze how the spatial configuration of plaza area neighborhoods, the use of space inside homes and in streets, and the national meanings many whites attached to them, were created and recreated in the context of rising industrialization and modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Locating the study of racial segregation in the urban borderlands shifts, not only the regional focus of racial formation, but places it in the larger context of nation-building. With regard to the U.S. South, racial segregation of this same period is usually bookended with the end of the Civil War and beginning of Reconstruction (1865) on the one hand, and the Great Depression and U.S. entry into World War II (1941) on the other. While these national historical frameworks are certainly important for understanding the history of the West and Southwest too, I seek to shift the lens slightly by framing this study against the backdrop of U.S. conquest (1848) and focusing roughly from U.S. Chinese exclusion (1875-1943) through the end of national Mexican repatriation campaigns (1930-1941). While these are similar periodizations, the highlighting of different national moments shifts the perspective of racial segregation in U.S. history from black-white and North-South contexts to multiracial and continental contexts. In doing so, this study moves the discussion of racial segregation beyond national context, placing it explicitly in the context of U.S. global imperialism.

### **The Making of Sonoratown and Chinatown in the Plaza Area**

This study builds on the work in Chicana/o history and Asian American history by including the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act as an additional pivotal moment in the

shaping of racialized economic and social structures of the U.S. Southwest in the post-1848 era. The historiography of Mexican American racialization has dealt with exclusion by looking at processes of conquest, incorporation and repatriation, focusing on how economic, political and social structures shifted under U.S. rule, with the consequence of relegating Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans to the bottom rung of the social structure as part of the expendable industrial working-class.

Historians have discussed how white supremacy and white racial ideologies regarding Mexicans drew on similar ideologies regarding Chinese.<sup>16</sup> This study begins from a framework that acknowledges not only that dominant racial ideologies drew upon “knowledge” of multiple nonwhite groups, but that in the post-1848 era, Chinese and Mexican people both crossed U.S. borders, even if their relationship to those borders was varied.

By the same token, Chinese settlers in Los Angeles in this time period arrived with the flows U.S. imperialism, most initially finding homes there in the midst of U.S. conquest and following their employment building the transcontinental railroad in the 1860s-70s. Chinese American historiography has shown how anti-Chinese racism and anti-Chinese immigration policy shaped the formation of largely male ethnic enclaves known as Chinatowns, effectively banned Chinese men from working in industrial labor, and limited migration to Chinese merchants and students. Chinese had long been the targets of anti-Chinese movements before 1882, and they continued to be long

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<sup>16</sup> Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

afterward.<sup>17</sup> Like the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Chinese Exclusion Act put definitions of national belonging and geopolitical border-crossing in racialized legal terms. Legal citizenship status was denied to Chinese during the exclusion era, but practices of border crossing and even the terms of exclusion itself were uneven, unclear and constantly changing. Historians of Chinese experience in the United States during exclusion period have pointed out the numerous ways in which Chinese contested, even circumvented, border exclusion.<sup>18</sup> It is crucial to this study to understand Chinese Americans not simply within the traditional immigrant narrative, but as people who came to a place with layered colonial legacies that continued to manifest in their own lives.

This dissertation builds on recent works of historians of the Los Angeles plaza area—Mark Wild, William Estrada, David Torres-Rouff and César López, for example—who have argued for the centrality of a multi-racial perspective in understanding the social dynamics that contributed to the making of the plaza and its surrounding neighborhoods. These scholars have argued, for example, that multi-ethnic communities were forged in relation to municipal policies and projects that positioned middle-class whiteness, commercial tourism, or the infrastructural inequalities at the

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<sup>17</sup> Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> K. Scott Wong points out that Chinese were strategic in their “self-defense,” with overlapping and conflicting methods of challenging the rhetoric of exclusion. K. Scott Wong, “Cultural Defenders and Brokers: Chinese Responses to the Anti-Chinese Movement,” in *Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities During the Exclusion Era*, ed. K. Scott Wong and Sucheng Chan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998). As Erika Lee contends, the ways in which the U.S.-Mexico border became a central site at which Chinese exclusion was put into practice. “Chinese became, in effect, the country’s first ‘illegal immigrants,’ entering the country through the back doors of Canada or Mexico or engaging in a highly organized interracial, transnational business of fraudulent immigration documents.” Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*, 13.

center of the city's urban planning schema. By focusing on localized representation or infrastructure, these studies center on public spaces as sites of contestation regarding the meaning and image of Los Angeles, noting that municipal discourse and segregation could be seen in the built environment.<sup>19</sup> The existing scholarship excels at analyzing the plaza as a site of municipal state-making and identity formation. But hardly any scholars comment on how it was a national space in which geopolitical borders were forged locally. This study examines how the function of geopolitical borders became visible through multiple and simultaneous exclusions that linked the local plaza area to national modernization projects—not only in public spaces, but in homes as well.

By expanding the discussion of the plaza area to include not only public space but also home spaces and everyday life, this study is the first to look at the ways in which gender, in addition to race and class, shaped the contours of local and national nation-state borders. The changing architecture of plaza area homes, for example, reflected larger social, cultural and political transformations of the area as Californio elite buildings were reconfigured for cheap working-class immigrant housing. New spatial configurations of homes informed the gendered social relationships that developed within them, as women residents, for instance, used and created places for both paid and unpaid work including child rearing, cooking, taking in lodgers and laundry, as well as creating community in common spaces. Thus, conquest reached into what Ann Stoler has referred to as “intimate domains” by structuring not only so-called “private spaces”

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<sup>19</sup> Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); William David Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008); David S. Torres-Rouff, “Making Los Angeles: Race, Space and Municipal Power, 1822-1890” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2006).

but also by seeking to control intimate relationships in “public spaces” and in the national imaginary.<sup>20</sup>

Those who mediated national borders in local terms—reformers, city officials and boosters, for example—often identified the plaza area as an immoral place, with social relationships between men and women that fell outside of their notions of what constituted an ideal “American” family.<sup>21</sup> This study builds on the works of Natalia Molina, Matt García, William Deverell, Stephanie Lewthwaite and Mark Wild, as well as Nayan Shah and Peggy Pascoe, who have shown the connection between reform and racialization in Los Angeles and San Francisco by analyzing education, urban planning, housing, public health, and Americanization.<sup>22</sup> It also builds on the studies of Jennifer Lisa Koslow and Judith Raftery who have chronicled the politics of reform through public health and public schools.<sup>23</sup> While these works provide important discussions of reformers, racialization and processes of Americanization, they still place their discussion within U.S. urban histories that often do not fully consider what the geography of urban terrain represented in terms of larger geopolitical boundaries. Ideas of citizenship became caught up not only with the continual recasting of the U.S. as a

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<sup>20</sup> See Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies,” *Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (2001): 832.

<sup>21</sup> On the intersections of gender, race and nation in the context of family configurations, see Patricia Hill Collins, “It’s All In the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation,” *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 62-82.

<sup>22</sup> On reform and racialization of Mexicans especially, see Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?*; Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*; Matt García, *A World of its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2001); Stephanie Lewthwaite, *Race, Place, and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles: A Transnational Perspective, 1890-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009); Wild, *Street Meeting*. With regard to reform and the racialization of Chinese, see Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> Judith Rosenberg Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise: Politics and Reform in Los Angeles Schools, 1885-1941* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Jennifer Lisa Koslow, *Cultivating Health: Los Angeles Women and Public Health Reform* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

moral and free modern nation, but a modern nation that must be protected through the local control of racial and geopolitical boundaries. In other words, rather than focus on the racialization of citizenship only through national belonging, inclusion or exclusion, this study contends that citizenship and racialization must also be understood through relationships to U.S. geopolitical borders and what it meant for Mexican or Chinese people to physically exist on one side or the other, or in between, at varying historical moments. While this study does examine how reformers understood daily life in the plaza area, it is more importantly concerned with how residents might have imagined their own spaces and daily activities in ways that often diverged from state and civic notions.

Reformers imagined ideal living spaces, for example, in the framework of single-nuclear-family units, with women caring for the home and raising children while men worked outside the home. However, plaza area residents often lived in crowded units, sometimes with extended family or in male lodging houses, and women often did work in the home that contributed to the household economy by taking in male boarders or running businesses and stores in the front rooms of the buildings, for example. Social interaction in public spaces, like the plaza itself and its surrounding streets, was largely geared toward and reproduced by working men. Yet researchers and reformers maintained that the danger of plaza area public spaces was the presence of “idle” men who frequented “immoral” businesses associated with vice, or simply spent time together in the plaza park. The disjuncture between how reformers thought households and public spaces should ideally be configured and how residents lived in reality demonstrate different spatial imaginaries—or ideas about how living space should look,

who should live there and how they should interact and use the space—demonstrated contrasting ideas about how space should be used by men and women.

While this study is not directly concerned with reform per se, it examines the rich writings of reformers, and reform-minded researchers and urban planners of the early twentieth century, as primary documents to understand the gender and class dynamics that were revealed in the spatial configuration of public spaces, homes, and youth culture. Reformers' and researchers' views of Chinese and Mexican landscapes, for example, help us to understand not only the materiality of public, private, and city spaces—who was there, what was around them, what their spaces looked like and what they did in these spaces—but to also examine the disjuncture between how city, state and reform discourse understood Chinese and Mexican residents, and how Chinese and Mexicans might have differently understood their own making of these spaces.<sup>24</sup>

As nation-builders, often with state-sanctioned authority, reformers focused on the intersections between family, race and nation in their writings of plaza area communities. Los Angeles reform had close ties to the Sociology and Social Work Departments at the University of Southern California, which understood urban space as a web of ethnic, often “foreign,” populations that needed to be assimilated in order to create a “modern” U.S. city. Under the mentorship of Emory Bogardus, who served as Chair of the Department of Sociology at USC, many students drew on their work in

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<sup>24</sup> To this end, I have found useful Emma Pérez's notion of decolonial imaginary, as well as Katherine McKittrick's understanding of black women's geographies. Pérez suggests the decolonial imaginary as a way to read Chicana subjectivity. McKittrick discusses how the interplay of geographies of domination and oppositional geographies — how spaces and architecture have different meanings for blacks that are potentially resistant. Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis, 2006).

settlement homes and classrooms to detail the everyday lives of these communities.<sup>25</sup>

The master's theses of sociology and social work graduate students who were concerned with the Chinese and Mexican sections of central Los Angeles provide a rich group of sources about this area during the 1910s through the 1930s.<sup>26</sup> Together with the writings and reports of city officials, these sources shed light on both the changing landscape of Los Angeles' plaza area and the ways in which social workers and residents imagined the transformations of these spaces. This study reads these materials as primary documents alongside municipal reports, oral histories, newspaper accounts, court records, census data and city directories, to understand the changing landscape of the plaza area and the daily lives of its residents.

As producers of knowledge, this group of reform-minded writings and studies used thick descriptions that illustrated architectural and geographical configurations of space, as well as the spatial imaginaries of reformers and residents. Material culture and geography offer a methodology with which to analyze these materials in order to understand the everyday lives of these plaza area communities. Gender scholars—such as Doreen Massey, Dolores Hayden, Antonia Castañeda and Katherine McKittrick—have noted that the material world, and its spatial ordering, produce and are created by the functioning of gender, race and class. More than that, they argue that an analysis of

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<sup>25</sup> Stephanie Lewthwaite, *Race, Place, and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles: A Transnational Perspective, 1890-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 7-8.

<sup>26</sup> Emory Bogardus, a professor of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Southern California beginning in 1911 and avid participant in community organizations, advised a many the Master's theses that documented a variety of "problems" confronted by the city's poorer communities. Several of these theses were written by settlement workers associated with the College Settlement. In this way, the College Settlement in Los Angeles was similar to Chicago's Hull House in that it "was for women sociologists...the institutional center for research and social thought." See Mary Jo Deegan, *Jane Addams and the Men of the Chicago School, 1892-1918* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 33.



gender and space sheds light on the means of knowledge production in relation to changing economic and political contexts.<sup>27</sup> In other words, reformers and residents had different understandings of the how space should be ordered—both in the city generally and in the homes—that were based in knowledge about the relationship between race and nation, for example, or about how to make do in the midst of limited resources under segregation. This study uses material cultural analysis of neighborhood spaces—architecture, common spaces, street and park layouts, for instance—as a way to understand daily life and social relationships of residents themselves.

Even as this study proposes throughout that space and place can become the basis for an alternative historiography of working-class communities of color, it is very difficult for the historian to know with certainty how often Chinese and Mexican residents of the plaza area interacted on a day-to-day basis. Yet the fact that Mexican revolutionaries would find refuge in the plaza area including in Chinatown suggests that, despite dominant racial ideologies that drew distinct, yet imaginary, boundaries around places called “Sonoratown” and “Chinatown,” the realities of daily life blurred these boundaries. That is to say, the supposed clarity of national borders was complicated by the dynamic life of the plaza area itself. Nowhere is this more visible than in the colonial legacies of Los Angeles. Chinatown and Sonoratown existed on land that went through multiple conquests—Spanish rule, then Mexican rule and finally U.S. rule—all of which shaped the changing dynamics of everyday life there. Shifting colonial rule not only changed the location of the border, but also residents'

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<sup>27</sup> Antonia I. Castañeda, ““Que Se Pudieran Defender (So You Could Defend Yourselves)”: Chicanas, Regional History and National Discourses,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 22, no. 3 (2001): 116-142; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*; Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: Gender, Housing, and Family Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002).

relationships to the ruling body, the land and the meanings attached to their presence on that land. Social and cultural relationships and practices near the plaza arose in new forms as migration, railroads, and municipal operations re-shaped neighborhood geography and community life.

### **Chapter Summaries**

The chapters that follow are organized both chronologically and thematically. The first and last chapters deal explicitly with geopolitical border control by looking at specific events of Mexican and Chinese exclusion that simultaneously shaped the plaza area. The middle chapters pay special attention to the everyday lives of plaza area residents by looking at how border formation shaped daily interaction with regard to public spaces, housing and youth mobility

Chapter One, ““Where you going John?": Conflict, Space and Colonialism,” examines how Mexicans, Chinese and whites vied for claims to city space near the plaza at a moment when nation-state borders and neighborhood boundaries were shifting beneath their feet. I examine the Chinese Massacre of 1871, in which Mexicans joined whites in anti-Chinese mob violence, as a lens with which to understand both the violence of U.S. conquest as well as the cultural geography created in the context of multiple colonial legacies under U.S. rule. Through this story, I show how Chinese and Mexican people came to share the space of the plaza area, following the completion of the transcontinental railroads. Additionally, I look at how white civic leaders understood the events in relation to their own narratives of the city’s rising modernity.

Drawing on the legacy of the massacre among plaza area communities, Chapter Two, “Racial Boundaries and the Making of Public Spaces: the Plaza, the Street, and the Neighborhoods,” looks at how Chinese, Mexicans and whites contributed to the formation the public spaces of the plaza and its surrounding streets under segregation in the early twentieth century. Continuing exclusion policies and industrialization structured migration and settlement patterns in Chinatown and Sonoratown, which had an important impact on the formation of public space. It examines how Chinese and Mexicans especially formed racial boundaries and transgressed them in the common spaces. The proximity of bodies and the potentially intimate relationships that formed across racial lines presented a conundrum for Anglo elites, reformers, researchers and city officials who often thought of nonwhite groups as geographically separate and distinct racial categories. The chapter begins by examining the plaza space itself, then moves outward toward the streets immediately surrounding it, and finally to the neighborhood streets.

Where the second chapter examines public and shared spaces, Chapter Three, “The Spatial Imaginaries of Home: Residents, Reformers and House Courts, 1900-1920,” turns to homes and family spaces as sites of geopolitical and geocultural border formation. With a particular focus on the house courts and lodging houses that accounted for the majority of Chinatown and Sonoratown residential dwellings, this chapter examines housing architecture and space in relation to economic changes that were taking place in the plaza area under U.S. rule. It begins with a discussion of how industrialization contributed to the transformation of buildings from homes of elite Californio homes to working class immigrant house courts. It uses the writings of

reformers and researchers, including their detailed mappings of home spaces and practices, to read the different spatial imaginaries of reformers as well as residents themselves. While reformers and city officials racialized the house courts as a problem for urban modernization, residents imagined their homes as community spaces.

Chapter Four, “(Re) Imagining Geography: Youth and Mobility in the Early Twentieth Century,” examines the urban borderlands by focusing on the geographical expansion of Chinatown communities and Sonoratown communities expanded through the perspectives of young people during the 1910s through the 1930s. Again, we see that industrialization and exclusion worked together in shaping migration and settlement, this time creating significant populations of young people in both Chinese and Mexican Los Angeles. By this time Chinese and Mexican neighborhoods had grown well beyond the plaza area, forming communities to the east and south of the plaza area. Children negotiated the city’s racial segregation as they began to find work and go to school farther from home. Their mobility was largely moderated by parental and cultural understandings of gender roles and familial responsibility; however, it was also shaped by mainstream ideologies that linked race, class and nation in urban geography.

The final chapter, “‘Shaken as by an Earthquake’: Modernity and the Policing of Racial Boundaries During the Depression Era,” examines how formal and informal policing of nation-state borders took shape in Chinatown and Sonoratown during the 1930s through two simultaneous and related events. First, I examine how Mexican repatriation campaigns targeted the city’s “alien” population for removal through deportation raids and “voluntary” relocation. Second, I look at the gender and class

dynamics of ongoing Chinese exclusion through the events that unfolded in the case of Toy Fong, who allegedly started a tong war necessitating police occupation of Chinatown in 1934-35. In the midst of Depression era anxiety over decreasing employment for working-class whites and declining local industries, the city's civic leaders and urban planners turned to multiple methods of maintaining the city's image as a modern white metropolis by removing Asian and Mexican bodies from the plaza area. From 1933 through 1938, the city destroyed Sonoratown and Chinatown in order to build a civic tourist center—Union Station, Olvera Street, China City and other municipal buildings—in their place.

By looking at both specific events in which Chinese and Mexican bodies were removed from urban space, along with the everyday lives of these residents, this study contributes to a new understanding of working-class, immigrant and urban U.S. history—one that is not just regional, but also national and global in scope. Studying the similarities and differences between Chinese and Mexican relationships to U.S. nation and geopolitical borders illuminates structures of power, particularly how U.S. global imperialism took on local manifestations in places such as Los Angeles. And finally, this study also offers a tool for better understanding community formation in the context of rapid industrialization and modernization that were part and parcel of border formation and nation-building in the region. It shifts the discussion of spatial formation and racialization in Los Angeles from a top-down perspective via reformers, city officials and urban planners by offering a way to examine how Mexican and Chinese residents—including women and children—made sense of their social worlds not only under unusual circumstances but also in their everyday lives. The discussion that

follows begins to fill in the spaces of time between extraordinary moments that found Mexican revolutionaries lodged in Chinatown, and local, ordinary everyday activities and interactions.

## Chapter One

### “Where you going John?”<sup>28</sup>: Conflict, Space and Colonialism

One afternoon in the summer of 1873, Guillermo Moreno and Abram Barelas decided to head out to the bathhouse nearby Moreno’s home in the primarily Mexican section of Los Angeles that was known as Sonoratown. Along their route, as they passed down Main Street, they encountered Lee Long and another Chinese man who were on their way to look for employment at the brick yards located a few blocks to the northwest of the recent Chinese settlement at the Plaza.<sup>29</sup> The two Chinese men were walking above the gas works through Sonoratown, when Moreno called out to them, “Where you going John?” “Go to hell you son of a bitch!” one of the Chinese men yelled back. After walking a few more blocks, verbal exchanges continuing along the way, one shoved another and a physical altercation ensued—Mexican versus Chinese.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *People v. G. Moreno and A. Barelas*, 1872. Los Angeles Area Court Records, District Court, Criminal Case files, Huntington Library.

<sup>29</sup> The two Chinese men walked into the Mexican quarter because they were looking for work at the Los Angeles Pressed Brick and Terra Cotta Company, which, by the 1890s employed between twenty-five and fifty workers at its plant near College Street. J. J. Crawford, *Twelfth Report of the State Mineralogist, Second Biennial Report, Two Years Ending September 15, 1894* (Sacramento: California State Office, 1894), 382; *Los Angeles Directory for 1888* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles City Directory Company, 1888); United States, Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860); United States, Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1870).

<sup>30</sup> *People v. G. Moreno and A. Barelas*.

Was this incident an example of everyday racial violence between Chinese and Mexican men, or was it an anomaly?

The taunt, “Where you going John?,” raises questions about how race and gender shaped public space during the early 1870s and after. A commonly used image of the mid-19th century, the “John Chinaman” stereotype signified difference between white American men and Chinese men, and also functioned to draw national boundaries that excluded Chinese from the national imaginary. In this case, Moreno and Barelas drew on this stereotype, defining Chinese as categorically different from themselves. Both were teenage Mexican boys born in Los Angeles, of California laboring families, who had been in the area before the U.S. Mexico War.<sup>31</sup> Implied in this difference was a sense of belonging, a claim to the landscape of Los Angeles itself. In the context of U.S. conquest following the U.S.-Mexico War, Moreno and Barelas laid claim to an area of the city that had long been populated by Mexicans, but which by 1873 had also become home to a growing Chinese population.

New High Street was a busy street and when the fight broke out, a sizable crowd of onlookers gathered. Hearing the commotion coming from above the gas works, Police Officer Ramón Benitez rushed to the scene on horseback. When someone yelled “police is coming!” Barelas and Moreno quickly ran away, afraid of being arrested and jailed for “fighting in the streets.” Barelas returned home to his mother with bruises on his face. Long immediately informed Benitez that the Mexican boys had stolen his gold watch, showing him the piece of chain still attached to the button on his pants pocket.

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<sup>31</sup> In 1873, Moreno and Barelas were thirteen and fifteen years old respectively. Due to different name spellings for Chinese at this time, it is difficult to locate Long in the census; however, my research suggests that Long was twenty-five years old. United States, Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*; United States, Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*.



Although neither Barelás nor Moreno were found guilty in the Los Angeles Area Court for the robbery of Lee Long, witness testimonies of Mexican and Anglo neighborhood residents and shop owners focused on Moreno's and Barelás' character, stating repeatedly that they were "good boys."<sup>32</sup> Witnesses asserted that Moreno and Barelás did not jointly fight against one Chinese man at a time. Summaries of the testimony of Francisca Ybarra, for example, stated that "at no time during said fight did the Defendants attack one Chinaman alone, or hold a Chinaman, while the other was attacking him." As the witness affidavit of local barber José María Obando stated, "I have known [the] defendant for many years and he has always been a good boy."<sup>33</sup>

While it is likely that Barelás' and Moreno's attorney, H. T. Hazard, asked the witnesses to focus on their character, the affidavits reveal a glimpse of the community that gathered on the street as the fight broke out. Francisca Ybarra and Jose Redona, both witnesses, lived on New High Street with their families. Their neighbors were mostly of Mexican origin, either of California heritage or more recent migrants from Mexico, who lived in family dwellings and male boarding houses.<sup>34</sup> This case raises questions about how the cultural geography of the area surrounding the plaza was changing in the 1870s, and how the larger population of Los Angeles understood these neighborhoods in light of industrialization and modernization.

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<sup>32</sup> At this time, Chinese were banned from testifying as witnesses in the court of law, due to the California Supreme Court decision, *People v. Hall* (1854). However, among the witness affidavits collected by the lawyer, were also affidavits of Barelás and Long themselves. See Lucy E. Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1995), 8.

<sup>33</sup> *People vs. G. Moreno and A. Barelás* (1873).

<sup>34</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1880.

Incidents like this one demonstrate how Chinese and Mexican residents moved across the city's landscape for work and leisure. And yet, they are often overlooked in light of the larger, more infamous "Chinese Massacre" of 1871 that occurred less than two years earlier. Reportedly, following a dispute over a "slave girl," a tong war had broken out in Calle de los Negros, the site of the city's Chinese settlement. When police officers who were patrolling the area were shot, an angry crowd of whites and Mexicans quickly gathered in the Chinese quarters seeking Chinese bodies. By the end of the night, some 18-22 Chinese men were killed, and many more injured in the mass most of them dragged from Calle de los Negros to the courthouse where the mobsters lynched them in front of a huge crowd of about one thousand onlookers. Of those indicted for the murder of an estimated one-tenth of the Chinese population of Los Angeles, Mexicans accounted for almost one-third.<sup>35</sup> How might we understand Mexican participation in this moment of anti-Chinese violence? And what might this conflict reveal about differential claims to urban geography under shifting nation-state borders?

While the massacre was a crucial moment in the lives of plaza area residents, particularly Chinese who were the targets of large-scale violence and lynching, the story of 1871 has often been construed as an exceptional moment in Los Angeles history. In

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<sup>35</sup> Marco N. Newmark, "Calle de Los Negros and the Chinese Massacre of 1871," *Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1944); Scott Zesch, "Chinese Los Angeles in 1870-1871: The Makings of a Massacre," *Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 90, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 109-158; "The Chinese Massacre," in *An illustrated history of Los Angeles County, California. Containing a history of Los Angeles County from the earliest period of its occupancy to the present time, together with glimpses of its prospective future ... and biographical mention of many of its pioneers and also of prominent citizens of to-day* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1889); Hubert Howe Bancroft, "Some Chinese Episodes," in *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft: California Inter Pocula*, vol. 35 (San Francisco: The History Company Publishers, 1888). See also, Scott Zesch, "Chinese Los Angeles in 1870-1871: The Makings of a Massacre," *Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 90, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 109-158.

the decades following the massacre, narratives of the massacre focused on the success of local law enforcement, signaling the city's progress from a lawless western town to an emerging modern U.S. city. At this time, Los Angeles was still a notably Mexican city in cultural, social and political realms, but it was quickly changing. It became known less and less as a center of the city's civic and community life, and increasingly racialized as the location of the city's "foreigners" who represented danger, immorality and mysteriousness. These stories reveal not only how white ideologies that associated nonwhite bodies with violence that they imagined to be confined to the space of the plaza area, but also how Mexicans and Chinese struggled over control of city space as well. In this larger context, perhaps racial antagonism between Chinese and Mexican residents in the plaza area was not an anomaly. When Guillermo Moreno shouted "Where you going John?," he demonstrated how interracial encounters—whether in conflict or otherwise—happened through unexceptional moments as people traversed space, while looking for employment or going to take a bath.<sup>36</sup>

This chapter begins with an exploration of Los Angeles during the two decades following the U.S.-Mexico War and leading up to the 1871 massacre, focusing specifically on the context of shifting colonial rule. It moves on to an examination of the events of the Chinese Massacre in 1871, how people have told its story, and how intersecting ideologies of gender and race worked to create a historical narrative of the city's progress. It then takes a step back from the on-the-ground details of the massacre

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<sup>36</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley has discussed the value of understanding everyday acts of black working-class resistance in public spaces of bus transportation, in addition to organized collective movements. Like the busses and streetcars of his study, the street and the plaza in 1870s Los Angeles are unique sites of contestation and interaction among Chinese and Mexican residents that help us to better understand how processes of racialization worked on the ground between nonwhite groups and in relation to whites. See Robin D. G. Kelley, "Congested Terrain: Resistance on Public Transportation," in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. (New York: The Free Press, 1994) 55-75.

to place it within a larger context of western violence, anti-Chinese and anti-Mexican racism, and the incorporation of the region into the national fold. Finally, it turns toward a discussion of the changing cultural geography of the area—how Chinese and Mexican residents transformed the meaning of space and how they made community in the context of U.S. expansion. Chinese and Mexican people made and understood space in everyday interactions, as well as in distinctive moments like the Chinese Massacre. Looking at how multiple racial groups vied for control over neighborhood and city space, offers a lens through which to understand how race, class and gender, as well as space, formed the contours of power in a moment of state transition.

### **Post-1848 Los Angeles**

The end of the U.S.-Mexico War and the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 marked the end of Mexican rule in the region. At that time, Los Angeles was “but a tiny village,” as Leonard Pitt has called it, “more Mexican than Yankee in character.”<sup>37</sup> Spanish-Mexicans and Indian Californios far outnumbered Anglos at first and they maintained their cultural, political and social practices in the first few decades of U.S. rule. In fact, it was not until the 1870s that Anglos would surpass Spanish Mexicans in both population demographics and municipal control—a transition that had crucial consequences for the city’s racial geography.

Los Angeles population grew rapidly after 1850. Between 1850 and 1853 alone, the numbers of Anglos had increased tremendously, as did the number of migrants from

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<sup>37</sup> Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 120.

Sonora.<sup>38</sup> From 1850-1870 the general population of City of Los Angeles grew immensely from 1,610 residents to 5,728. In 1850, approximately 75% had Spanish surnames, just over half of them were women. That year, there were only two Chinese residents recorded, both of whom were listed as servant men living and working for a white American family. By 1870, Spanish-surnamed people made up only 37.7% of the Los Angeles population.<sup>39</sup>

During the first few decades of U.S. rule, Spanish-Mexican landowners in the City of Los Angeles faced increasing property values and new tax laws, as Anglo Americans sought ownership of valuable lands in the city. The 1850s through the 1880s saw the vast majority of Spanish-Mexican landowners lose their lands due to policies that failed to uphold the statutes set forth in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Native Californians also lost their land on surrounding *rancherías*, as the U.S. government turned it over to public domain. Many Spanish-Mexican elites who had been living around the Plaza lost their land or moved to *ranchos* farther away. Additionally, many former landowners relocated to areas populated by recent migrants from Mexico. Although land dispossession did not happen to all Spanish-Mexican landowners, the process of dispossession in the first few decades after the U.S.-Mexico War had profound effects on ethnic Mexicans as a whole, as the Spanish-Mexican class

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 123..

<sup>39</sup> These numbers are based on my own research of the U.S. Census data as well as Griswold del Castillo's calculations. It is likely that this population of Spanish-surname residents also included a number of native Californians who had taken on Spanish names while living under Spanish and later Mexican rule. United States, Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*; United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1850). Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Los Angeles Barrio, 1850-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 35.. See also Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, "Chinese Women of Los Angeles, A Social Historical Survey," in *Linking Our Lives: Chinese American Women of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1984).

hierarchy was flattened under a U.S. racial order. This impact on family and community life was profound as well. In particular, Spanish-Mexican and Native Californian women increasingly confronted social and physical dislocation by redefining gender roles--“working for a living or living with a provider who was not a spouse.”<sup>40</sup>

This transition in land tenure also marked a period in which the racial landscape changed through violence, political control and changing gender roles. Interracial violence was a common occurrence that reminded Mexicans and Anglos alike that the city itself was contested terrain. Historians have questioned whether 1848 accurately marked the end of the U.S.-Mexico War, suggesting that rising anti-Mexican violence in the decades following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was a continuation of the war itself as Anglos sought to establish dominion by engaging in a violent warfare against Mexican Americans.<sup>41</sup> As in other locales across the former Mexican territories, outright violence was not the only way Anglo Americans, with the backing of the U.S. state, established control in the area. Spanish-Mexican land loss, coupled with increasing Anglo American dominance in economic, political and cultural arenas relegated Spanish-Mexican Angelenos to the bottom rung of the social structure.

Anti-Mexican violence reminded Mexicans of the geographical limits of ethnic Mexican mobility within the city—where ethnic Mexicans could live, where they could work and where they could visit. This violence, especially the public lynching of Mexicans, in the late nineteenth century was one way in which Anglos solidified their

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<sup>40</sup> Miroslava Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest: Gender and Power in California, 1770s to 1880s* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004), 124-125., 173.

<sup>41</sup> William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 11-48.

control of the city.<sup>42</sup> Anti-Mexican violence, along with the loss of land and political control of city operations, as historian William Estrada has argued, were “environmental and social factors that led to the decline of the Californios and an increasing separation between Anglos and Mexicans [that] were reflected in the physical look of the Plaza.”<sup>43</sup> Additionally, it led to the formation of a racially segregated working-class ethnic Mexican area north and west of the Plaza, which Anglos would later call “Sonoratown.”

This was the climate of Los Angeles at the dawn of the 1870s. It was the atmosphere into which a growing Chinese population came to share geographical space around the Plaza with ethnic Mexicans. The Chinese population remained small, but saw a sharp increase between 1860 and 1870, growing from 16 to 234 within a ten-year period. These Chinese settled in adobes previously occupied by Spanish-Mexican elites who had moved away from the city center. The Coronel Building and others alongside it on Calle de los Negros became the home of this growing Chinese section. In 1870, approximately half of the Chinese population of Los Angeles County lived on Calle de los Negros along the eastern side of the plaza, in the heart of Los Angeles’ ever-changing Mexican and Spanish-Mexican area.<sup>44</sup>

Although the city and its residents would see great changes in the following decades, racial violence, unequal access to resources, segregated neighborhoods and a segregated male workforce would shape the ways in which men and women residents

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<sup>42</sup> William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, “The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848 to 1928,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 411-438.

<sup>43</sup> William David Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 60..

<sup>44</sup> Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, “Chinese Women of Los Angeles, A Social Historical Survey.”

made meaning of and navigated the city's geographical terrain. The violent transition of the Plaza area from Spanish-Mexican control to Anglo control had profound consequences for the working-class residents who would come to live there. As the following sections will demonstrate, Mexican residents also participated in violence that was racially motivated, but this motivation was complicated by both anti-Mexican violence and Mexican men's changing relationship to state power under U.S. control.

### **Calle de los Negros, 1871**

Calle de los Negros was the site of the Chinese Massacre on the night of October 24, 1871. Several historians have chronicled the events of that night and all agree that the Massacre was a race riot, a local example of growing anti-Chinese violence in the West, jointly perpetrated by whites and Mexicans. When we consider the events of the Chinese Massacre in this context, we can see that conflict between Chinese and Mexican residents was part of daily life for the Plaza area communities in the 1870s and after.<sup>45</sup> Yet, these events were overshadowed by the mass lynching of 10% or more of Los Angeles' Chinese population during a mob riot and events leading up to it that occurred in 1871.<sup>46</sup> With the large-scale violence and the great numbers of Chinese killed, the "Chinese Massacre" became a noted event in the narrative of the city's history, as the events were recounted by witnesses who served in the city's local law enforcement as well as writers and historians of the late nineteenth and early

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<sup>45</sup> For a rich discussion of many other incidences between Chinese and Mexicans in Los Angeles, see Zesch, "The Makings of a Massacre."

<sup>46</sup> The U.S. Census of 1870 recorded roughly 180 Chinese residents in the City of Los Angeles, which accounted for approximately half of the Chinese population of Los Angeles County. Accounts of the 1871 Massacre estimated between 18-22 Chinese people were killed on the night of October 24, 1871. United States, Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*. See also Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, "Chinese Women of Los Angeles."



twentieth centuries. In his famed narrative of early U.S. Los Angeles, Boyle Workman called it “one of the darkest pages in the history of Los Angeles...written in black and bloody letters.”<sup>47</sup> James Franklin Burns, who was the sheriff at the time of the riot, later called it “the greatest riot in California history.”<sup>48</sup> For C. P. Dorland, a California scholar writing in 1894, it was “one of the most bloody and barbarous tragedies in the annals of this State.”<sup>49</sup> Nineteenth century historian Herbert Howe Bancroft wrote in 1888 that it “illustrate[ed] the extreme” of anti-Chinese violence in California. As these writers tried to make sense of the massacre, their narratives shared a common preoccupation with the place of violence within a “free and forward nation.” They told a story of “good citizens,” who aided in the “rescue” of “hapless” and immoral Chinese, saving them from the “brutal passions” of a faceless crowd, including men, women and children who participated in the massacre by observing the murders.<sup>50</sup>

“The cause of the outbreak...was the possession of a Chinese woman named Ya Hit, young and attractive, and from a Chinese estimate of female worth, of the financial value of \$2500.”<sup>51</sup> Narratives of the Massacre often began with Ya Hit, either identifying her as the instigator of the events leading to the Massacre or placing the

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<sup>47</sup> Boyle Workman, *The City that Grew, as Told to Caroline Walker* (Los Angeles: The Southland Publishing Co., 1935), 144.

<sup>48</sup> James Franklin Burns, “Reminiscences,” May 1, 1900, Huntington Library..

<sup>49</sup> C. P. Dorland, “Chinese Massacre at Los Angeles in 1871,” *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California* (1894): 22.

<sup>50</sup> Bancroft, Hubert Howe, “Some Chinese Episodes,” in *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft: California Inter Pocula*, vol. 35 (San Francisco: The History Company Publishers, 1888) 563.

<sup>51</sup> There is some discrepancy between accounts about how much the Chinese woman was worth, signifying the vehemence with which Chinese tongs fought over her. While Dorland estimated the monetary value of Ya Hit at \$2,500, Bancroft suggested that Chinese women in general were worth \$400 each. Despite the large difference in estimation, it is important to note that these narratives highlighted both the possession of Ya Hit’s body and the idea that she could be bought and sold. Dorland, “Chinese Massacre at Los Angeles in 1871,” 22; Bancroft, “Some Chinese Episodes,” 563. For more discussion on the figure of the Chinese “slave girl” in the nineteenth century, see Sarah Paddle, “The Limits of Sympathy: International Feminists and the Chinese 'slave girl' Campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 4, no. 3 (2003).

blame with Chinese tongs that had reputations amongst Whites for orchestrating the trade of Chinese women. Ya Hit's position at the center of these narratives racialized Chinese women's bodies as a problem for local law enforcement in keeping order amongst Chinese residents. Through these narratives, this Chinese woman's body became construed as the site of an interracial battle over male control of public space.

On the night of the massacre, Police Officers Jesús Bilderrain and Esteban Sánchez went to the Coronel Building on Calle de los Negros, where the Chinese settlement was located, to make some arrests. For a few days prior, there had been a "battle in the streets" between two Chinese groups, apparently adversaries, who fought over "the possession of a Chinese slave woman." Robert Maclay Widney's witness account suggested that the scuffle began when one "Chinese faction" accused another "faction" of having taken the woman to Santa Barbara. After the first group accused her of jewelry theft, the Los Angeles police arrested her and held her in jail. The "factions" continued their confrontation in the street alongside the jail, which was quelled by police.<sup>52</sup> Bancroft's account put a great deal of emphasis on this Chinese woman as well, suggesting that the Chinese "companies" fought so vehemently in order to claim her because of her supposed monetary worth.<sup>53</sup>

Later that afternoon, shortly after Bilderrain and Sánchez arrived on Calle de los Negros, more violence erupted. They were joined by local businessman Robert Thompson, who was mortally shot and Bilderrain wounded, allegedly by stray Chinese bullets. According to Widney's account it was within an hour that "a vast excited

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<sup>52</sup> Robert Maclay Widney, "An Account of the Great Chinese Riot and Massacre in Los Angeles, November 1871." (Widney Family Collection, Huntington Library, n.d.), Widney Family Collection, Huntington Library; "An Illustrated History of Los Angeles County," 250..

<sup>53</sup> Bancroft, "Some Chinese Episodes," 563.

crowd...estimated at from 2,000 to 3,000 persons” gathered at the Coronel Building, “many armed with guns and pistols and were firing into the doors and windows of the building.” While it is possible that Widney’s estimation may have be higher than the actual size of the crowd, it is significant to note that the U.S. Census recorded Los Angeles’ population in 1870 at roughly 5,700. In this estimation, anywhere from one-third to one-half of the entire population of the city were present either as participants or as witnesses. Court witnesses later testified to having seen Chinese dragged and hanged a few blocks south of Chinatown.<sup>54</sup> Newspapers noted the onlookers included women and children; one young boy in particular helped hold the rope as a Chinese man was hanged.<sup>55</sup> Widney asserted that “one of the victims was a fourteen year old boy whom I felt confident must be innocent.”<sup>56</sup> Accounts of the massacre estimate that between eighteen and twenty-two Chinese people were lynched that night and many more Chinese were wounded. Among them, only seven men were listed by the Court: Ah Choy, Lung Quan, Tang Wan, Wa Sin Quai, Day Kee, Chee Long Tong and Chaa Wan.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, two Chinese women, Cha Cha and Fan Cho, were also shot at and one of them was wounded.<sup>58</sup> One in every ten Chinese residents was killed in the massacre.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Widney, “An Account of the Great Chinese Riot and Massacre in Los Angeles, November 1871..”

<sup>55</sup> “The Los Angeles Massacre,” *New York Times*, November 10, 1871.

<sup>56</sup> Widney, “An Account of the Great Chinese Riot and Massacre in Los Angeles, November 1871..”

<sup>57</sup> *People v. Louis M. Mendell*, 1872. Los Angeles Area Court Records, District Court, Criminal Case files, Huntington Library. Lichtenberger’s published list of Chinese victims killed in the Massacre match the names listed in this court record. I have chosen to use the spelling provided by Lichtenberger in H. C. Lichtenberger, “Faulty Indictment Saves Those Convicted,” *The Grizzly Bear*, January 1921, 4..

<sup>58</sup> Zesch, “The Makings of a Massacre,” 138..

<sup>59</sup> The U.S. Census of 1870 recorded roughly 180 Chinese residents in the City of Los Angeles, which accounted for approximately half of the Chinese population of Los Angeles County. Accounts of the 1871 Massacre estimated between 18-22 Chinese people were killed on the night of October 24, 1871.

In Widney's estimation, what originally began as a riot turned into an anti-Chinese massacre in which "the down town lower element" was led by a "large foreign born person apparently a miner."<sup>60</sup> Another account said that the crowd was "composed principally of the lower class of Mexicans and the scum of the foreigners" whose "thirst for blood" was fueled by alcohol.<sup>61</sup> Widney identified the mob participants as Mexican and Irish. The grand jury issued thirty-seven indictments for participation in the riot. Twenty-five were indicted for murder including twelve whites and eight Mexicans: Edmond Crawford, Refugio Botello, Ramon Dominguez, Adolfo Celis, I.G. Scott, Estevan Antonio Alvarado, Richard Roe Doland, L.F. Crenshaw, D. W. Moody, S. M. Mendell, Jesús Martínez, A. R. Johnston, Charles Austin, P. M. McDonald, J. C. Cox, Ambrosio Ruíz, F. M. Peña, A. L. King, Soen Andres, Samuel Carson, and Victor Kelly.<sup>62</sup> Due to California Supreme Court decision in 1854, *People v. Hall*, state law excluded Chinese from testifying as witnesses in court, along with blacks, mulattos and Indians who had already been banned from testimony.<sup>63</sup> One hundred witnesses were examined before the Grand Jury on December 2, 1871, only twelve of which had Spanish surnames.<sup>64</sup> H.C. Lichtenberger, who was a deputy clerk of Los Angeles

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United States, Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*. See also Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, "Chinese Women of Los Angeles."

<sup>60</sup> "An Illustrated History of Los Angeles County."

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>62</sup> Eight Chinese men also received indictments for the murder of Ah Choy (who was killed in the initial shooting between Chinese factions before Bilderrain arrived on Calle de los Negros) and Robert Thompson. Widney, "An Account of the Great Chinese Riot and Massacre in Los Angeles, November 1871." *People v. L. F. Crenshaw, et al.*, 1872. Minute Books, Civil Case Records, Los Angeles Area Court Records, District Court, Huntington Library.

<sup>63</sup> This law was rescinded in 1872 with the Federal Civil Rights Act. See Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 261; Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 162-164; Salyer, *Laws Harsh as Tigers*, 8.

<sup>64</sup> *People v. Victor Kelly, et al.*, 1871. Criminal Case Records, Los Angeles Area Court Records, Huntington Library. Witnesses examined before the Grand Jury were listed as follows: Emil Harris,

County, noted that the thirty-some witnesses called by prosecution were “all prominent and well-known men of the time”—merchants, artisans, and municipal officials.<sup>65</sup>

Seven were initially found guilty and were sentenced to spend two to six years in San Quentin prison. Of this seven, three had Spanish surnames, while the two found not-guilty had Anglo surnames. However, upon appeal, the case was found defective due to a supposed inability to prove that Chee Long Tong was “actually murdered.”<sup>66</sup> As one history of the city published in 1889 put it, “There are certain persons in Los Angeles who were helping to murder Chinamen that night who hold their heads high to-day.”<sup>67</sup>

The progress narratives written by city-boosters like Widney, Workman and others, position the Chinese Massacre as a violent moment common in the “wild west.” On one hand this framing of the story suggests that the massacre was representative of the unlawfulness of the United States’ newly acquired territories. This understanding of the massacre places the events within the context of a linear progress civilization narrative, as a final large-scale act of lawlessness as the city’s municipal law enforcement agencies were still being formed. On the other hand, these narratives

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Joseph Dye, J. F. Burns, J.F. Staples, Samuel Carson, Richard Kerren, Frank Baker, J.C. Cox, John Carpenter, M. C. Fay, H. C. Russell, W. W. Robinson, P. McFadden, John Goller, C. A. Coffman, R. M. Widney, Frank Kerren, Thomas E. Rowan, W. J. Brodrick, Alfred Bell, Elbridge Tice, Cyrus Lyon, John R. Summers, Robert Malloy, George Graham, H. Newbauer, P. S. Orney, Benjamin McLaughlin, C., E. White, C. E. Beane, Andrea Abila de Dominguez, P. Dominguez, John Lazzarovich, A. J. King, J. D. Hicks, J.F. Ellis, Ramon Valencia, R. H. Wilkens, Frank McKewen, S. J. Meyer, Mark Leonard, Fred Weber, Charles R. Johnson, S. B. Caswell, Estevan Sanchez, Mariano de Santa Cruz, James Monroe, Eugene Germain, Cristobal Aguilar, Wm. Sands, Peter Wilson, J. M. Baldwin, Ramon Sotello, Edward Roberts, M. D. Madegan, H.C. Austin, Wm. C. Martin, Joseph Warren, Vicente Duarte, John W. Painter, George Goodhue, John Hessinger, Henry Hammel, Francisco Gonzalez, Everista Hosman, Jesus Bilderrain, A. Rendon, R. R. Haynes, Wm. Abbott, M. J. Reilly, D. W. Moody, John McArthur, George Bakerpool, George Yarnell, Thomas Burdick, Dennic McCanley, A. J. Bowman, David Main, William Rapp, R. J. Wolf, H. W. Rose, P. Morales, W. Potts, E. Huber, A. James, S. H. Bryant, A. Harris, A. H. Bewley, W. W. Widney, J.S. Champion, T. Gates, P. Clause, H. Schaeffer, A. F. Warner, H. Rhoades, C. Holtz, D. Maumus, P. Baffet, James Northrop, C. E. Thom.

<sup>65</sup> Lichtenberger, “Faulty Indictment Saves Those Convicted,” 22.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> “An Illustrated History of Los Angeles County,” 250.

insist that such a momentous act of violence, which drew large numbers of participants—both perpetrators and onlookers—was exceptional and not representative of the Los Angeles path toward modernity.

Bancroft's conclusion of the story supported this when he said that the "hundreds of law abiding citizens" who were forced to witness the "barbarism" of that night, might have assisted had local law enforcement presented more leadership.<sup>68</sup> Local Anglo elites played a key role in creating the narratives about the incident that would live in the city's official historical memory. One of the only first-hand accounts to be archived, Widney's unpublished commentary and 1921 published depiction of the event depended on his claim to class-based virtuosity as President of the Law and Order Party, an organization of businessmen who, as "law abiding citizens" sought to work with local police toward the suppression of criminality. Despite the widespread anti-Chinese movements in the West at this time, Widney maintained that he and his fellow party members were concerned with the welfare of innocent Chinese victims.<sup>69</sup> His son-in-law, Boyle Workman, highlighted city residents, like William Slaney, boot and shoe merchant, who provided his Chinese employees "protection by locking them in his store and standing guard," thus saving Chinese lives. Indeed in this framework, those who engaged in the killing of Chinese people exposed more virtuous residents to violence and needed to be controlled.

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<sup>68</sup> Bancroft, "Some Chinese Episodes," 568.

<sup>69</sup> Widney, "An Account of the Great Chinese Riot and Massacre in Los Angeles, November 1871." This party's role in fighting on behalf of the Chinese victims, was, according to historian Gilbert Estrada, an example of the City's rocky transition from a violent wild western town to an orderly modern metropolis, an example of how residents like Widney made efforts toward non-violence. Gilbert Estrada, "Riot in the Land of Sunshine: "Negro Alley," "the scum of foreigners," and the rescue of "Chinese Devils" within L.A.'s Chinese Massacre of 1871." Paper presented at the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West, Brown Bag Series in U.S. Western/Borderlands History, University of Southern California, November 14, 2007.

For over a century, historians and witness accounts have rightly noted that the riot was an example of anti-Chinese violence, one of many in the West. In his recent study, contemporary historian Scott Zesch argues that the massacre was not a conflict over labor, but was one that occurred “in the context of increasing and uncurbed racial hostility between the town’s Chinese residents and its American population.”<sup>70</sup> To be sure, the population targeted for lynching by the rioters was Chinese. At the time, Los Angeles’ Chinese population mostly settled along the eastern side of the Plaza, making a growing Chinatown on what was then called Calle de los Negros. As Bancroft described it, “The alley itself was a small street connecting this hotbed of human depravity with the business portion of the city.”<sup>71</sup> The physical space of Chinatown itself was targeted, as rioters looted and set fire to Chinatown homes and stores, and fed hoses into buildings in an attempt “to flood the Chinamen out.”<sup>72</sup> However, the presence of both Mexicans and whites among the indicted and witnesses of the events of October 24, 1871 is significant because it complicates how we understand the process of racialization in urban spaces like Los Angeles. Taking these discussions of race and class a step further to examine the differential positions of Irish and Mexicans in relation to citizenship and nation-building projects at the time, sheds some light on the complex racialization of the participants in the massacre.

Many accounts focus on Thompson’s whiteness in their narratives. Thompson was a Tennessee-born saloonkeeper and rancher, who was well-known in the city. His

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<sup>70</sup> Zesch, “The Makings of a Massacre,” 109-110..

<sup>71</sup> Bancroft, “Some Chinese Episodes,” 562.

<sup>72</sup> Widney, “An Account of the Great Chinese Riot and Massacre in Los Angeles, November 1871..”

wife, Rosario and daughter, Elisa, were ethnic Mexicans.<sup>73</sup> Officer Bilderrain was also of Mexican origin, as was Juan José Mendibles, a teenage boy who was also wounded in the initial crossfire following Bilderrain's arrival outside the Coronel Building. Further, the massacre was not an isolated act of anti-Chinese violence committed by Mexicans in Los Angeles. In fact, Los Angeles had seen an increase in the number of racially-motivated attacks on Chinese persons in public spaces for a few years, the majority of which were committed by white and Mexican men and boys.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, anti-Chinese rhetoric had been circulating in local and state newspapers for years.<sup>75</sup> By understanding Thompson and Mendibles possibly had loyalties with the Mexican community in Los Angeles at the time, complicates the reasons for which Mexicans might have joined in the rioting.

Irish and Mexican people had different relationships to the processes of conquest and exclusion that were unfolding in Los Angeles at the time. The White perpetrators of anti-Chinese violence in 1871 Los Angeles were, according to accounts, mostly Irish and had migrated to the city from eastern regions of the United States, where race was defined in black-white terms as the persisting legacy of a chattel slave system just a few years after the end of the Civil War. As David Roediger has argued, the nineteenth century before the Civil War was a period in which the white working class, largely Irish and German, used whiteness to claim their freedom as free laborers

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<sup>73</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1870. I have interpreted Rosario's and Elisa's ethnicity as Mexican based on their names, since the 1870 census lists Mexicans as "white." The writing in the census manuscript pages shows Thompson's daughter's name as "Elisa," with a "z" written over the initial spelling. In his exhaustive research of newspaper coverage of the event, Zesch lists her name as "Cecilia." See Zesch, "The Making of a Massacre," 138.

<sup>74</sup> Zesch, "The Makings of a Massacre," 126-128..

<sup>75</sup> Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975)..



in opposition to blackness and slavery.<sup>76</sup> In a slightly different vein, Alexander Saxton contends that anti-Chinese movement in California was a working-class movement in which Irish and German workers claimed racial superiority based, in large part, on the idea that they were entitled to American notions of freedom and Chinese laborers were, in fact, unfree.<sup>77</sup> The fact that the majority of the white participants in the Chinese massacre were working-class Irish men, suggests that they may have had a long-standing relationship with the anti-Chinese movement in other parts of California. Additionally, as workers, they had little power in the municipal landscape in comparison to Anglo businessmen and elite Spanish-Mexicans who still maintained positions as servants of the city's municipal governances. Irish working-class residents' claims were to belonging in the U.S. nation, in a region where U.S. authority was not yet solidified and where the process of instilling state rule largely left them out.

Only a few accounts of the massacre mention Mexican participation in the attacks on Chinese during the massacre, opting for a general discussion of the perpetrators as an nameless, faceless mob. The Mexican men who participated in the Massacre, had a very different relationship to state power than white men. As this chapter has discussed, the Massacre occurred in the midst of a long period of transition to U.S. rule in Los Angeles. Like the Irish population of the city, Chinese residents were new settlers in the area, on land that used to be owned by Spanish-Mexicans in a region that was previously controlled by Spanish-Mexicans. As such, Mexicans claim to spatial ownership, whether it was legal property ownership or ownership based on

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<sup>76</sup> David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991)..

<sup>77</sup> Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California*.

long-time residential status, was quite different from that of Irish residents. Mexican participation in this event of extreme anti-Chinese motivation cannot simply be understood as a moment in which Mexicans joined in anti-Chinese violence. Rather, their participation must be understood in relation to the changing locations of U.S. borders that displaced their claims to state power.

The events of 1871 made national news, which continued to construct narratives that not only placed Ya Hit at the center of the riot's origins and conflated the "danger" of Calle de los Negros with Chinese barbarism. Such narratives also suggested that Chinatown/Calle de los Negros kept Los Angeles from becoming a modern city, maintaining its image as a backward, un-Christian and, thus, un-American city. The *New York Times* coverage of the Massacre asserted that Calle de los Negros was "a hotbed of crime and depravity" that "cursed" the City of Los Angeles. The article went on to say that "Negro-alley" bore "a striking contrast with its neighbor, Los Angeles-street, with its fine two-storied brick warehouses."<sup>78</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft contributed to this rhetoric in 1888 when he characterized Calle de los Negros as "a hotbed of human depravity" populated by "Asiatic, African, and European, Latin and Indian [who] there lived in unholy association, and for vocation followed thieving and murder."<sup>79</sup> Boyle Workman, who wrote a history of Los Angeles in the 1930s, suggested that this kind of discourse reflected poorly on Los Angeles as a whole: "This tragic event placed Los Angeles in the public limelight as a place of violence, an uncivilized community. Sermons were actually preached in eastern cities on the necessity of sending

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<sup>78</sup> "The Los Angeles Massacre."

<sup>79</sup> Bancroft, "Some Chinese Episodes," 562..

missionaries to this community and converting it to Christianity.”<sup>80</sup> According to one historian, this was the first time Los Angeles appeared significantly in national news.<sup>81</sup> Much to the disappointment of Anglo elites who championed a modern image of the city, the article focused primarily on Calle de los Negros and not on the burgeoning Anglo business center to its immediate south. Workman’s statement about Los Angeles’ place in nation at large demonstrates that after U.S. rule was firmly established in the area, there was still concern about what to do with the non-white people who continued to live there, and who were perceived to be responsible for the violence of 1871. Even though the former Mexican territories had been acquired by the United States, he worried that easterners perceived the plaza-area community—and, by extension, Los Angeles—as a place in need of a moral transformation in order to make it truly American.

The Chinese Massacre of 1871 occurred during the era of Reconstruction in the region of the U.S. South. In a post-Civil War moment, the significance of racial violence against nonwhite peoples in the West cannot be separated from the upheaval of the racial order in a post-slave, and war-ravished society of the South. As boosters, like Widney and Workman, sought to reconfigure Los Angeles as a modern metropolis, progress and civilization rested on the idea that freedom must define the society of a modern world. In this case, they located backwardness and barbarism in the Plaza area through the association of violence with Chinese and Mexican residents of the Plaza area. However, the forces of modernity, such as the economic downturn of 1870 and the

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<sup>80</sup> Workman, *The City that Grew*, 147.

<sup>81</sup> Schwarz, Frederic D. “Time Machine.” *American Heritage Magazine* 47:6(1996), [http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1996/6/1996\\_6\\_116\\_print.shtml](http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1996/6/1996_6_116_print.shtml) (accessed October 17, 2009).

completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, were largely responsible for the presence of working-class Chinese and Irish in the plaza area, as well as the increasing migrant populations from Mexico. These communities were as much the product of modernity as was the Anglo urban development to the south of the plaza as well as in residential areas such as those farther west and in Pasadena. But to whom did Los Angeles belong?

### **Western Violence and incorporation**

It is likely that Guillermo Moreno and Abram Barelás were among the thousands of people who witnessed the Chinese Massacre less than two years before their street encounter with Lee Long and the unnamed Chinese man. According to census data, Moreno and Barelás had been living in Los Angeles' Sonoratown with their families long before 1871.<sup>82</sup> Given the enormity of the crowd that gathered on Calle de los Negros and at the lynching site a couple blocks south, the massacre was significant not only for Los Angeles' Chinese residents, but for the city's residents in general. One third to one half of the city's residents were estimated to have been in the crowd, participating as both perpetrators and spectators. As part of the "legacy of violence and terror experienced by racialized communities in the West," the spectacle of the mass lynching of Chinese male bodies in 1871 is significant because of possible impact it had on the collective memory of Los Angeles residents and the formation of public space.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> United States, Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*.

<sup>83</sup> Gonzalez-Day, Ken. *Lynching in the West: 1850-1935*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 3.

In the case of the Chinese Massacre, the spectacle of the lynching mirrored a sequence similar to what Grace Elizabeth Hale has described regarding the spectacle lynching culture in the South under racial segregation.<sup>84</sup> Robert Thompson, a respected white man was killed, but the individual Chinese perpetrator was not singled out from the entire population of Chinese residents living there at the time. Rather, the space of Chinatown itself was targeted for this brutal violence, and in particular Chinese people regardless of their participation in the supposed tong war surrounding Ya Hit or the killing of Thompson. The massacre became a spectacle of Chinese otherness in a moment of economic and demographic upheaval. And yet, unlike in the region of the U.S. South, the crowd that witnessed and participated in the violence was not a racially homogenous white crowd, but comprised of whites and Mexicans, both of multiple class statuses. Therefore, the crowd was simultaneously racially differentiated, including both whites and Mexicans, and discussed as a single mob of “downtown lower elements.”

While writers may have identified the 1871 massacre as a crucial moment in the history of Los Angeles, some also recognized that anti-Chinese massacres were not so exceptional in the history of the West from the Gold Rush through the 1920s and 30s.<sup>85</sup> To be sure, Bancroft identified another massacre that occurred in 1876-1877 in Chico, which he noted was prominent like the Los Angeles massacre. In these narratives, the thousands of persons who participated in the mob violence, “demanding the life of

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<sup>84</sup> Hale, Grace Elizabeth. *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1998) 203-204.

<sup>85</sup> See for example, Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, 202. As Susan Lee Johnson has argued, during the Gold Rush, no other group suffered more from being the targets of violent attacks than Chinese men. Susan Lee Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 34.

every Chinese in town—man, woman or child”<sup>86</sup> were unnamed, marking a stark contrast between the prominence given to law-abiding Anglo elites and the lack of specificity used to describe criminal White ethnic and Mexican underclasses.

Like the Chinese, Mexicans as a group were also targets of racialized mob violence. Historians have chronicled the continuation of the U.S.-Mexico War even after the United States officially claimed the former Mexican territories in 1848, calling attention to the persistence of anti-Mexican brutality as well as the long and violent process of incorporation whereby Anglo Americans gained cultural, political and economic power through the insertion of U.S. legal apparatuses and capitalist infrastructure, the displacement of Spanish-Mexicans from land ownership, and the imposition of state-sponsored and vigilante brutality. As William Deverell puts it, “Laid atop the Mexican War and its violence, racist exuberance were the postwar brutalities of the Gold Rush, the beatings, the criminalization, and the lynching of resident Mexicans, most of whom had, at least by treaty, become Americans.”<sup>87</sup> Historians William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb have found that during the period twenty-year period following the U.S.-Mexico War (1848-1879), “the Mexican population of the United States...faced unparalleled danger from mob violence.”<sup>88</sup> The prevalence of Mexican lynchings in the West indeed served to instill a sense of the danger of lynching among Mexican residents. In this sense, even if Mexicans participated in the racially-motivated mob violence against Los Angeles’ Chinese

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<sup>86</sup> Workman, *The City that Grew*, 147.

<sup>87</sup> Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 13.

<sup>88</sup> Carrigan, William D. and Clive Webb, “The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848 to 1928.” *Journal of Social History* 37:2(2003) 414.

residents, they also knew that as a group, they could also be targeted for similar racially-motivated mob violence.

Chinese residents came to live on Calle de los Negros alongside the plaza as a result of changing economic forces. The Gold Rush Era drew significant numbers of Chinese to the California mines and even more arrived to work on the first transcontinental railroad. Once the transcontinental was completed in 1869, many settled in San Francisco and smaller agricultural communities. With the economic downturn in 1870, flooding and other hardships facing cities to the north, many Chinese and ethnic whites migrated to Los Angeles. As this chapter has already mentioned, the Chinese population increased dramatically in the latter years of the 1860s, increasing from 16 to 234 between 1860 and 1870. Even before the Southern Pacific railroad tracks reached Los Angeles in 1876, the city's population had grown significantly and with it vice industries were increasingly located near the plaza. With these changes, as well as loss of land ownership, Spanish-Mexican elites began to leave their adobe homes alongside the plaza in order to relocate their families to ranchos farther from the city. In the meantime, their large family homes were converted into smaller units that would become the tenements homes of Chinatown. From 1870 to 1880, the Chinese population would continue to grow exponentially, increasing fivefold to 1,169.<sup>89</sup>

Part of this increase can also be explained by the arrival of the Southern Pacific railroad tracks in 1876. That year, the City commemorated the rail connection between San Francisco and Los Angeles event with a ceremony that celebrated an undeniable path to modernization. With its ocean ports, Los Angeles was poised to become a hub

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<sup>89</sup> Cheng and Cheng, "Chinese Women of Los Angeles," 2.

for U.S. trade linking eastern industries to Pacific markets, making it a center of global trade. In a striking resemblance to the festivities at Promontory Point marking the completion of the United States' first transcontinental railroad line in 1869, the City presented Charles Crocker, President of the Southern Pacific Railway Company, a golden spike with which to drive into the last rail. *The Chicago Daily Tribune* mentioned the event briefly, noting that "a force of 5,000 laborers was present, who laid the last 1,000 feet of track in five minutes."<sup>90</sup> However, the celebration was not meant to include the mostly Chinese workforce that laid track connecting Los Angeles to the transcontinental railroad line, which then connected the small town to railroad networks in the east, and ports along the Atlantic coast. In the tradition of railway connections in the U.S. West, this ceremony was an expression of Los Angeles' modernity and its instilment of order in a space of disorder, indeed its participation not only in the U.S. nation, but in the expanding U.S. empire as well.

In addition to the rising Chinese population, the arrival of the rails signified a number of transitions in the Los Angeles landscape, all of which worked toward the solidification of a racial order that organized living and working space in the city. Ten years after the Southern Pacific lines arrived in Los Angeles, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad joined its tracks from the east in 1885. Together these railroad networks facilitated a booming Anglo population as well as growing industries in tourism, vice and manufacture.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, this increased migration amplified the rapidity with which Spanish-Mexican lands changed hands to Anglo American owners.

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<sup>90</sup> "Southern Pacific," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 6, 1876.

<sup>91</sup> Deverell, William. *Railroad Crossing: Californians and the Railroad, 1850-1910*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994)62; Fogelson, Robert M. *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles 1850-1930*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 55-61.



It also fueled the growth of the working-class ethnic Mexican neighborhood northeast of the plaza, which Anglos had come to call “Sonoratown.” In 1880, an estimated ninety percent of the ethnic Mexican population in Los Angeles had migrated from other regions of California or from Mexico after 1848. That year almost half of Los Angeles’ Mexican population lived near the plaza—forty-eight percent or 1,072.<sup>92</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Over twenty years after the official end of the U.S.-Mexico War, the Massacre reveals the ways in which Chinese, Mexicans and whites struggled over space as colonial power shifted hands. Questions about who would control the plaza space, who would come to live there, and under which circumstances were still in flux. More than simply an example of anti-Chinese violence perpetrated by whites, my analysis has suggested that the multiracial context complicated racial antagonisms as nonwhites conflicted with each other. Although the majority of the Mexicans who were involved in the murders, whether as lynchers or as spectators, were likely not of elite classes, they were still able to wield the violence of colonial processes in this moment. It also demonstrates how Mexican and Chinese residents, in particular, negotiated the emerging georacial order under U.S. rule.

Considering transracial moments like the Chinese Massacre in light of everyday interactions illuminates not only the ways in which the making of race and gender took shape between nonwhite groups as well as in relation to whites, but also the contours and limits of power under U.S. expansion. White civic leaders used the events of that

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<sup>92</sup> Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Los Angeles Barrio, 1850-1890*, 38-40, 145.

night to distinguish themselves from Mexicans and Chinese, as well as from working-class white ethnics. In an effort to establish order in the midst of what they saw as a illicit and immoral intermingling of multiple racial groups, their narratives worked to contain this violence—and the people associated with it—in both time and space, by positioning the Massacre as a last moment of lawlessness. Their claims to having acted on behalf of Chinese “victims” made their interests moral ones that would then be mapped onto the city landscape through racial segregation.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Plaza, the Street and the Neighborhoods: Racial Boundaries and the Making of Public Spaces**

After working in gold mining and in railroad construction, David Fon Lee's grandfather settled with his brother in Los Angeles' Chinese quarter—a recent and growing addition to the city's Spanish-Mexican plaza area—around 1870. They eventually opened a restaurant called Man Jen Low a couple blocks off of the plaza “in a little, small place that was abandoned, right on the sidewalk.” Soon afterward, they moved the restaurant to a larger location on Marchessault Street, directly across from the plaza itself on the north side. Like other Chinese restaurants in the plaza area in the late nineteenth century, theirs was located on the second floor of the building, reserving the ground floor for other businesses such as markets, herbal medicine shops and gambling dens. Lee's grandfather later sent for his son (Lee's father) at the turn of the twentieth century. After living in Los Angeles for a short time, Lee's father, Fon Lee, returned to China where he met, and was matched and married to Lum Shee. They crossed into the United States and re-settled in Los Angeles to run the family restaurant, which they called a “chop suey house” and by then was located in the Chinatown market area to the east of the plaza.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> David Lee oral history, Interview B, interviewed by William Gow and James Hoon Lee, CHSSC; and David Lee oral history UCLA. Although Lee did not state whether the restaurant catered to a Chinese

As a child in the 1920s, Lee remembered the world of Chinatown streets—the unpaved “dirt and rock” that got muddy in the rain, the small sidewalks, and the men who spent time there. He lived with his family in the second-floor corner apartment of a rooming house that was above a shoemaker’s shop, and which was also home to the five or six Chinese men who worked at his father’s restaurant. “Most of them [were] singles,” who migrated to the United States alone, often leaving behind wives whose migration into the United States was restricted by law. Like many other Chinese men of merchant class, both Lee’s grandfather and father had returned to China to marry and have children before returning to Los Angeles.<sup>94</sup> Although Chinatown was home to the majority of Chinese women in the county, the Chinese population remained overwhelmingly male and working class. It was men who primarily occupied public spaces in Chinatown and on the plaza, and who frequented commercial and business spaces.

Although Mexicans did not have the same gender disparity in terms of population, white observers—social workers and tourists alike—consistently concerned themselves with what they saw as an overwhelming presence of “idle” Mexican men in the public spaces of the plaza area, especially on weekdays when working men waited

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cliente or to a non-Chinese or white customer base, it seems likely that calling the restaurant “chop suey house” was for non-Chinese benefit. “Chop suey house” was the name designating most Chinese restaurants in the United States during the era of exclusion, when work in laundries and restaurants was often the only kind of work available for Chinese people. Lee did not name his grandfather and father in the oral history interview. I was able to locate his father on the 1930 census, but not his grandfather. David Lee, interview by Suellen Cheng, December 5, 1979, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, UCLA Special Collections. As Haiming Liu has noted, “As an imagined authentic Chinese food, chop suey was a meaningful social construct in the racialized environment of American society.” See Haiming Liu, “Chop Suey as Imagined Authentic Chinese Food: The Culinary Identity of Chinese Restaurants in the United States.” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 1:1(2009) Retrieved from: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/2bc4k55r>.

<sup>94</sup> David Lee, interview by William Gow and James Hoon Lee, transcript 2009, n.d., Chinatown Remembered Community History Project, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California; David Lee, interview.

for transport to work or passed the day between odd jobs. In 1883 Helen Hunt Jackson wrote in *Century Illustrated Magazine* that “[a]t all hours of the day idle boys and still idler men are to be seen basking on the fountain’s stone rim, or lying, face down, heels in the air, in the triangles of shade made by the cypress croquettes.”<sup>95</sup> Likewise in his 1914 participant observation of public spaces around the plaza, sociologist William Wilson McEuen also characterized the plaza as “a gathering place for idle men.”<sup>96</sup> For him, “idle men,” particularly the presence of Mexican “idle men” in public space, made the plaza and the area surrounding it a site exemplary of the so-called “Mexican problem” of the United States during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Despite his gaze, McEuen’s study illuminates the multiple ways in which Mexican residents made use of the plaza—as a place to find transportation on the express wagons, a meeting place for Mexican working men, a site for intellectual exchange, a place for religious and other cultural celebrations, as a central spot to be visited while attending the moving picture theater, or going to the store, the barber shop, the penny arcade, the pool hall or to eat at a restaurant.<sup>97</sup> Whites’ descriptions of the plaza area illuminate as much about what they thought of Chinese and Mexican residents of the plaza area as they do about the configuration of public space. Even if their accounts were informed by their own moral ideologies regarding the place of nonwhites in the nation.

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<sup>95</sup> Carey McWilliams notes that Helen Hunt Jackson frequently published her tourist writings under the pen name, “H.H.” H.H., “Echoes in the City of the Angels,” *Century Illustrated Magazine*, 27:2(December 1883)

<sup>96</sup> William Wilson McEuen, “A Survey of the Mexicans in Los Angeles” (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1914), 68.

<sup>97</sup> McEuen, “A Survey of the Mexicans in Los Angeles.”

The presence of Mexican and Chinese men in the plaza and in the streets and businesses surrounding it, suggest that masculinity and class were central to the production of public spaces in this geographical area. Already designed as a space of Spanish colonial domination, the plaza underwent a dramatic transition to U.S. capitalism after the U.S.-Mexico War, affecting plaza-area residents and the ways in which they interacted and made public spaces in multiple ways. For one, the general population, including both Chinese and Mexican populations, increased tremendously with the building of multiple railroad lines, as did booming industries in the 1870s and after. Additionally, the city's burgeoning industrial zone found a location along the Los Angeles River—the very same place where the majority of the city's Chinese and Mexican settlements were also located. These shifts directly affected the development of Chinatown and Sonoratown neighborhoods and the ways in which Chinese and Mexican residents would come to interact in public space on a day-to-day basis.

Single Chinese and Mexican working men often lived in close quarters that made it difficult to spend significant time in their home spaces, such as lodging houses near or directly on the plaza. For this reason, working men spent a great deal of time in public spaces with other men. Sometimes Chinese and Mexican residents shared public spaces, sometimes they spent time in separate ones. Although white tourists, city officials and others sought to categorize Chinese and Mexican space as categorically and geographically distinct, often turning a blind eye to what Mark Wild has called the “polyglot nature of the central neighborhoods’ ethnic communities,”<sup>98</sup> an analysis of the landscape of everyday places in the plaza area shows that such racial boundaries were

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<sup>98</sup> Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 39.

much more complex than white georacial imaginaries would have concluded. Even as the racial and gender dynamics of border exclusion, industrialization, and residential segregation structured the geography and architecture of the plaza area, everyday interactions in public spaces around the plaza reveal the racial and gendered location of Chinese and Mexican men in the public sphere and illuminate the ways in which their everyday activities did not follow the logics of U.S. conquest that white social workers, researchers, city planners, tourism writers and elites thought to be the engines of modernization.<sup>99</sup>

This chapter analyzes the spatialization of everyday interactions between and among Chinese and Mexican residents in public spaces of Los Angeles, and examines the relationship between geocultural order—that is, forces of industrialization, modernization and border formation—and bodily experiences and practices. While the plaza itself often symbolized a geographical border between Chinese and Mexican residential and business districts, the space of the plaza and the interactions between residents—and even the delineations between them—were much more complex than the ideologies of white Anglenos could imagine. The chapter addresses the spatialization of culture in the urban borderlands space of the plaza area in two ways. First, it addresses the impact of changing geopolitical borders on the configuration and meaning of the plaza itself in relation to Chinese and Mexican residents who came to use it daily. Processes of U.S. incorporation and modernization leading up to the early twentieth century contributed to marking the space as one characterized by Mexican and Chinese masculinity. Although the plaza lost its place as the city’s civic center, it continued to

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<sup>99</sup> For more on the interplay between structure and agency in the social production of space, particularly with regard to race, gender and sexuality, see Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis, 2006).

be a space for social meeting, intellectual debate, and community formation, particularly amongst Chinese and Mexican men. Second, moving outward from the plaza itself—as central Los Angeles’ core geographical spot—the chapter finally examines the streets and other public spaces of human interaction inside the hearts of Chinatown and Sonoratown. As both the Chinese and Mexican populations grew from 1910-1930, street spaces located within a few blocks of the plaza’s business area also proliferated, making for more areas of potential racial interaction between Chinese and Mexican men who lived amongst each other.

### **“Truly they seem strange neighbors”: Modernity and the Plaza**

Founded in 1781, El Pueblo de la Reina de los Angeles was a multiracial settlement of pobladores who came from the interior of Mexico. After studying the cultural patterns of indigenous peoples of the region, Felipe de Neve chose the site near Yaanga, an Indian village, so as to build a civic plaza using indigenous labor from Yaanga. A center of urban life, the plaza was built upon a grid pattern according to a mixture of indigenous and Hispanic colonial models of urban planning, “embodying both the formal and informal activities of church and state into a common space.”<sup>100</sup> Similar to other spatial arrangements of Spanish settler colonies, the Los Angeles plaza was a central space that served as a meeting place for celebrations, markets for exchange of goods and ideas, and civic engagements whether political, religious or social, with the civic church located on its western edge, and the residences and businesses of the Spanish elite surrounding it. Farther distance from the plaza center

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<sup>100</sup> William David Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 16.



suggested decreasing social status. Such geographic configuration relegated indigenous people of the area to the lowest rung of the ladder through architectural, religious, and civic design.<sup>101</sup>

Following the U.S.-Mexican War from 1846-1848 and the granting of statehood for California in 1850, Los Angeles went through a number of transitions under U.S. rule. Increasing numbers of whites and Mexicans who worked in mining during the Gold Rush, eventually came to settle in Los Angeles. Mexican miners, mostly from the state of Sonora, Mexico, settled to the northeast of the plaza, hence the naming of the neighborhood “Sonoratown.”<sup>102</sup> In addition to the sheer population growth of both Anglos and Mexicans in the 1850s and 1860s, the plaza became the site of a growing vice district and progressively more racialized violence aimed at Chinese and Mexican residents.<sup>103</sup> The 1870s accelerated these drastic changes to the city’s geography as Anglo American architectural configurations of modernity, such as the court house, city hall buildings, and the new Catholic Church were increasingly constructed farther south of the plaza. As William David Estrada has argued, the configuration of the plaza as the center of civic life would be displaced under U.S. rule, as Spanish-Mexican elites lost their land and/or relocated their families to ranchos farther away, and Anglo Americans constructed municipal buildings farther south and built their homes away from the plaza. “Indeed, the overall specter of change during the last two decades of the century brought an end to the rancho economy and culture along with the significance of the

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<sup>101</sup> For more on the spatialization of plazas in the Spanish settler colonies, see Daniel D. Arreola, “Plaza Towns of South Texas,” *Geographical Review* 82, no. 1 (January 1992): 56-73; Setha M. Low, “Spatializing Culture: The Social Production and Social Construction of Public Space in Costa Rica,” *American Ethnologist* 23, no. 4 (November 1996): 861-879; Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*.

<sup>102</sup> See Chapter One for more discussion on the formation of Sonoratown.

<sup>103</sup> Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 58-71.

Plaza as the civic center.”<sup>104</sup> Whites increasingly configured the plaza in contradistinction to what they perceived as a more modern representation of Los Angeles’ municipality on Temple and Main Streets, several blocks to the direct south of the plaza. Additionally, the construction of a new Catholic Church, Saint Vibiana’s Cathedral—the second Catholic Church in Los Angeles—was completed at Second and Main Streets near the new civic buildings in 1876. Designated for a primarily Anglo parish, the new church hastened the cultural and spatial segregation of the Mexican Catholic community in the plaza area.<sup>105</sup>

Although industrial growth had already begun in Sonoratown and Chinatown, the arrival of the railroad tracks spurred industrial and population growth at a spectacular rate. When the tracks of the Southern Pacific stretched southward from San Francisco reaching Los Angeles in 1876, the City of Los Angeles commemorated the event with a ceremony that celebrated the rail connection. With its ports on the Pacific, Los Angeles was poised to become a center for U.S. trade with Pacific markets. In a striking resemblance to the festivities at Promontory Point marking the completion of the United States’ first transcontinental railroad line in 1869, the City presented Charles Crocker, President of the Southern Pacific Railway Company, a golden spike with which to drive into the last rail. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* mentioned the event briefly, noting that “a force of 5,000 laborers was present, who laid the last 1,000 feet of track in five minutes.”<sup>106</sup> The celebration excluded the mostly Chinese workforce that laid track connecting Los Angeles to the transcontinental railroad line, which then connected

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>105</sup> See Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 82; Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Los Angeles Barrio, 1850-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

<sup>106</sup> “Southern Pacific,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 6, 1876.

the small town to railroad networks in the east, and ports along the Atlantic coast. In the tradition of railway connections in the U.S. West, this ceremony was an expression of Los Angeles' modernity and its instilment of order in a space of disorder, indeed its participation not only in the U.S. nation, but in the expanding U.S. empire as well.

The exclusion of Chinese workers in the celebration of Los Angeles' impending modernization manifested in material ways in the city's plaza area neighborhoods. The arrival of the rails signified a number of transitions in the Los Angeles landscape, all of which worked toward the solidification of a gendered racial order that organized living and working space in the city. Ten years after the SPRR arrived in Los Angeles, the Santa Fe Railroad joined its tracks from the east.<sup>107</sup> Together these railroad networks facilitated a booming Anglo population as well as growing industries in tourism, vice and manufacture. This increased migration fueled the rapidity with which Spanish-Mexican lands changed hands to Anglo American owners, as discussed in the previous chapter. It also fueled the growth of the working-class ethnic Mexican neighborhood to the north and west of the plaza, which Anglos came to call "Sonoratown," as well the growth of the Chinese settlement to the east of the plaza that Anglos came to call "Chinatown."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> William Deverell, *Railroad Crossing: Californians and the Railroad, 1850-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, n.d.).

<sup>108</sup> Griswold del Castillo, *The Los Angeles Barrio*, 38-40, 145.



**Table 2.1: Populations of Chinese, Mexicans and Whites in Los Angeles<sup>109</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Chinese</b>	<b>Mexicans</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Total</b>
1860	16	2,069		4,385
1870	179	2,160		5,728
1880	604	2,166	10,379	11,183
1890	1,871	498	47,205	50,395
1900	2,111	817	98,082	102,479
1910	1,954	5,632	305,307	319,198
1920	2,062	21,598	546,864	576,673
1930	3,009	97,116	1,073,584	1,238,048
1940	4,736	36,840	1,406,430	1,504,277

Industries also fueled population growth in the city in general. Census data shows that after the railroads, the total population of Los Angeles grew exponentially.

Between 1870 and 1880, the population doubled from 5,728 to 11,183. Over the next decade it increased by almost five fold to 50,395. By 1930, Los Angeles boasted a population of well over one million. (See Figure 2.1)

With increasing municipal power beginning in 1872, white urban planners executed a number of infrastructural changes to the urban landscape that drastically changed way the plaza area looked and how people interacted there. Along with

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<sup>109</sup> United States, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920* (Washington, D. C.: Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, 1920); United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1900); United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1910); United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1930); United States, Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860); United States, Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1870); United States, Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1880). See also Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, “Chinese Women of Los Angeles, A Social Historical Survey,” in *Linking Our Lives: Chinese American Women of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1984), 2; Griswold del Castillo, *The Los Angeles Barrio*, 35 (figures for 1860-1880); Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 7 (figures for Chinese and white from 1880-1940 and for Mexicans from 1890-1940).

industries, they instituted plans to build new infrastructure—sewer lines, water mains, and street surfacing—that would bring an increase in immigration and businesses. However, these plans often were not materialized in plaza area neighborhoods. As David Torres-Rouff has argued, these infrastructural changes not only signaled a transition from agrarian to capitalist society, but they also served to recast racial inequalities that could be seen in the public spaces of Chinese and Mexican areas which did not receive the same kinds of infrastructural attention.<sup>110</sup>

As both population and industries boomed following the connection of the railroad tracks in 1876, the riverbed—the very same place where Sonoratown and Chinatown were located—became increasingly a favored site for industrial growth. By the turn of the twentieth century, industries had grown so much in the riverbed area, that the city instituted zoning ordinances in 1908 that drew boundaries around industrial districts. The first district stretched from Buena Vista Street in the heart of Sonoratown to the Los Angeles River, encompassing as well the Chinese and Mexican residential and business districts that shared the same geographical space. With this overlapping of Chinese and Mexican residential space with the pollution and dirt produced by industrial waste, the area became increasingly understood amongst whites as “a place of bad smells and bad people.”<sup>111</sup> Nora Sterry, principal of the Macy Street School in the 1920s, wrote that her students and their families lived daily with the grittiness of industrial growth. “The surrounding packing houses have so polluted the air with poisonous gasses as to stunt all vegetation and to make the process of breathing at times

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<sup>110</sup> David S. Torres-Rouff, “Making Los Angeles: Race, Space and Municipal Power, 1822-1890” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2006), 262-264.

<sup>111</sup> William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 108-109.

disagreeable because of disgusting odors. There is always a heavy cloud of smoke hanging low over the district from the ever passing trains, making the air full of soot and all things grimy to the touch.”<sup>112</sup>

Los Angeles’ Chinese district was distinct from most other Chinese settlements in the West for a couple of reasons. For one, Chinese men settled directly on the Spanish-Mexican plaza—arguably in Sonoratown—at a moment when the Spanish-Mexican colonial power structure was rapidly supplanted by rising Anglo American political, economic and cultural power structures. As Spanish-Mexican elites moved out and Anglo Americans moved their centers of municipal power south, the area became increasingly designated for working class Mexican and Chinese residents. Thus, the Chinese settlement grew alongside a long-standing and, by the turn of the twentieth century, increasingly immigrant Mexican neighborhood. For another, although the anti-Chinese movement and Chinese exclusion laws were successful in limiting immigration and decreasing the overall Chinese population within U.S. borders, the Chinese population of Los Angeles actually increased. In the plaza area, Chinese fleeing found anti-Chinese violence in rural areas found some refuge in Chinatown, even though it was not always immune from anti-Chinese violence. Additionally, many Chinese who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border were en route to Los Angeles, where they met up with relatives or found work. Also, increasing numbers of Chinese women migrated with their merchant husbands who could legally enter the United States, and began to raise families in Los Angeles.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Nora Sterry, “The Sociological Basis for the Re-organization of the Macy Street School” (Master’s thesis, University of Southern California, 1924), 13.

<sup>113</sup> Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, “Chinese Women of Los Angeles”; Kit King Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles” (Master’s thesis, University of Southern

After having worked in track construction for the first transcontinental railroad, which was completed in 1869, many Chinese men found work in other industries in California such as agriculture and domestic work in wealthy Anglo homes of Los Angeles. Still the Southern Pacific Company continued to employ Chinese track workers as rail lines were built southward from San Francisco, reaching Los Angeles in 1876. In fact, the Southern Pacific and other employers continued to hire Chinese men for additional construction work on railroad and other industrial sites in Los Angeles and surrounding areas over the next few decades.<sup>114</sup> This construction work coincided with a large increase of Chinese residents in the city, who settled in the adobes on the plaza's eastern edge that formerly housed Spanish-Mexican elites.<sup>115</sup> By 1880, the Chinese population in the City of Los Angeles had increased from 179 to 604 since the previous decade. Despite this significant growth in the general population, the numbers of Chinese women in the County between 1870 and 1880 only increased from 38 to 52.<sup>116</sup>

As historians have argued, the 1875 Page Law, which specifically restricted the migration of Chinese women into U.S. geopolitical borders, played a crucial role in limiting the population of Chinese women in the United States. Framed to both appease the anti-Chinese white labor movement and to limit Chinese immigration, the law was

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California, 1931); Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007); Robert Chao Romero, "Transnational Chinese Immigrant Smuggling to the United States via Mexico and Cuba, 1882-1916," *Amerasia Journal* 30, no. 3 (2004): 1-16.

<sup>114</sup> See Icy Smith, *The Lonely Queue: The Forgotten History of the Courageous Chinese Americans in Los Angeles* (Gardena, CA: East West Discovery Press, 2000), 16. See also Chinese American Museum, "Chinese Americans in Los Angeles: A Timeline," n.d., <http://www.camla.org/history/timeline.htm>. (Accessed October 29, 2008).

<sup>115</sup> I discuss more about Chinese settlement in the adobes of the Spanish-Mexican elites in Chapter One.

<sup>116</sup> Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, "Chinese Women of Los Angeles," 2.



framed around moral protection of the U.S. nation by specifically targeting prostitution in particular. As Ming M. Zhu has argued, morality became a means by which to avoid a breach of the Burlingame Treaty of 1868 while appeasing the labor movement.<sup>117</sup> This moral ideology, written into law, had profound impact on Chinese communities already within the United States. Although the law was aimed at restricting the immigration of all Chinese, its focus on prostitution cast Chinese women in particular as perpetrators of illegality and immorality within the geopolitical borders of the United States. In addition to race, the gender and sexual politics of border restriction in this case figured Chinese residential areas, like Los Angeles' Chinatown, as spaces of immorality and sexual violence.<sup>118</sup>

The Page Law was rewritten seven years later in 1882—the Chinese Exclusion Act—to limit the migration of all Chinese laborers. The Geary Act of 1892 extended the Exclusion Act and mandated that Chinese laborers register with the federal government by demonstrating that their presence inside U.S. geopolitical borders was legal. If they were unable to provide such proof, they faced deportation.<sup>119</sup> According to Icy Smith, “Wong Dep Ken, a Los Angeles cigar maker, was the first Chinese to be deported from the United States under this act.”<sup>120</sup> The Exclusion Acts were successful

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<sup>117</sup> The Treaty between the United States and the Chinese Empire stipulated that encouraged trade, immigration and protection of citizens of both nations. While the migration of Chinese nationals across U.S. borders would not be limited, the treaty did not guarantee naturalization. See for example, Ming M. Zhu, “The Page Act of 1875: In the Name of Morality,” in *Working Paper Series*, 2010, 4, Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1577213>.

<sup>118</sup> See, for example, Sucheng Chan, “The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870-1943,” in *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 94-146; George Anthony Peffer, *If They Don't Bring their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration Before Exclusion* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

<sup>119</sup> Smith, *The Lonely Queue*; Evelyn Nakano Glen, “Split Household, Small Producer and Dual Wage Earner: An Analysis of Chinese-American Family Strategies,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 45, no. 1 (February 1983): 35-46; Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, “Chinese Women of Los Angeles.”

<sup>120</sup> Smith, *The Lonely Queue*, 27.

in curbing the migration of Chinese into the United States in general. However, together with escalating anti-Chinese racism, many Chinese who lived and worked in rural areas eventually migrated to Los Angeles. Thus, although the total Chinese population declined at the end of the nineteenth century, the population in Los Angeles continued to grow. Additionally, while in early twentieth century, the proportion of Chinese women to men steadily increased as women migrated to the United States legally as the wives of merchants, the great majority of Chinese continued to be men.

Scholars have addressed the creation of male dominated communities in U.S.-Chinese communities, as industries recruited “able-bodied young men” to labor in railroad, agriculture, mining and manufacture. So-called “bachelor societies” were made up of mostly Chinese laboring men who lived alone in a rented room, or in lodging houses with many other “single” men.<sup>121</sup> In this regard, Los Angeles Chinatown was no exception. Historians of Chinese American women, however, point out that in addition to immigration restrictions, the small numbers of Chinese women may also be explained by Chinese cultural ideas which understood that women should stay at home in China rather than travel with men.<sup>122</sup> In Los Angeles County, the Chinese population was overwhelmingly male, accounting for 94-96% of the Chinese residents there between 1880 and 1910.<sup>123</sup>

The Exclusion Acts, of course, were not the only way in which anti-Chinese racism affected the space of the Los Angeles plaza area. Anti-Chinese ideologies often

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<sup>121</sup> Glen, “Split Household, Small Producer and Dual Wage Earner: An Analysis of Chinese-American Family Strategies,” 38-39.

<sup>122</sup> Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, “Chinese Women of Los Angeles”; Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>123</sup> Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, “Chinese Women of Los Angeles,” 2.

fueled acts of violence on Chinese communities throughout the U.S. West and reinforced the ways in which geopolitical borders took shape through everyday practice. Fire, in particular, was especially common. In 1886 and 1887 there were frequent attempts to burn down Los Angeles' Chinese quarters. On June 25, 1887 Calle de los Negros was the site of a fire thought to be started by arson. Ah Sing, a merchant who ran his store on Calle de los Negros, woke that morning to find that the shed behind his store was on fire. He later told the *Los Angeles Times* that a number of Chinese men who lived on the same block rushed to help put out the flames. Some witnessed two white men running along the railroad tracks on Alameda Street, and later they "found a coal-oil can in one corner of the shed where the fire had started." An investigation showed that the men had strategically placed a string of oil cans throughout Chinatown, and "had been placed in such a position that the whole of Chinatown would have been in flames in less than three minutes after the first can was fired, had not the chain of powder been broken by Gee [Chinatown resident] or someone else."<sup>124</sup> One month later, on July 24, a fire was lit in multiple places at once in the store run by Chung Wah, and the arsonists succeeded in burning down most of the adobes on Calle de los Negros, resulting in significant loss for Chinese residents.<sup>125</sup> The wooden shacks and adobes that made up most of the architecture in plaza area neighborhoods were especially prone to fire. After most of the buildings on Calle de los Negros were destroyed in 1887, they were replaced with brick buildings as Chinatown expanded eastward from the plaza.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> "Vigilantes?" *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 1887.

<sup>125</sup> "Fire: Chinatown Swept by and Incendiary Blaze" *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1887.

<sup>126</sup> Smith, *The Lonely Queue*, 26.

Even so, Chinatown buildings were again the targets of arson in 1896, during a Chinese holiday when most residents were attending religious services at the temple.<sup>127</sup>

Over the next several years, arson occurred in Chinatowns throughout the region in Modesto, Riverside, San Bernardino, Weaverville, Junction City and Pasadena, for example.<sup>128</sup> Despite the success of Chinese exclusion laws in decreasing the general Chinese population in the United States and in California specifically, anti-Chinese racism like the fires and limited work availability had the opposite effect for Los Angeles' Chinatown, which continued to grow. This can be seen even within Los Angeles County, since the general population of the county decreased while the population in the city increased, suggesting that Chinese residents in outlying areas of the County relocated to the plaza area.<sup>129</sup> (See Tables 2.2 and 2.3)

The railroad connection in 1876 was largely responsible for the tremendous rise in Sonoratown's Chinese population. Although there had been a spike in Chinese settlement in Los Angeles at the end of the 1860s, likely due to the decline of placer mining in the Motherlode that displaced Chinese miners, the large spike in the 1870s was due to the arrival of the tracks. When the tracks of the Southern Pacific arrived in Los Angeles, there were teams of Chinese workers who labored in track construction for the San Francisco-Los Angeles connection as well as the connection between Santa Monica and Los Angeles, as well as other rail lines that ran to the Panamint Mines. Additionally, Los Angeles' port was the arrival location for steamers carrying Chinese

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<sup>127</sup> "A Roasted Joss" *Los Angeles Times* April 1, 1896.

<sup>128</sup> "Riverside County: The Losses by the Chinatown Fire—Several Accidents" *Los Angeles times*, August 1, 1893; "Attempt to Burn the San Bernardino Chinatown" *Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 1894; "Two Chinatown Fires" *Los Angeles times* April 3, 1896;

<sup>129</sup> Raymond Lou, "The Chinese American Community of Los Angeles, 1870-1900: A Case of Resistance, Organization, and Participation" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1982).

laborers who stayed in the city temporarily on their way to work on interior rail lines. While in Los Angeles, the workers spent time in Chinatown, patronizing Chinatown stores, gambling houses, restaurants and brothels. Having made connections in the area, many decided to settle in Los Angeles; this booming population also enticed the arrival of additional merchants to Los Angeles Chinatown.<sup>130</sup> By 1910, the population more than doubled from what it was in 1880 to 2,602. While the population increased tremendously between 1880 and 1910, the percentage of women only grew from 4.5% to 5.7%.<sup>131</sup>

**Table 2.2: Chinese Population Growth in City of Los Angeles**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>Percent Increase</b>	<b>Chinese Population</b>	<b>Percent Increase2</b>
1850	1,161	--	2	--
1860	4,385	172	14	--
1870	5,728	27	172	1711
1880	11,183	96	605	251
1890	50,000	350	1,871	209
1900	102,000	103	2,111	13

**Table 2.3: Chinese Population Growth in the County of Los Angeles**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>Percent Increase</b>	<b>Chinese Population</b>	<b>Percent Increase2</b>
1850	3,530	--	2	--
1860	11,348	221	15	550
1870	15,309	35	234	2027
1880	33,381	118	1,169	400
1890	101,454	204	4,424	278
1900	170,298	68	3,209	-27

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 22, 34-35.

<sup>131</sup> Census figures for the general population in Los Angeles were actually highest in 1890 (at 4,424) and began to decrease over the next few decades. Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, "Chinese Women of Los Angeles," 2.

While Chinese people were specifically targeted for exclusion at U.S. borders, Mexican people continued to cross freely.<sup>132</sup> In 1880, an estimated 90 percent of the ethnic Mexican population in Los Angeles had migrated from other regions of California or from Mexico after 1848. That year almost half of Los Angeles' Mexican population lived near the plaza—48 percent or 1,072.<sup>133</sup> Although there was a sharp increase in Mexican migration to the United States in the 1890s, an even larger migration began around 1900 when the Southern Pacific lines connected with the Mexican Central Railroad whose tracks reached into interior Mexico. Labor recruiters targeted able-bodied Mexican young men to work in U.S. industries. In the plaza area, railroads employed the largest number of residents, especially Mexican men. In 1920, sociologist David Alexander Bridge estimated that more than forty percent of Mexican men in the district were employed by railroads doing “unskilled” labor, followed by day labor and miscellaneous employment. Some twenty-five percent of Italians living in the district also worked in railroads. Bridge noted that “as one would expect by reason of the fact that the railroads are within walking distance of the district the railroads employ the largest number of laborers of [unskilled] class.” He also estimated that almost twelve percent of Mexican men were unemployed.<sup>134</sup>

After immigration restrictions placed quotas on European immigrants in the 1920s, Mexican migration to the United States increased exponentially from 10,000 in 1913, to 68,000 in 1920 and 106,000 in 1924.<sup>135</sup> During the first three decades of the

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<sup>132</sup> Erika Lee, *At America's Gates*.

<sup>133</sup> Griswold del Castillo, *The Los Angeles Barrio*, 38-40, 145.

<sup>134</sup> David Alexander Bridge, “A Study of the Agencies which Promote Americanization in the Los Angeles City Recreation Center District” (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1920), 42-44.

<sup>135</sup> See Lawrence A. Cardoso, *Mexican Emigration to the United States, 1897-1931: Socio-economic*

twentieth century, thousands of Mexicans migrated into the United States, mostly for work in construction and agribusinesses that paid double the amount they could earn in the north of Mexico. As some scholars have noted, Mexico lost 10 percent of its population during this period, due to migration into the United States.<sup>136</sup>

Despite industries' reliance on Mexican men to become the labor base for track work, the ratio of Mexican men to women was much more balanced in comparison to the gender ratio for Chinese. One 1920 study estimated the district to house a Mexican population that was 53% men and 47% women.<sup>137</sup> In fact, in addition to industrial recruitment of Mexican laborers, the Mexican Revolution, which lasted from 1910 through 1921, also fueled the increasing Mexican immigrant population. María Bustos Jefferson recalled riding the rails to El Paso as a child, after her parents decided to move to the United States during the Revolution for safety reasons.<sup>138</sup> Likewise, Enrique Vega remembered migrating to Los Angeles with his mother during the Revolution, following the death of his father. “[W]e were humble people, poor people. And must have been pretty rough over there...during the Revolution. A lot of people immigrated to this country at that time.”<sup>139</sup> The majority of those who crossed into the United States and migrated to Los Angeles came from the northern regions of Mexico and followed the rails from the Mexican interior to El Paso and on to Los Angeles, where they often

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*Patterns* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), 109.

<sup>136</sup> See Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 93-94.

<sup>137</sup> Bridge, “A Study of the Agencies which Promote Americanization in the Los Angeles City Recreation Center District,” 16.

<sup>138</sup> Maria Bustos Jefferson, interview by Christine Valenciana, transcript, 1988, September 11, 1971, Mexican American Collection, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

<sup>139</sup> Enrique Vega, interview by Christine Valenciana, Oral History tape, September 3, 1972, Mexican American Collection, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

continued working for the railroad and lived close to the industries that employed them.<sup>140</sup>

### **Daily life on the Plaza in the Early Twentieth Century**

Excitement over the growth of Los Angeles' modernity was tempered by white fears of the increasing nonwhite populations that came with it. As tourism writers and researchers alike struggled to contend with what seemed a contradiction of modernity, they also recognized the structural and spatial affects on the city's racial geography. As tourists and social scientists, these writers imagined themselves observing plaza life from afar, even as they sometimes physically spent time in the plaza and its stores and businesses in order to witness the daily lives of "foreigners" in public spaces (i.e. not inside their homes), effectively becoming participants in the making of these spaces. Their writings tell us as much about how the process of modernization contributed to the spatialization of culture in the plaza area, as they do about their imperial gazes. While white Angelenos identified the plaza as both the boundary between racialized Mexican and Chinese geographical spaces of the city, and the locus of the "Mexican problem" or the "Chinese problem," daily activity in public spaces of Mexican and Chinese working class neighborhoods surrounding the plaza reveal a more complex gendered and racial configuration of space.

From the 1870s until the 1930s, increasing Chinese and Mexican populations affected residential and business spaces surrounding the plaza on all sides, making for a

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<sup>140</sup> George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 44; George J. Sanchez, "'What's Good for Boyle Heights Is Good for the Jews': Creating Multiracialism on the Eastside during the 1950s," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (September 2004): 633-661.



dynamic racial and gendered public space in the plaza itself. Los Angeles Street (and Calle de los Negros until 1877), which ran along the plaza's eastern side, was increasingly the site of Chinese male lodging houses, restaurants, and businesses. On the plaza's western side was Main Street, which, along with the plaza Church, was the site of a hodgepodge of male lodging houses, retail stores and restaurants, as well as commercial leisure establishments that served a primarily Mexican population. The plaza itself was a park area that served multiple functions for the communities who lived in the area, most notably Mexicans and Chinese, who frequented the stores, restaurants, and other businesses as well as the plaza church. In the 1880s it was surrounded by cypress trees with a fountain in the center.<sup>141</sup> Aside from Sundays when families attended church, or the moving picture theaters, the space was mostly inhabited by working Mexican and Chinese men on the weekdays.

The plaza and its surrounding neighborhoods became a site for Anglo fascination with and fear of racialized difference. Tourist depictions characterized the plaza district, with its Chinese and Mexican residential, community and business spaces, as simultaneously as a place where Los Angeles' global reach could be witnessed locally, and a location in which the racial categorization of Chinese and Mexican people could be defined in isolation from whites. In 1883, Clara Spalding Brown wrote a vivid depiction of Los Angeles' "unusual and unique" racial landscape, geared toward an audience of white tourists from the eastern United States. With the recent connection of the Southern Pacific in 1876, Los Angeles saw itself on the brink of becoming a national, if not global, metropolis. In this vein, Spalding Brown declared

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<sup>141</sup> H. H., "Echos in the City of Angels," *Century Illustrated*, 2000.

that the city was well on its way to making this transition a reality. Los Angeles, she wrote, was “a slice of Mexico and a slice of the United States...set side by side” and the “line of demarcation between the old town—commonly called Sonora—and the new is very distinct.” Within this Mexican area, she wrote that one could “also find ‘John’ in the “portion of the Mexican town [that had] been converted to the uses of the inevitable Chinaman.” To her, the Anglo “American city” contrasted sharply with the “old” Mexican portion, where Chinese men found accommodations amongst Mexicans. For her the threat of the “inevitable Chinaman” posed to the U.S. nation had been contained in the undesirable Mexican district of the city. This was her depiction of Los Angeles and the West, a region in which the process of modernization gave rise to assumedly opposing racialized geographies: modern versus primitive, United States versus Mexico, American versus foreign, and white versus nonwhite.<sup>142</sup>

Almost twenty years later, Benjamin Rotholtz published a similarly sensational depiction in a city tourist guide issued by the Los Angeles Times in 1901. He focused on the city’s Chinese neighborhood, casting all things Chinese—people, food, religion and artisan work—as “curious,” “primitive,” and “gaudy.” Where Spalding Brown raised concern about the “inevitable Chinaman,” Rotholtz seemed fascinated by the overlapping of Chinese and Spanish-Mexican spaces in the plaza itself. In particular he figured the plaza Church in contradistinction to Chinatown, which he located on opposite sides of the plaza itself, and assumedly on opposite sides of a racial, cultural and moral divide. “Truly they seem strange neighbors,” he wrote.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Clara Spalding Brown, “La Ciudad de la Reyna de los Angeles,” *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine*, July 1883.

<sup>143</sup> Benjamin Rotholtz, *Wilson's Illustrated and Descriptive Souvenir and Guide to Los Angeles and Nearby Towns* (Los Angeles: Wilson Publishing Co., 1901), 98.

This kind of imperialist gaze did not go without contestation. In 1927, Mrs. L. M. Wolfe, a self-identified “Mexican woman,” wrote to the *Los Angeles Times*, of her concerns regarding the portrayal of Mexican people and culture, which had appeared a few days prior in an article by Laura Pirtle Edwards. In particular, Wolfe took issue with Edwards’ suggestion that Mexicans eat “‘skinned dog heads’ and ‘other peculiar delicacies which are better not mentioned,’” a statement she insisted was “absolutely untrue,” and that “only an ignorant or a prejudiced person would say so.”<sup>144</sup> This portion of Edwards’ ethnographic essay was part of a larger description of a Sonoratown meat market—one of many places she identified in which whites might catch a “passing glimpse” of Mexican daily life. Reflecting common Anglo perceptions of Chinese and Mexican neighborhoods in central Los Angeles, Edwards described with tourist gaze the area and its residents as pre-modern and un-American and, thus, mysterious and unknowable. While she saw Chinese and Mexican spaces as equally foreign and similar in their peculiarity and proximity, to her they were also categorically different from each other and from whites.

It was Edwards’ comparison of Mexican cultural practices with Chinese ones—the potential collapsing of Chineseness and Mexicanness in space and category—with which Wolfe took issue. The familiar trope of barbaric and, perhaps, anti-modern culture figured through the myth of eating dog was associated with Chinese people since the late 19th century, and was used as a means of racializing Chinese as “heathen.” As Robert Lee has stated, “The consumption of dogs and cats is the most common image of Chinese foodways.” Thus, the association between Chinese food and

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<sup>144</sup> L. M. Wolfe, “Little Mexico,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1927.

the eating of dogs was typical imagery in the construction of Chinese as “alien” threats to the U.S. nation.<sup>145</sup> In this case, Edwards used a popular anti-Chinese trope to inscribe racialized ideas of Mexicans as “altogether foreign” (and therefore un-American) into geographical space—in short, to identify Sonoratown as foreign space located within U.S. territory, just as she identified Chinatown. Wolfe, on the other hand, wrote to create social distance between herself—a knowledgeable Mexican woman—and the working class Mexicans of Sonoratown. After describing skilled artwork and handicrafts women produced in Mexico City, Wolfe ended her letter by upholding Edwards’ ethnographic judgment that Sonoratown was “dirty.” “As to the dirt and squalor, anyone who has traveled knows that that is part of the lower classes of any nation.”<sup>146</sup> Thus, for Wolfe, “dirt and squalor” was less a function of race or ethnicity than it was about class.

In this public exchange, both women imagined Chinatown and Sonoratown as bounded and separate geo-cultural entities. Edwards identified the Plaza as a physical demarcation between Chinese and Mexican geo-racial space--the “dividing line” between these “foreign elements.” “Glaring Spanish signs, advertising cheap picture shows, and the conspicuous presence of the dark-skinned, soft-eyed people” were cultural markers of difference that segregated Mexican spaces from white spaces, while “fear and mystery” were well-known attributes of “the oriental settlement” that

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<sup>145</sup> This discussion about the eating of dogs, for both Edwards and Wolfe, imply a comparison to the portrayal of Chinese originating from the late 19th century minstrel shows that defined Chinese as “heathen,” ideas that white Americans brought to California from eastern states and which were redefined and reinforced there since the Gold Rush. See Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 38.

<sup>146</sup> Wolfe, “Little Mexico.”

segregated Chinese spaces from white spaces.<sup>147</sup> And yet conflicts that suggest similarities between Chinese and Mexican cultures like this one, demonstrate the precariousness of discursive boundaries that, in lived experience, were nonetheless traversed by bodies, capital, and histories of racialization.

Tourist descriptions together mapped onto Los Angeles' core area a common narrative of racial order that separated non-white peoples from white people on the one hand, and divided non-white groups into discrete racial categories on the other. Their narratives of plaza area neighborhoods were built upon a gaze from outside the homes of Chinese and Mexican residents—from public spaces, the street, the plaza park, and the businesses that lined it. Together their observations reveal the economic and cultural changes that shaped the configuration of public spaces of the plaza and nearby streets during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. They illuminate how U.S. colonization, layered on top of Spanish-Mexican colonial landscapes, ushered in processes of industrialization and modernization that informed the daily overlapping of Chinese and Mexican residential, business and, increasingly, leisure spaces.

Pollution and foul smells hung heavy over the homes, playgrounds, streets and parks of the district. The trains and the tracks, in particular, were a conspicuous material and symbolic presence of modernity in the spatial configuration of the city's core area, signaling both the city's progress as well as the poor, nonwhite communities whose labor made possible this modernity even while supposedly holding the city's progress back. Once reaching the city limits from the north, passenger trains passed down the middle of Alameda Street, the main artery that first ran through

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<sup>147</sup> Laura Pirtle Edwards, "Little Mexico Holding It's Own Along With Other Communities," *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1927; Wolfe, "Little Mexico."

“Sonoratown,” and then followed by “Chinatown” before heading further south toward the railroad depot. For decades, the tracks were a presence in these neighborhoods that could not be ignored by its residents. The sound of passing trains, the pollution they emitted and the feeling of rattling floorboards lived vividly in the memories of plaza area residents. Arthur Chung, who lived in Chinatown as a child during the 1920s, remembered Chinatown as a “very noisy” place due to the tracks: “All night long you could hear the trains coming in and out.”<sup>148</sup> While tourists may have viewed the area from the trains on their way to the city’s more “modern” downtown civic center, they may not have imagined the daily experience of living next to the tracks on which they traveled.

Despite the displacement of the plaza as the center of the city’s public life in the 1870s, as I discussed earlier, the plaza itself continued to be a central space for those who lived nearby in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Religious, cultural and community events of the surrounding communities persisted as did everyday interactions that characterized community life. On the plaza the Catholic Church, La Iglesia de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles, located on the Main Street side across from the plaza, was a recognizable presence in the area. The plaza church drew mostly Mexican parishioners, while Italian and Syrian populations who also lived in the area had their own Catholic churches further north.<sup>149</sup> Additionally, in 1925-26, in an effort to reach the growing Mexican population of the plaza area, Methodist missionaries who had long been conducting services in the plaza, erected a church on

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<sup>148</sup> Arthur W. Chung, interview by Beverly Chan, October 1979, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, UCLA Special Collections.

<sup>149</sup> Sterry, “The Sociological Basis for the Re-organization of the Macy Street School,” 53-54.

the north side of the plaza on Marchessault Street. La Iglesia Metodista de la Placita was constructed in a spot that had previously been Spanish-Mexican elite homes and later Chinese quarters. As Estrada has noted, “the Plaza Methodist Church revealed the tension between the city’s Mexican-Catholic past and its Anglo-Protestant present” through its virulent Americanization and relief programming, which the Catholic church could not provide.<sup>150</sup> The Buddhist temple serving the Chinese community was also located on the plaza, occupying the second floor of the Lugo house above the Sun Wing Wo store on Los Angeles Street. There were also several Christian missions in Chinatown.<sup>151</sup>

Because churches served members of the plaza area, and hosted a number of cultural events on the plaza, they shaped the plaza by maintaining its use as a community space despite the commercial and industrial factors that drew large numbers of men to the space. Although the vast majority of Mexican women, for example, worked at home, some women—especially women elders—often attended mass during the weekdays.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the plaza continued to be a place where people came to shop, socialize, work or gain services. The plaza itself was a site of celebration and leisure as well as a place of work. Sociologists of the early twentieth century considered it a site of “constructive recreation” having grass and trees, as well as benches and a drinking fountain. The Park Commission managed the plaza’s maintenance and usage for the celebration of national holidays. And as one researcher

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<sup>150</sup> Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 126-127.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. See also Tyrus Wong, interview by William Gow, October 6, 2007, Chinatown Remembered Community History Project, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California; Sterry, “The Sociological Basis for the Re-organization of the Macy Street School,” 53-54.

described it, the plaza was “at all times available as a meeting place for the people.”<sup>152</sup> Workers and patrons of surrounding businesses also spent time in the plaza while on their breaks, taking advantage of the water in the center fountain to cool their feet. For Mexican shoe shine boys—”shineros”—the plaza was literally their place of work. As they were seen walking to the plaza with their boxes on their backs, it seems likely that they lived in Sonoratown nearby. They sat daily on wooden boxes near the fountain and socialized together.<sup>153</sup> (Figure 2.4)



**Figure 2.1: Mexican shoeshine boys working in the plaza.**

*Shoe Blacks. Mexicans -- Plaza. Los Angeles. 1911. BANC PIC 1905.02729--PIC, 1911. Photographs of Agricultural Laborers in California, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.*  
<http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf396nb4xk/?docId=tf396nb4xk&&query=plaza%20los%20angeles&brand=oac&layout=printable-details>. (Accessed May 27, 2008.)

<sup>152</sup> Sterry, “The Sociological Basis for the Re-organization of the Macy Street School,” 23.

<sup>153</sup> Timothy G. Turner, “Plaza’s Welter of Nations Greet New Year Quietly” *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 1937; see also David Lee, interview, Interview B.



Sharing the same space with plaza area residents and drawing especially on a work force of immigrant Mexican men, industries played a central role in the making of public spaces in and around the plaza, as well as in the neighborhoods. While there were many Mexican families living in the area, the proliferation of lodging houses that provided cramped quarters for working men meant that the plaza was a space that, especially on weekdays when families attended mass or motion picture shows, was shaped by Mexican men who waited for transport to work or who were in between seasonal work. Drawing on a male patronage, many businesses found a lucrative location around the plaza.

In 1913-1914, when William Wilson McEuen conducted his study of the “Mexican problem” in Los Angeles, he spent several weeks sitting in the plaza, or had research assistants who were likely white as well sit there, observing Mexicans who went about their day. He went on different days of the week, and at multiple times of the day. He counted the numbers of Mexican men who passed through or stopped there. He walked up and down Main Street on the plaza’s western perimeter and counted the numbers of pool halls, penny arcades, moving picture theaters, and handball courts—places where “idle” Mexican men found “amusement.” Despite his concern for “idleness” he also observed that the plaza was a central location for finding public transportation to other parts of the city. McEuen’s observations suggest that the majority of express wagons that arrived on the plaza were Mexican, ranging from 48% to 87% Mexican. Additionally, at the times of his observations, the number of Mexican men on the plaza on weekdays between 11am and 4pm varied from 177 to 226. This number greatly increased on the weekends to more than 300 on a Saturday and almost

600 on a Sunday.<sup>154</sup> Although he spent some time researching housing a few blocks east of Main Street, he argued that the ways in which Mexican men used the plaza space contributed greatly to the “Mexican problem” of Los Angeles.

The plaza was also an intellectual space for both Mexican and Chinese men, who formed separate spaces for the exchange of knowledge. Spanish-language newspapers and magazines were sold on the street corners near the plaza. McEuen’s concern about this formation of public space was that “idle men” congregated at the plaza, which had an area with benches near the North Main Street side (opposite from Chinatown). However, even in his description, the space of the plaza was, for many Mexican men, a site of public debate about the Mexican Revolution. The bench area of the plaza, as McEuen observed, was often the site of “a more or less heated argument” about the revolution. “Supporters of all factions are to be found among them and adherents of the Industrial Workers of the World and of the Mexican Liberal Party may be heard in the general discussion”<sup>155</sup> McEuen’s 1914 description of the plaza as an intellectual arena reflects the effects of the Revolution on the public space of Los Angeles’ plaza area. However, the exchange of current events, politics and ideas continued well into the 1930s, as plaza area residents could always find access to news in the plaza.<sup>156</sup>

McEuen described the plaza as a public space of political and intellectual debate for Mexican men, but it was also a public intellectual arena for Chinese men as well. While there is little archival material describing how Chinese men used the plaza space

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<sup>154</sup> McEuen, “A Survey of the Mexicans in Los Angeles,” 68-70.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Turner, “Plaza’s Welter of Nations Greet New Year Quietly”

in the 1910s, photos of what one historian has called “The Wall,” demonstrate that Chinese men also created public spaces of intellectual debate on the plaza. Community events among the Chinese community as well as news were often posted on the wall of one of the buildings on the eastern side of the plaza. There, Chinese men gathered to read and, we might guess, to discuss community, local, national and international news affecting the Chinese residents of Chinatown in Chinese language.<sup>157</sup> In this sense, The Wall and the benches served as racially segregated male public spaces of knowledge-sharing on the plaza for both Chinese and Mexican men.

### **Plaza perimeter**

Although the plaza was a social, cultural and economic space for both Chinese and Mexican residents, it was also a symbolic georacial boundary between Chinese and Mexican businesses and residences. Although the portion of Marchessault Street, which ran along the plaza’s northern edge, was the site of a mixture of different businesses, and in the 1920s a Mexican-serving Protestant church, the residences and businesses on the western and eastern sides of the plaza were racialized as Mexican and Chinese respectively. As historians have shown, the process of industrialization, along with racially restrictive covenants and municipal policy, produced multiracial and multiethnic working class communities at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>158</sup> In the early twentieth century, the making of a georacial landscape around the plaza—that is, the ways in which people daily interacted in public spaces—was simultaneously

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<sup>157</sup> Smith, *The Lonely Queue*.

<sup>158</sup> See Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*; Wild, *Street Meeting*; Torres-Rouff, “Making Los Angeles: Race, Space and Municipal Power, 1822-1890”; Devereil, *Whitewashed Adobe*.

separate and mixed. In addition to institutional factors, this social process of space-making was shaped in large part by a complex interplay between commercial establishments and the men and boys who frequented these businesses.

North Main Street was occupied primarily with businesses and lodging houses that were frequented especially by Mexican working men. North Los Angeles Street was a similar mishmash of Chinese residential and business spaces. While it may have appeared that each side of the plaza was inhabited by a singular group, these georacial boundaries were somewhat permeable. In the 1910s and 20s the entire plaza area also attracted whites, especially men, who frequented the shops, restaurants and pool halls facing the plaza. An analysis of the main thoroughfares—North Main Street on the western edge of the plaza, and North Los Angeles on the eastern edge—shows that in addition to significant racial intermingling, the large numbers of working men and boys, along with the types and locations of businesses, created a masculine working class culture in the public spaces of the street and plaza.

#### **North Main Street, 1914-1915<sup>159</sup>**

106: Morris Lustig (saloon)

107 ½ : Concordia Hall - Business Buildings, Halls, Etc.

109: Pool Hall (7 tables – Sheehy & Mitchell)

111: Ernest Lombardo (saloon)

112: Knights of the Royal Arch Hall - Business Buildings, Halls, Etc.

115 ½: Brown Print Shop (commercial/ book printing) & Twin Printers Wood and Wood

120: Hellman Building - Business Buildings, Halls, Etc.

120: R.A. Perez, E.M., Assayist, Chemist and Metallurgist

122: A. P. Save (saloon)

126: Abraham Gollober – Clothing Retail

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<sup>159</sup> Compiled from McEuen, “A Survey of the Mexicans in Los Angeles”; Los Angeles Directory Company, *Los Angeles City Directory, 1915, including San Pedro and Wilmington* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Directory Company, Directory Publishers, 1915).

127: McDonald Building - Business Buildings, Halls, Etc.  
 127: Luigi Ferrero – Furnished Rooms  
 128: Tartarian and Pratt - Chemists, Assayists and Refiners (gold and silver)  
 128: Concord Hall - Business Buildings, Halls, Etc.  
 128: Druids Hall - Business Buildings, Halls, Etc.  
 128: Unity Hall - Business Buildings, Halls, Etc. [and LA Social and Literary Club met]  
 133: Isadora Pereira housekpr, Mrs. M. E. Molle  
 134: Charles Gross – Clothing Retail  
 136: Antonio Sepulveda (furnished rooms)  
 138: Hyman Kaufman – Clothing Retail  
 140: Pool Hall (7 tables – Harry Sloan)  
 142: Harry Sloan (saloon)  
 142 ½ : Fredrick Fleck – Furnished Rooms  
 144: Morris Rosenthal – Clothing Retail  
 145: Union Rescue Mission  
 146: Penny Arcade  
 148: Bernard Wolff – Clothing Retail  
 149: Camille Le Gras (furnished rooms)  
 151: Jos [Joseph? Jose?] Longo (saloon)  
 153 ½: M. A. Treosti (billiard hall)  
 155: Pool Hall (9 tables + 3 bowling allies)  
 164: Silverstein Bros – Clothing Retail  
 166: Pool Hall (6 tables – G. W. Yarrow)  
 168: Patrick L. Colleran, engineer  
 168-172: United States Hotel Aug Tatsch prop  
 200: A. Goldsmith and Son – Clothing Retail  
 202: Amestoy Building – Business Buildings, Halls, Etc.  
 202: Antonio Santil (furnished rooms)  
 204: J. H. Hallenberger (saloon)  
 204: George Mandas bootblk [business – lived elsewhere]  
 208: Bert Brusso (furnished rooms)  
 218: Lanfranco Building - Business Buildings, Halls, Etc.  
 218: Sebastiano Rinetti (furnished rooms)  
 219: Pool Hall (9 tables + center for car men?)  
 222: Aaron Greines (clothing retail)  
 223: O. W. Blume (billiard hall)  
 224: Pool Hall (6 tables – John Bawanda), Jules Fallandy (barber)  
 227: Peniel Mission (inter-denominational), Mr and Mrs Ferguson, supts  
 228: W. T. Smith (saloon)  
 230: Nuccio & Macagno (saloon)  
 232: Danish Brotherhood Hall - Business Buildings, Halls, Etc.  
 300: New Federal Theater (240 capacity)  
 302: Pool Hall (B. K. Chung) [McEuen: “16 tables, Japanese run” but may be Chinese]  
 304: Hachigo Kinney (furnished rooms)  
 306: Harry Mandel (clothing retail)  
 308: U Aratani (barber)

310 ½: Mrs. Martha Menard (furnished rooms)  
 312: Charles Coppo (saloon)  
 314: Charles Boggio (furnished rooms)  
 326: Charles [Chas] Perde, Carlo Valpreda (furnished rooms)  
 328 ½: V. L. Strong (furnished rooms)  
 330: E. S. Kisby (furnished rooms)  
 335: Saul Kinderman  
 342: Baker Building - Business Buildings, Halls, Etc.  
 344: Cohen Bros (clothing retail)  
 349 ½ : Cigar and Tobacco Dealers Social Club  
 357: Emil Chaides (furnished rooms)  
 359: Warren and Bailey Manufacturing Co. (roofing, cement)  
 361: Mrs. Virginia Shipley (furnished rooms)  
 369: Frances Laporte (furnished rooms)  
 371: Abe Horovitz (clothing retail)  
 371: Hidalgo Theater (700 capacity)  
 400: Borris Silver (clothing retail)  
 400: Pool Hall (12 tables, Japanese run – M. M. Stenian)  
 400 ½: Mortarotti and Ruschena (furnished rooms)  
 401: Orth and Weingart (furnished rooms)  
 403: Pool Hall (12 tables, Japanese run - Iyemura), Alfonso Cordoba (barber)  
 405-407: California Commercial Co.  
 408: William Cramer (clothing retail)  
 408 ½: S Akita (barber)  
 410: Pool Hall (9 tables, Japanese run)  
 410: John R. Cate (hay and grain – lived S Fig)  
 411 ½: Arthur Boyd (furnished rooms)  
 412 ½: Jeanne Reignault (furnished rooms)  
 415: T. G. La Maida (saloon)  
 414 ½: Francoise Schutz (furnished rooms)  
 416 ½: Mrs. Celini Canal (furnished rooms)  
 417: Abe Horovitz (clothing retail)  
 418: Eulichio Fernandez (resident) Pedro Fernandez (laborer, resident), Mortarotti and Ruschena (furnished rooms)  
 419 ½ : William R. Greening (furnished rooms)  
 422: A. Itami Co. (clothing retail)  
 422 ½: Loza & Sanchez (billiard hall)  
 423: Plaza Theater (500 capacity)  
 424: Louis Rosen  
 432: Pagliano & Amilio (saloon)  
 432: Wang Sam Ling (merchant)  
 504 ½: Quong Co (merchant – grocer)  
 507: Plaza Novelty Co (Penny Arcade—S. S. Wesley, mgr)  
 509: Dominick Turinetti (clothing retail)  
 511: Jos Reyneri Bakery

511 ½ : Adolfo Ramirez (resident), Plaza Hotel (furnished rooms), Teresa Turineto  
 (furnished rooms)  
 517: Emilio Castellano (saloon)  
 527: Church of Our Lady Queen of the Angels – Rev Michael Onate  
 602-606: William Gregory Machinery (tractors)  
 618: American Pattern Works (patterns)  
 622 ½: Mrs. Margaret Valle (furnished rooms)  
 625: Southwest Welding & Manufacturing Co  
 632: Salvatore Bua (barber)  
 634: L. R. Hibbard – Tool Manufacturers  
 642 ½ : Italian Hall -- Business Buildings, Halls, Etc., [Italian Labor Club and Italian-  
 American Club met there]  
 643 ½: Alex Leoni (furnished rooms)  
 646: Lorezo & Marinelli (billiard hall)  
 650: Paggi & Issoglio (saloon)  
 653: Abegg & Reinhold – Tool Manufacturers  
 704: Peter Picco (furnished rooms), Pico and Leon (furnished rooms)  
 707-713: Luitwieler Pumping Engine Co.  
 747: Zabaldano & Favero (saloon)  
 800: Louis Pianta (saloon)  
 921-925: McKain Manufacturing Co.  
 937: P. K. Wood Pump Co.  
 1123: Barnabe & Barasa (saloon)  
 1133: Rodolfo Aguirre (furnished rooms)  
 1207 (rear): Catalina Perez wid [widow?] Febronio r  
 1217: De Grazia Pietro (barber), Mrs. Frances Peila (furnished rooms)  
 1315: Jas Autsatsos (billiard hall)  
 1316: Armendariz family home?  
 1421: Pacific Chemical Co.  
 1428: Antonio Benedetti (barber)  
 1435: Engine Co No 19  
 1441: El Hogar Feliz [Mission]  
 1454 ½: John Zimmerman (furnished rooms)  
 1461: Archer Epifonos (billiard hall)  
 150: Mrs. Caroline Moffet (furnished rooms)  
 1590: Vulcan Iron and Tool Works Inc.  
 1636: Advance Truck Co.  
 1760: Mrs. Catherine Cordero (furnished rooms)  
 1765 ½: Mrs. Winniefred Terwillegar (furnished rooms)  
 1775: Jack Fontana (billiard hall)  
 1794 ½ : Mrs. Laura Fickes (furnished rooms)  
 1792 ½: Mrs. G. C. Alves (furnished rooms)  
 1802 1/2: Mrs. Rose Phillips (furnished rooms)  
 1857: Buccola and Schiambra (barbers + Billiard hall)

In the 1910s, there were several theaters located across the street from the plaza along North Main Street. According to one scholar's 1914 observations, films showcased at these theaters were "melodramatic and exciting in the extreme and not infrequently suggestive and more or less immoral." These theaters frequently advertised featured movies in Spanish, Italian and English, drawing on the Mexican and Italian populations that lived in the Mexican quarter and which were served by the plaza Church in the early twentieth century. In his study of the Mexicans in the plaza and the immediately surrounding streets, McEuen noted that the audience was largely male and Mexican based on visual observation, with few women and children. Children who attended moving picture shows during his study were most often adolescent and teenage boys.<sup>160</sup> Mexican films showcased in some of the theaters along with vaudeville, piano players and orchestra performances. As another study suggested, the theaters on North Main Street served the entire surrounding area.<sup>161</sup>

Despite the characterization of the plaza, and particularly of North Main Street as a Mexican space, the City Directory in 1915 shows that many of the merchants who ran stores on the section of North Main close to the plaza were Jewish and Japanese. Sections farther north on the same street, included increasingly more Italian-run businesses. While Jews had originally settled a few blocks to the southeast of the plaza in the mid-nineteenth century, by the early twentieth there were identifiable Jewish districts downtown along Temple Street and across the river in Boyle Heights. While Jews often did not live in the plaza area in the early decades of the 1900s, there were

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<sup>160</sup> McEuen, "A Survey of the Mexicans in Los Angeles," 70.

<sup>161</sup> Sterry, "The Sociological Basis for the Re-organization of the Macy Street School," 51.



quite a few Jewish merchants on North Main Street.<sup>162</sup> The city directory listings show that Jewish merchants especially had a hold on the clothing retail businesses, accounting for eleven of the sixteen clothing retail stores. Italians, on the other hand, did make up a small population of the plaza area community. Working alongside Mexican men in the railroad industries, Italian residential and business area was located farther north on North Main. Italian-run businesses accounted for over one-third of the saloons and pool halls on North Main, as well as one-third of the lodging houses, regardless of the racial-ethnicity of their residents. Other white merchants, including Anglo, German, Scottish, Irish, French and Greek, ran one-third of the saloons and pool halls, and almost two-fifths of the furnished rooms on North Main. Japanese merchants ran three of the eight pool halls.<sup>163</sup> There were also three Chinese-run businesses. Only one saloon and two other businesses were run by Mexican merchants, and less than one-sixth of the furnished rooms.<sup>164</sup>

This proliferation of white-run businesses and lodging houses shows that whites had a profound impact on the shaping of plaza area public spaces, even if the vast

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<sup>162</sup> Like many other newcomers to the region, Jews arrived in Los Angeles following the Gold Rush. They settled near Aliso and Los Angeles Streets—to the south of the plaza—in a building called “Bell’s Row,” a two-story adobe that often accommodated businesses on the first floor. While the population was only estimated at 600 in 1876, by 1900, the Jewish settlement downtown grew to some 2,500 there during the first two decades of the twentieth century. In the 1920s, the Jewish population grew tremendously to 65,000 and most settled east of the Los Angeles River, in Boyle Heights, at that time. N. B. Stern and W. M. Kramer, “Emile Harris: Los Angeles Jewish Police Chief,” *The Jews of Los Angeles: Urban Pioneers* 55, no. 2, Reprinted in Norton B. Stern, *The Jews of Los Angeles: Urban Pioneers* (Los Angeles: Southern California Jewish Historical Society, 1981) (Summer 1973): 59; Neil C. Sandberg, *Jewish Life in Los Angeles: A Window to Tomorrow* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1986); Sanchez, ““What’s Good for Boyle Heights Is Good for the Jews”: Creating Multiracialism on the Eastside during the 1950s”; Harriet Rochlin and Fred Rochlin, *Pioneer Jews: A New Life in the Far West* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984).

<sup>163</sup> Although McEuen identified four Japanese-run pool halls, my own research in the City Directories suggests that one of them was actually run by a Chinese merchant. Los Angeles Directory Company, *Los Angeles City Directory, 1915*.

<sup>164</sup> These figures are based on my own count of the businesses and residences on North Main Street. Mexican figures are based on those with Spanish surnames. *Ibid*.

majority of those who spent money or resided there were Mexican. The types of businesses contributed to the gendering of this space. There were sixteen saloons and eight billiard halls as well as penny arcades and several blind pigs, “easily recognizable to everyone but the members of the local police.”<sup>165</sup> The grouping of these businesses drawing on the patronage of Mexican men suggests that as a group, they were important for male public space because in addition to time spent inside the businesses, customers likely spent time on the street between them as well as on the plaza nearby. As a critic and sociologist, McEuen believed these pool halls created “atmospheres” that were “unwholesome and destructive” thus contributing to the Mexican “problem” of Los Angeles, one that he blamed primarily on Mexican men who created immoral public spaces in the Mexican district. Pool halls, he wrote, were also located along North Main Street between the plaza and First Street (south of the plaza) and each boasted six to twelve tables. Inside halls smoke-filled air permeated the rooms as employees circulated through the crowd handing out cigarettes and chewing gum to players who used “vile and obscene talk.” The pool hall located at 155 North Main Street had 3 bowling lanes in addition to nine tables.<sup>166</sup>

In addition to these businesses that sold commercial leisure, there were also a number of service oriented[?] businesses that drew on the same population of Mexican working men. As McEuen noted, “A cigar stand, a barber shop and a soda fountain are usually found in connection with each hall.”<sup>167</sup> Boys often spent time in these spaces as well.

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<sup>165</sup> Sterry, “The Sociological Basis for the Re-organization of the Macy Street School,” 22.

<sup>166</sup> McEuen, “A Survey of the Mexicans in Los Angeles,” 76.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

## North Los Angeles Street, 1915<sup>168</sup>

- 315: J. C. Foy (harness and saddlery)
- 317: Eastern Produce Co (produce)
- 321: Standard Fertilizer Co (fertilizer)
- 321 ½ : Chinese Mission School (Congregational)
- 325-345: Los Angeles Waterhouse & Lester Co (F. J. Behrle Mgr, hardware, iron and steel)
- 330: Hills Bros (teas, coffee, spices)
- 345: Waterhouse & Lester (hardware)
- 401: Frank E. Zucca (h)
- 406 ½ : Upper Room Mission (E. K. Fisher pastor)
- 404: Guiseppe Fanucchi (saloon)
- 409: Quong Chew Lung (general merchandise)
- 410: John R. Cate (hay and grain)
- 411: Quong Yate (tea shop), Chinese Laundrymen's Assn
- 415 ½ : Christian Chinese Mission School, Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Assoc
- 417: Cheung Shuey (merchant)
- 417 ½ : Chinese Empire Reform Assn.
- 420: J. S. Munoz (barber)
- 421: Sun Wing Wo and Co (merchant)
- 423: Agostino Cerrina (restaurant - Italian?)
- 424: Guey On Co (merchant)
- 426: Quong Mee Lung and Co (general merchandise)
- 428: Sam Sing and Co (merchant)
- 432: Kwong On and Co (merchant – Chinese goods)
- 432: Wong Sam Ling (merchant – fuel and feed)
- 434: Hong Hop and Co (merchant – Chinese goods)
- 436: Fung Lung and Co (merchant – Chinese goods)
- 438 ½ : Ging Lung and Co (merchant – Chinese goods)
- 500: Pong Wong (merchant -grocer)
- 506: Rafael Moreno (restaurant)
- 510: Suie One F. Co (merchant)
- 510: N. S. Lee (dental laboratory)
- 510 ½: Kiu Sing Chan (interpreter)
- 512: Wing Yunt (restaurant)
- 514: Ning Tong Gee (merchant – Chinese goods)
- 516: Tai Sang Hing and Co (merchant)
- 518: Kim Yuen Co (merchant – Chinese goods)
- 520: Hong Hai (merchant – Chinese goods)
- 520 ½: Wing Young (resident, porter)
- 522 ½ : Wing Chung Tong (merchant - grocer, merchandise)
- 524: Houng On (merchant – Chinese goods)
- 528: Fook Wo Lung Curio Co. (merchant – Chinese goods)

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<sup>168</sup> Compiled from Los Angeles Directory Company, *Los Angeles City Directory, 1915, including San Pedro and Wilmington* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Directory Company, Directory Publishers, 1915).

Sterry described the small businesses in Chinatown much differently than McEuen described those on Main Street. She counted 184 stores in Chinatown, most of which catered to Chinese clientele and offered imported Chinese goods. According to her, some of these shops facing the street were one-room stores with living quarters, brothels and opium or gambling dens in the rear so that one had to cross through the shop to get to the rooms in the back of the building.<sup>169</sup> Los Angeles Street, on the eastern side of the plaza, also had a number of public commercial spaces, such as curio stores “designed to catch the American trade.”<sup>170</sup> Different from the many stores within Chinatown, the larger curio shops and restaurants located on Los Angeles Street were aimed at a white clientele.<sup>171</sup>

In the early 1930s, Tyrus Wong worked as a waiter at a restaurant called the Dragon’s Den located at the northeast corner of the plaza at Marchessault and North Los Angeles Streets. With the help of his father who worked in a Chinatown gambling house, Tyrus Wong attended art school while living with his father in a room they rented at a lodging house that was also home to five or six other men. He worked at the restaurant to contribute to the income. Wong recalled that the restaurant, owned in part by a friend of his, Eddy See, catered to a non-Chinese clientele, drawing especially on those who worked in the city’s bustling film industry. The restaurant’s location directly on the plaza allowed the waiters to take advantage of the plaza fountain to wade their feet after long hours of work.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Sterry, “The Sociological Basis for the Re-organization of the Macy Street School,” 21.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Wong, interview; Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 128.

Public spaces in Chinatown, such as streets and businesses that provided personal services, were places where Chinese could spend time in public without the intense risk of experiencing anti-Chinese ridicule and violence. This was true even for those Chinese of merchant class status whose economic mobility allowed them to live and do business in other parts of the city among whites and others, rather than Chinatown. Tom Jerng How came to Los Angeles in 1902, where he helped with and eventually ran his cousin's herbal shop, Foo Yuen Herb Company on in the Produce Market area south of Chinatown. When he arrived, he wore Chinese clothes and queue, along with a gold watch with a heart charm inscribed with Chinese characters; his daughter would later describe him as "the best-dressed Chinese gentleman in Los Angeles." However, when he decided to wear "Western clothes" he also wore a wig to cover his queue. Wishing to have it cut off, he worried about going to a nearby barber shop "for fear he would be ridiculed." Finally, he decided to go to a Chinese barber in Chinatown.<sup>173</sup>

### **Neighborhood Streets of Sonoratown and Chinatown**

Racial segregation in the city at the turn of the twentieth century was maintained through a combination of policy and practice, and coincided with the general population boom in the city. In 1908 municipal legislation created zoning that designated land in the west side of the city for exclusively residential use. The proliferation of industries downtown and on the eastside attracted immigrant residents who sought housing near their places of work. Racial covenants originally designed to restrict Chinese from

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<sup>173</sup> Louise Leung Larson, *Sweet Bamboo: A Memoir of a Chinese American Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 44-45.

making residence in areas “protected” for whites only, was expanded to include Mexicans, Japanese, Filipinos, blacks and Jews. Such practice became common in the 1920s and would remain so through 1948 when the U.S. Supreme Court declared such practice unconstitutional. As Michael Engh has pointed out, “California Supreme Court in 1919 ruled that people of color could not be prevented from buying real property, but they could be denied occupancy or use!”<sup>174</sup>

Outside observers of Sonoratown and Chinatown repeatedly comment on the visible lack of city services and infrastructure that one could see from the street. In each of these areas, they noted the aesthetics of the streets. One researcher wrote that the streets of Chinatown were “pleasing to the eye” because of the colorful flags, lanterns and flower boxes, which she saw as contradictory to the “uniform drabness and squalor” that made the neighborhood “offensive.”<sup>175</sup>

Anglo researchers imagined the geographical space of Chinatown as strictly Chinese, with exact geographical boundaries drawn at the southern end by Arcadia and Aliso Streets, on the west by Main, and on the north and east by the Southern Pacific Railroad yards, which were delineated by a “solid blank wall which is the limit of Chinatown.” Sterry wrote that despite the fact that there were no legal definitions of Chinese racial segregation, “there [was] no gradual approach” to Chinatown. While the vast majority of residents living in this area were Chinese, there is evidence suggesting that a few Mexican homes were scattered throughout the area designated as

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<sup>174</sup> Michael E. Engh, ““A Multiplicity and Diversity of Faiths”: Religion's Impact on Los Angeles and the Urban West, 1890-1940,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 467.

<sup>175</sup> Sterry, “The Sociological Basis for the Re-organization of the Macy Street School,” 53.

“Chinatown.” Additionally, Mexican residences surrounded the perimeter of the area Sterry identified as strictly Chinese.<sup>176</sup>

The streets of Chinatown were public spaces, but to social workers and writers, they embodied a contradiction between public and private space. On the one hand, streets were public spaces shared by residents and other people who traveled them. On the other hand, Anglo researchers and tourist writers repeatedly described the Chinatown streets as mysterious due to both the architectural design of the buildings and the narrow configuration of the streets. One sociologist noted that the doors of the majority of Chinatown homes opened directly to the street, marking a very fine line between public and private spaces. She also described how the four major thoroughfares that ran through Chinatown leading to areas of the city beyond, were paved and cleaned regularly. The rest of the streets were unpaved and according to one sociologist, “were never visited by the street department of the city but are always littered with rubbish and filth.”<sup>177</sup> Additionally, the architectural geography of Chinatown, like Sonoratown, included a number of smaller alleys between buildings that were commonly used for pedestrian traffic. Sterry counted more than twenty-two alleys, no wider than three feet, and a few that were “hidden away...almost impossible of discovery” leading to homes that were not located on the street.<sup>178</sup> Because many of the streets in the Chinese district were private property, they did not fall under the care of the City and thus did not receive many of the paving and cleaning services. This differentiation between the larger paved and cleaned thoroughfares and the smaller unpaved and unserviced streets

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 14.

served to benefit whites' access to business and economic areas by creating thoroughfares through Chinatown, while ignoring streets in residential areas. "The streets form a veritable maze. There are twenty seven of them, seven only leading out to the district boundaries and but four crossing into adjacent territory."<sup>179</sup> This contributed to the racialization of Chinese space by marking residential streets as either public (accessible to whites) or mysterious (inaccessible to whites).

As Chinatown's population grew on the eastern side of the plaza, the area became increasingly identified as Chinese, despite the racial and ethnic diversity of those living in the area. Still, Chinese often settled in Chinatown "where they became involved in occupations geared toward service their own ethnic community." Unless they labored in laundry or domestic service—employment that required them to live in the same place where they worked—it was difficult to live in other parts of the city.<sup>180</sup> This was true even in the 1930s, as census data shows that streets in the heart of Chinatown—such as a section of North Alameda, the short block called Ferguson Alley (which whites sometimes referred to as "China Alley"), and Marchessault Street—housed primarily Chinese residents. The mostly male Chinese population is listed in occupations such as groceries, restaurants, cooks, and gardening. While many were merchants who ran their own businesses, the majority were working men who stayed in lodging houses.<sup>181</sup>

Although the streets within the center of the area known as Chinatown were home to almost exclusively Chinese residents, streets that formed the boundaries of

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>180</sup> Smith, *The Lonely Queue*, 23.

<sup>181</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.



Chinatown in the first few decades of the twentieth century were racially mixed. In 1910, Chinatown was surrounded on its northern and southern perimeters by Mexican residential areas. To the direct east were railroad tracks, but Mexican housing continued on the other side of the tracks. Aliso Street, which formed the southernmost boundary of Chinatown housed a racially mixed population of primarily Mexican and Chinese residents.<sup>182</sup> In 1930 Lim Wong and Lee S Wong lived on Aliso Street with their children, three sons and two daughters, as well as nine Chinese men who were lodgers, Josefina Ramírez lived and worked next door to the Wongs, with her mother, daughter and two sons. Lee S. Wong and Josefina Ramírez were women whose work was inside the home, as they labored to keep up lodging houses for male workers. Wong's lodgers included nine Chinese men, all but one of whom worked in grocery or restaurants, while Ramírez took in three Mexican men who worked railroads and gardening. Similar racial mixture could be seen on Macy Street.<sup>183</sup>

In the Macy Street School district, the primary languages spoken were Spanish and Cantonese. According to Sterry, Spanish was quite prevalent, so much so that the majority of the area residents had some knowledge of the language. "Nearly every inhabitant of whatever nationality speaks and understands [Spanish] to some degree." Because of this, Spanish was often heard in the area's businesses and shops, except for those in the interior of Chinatown.<sup>184</sup> While Cantonese language characterized Chinese public spaces, particularly for those working class residents who recently migrated from

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<sup>182</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*; United States, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*; United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*.

<sup>183</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

<sup>184</sup> Sterry, "The Sociological Basis for the Re-organization of the Macy Street School," 31.

China, Chinese young people spoke what David Fon Lee called “Chinatown English.” That is, English with a Chinese accent, he explained.<sup>185</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The public spaces of the plaza area served multiple functions for plaza residents and for those who visited. It was simultaneously a community space, a racially separate space, a commercial zone and an industrial zone. Chinese exclusion policy and the rapid rise of industries in the area mitigated the flows of Chinese and Mexican migration and settlement in the area. With this settlement came commercial businesses catering to specific demographics, which also shaped public space. For white researchers, reformers and tourists who often imagined the Chinese and Mexican neighborhoods to be separate and distinct racial areas, the plaza space presented a conundrum because it was a common, multiracial space. Chinese and Mexican residents, who made up the most visible populations there moved around in close proximity, sometimes interacting and sometimes forming separate groupings just feet away from each other. In their interaction and in their lack of direct interaction, we can see that they also created racial boundaries between each other, often based on religious, labor or class differences.

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<sup>185</sup> David Lee, interview.

## **Chapter Three**

### **The Spatial Imaginaries of Home:**

#### **Residents, Reformers and House Courts, 1900-1920**

From the 1890s through the 1920s, the transition from Spanish to Mexican and finally to U.S. rule drastically changed the economic, cultural, and architectural landscape of the Plaza area. Remarkably, within three decades or so, the architectural design of buildings around the plaza changed from adobes inhabited by Californio elites to house court-style immigrant housing. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, rapid industrialization shaped both the populations that came to live around the plaza as well as the formation of public spaces through the increased migration of immigrant work force, and the subsequent transformation of communities and their work and business establishments. But rapid industrialization also led to the drastic restructuring of home spaces and reformers placed the localized “house court problem” in Los Angeles within larger national conversations about “tenement problems,” which had become a central interest of reformers in U.S. cities of the east and midwest at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>186</sup>

While there were many different architectural configurations amongst the homes that fell under the city’s house court categorization, the city legally defined the “house

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<sup>186</sup> Emory S. Bogardus, “The House-Court Problem,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 22, no. 3 (November 1916): 391.

court” in 1908 as any area of land upon which “three or more” residential units were located, and whose residents shared a common yard.<sup>187</sup> In addition to the barrack-like structures typically known as “house courts,” other buildings such as lodging houses, railroad boxcars and wooden shacks were common forms of working class housing amongst Mexicans, Chinese, and others in the plaza area. By 1906, the reform worker Amanda Mathews would pen short stories set in Sonoratown and would describe the house court as “a tiny village of whitewashed board cabins crowding what had once been the spacious backyard of an old adobe dwelling in the Mexican quarter of Los Angeles.”<sup>188</sup>

Drawing on her experience as a settlement worker as the basis for her fiction, Mathews described how “Gonzales Court” was made up of several residential units surrounding a central patio where the air was filled with the sounds and aromas of women working—making corn tortillas on the griddle, washing laundry, and child rearing. Children played amongst small gardens of vegetables and around an orange tree that served as clothesline for the residents’ laundry. In her stories, some of the women and girls took in laundry as a way to help support the family. They also collected water in earthen jugs from a hydrant next to the tree and often simply congregated in the court talking together.<sup>189</sup> Bessie Stoddart, another settlement worker, wrote that without going into the homes, one might have noticed only “narrow alleyway[s] running back between two houses, or a double gateway with children

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<sup>187</sup> Los Angeles Housing Commission, *Report of the Los Angeles Housing Commission, 1910*, 1910; Bogardus, “The House-Court Problem,” 391.

<sup>188</sup> Amanda Mathews, “Manuela’s Lesson,” in *The Hieroglyphics of Love: Stories of Sonoratown and Old Mexico* (Los Angeles: The Artemisia Bindery, 1906), 50.

<sup>189</sup> These descriptions of the Gonzales Court are drawn from the Mathews’ narrative. Mathews, “Manuela’s Lesson.”

flocking in and out.”<sup>190</sup> Many house courts could only be entered through the narrow patio entrances, while others had doors that faced the street as well as doors that accessed patio.<sup>191</sup>

Despite this depiction of women and children at work and play, Mathews also cast the house courts as homes for working men. She observed that the “numerous courts [were] concealed from the street and swarming with the despised cholos, imported by the railroads for cheap labor” and that “Sonoratown was detested by the citizens of Los Angeles as the last outpost against progress.”<sup>192</sup> The descriptions of reformers and city officials constitute some of the only archival materials available about the “intimate domains” of Chinese and Mexican residents.<sup>193</sup> Recognizing the limits of white reformers’ descriptions of the house courts, this chapter nevertheless analyzes them, along with available maps and census records, to trace how living spaces in Chinese and Mexican districts around the plaza were constructed and used. This analysis of the built environment of home and neighborhood reveals much about the social relationships of the people who lived in them, but also about the interplay between segregation and nation-building in early twentieth century Los Angeles geography?

As can be seen in Mathews’ opposition between the “despised cholos” and the “citizens of Los Angeles” the house courts constituted real and imagined boundaries

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<sup>190</sup> Bessie B. Stoddart, “The Courts of Sonoratown: The Housing Problem as it is to be Found in Los Angeles,” *Charities and the Commons* 15 (December 1905): 296.

<sup>191</sup> Descriptions drawn generally from Mathews anthology. Amanda Mathews, *The Hieroglyphics of Love: Stories of Sonoratown and Old Mexico* (Los Angeles: The Artemisia Bindery, 1906).

<sup>192</sup> Amanda Mathews, “The Kidnapping of Maria Luisa,” in *The Hieroglyphics of Love: Stories of Sonoratown and Old Mexico* (Los Angeles: The Artemisia Bindery, 1906), 67.

<sup>193</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies,” in *Haunted By Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

between “citizens” and “despised” communities. Broadly speaking, this chapter describes the construction of these borders between citizen and other in the construction of housing, arguing that a clearer picture of the local terrain around the plaza, and its contemporary meanings, can help historians better to understand the racial, class, and gender dynamics of larger processes of municipal reform and nation-building at work in early twentieth-century Los Angeles. In the relation to the city and its “citizens,” as well as in practical matters of architectural design and spatial organization, Chinese housing and Mexican housing often quite similar. Yet this chapter will highlight important divergences between the two communities. Differences in immigration law, and the resulting differences in demographic composition, as well as different relationships to the emerging industrial economy of the city, helped make places that came to be known as Sonoratown and Chinatown into distinct social worlds, shaped by and helping to reshape, distinct ideas about Chinese and Mexican social difference.

The writings of social workers are useful, if highly imperfect, windows into the complex local organization of space and social identity, especially as those local social worlds were read (or written) into larger narratives of social change—national expansion, modernization, and social assistance, all of which presumed the universalization of white and middle-class norms. Social workers, researchers and city officials—often the same people—had a great deal of anxiety about housing and living spaces in these neighborhoods. On one hand, they identified industrialization, and the breakup of traditional community life, as responsible for immigrant housing configurations and their ostensible depravities. On the other hand, they faulted residents themselves, who these writers understood as lacking ideal family structures

due to their foreignness. I examine these tensions as a way to understand the roles these reformers played in managing nation-state borders in the local context through their writing, programming and removal campaigns. The social relationships forged in these neighborhoods were made not only through everyday practices, but also through the local institution of state power. Social workers had a hand in deploying this state power, which can be seen in the differences between the way they imagined these living spaces to ideally function, and how they understood how these living spaces were actually functioning.

Reformers' descriptions and portraits of those everyday spaces and lives constitute a major bulk of the available archival sources but also bring with them major problems. Governed by reformer ideology and obsessed by the "house court problem," these sources now serve to distort if not conceal the everyday lives of Sonoratown and Chinatown residents. To the extent that it is possible, this chapter works around such distortions by putting these descriptive accounts in the context of other kinds of sources, including censuses, maps, fiction, and images. I also borrow from the theoretical perspectives of scholars working on material culture and space in order to understand how home spaces were socially constructed and the ways that in Lizabeth Cohen's words, "workers who left no private written records may speak to us through the artifacts of their homes."<sup>194</sup> With this in mind, the changing architecture of plaza area homes have much to tell us about how residents might have used their living spaces and how they understood everyday activities in relation to others around them. I argue throughout this chapter that the house court—both in its physical structures and in its

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<sup>194</sup> Lizabeth A. Cohen, "Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915," in *Material Culture Studies in America: An Anthology*, ed. Thomas J. Schlereth (Oxford: AltaMira Press, 1999), 292.

representation—is an artifact that offers a way of interpreting and recreating everyday immigrant lives and a “web of economic arrangements” shaped by segregation and the ideologies of domesticity, conquest, and reform. While reformers’ discourse was documented in the archive, spatial analysis offers a way to try to understand how working-class and immigrant residents produced knowledge about their social contexts through everyday activities.<sup>195</sup> Following Edward Soja, I argue that the meanings that reformers and residents assigned to these spaces were potentially multiple, sometimes opposing, and crucial to contested visions of the social identities of the people who lived there.<sup>196</sup> I use the concept of “spatial imaginary” as a way to understand the meanings reformers and residents attached to space and how these meanings were inextricably linked not only to dynamic material form of the homes themselves, but also to their differential power relationships with regard to race, gender and nation.

The discussion that follows begins by analyzing the documents created by reformers, researchers, and city officials, many having had strong ties to programs in Sociology and Social Work at the University of Southern California during the early twentieth century. As an archive, their studies and reports not only documented the everyday lives of plaza area residents, but also produced knowledge about what

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<sup>195</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 22-23, 120-121, 177-183. Building on the foundational work of Henri Lefebvre, regarding the social construction of space, geographers have interrogated the ways in which spatial arrangements have been shaped in the context of historical economic processes. Dolores Hayden has argued that the architectural design of homes “encompass a web of economic arrangements” in her research on the importance of industrialization in the transformation of home spaces. Doreen Massey has theorized spatialization as a historically specific process through which space, always dynamic and contested, is socially constructed in relation to economies and societies. To that end, she calls for an analysis that reflects the multiplicity of gender relations. Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: Gender, Housing, and Family Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 85.

<sup>196</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996); Antoine S. Bailly, “Spatial Imaginary and Geography: A Plea for the Geography of Representations,” *GeoJournal* 31, no. 3 (1993): 247-250; George Lipsitz, “The Racialization of Space and the Spacialization of Race,” *Landscape Journal* 26, no. 1 (2007): 10-23.



constituted a proper use of home space so as to build a city of citizens. The next section details how the rise of industrialization that accompanied U.S. conquest had crucial material consequences for the buildings near the plaza, as Californio elites vacated their familial adobe homes which were reconfigured to house a growing industrial working-class and immigrant population. The third discussion centers on reformers' spatial imaginaries of plaza area home spaces. They contrasted an ideal "American" family household against the "slum" model they equated with "foreign" Mexican and Chinese home spaces, linking together ideologies about gendered social relationships within the homes to race and nation. The final section examines the spatial imaginaries of Mexican and Chinese residents themselves, whose work—across space and gender—contributed to the household economy. Whereas reformers critiqued their home spaces for falling outside of their single nuclear family unit ideal, residents conceptualized home spaces for extended family, work, and community.

### **House Courts and the Problem with Reform**

The geo-cultural transformations brought about through industrialization were a central concern for social workers, researchers and other city progressives who worked in Los Angeles' central neighborhoods. Like other U.S. reformers of the Progressive Era, social workers in Los Angeles identified the "tenement problem" as one of the evils of industrialization and urban growth.<sup>197</sup> Settlement workers, in particular, built a

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<sup>197</sup> Mark Pittenger, "A World of Difference: Constructing the "Underclass" in Progressive America," *American Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1997): 26-65; Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 105-119; Eileen Boris, "Reconstructing the "Family": Women, Progressive Reform, and the Problem of Social Control," in *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*, ed. Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 73-86; Rivka Shpak Lissak, *Pluralism and*

national progressive reform movement around the problem of slum housing, which they understood as part of larger problem of industrialization and urbanization.<sup>198</sup> Indeed, increasing immigration that coincided with the rise of industries in many of the nation's larger cities sparked a great deal of concern amongst reformers about overcrowded tenement conditions. As part of a national reform movement, the Los Angeles College Settlement, as well as reform-minded researchers positioned their discussions of the local housing situation in relation to national conversations about housing concerns across the United States. Located in Sonoratown, the Los Angeles College Settlement, aimed to assist Sonoratown residents.

Like the settlement workers of Chicago's Hull House who had close intellectual and political ties to the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, women workers/residents of the Los Angeles College Settlement had similar ties to the Departments of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Southern California.<sup>199</sup> The Chicago School understood the city as a web of ethnic populations, each of which moved toward assimilation into the American ideal. As chair of the Department of Sociology at USC, Emory Bogardus, who himself was a student of Robert Park of the Chicago School of Sociology, advised numerous graduate student studies in Los Angeles.<sup>200</sup> Many of these students drew on their work in settlement homes and classrooms to detail the everyday lives of these communities. The master's theses of

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*Progressives: Hull House and the New Immigrants, 1890-1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>198</sup> Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives*, 1-3.

<sup>199</sup> Mary Jo Deegan, "'Dear Love, Dear Love': Feminist Pragmatism and the Chicago Female World of Love and Ritual," *Gender and Society* 10, no. 5 (October 1996): 590-591; Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives*, 6-7.

<sup>200</sup> Stephanie Lewthwaite, *Race, Place, and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles: A Transnational Perspective, 1890-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 7-8.

sociology and social work graduate students who were concerned with the Chinese and Mexican sections of central Los Angeles provide a rich group of sources about this area during the 1910s through the 1930s.<sup>201</sup> Together with the writings and reports of city officials, these sources shed light on both the changing landscape of Los Angeles' plaza area and the ways in which social workers and residents imagined the transformations of these spaces.

These studies were productions of knowledge backed by the authority granted to the writers by the university, and municipality and the state of California. Reformers' ideal household may have separated public and private spheres, but their ideal city did not.<sup>202</sup> Reformers operated from a deep belief in civic responsibility geared toward establishing state services for the communities they served. In the arena of public health, Jennifer Lisa Koslow has argued, reformers and public health officials in Los Angeles played key roles in shaping public health services at the municipal level, thus producing and managing social order.<sup>203</sup> Natalia Molina and Stephanie Lewthwaite have likewise shown that reformers had a hand in designing programming aimed at urban planning at multiple levels—city, neighborhood and home--which

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<sup>201</sup> Emory Bogardus, a professor of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Southern California beginning in 1911 and avid participant in community organizations, advised a many the Master's theses that documented a variety of "problems" confronted by the city's poorer communities. Several of these theses were written by settlement workers associated with the College Settlement. In this way, the College Settlement in Los Angeles was similar to Chicago's Hull House in that it "was for women sociologists...the institutional center for research and social thought." See Mary Jo Deegan, *Jane Addams and the Men of the Chicago School, 1892-1918* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 33.

<sup>202</sup> Dolores Hayden argues that settlement workers were institution-builders, and as such, they did not divide public and private spheres. Their ideal city included a series of municipal services that dealt with housing and architecture. Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream*, 44.

<sup>203</sup> Jennifer Lisa Koslow, *Cultivating Health: Los Angeles Women and Public Health Reform* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 1-9.

institutionalized racial categorization of Mexicans.<sup>204</sup> In order to understand how residents themselves lived everyday, this discussion focuses less on programming, and more on the ways in which reformers and city officials wielded state power through their conceptualizations of Sonoratown and Chinatown home spaces. Reform women, in particular, understood home spaces as private spheres characterized by women's activities that were geared toward caring for children and men. My research on house courts of the period reveals the gendered construction not only of the home space itself but also of the reformers' attitudes toward domestic space, what Amy Kaplan has described as "manifest domesticity" of the mid-nineteenth century, which drew distinct boundaries between public and private spheres, at the same time that it became a force for national expansion.<sup>205</sup>

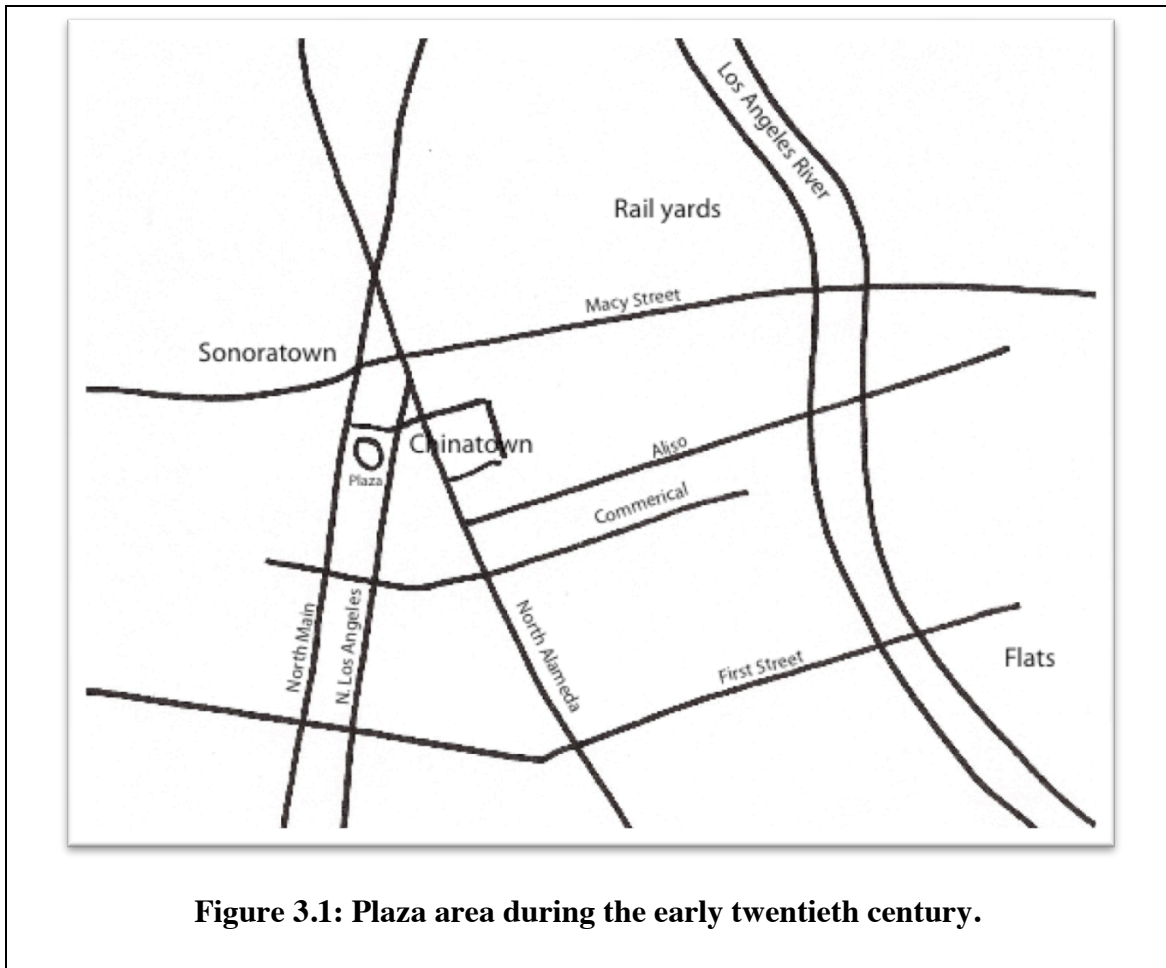
At the turn of the twentieth century, urban changes occurring in Los Angeles must be differentiated from cities in the U.S. Northeast and Midwest. In the center city, inherited from Spanish colonial and Mexican urbanists, the homes of prominent Californio families clustered around the old central plaza. The adobe facades of these buildings combined to create a regularized public streetscape, and to control access to the private interior space of the household, including inner chambers and private courtyards. As the status of the old Californio families declined, railroads and port linkages to global markets brought a steady flow of cheap immigrant laborers who found housing near the plaza and increasingly to the plaza's southeast in the Flats. The old adobes were often subdivided into multiple living spaces. This model, and the

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<sup>204</sup> Lewthwaite, *Race, Place, and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles*, 4-7; Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>205</sup> Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 23-50.

relative availability of open space for urban expansion, then gave rise to newly constructed house courts that differed from high rise tenement housing in Chicago or New York. Los Angeles' house courts were mostly one- or two-story buildings and often included a common yard. The transition and growth of the old Californio town into a working-class slum reflected, and in some ways defined, the shifting relationship of Mexican social identities to political and economic power in the city. Unlike the immigrant working-class in other regions which was primarily made up of white ethnics, mainly Eastern and Southern Europeans, Los Angeles' immigrant communities that lived in house courts were largely Mexican, but also notably Chinese and Italian as well. The area of house courts around the plaza and in the Flats included pockets of ethnic and racial diversity, including the smaller area immediately to the east of the plaza, known as Chinatown. But the whole came to be known, generally, as a Mexican neighborhood, and descriptions of the neighborhood became key ways in which Los Angeles officials and reformers imagined Mexican racial identity. **(Figure 3.1)**



**Figure 3.1: Plaza area during the early twentieth century.**

The housing types within this area, which city officials and reformers often referred to as “cholo courts,” also became increasingly associated with the Mexican immigrant working class, particularly with those who worked in railroad labor and other industries that were located nearby.<sup>206</sup> Significantly, the term “cholo” referred especially to Mexican laboring men, suggesting that the residents of the courts were mostly Mexican men who worked in industrial labor.<sup>207</sup> As Stephanie Lewthwaite has

<sup>206</sup> Mathews, *The Hieroglyphics of Love*; Titian Coffey, “The Housing Conditions of Los Angeles,” *The Southern California Practitioner* 21 (1906): 623-624; United States, Immigration Commission, William Paul Dillingham, *Reports of the Immigration Commission: Immigrants in Industries*, 1907, 448-449.

<sup>207</sup> It is important to note that the term “cholo” in the early twentieth century, when used, was often used synonymously with the term “peon” by Anglo reformers, researchers and city officials and other Anglos. Both have racial and class—and I would argue, gendered—meaning in that they both differentiated the

argued, “the term ‘cholo’ became synonymous not simply with racial degeneration but with a degenerate male type whose transient lifestyle and unsocial behavior threatened the basis of American civilization—the heterosexual nuclear family.”<sup>208</sup> This focus on the cholo looked past the many women, children, and families that inhabited house courts—Mathews noted that the house courts were a “familiar environment in the Mexican quarter of Los Angeles.”<sup>209</sup> Yet, others identified Sonoratown and Chinatown as the locations of the “house court problem,” and as “foreign districts” occupied by “Cholos, Russians, Italians, Japanese, Slavonians, Syrians and Chinese.”<sup>210</sup> Despite the range of ethnic immigrants living in these areas, reformers, researchers and city officials identified the “house court problem” as one that stemmed especially from Mexican and, to a lesser extent, Chinese communities, and which posed a threat to the image of the city as a haven for white U.S. middle-class and elites during the 1910s and 20s. In their roles as nation-builders, social workers, and producers of knowledge about Los Angeles’ nonwhite populations around the plaza, reformers, researchers and city officials collapsed racial, gender and national categories with the localized space of the

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Mexican immigrant working class from the Californio elites, and emphasized the impurity of mixed indigenous and Spanish blood history of Mexican territories, thereby assigning a nonwhite racial status to the Mexican working class of this period. Writing about a similar moniker “Juan Garcia,” William Deverell has noted that in 1920s Los Angeles “the constellation of behaviors and ideas that make up an Anglo cultural stance toward Mexicans (including legal, political, social, occupational, spatial, and other strictures) worked as a kind of cultural cryogenics. This allowed, even insisted, that the dominant society freeze Mexicans in time and space, and that it describe them in particular ways: childlike, simple, quick to anger, close to nature, primitive, hard-working, lazy, superstitious, possibly criminal.” William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 42. For a similar discussion of Mexican racialization with specific reference to mestizo history, see Arnoldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 14-23.

<sup>208</sup> Lewthwaite, *Race, Place, and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles*, 77.

<sup>209</sup> Amanda Mathews, “The Hieroglyphics of Love,” in *The Hieroglyphics of Love: Stories of Sonoratown and Old Mexico* (Los Angeles: The Artemisia Bindery, 1906), 14.

<sup>210</sup> Coffey, “The Housing Conditions of Los Angeles”; Dana W. Bartlett, *The Better City: A Sociological Study of a Modern City* (Los Angeles: The Neuner Company, 1907), 71-72; Bogardus, “The House-Court Problem.”

neighborhood. In the imaginations of reformers, researchers and city officials, Sonoratown and Chinatown were distinct, separate and foreign geographical spaces that reflected discrete racial categories defined in national terms—Mexico and China. As later sections of this chapter will show, their forms of invidious judgement and differentiation rested on nation-based paradigms rather than race-based paradigms. Sonoratown and Chinatown were imagined as culturally located outside the nation even if it spatially was contiguous with the city of Los Angeles. While reformers had their own spatial imaginaries about Sonoratown and Chinatown tied to race, class, gender and nation, their writings suggest that the spatial imaginaries of the residents were quite different.<sup>211</sup> Whereas reformers often idealized the nuclear single-family unit, for example, residents often used their home spaces in more communal ways that opened up possibilities for community-building both within and across households or units.

But if we take the house court as an historical artifact, we can see how house court residents produced knowledge through their everyday activities in their homes. While reformers concluded that the repetition of ordinary gestures or actions were “typical” of house court culture, they in fact reflected a multiplicity of “ways of being-in-the-world and making it one’s home.”<sup>212</sup> Everyday activities through which residents “made do” reveal how they might have understood their social worlds, and the transformations of social processes such as economic constraints, geographical segregation and border

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<sup>211</sup> I discuss “spatial imaginary” more at length in the introduction chapter. In this instance, I am using the concept to better understand how reformers’ and residents’ differing, sometimes opposing, understandings of what one should do and how one should act inside the home reflect social group dynamics.

<sup>212</sup> Luce Giard, “Doing-Cooking,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living & Cooking*, ed. Luce Giard, trans. Timothy J. Tomasik, Revised. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 154. On reformers’ representations that racialized house courts as “typical” of Mexican behavior see Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 172-176.



restrictions. Amanda Mathews' short stories were fictional but her descriptions of the living spaces in Sonoratown were based on her experiences as a reformer who worked amongst the residents and visited their homes regularly. The realism of her fiction and the material impact of her "real" social reform activities reveal the importance of the larger nation-building project in the shaping of neighborhoods and homes. Her fellow reform workers from the College Settlement House, as well as other urban reformers, city planners and social scientists who worked in Los Angeles during the early twentieth century, produced reports, articles, stories, and photographs about the populations with whom they worked. Social scientists—particularly those who were reform workers and teachers—wrote about their observations detailing the spatial and material configuration of homes, the activities of women, men and children, and the gendered social relationships that developed within those spaces. Although they reveal multiple perspectives and often reflect the race, class and gender biases among urban reformers of the Progressive Era, these materials provide some of the only archival accounts available about the "intimate domains" of Chinese and Mexican residents.<sup>213</sup>

Reading this body of documentation for their thick descriptions of Mexican and Chinese neighborhoods—local housing landscapes, varied architecture, details of living spaces, and the daily activities—in relation to other kinds of archival materials such as oral histories, census data and fire insurance maps, for example, I offer a way to better understand how Chinese and Mexican residents forged communities through everyday life in the plaza area. I am concerned with how home spaces were created through the

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<sup>213</sup> Ann Stoler uses "intimate domains" or the "intimacies of empire" as a way to understand the relationship between intimate matters, colonial power and narrative/knowledge production. See Ann Laura Stoler, Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties," 23-26.

social relationships between women, men and children residents, as well as residents' relationships with the city's political and economic expansion in the early twentieth century. Scholars of material culture have argued that studying landscape, architecture and other "things" reflects not only the residents' ideologies and values, but how they positioned themselves in relation to others in the midst of social processes.<sup>214</sup> As populations about whose historical experiences there is limited written documentation, material culture analysis offers an opportunity to better understand how these residents coped with limited resources and the daily strategies they devised to survive in the context of local and national transformations of nation-making, border formation and racial segregation. I analyze the house courts—their spatial configuration and usage—as "artifacts" through which Mexican and Chinese might articulate their social worlds.<sup>215</sup>

### **From Californio Elite Adobes to Working-Class House Court**

The story of the house courts during the early twentieth century has its roots in the Spanish and Mexican periods. During the mid-nineteenth century, the buildings immediately surrounding the plaza were home to elite Californio families who not only maintained municipal control, but also dominated the area immediately surrounding the

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<sup>214</sup> Henry Glassie has proposed that architecture is "a conceptual activity" through which ideas are literally constructed in material means and social relationships are shaped. Henry Glassie, *Vernacular Architecture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 22. Architecture in the context of the larger landscape reveals the ways in which people interact and form social identities based on belonging to a group and a place. Paul Groth, "Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study," in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1. For additional discussion of material culture with regard to architecture and landscapes, see Marina Moskowitz, "Backyards and Beyond: Landscapes and History," in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (New York: Routledge, 2009), 67-84; Katherine C. Grier, "Culture Made Material," *American Literary History* 8, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 552-565; Thomas F. Gieryn, "A Space for Place in Sociology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 463-496.

<sup>215</sup> Cohen, "Embellishing a Life of Labor: An Interpretation of the Material Culture of American Working-Class Homes, 1885-1915."

plaza itself. In a spatial arrangement common to many settlements in the Spanish colonial empire, the plaza was the center of community and civic life. A family's proximity to the plaza reflected higher social and economic status while distance from the plaza reflected lower status. Under Spanish and Mexican rule, this spatialization served to maintain political power for the elites.<sup>216</sup> During the first three decades of U.S. rule, this hierarchical spatial arrangement transformed into quite the opposite as Anglo elites increasingly chose to live away from the plaza, and their homes surrounding the plaza were structurally reconfigured for immigrant and working class housing and commercial businesses.<sup>217</sup>

The spatial reorganization of the building known as the Avila Adobe demonstrates this restructuring of the Californio adobes as well as the changing usage of the building to accommodate shifting populations. (Figure 3.2) Don Francisco Avila, who served as alcalde (mayor) of Los Angeles in 1810, built his family home in 1818. During the mid-nineteenth century, the homes of Californio elite families were adobe structures, often a series of successive rooms in a row, each with a door opening either into a private yard or opening onto a porch facing the street. Preserved during the 1930s as part of the work of Christine Sterling and city boosters, and now part of an exhibit at El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument, Avila's adobe was an "L" shape structure with doors that opened into a porch facing a patio where the family's vineyard was located. As was common amongst adobes of the period, the house had a compacted earthen floor that was later replaced with wooden planks. At the time, this

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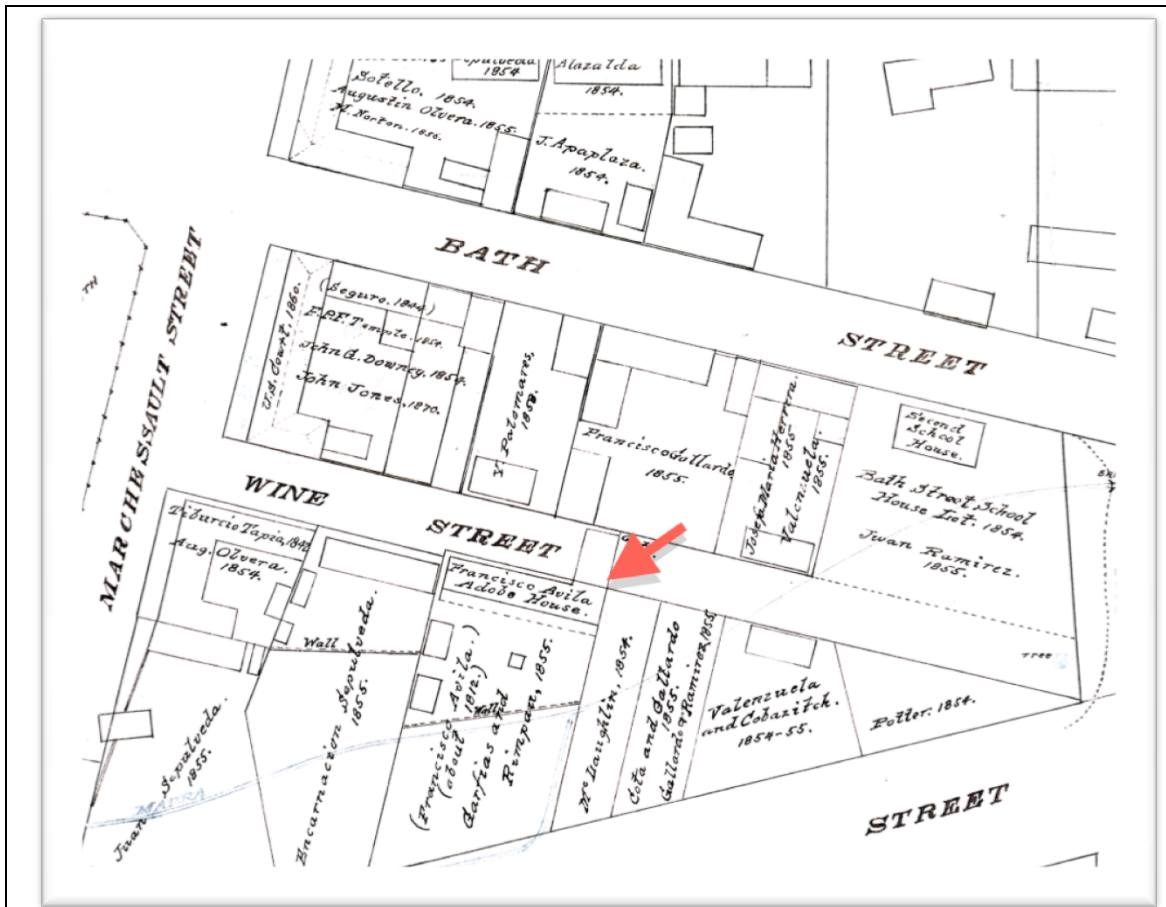
<sup>216</sup> Setha M. Low, "Spatializing Culture: The Social Production and Social Construction of Public Space in Costa Rica," *American Ethnologist* 23, no. 4 (November 1996): 867; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1974), 151-152.

<sup>217</sup> William D. Estrada, "Los Angeles' Old Plaza and Olvera Street: Imagined and Contested Space," *Western Folklore* 58, no. 2 (1999): 26.

particular adobe was considered quite spacious and the front room was often used to entertain social gatherings amongst the elites. Avila's youngest daughter, Francisca, lived there with her family during the 1850s and 60s until 1868 when they decided to move away and rent the building.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Through the work of Christine Sterling and city boosters during the 1920s and 30s, the Avila Adobe has been preserved with an eye to how the Avila family might have lived there during the mid-nineteenth century. Today it is an exhibit at El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. Although a portion of the original building no longer stands, a walk through the building reveals, to some extent, the spatial organization of the rooms as well as their relationship to the court yard, where food was prepared and where there stood a garden including a small vineyard. Each of the front rooms each open onto porch facing Wine Street (later renamed Olvera Street). For a discussion of Sterling's campaign toward historic preservation of the plaza and the Avila Adobe, see William David Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 181-201; Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 207-260; César López, "El Descanso: A Comparative History of the Los Angeles Plaza Area and the Shared Racialized Space of the Mexican and Chinese Communities, 1853-1933" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2002), 157-161. For a brief discussion of the architecture of the building, see John R. Kielbasa, "Avila Adobe," in *Historic Adobes of Los Angeles County* (Pittsburgh: Dorrance Publishers, 1997), <http://www.laokay.com/halac/AvilaAdobe.htm>. (Accessed July 18, 2010.)



**Figure 3.2: Los Angeles, 1873**

This 1873 map shows the Avila’s property, including the “L” shape of the family adobe house that faced Wine Street. The homes of other Californio elites were located nearby and around the plaza. The plaza is located on Marchessault Street across from Wine Street.

“Map of the old portion of the city surrounding the plaza, showing the old plaza church, public square, the first gas plant and adobe buildings, Los Angeles city, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1873 / A.G. Ruxton, surveyor.” Library of Congress Geography and Map Division. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4364l.ct001794> (Accessed February 17, 2009.)

Over the next several decades, the Avila building was converted to be used at various times, as a hotel, a lodging house and a restaurant, reflecting the increase in both commercial and business establishments that proliferated there, as well as the need for worker housing in the area. (Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.4) Sanborn Fire Insurance

maps in 1888 show that the building was the Hotel Italia Unita.<sup>219</sup> In 1906 the maps list the same building as both a restaurant and a women's lodging house, or brothel.<sup>220</sup> A closer look shows that along with the Avila building, the other buildings lining Wine Street (later renamed Olvera Street) also underwent remarkable changes. On this street alone, the 1873 map lists family names of Apablaza, Downey, Gallardo, Jones, McLaughlin, Sepulveda, Valenzuela and, of course, Olvera and Avila. At the corner of Marchessault and Bath, across from the plaza, was the U.S. court house.

Within just fifteen years, the homes of Californio and Anglo elites who lived there in 1870s had been transformed into multiple store fronts, restaurants, an Italian-run winery and dwellings, notably the homes of Chinese, Black and Mexican residents. By 1906 the street had many more businesses than dwellings, which were listed as "cheap lodging," "tenements" and "female boarding" for example.<sup>221</sup> Notably, the U.S. Court House was relocated a few blocks south of the plaza, as part of the city's modernization project which moved the Anglo American center of municipal power and recentered "downtown." By the 1880s, merchants and manufacture replaced the agriculture which had previously formed the basis of the local economy run by the Californio elites.<sup>222</sup> Thus, the marked increase in house courts and the decline of

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<sup>219</sup> Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California 1888*. Volume 1, Sheet 10a. New York: Sanborn Map Company. From the University of Michigan Map Library, ProQuest Digital Information and Learning. <http://sanborn.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu> (Accessed February 17, 2009.)

<sup>220</sup> The Sanborn maps published in 1906 list the Avila building as "Restrt & Female Boarding" [original abbreviation]. Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California 1906*. Volume 3, Sheet 301. New York: Sanborn Map Company. From the University of Michigan Map Library, ProQuest Digital Information and Learning. <http://sanborn.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu> (Accessed February 17, 2009.)

<sup>221</sup> Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California 1888 and 1906*.

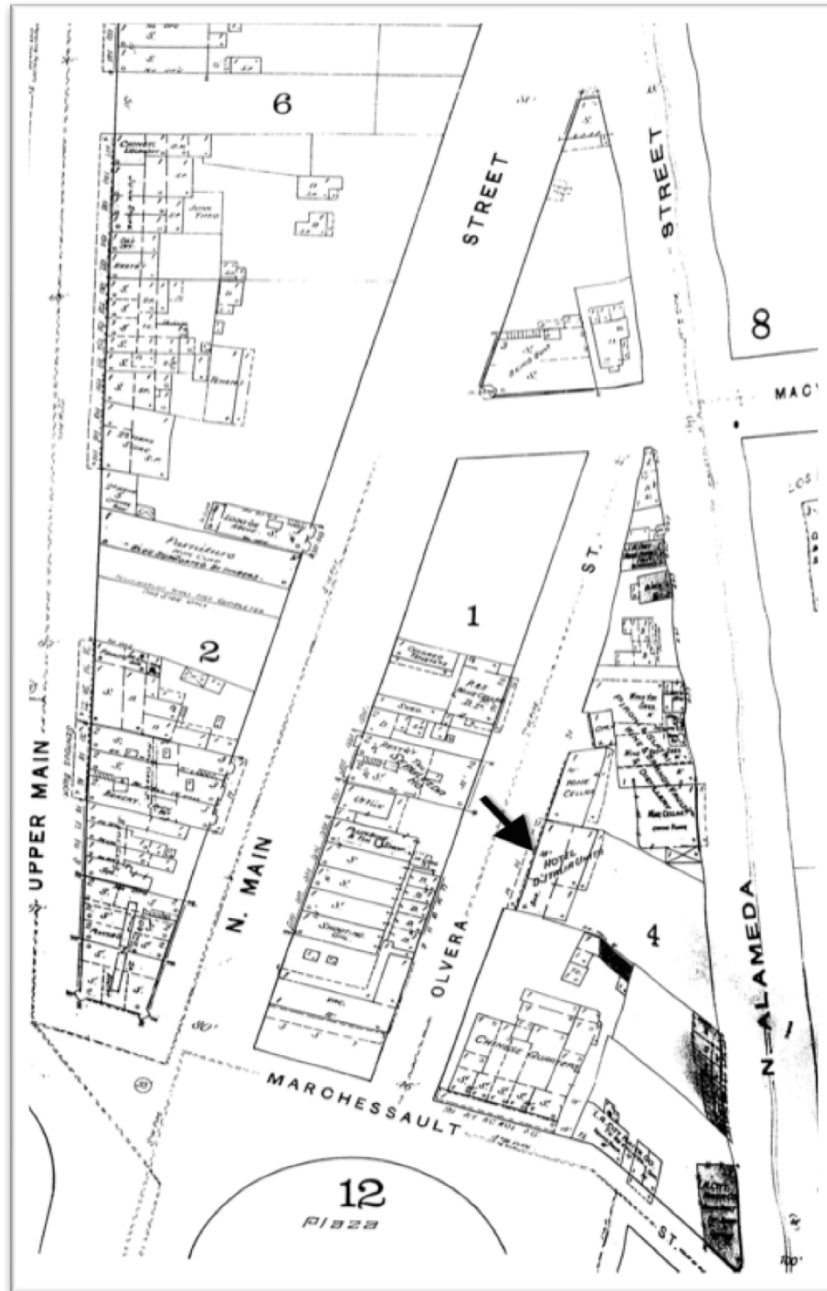
<sup>222</sup> Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, n.d.), 23.

Californio elite society in the plaza area were shaped in large part by U.S. conquest and industrialization. Considerable changes in architecture, spatial arrangements and usage of home spaces—not just public spaces like streets, workplaces, and businesses—were the material consequences of these broader systemic changes that transformed the urban landscape.<sup>223</sup>

This process of spatially reorganizing home spaces—the relationship of the houses to the neighborhood, changing populations in the city, and architectural configuration—was part of the larger economic changes in the city and region brought about through U.S. conquest. The arrival of the Southern Pacific railroad lines in 1876 followed by the Santa Fe Atchison and Topeka in 1885 facilitated industrial growth throughout the city, but especially in the riverbed near the plaza. Industrial sites such as railroad yards, brick yards, packing houses, street rail yards, and gas and water works proliferated there. The area was ideal for industrial settlement for multiple reasons. The unpredictability of the river and the relatively flat terrain around it made land near the riverbed cheap enough for the building of housing for a poor immigrant workforce, but also for building industrial centers.

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<sup>223</sup> Dolores Hayden has discussed the importance of industrialization in the transformation of home spaces. Architectural design of homes “encompass a web of economic arrangements” that reinforce social relationships with each other, but also with land, resources, sustenance and daily activities. Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream*, 85.



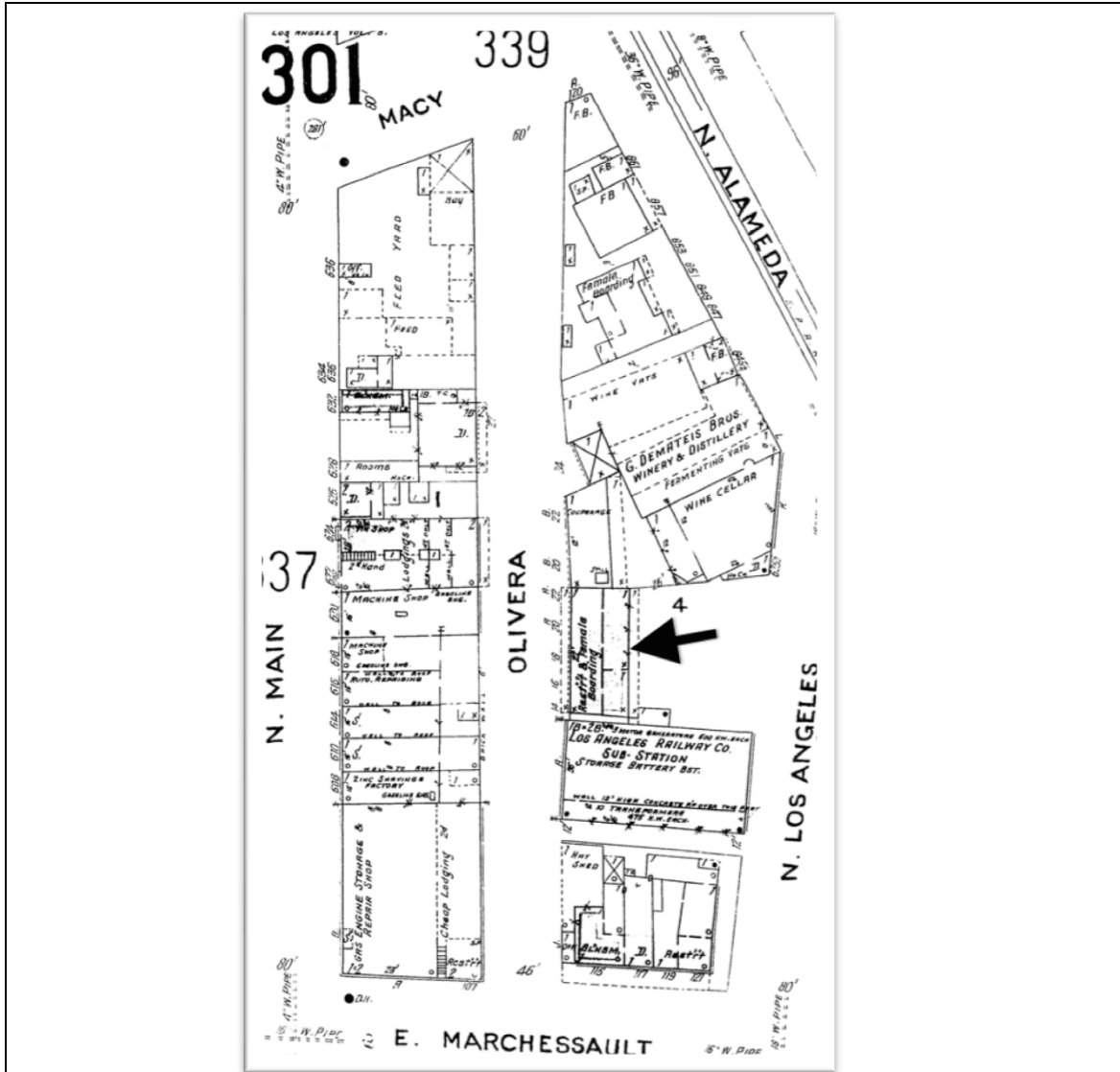
**Figure 3.3: Olvera Street, 1888**

Sanborn Insurance map of Olvera Street (formerly Wine Street) in 1888, listing the Avila building as Hotel D'Italia Unita. To the right of this hotel was an Italian winery. The building facing Marchessault Street and the plaza lists storefronts with Chinese quarters behind them.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California 1888*. Volume 1, Sheet 10a. New York: Sanborn Map Company. From the University of Michigan Map Library, ProQuest Digital Information and Learning.

<http://sanborn.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu> (Accessed February 17, 2009.)





**Figure 3.4: Olvera Street, 1906**

Sanborn Insurance map showing Olvera Street (formerly Wine Street) in 1906, and listing the Avila building as a Restaurant and Female Boarding House. Surrounding buildings are labeled for “cheap lodging” and there are many more dwellings. The building on Marchessault that was in 1888 Chinese quarters is listed as a blacksmith and a restaurant with a dwelling in between. Also note that Los Angeles Street has been extended and cut through a portion of these properties.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California 1906*. Volume 3, Sheet 301. New York: Sanborn Map Company. From the University of Michigan Map Library, ProQuest Digital Information and Learning.

<http://sanborn.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu> (Accessed February 17, 2009.)

The rails and their connection to Pacific ports brought the promise of modernity and economic prosperity for the city that was rooted in whiteness. City boosters who worked in real estate and land development touted this promise along with the notion that the sunny regional climate, rich agricultural economy, and opportunities for land speculation of southern California was ideal for health seekers and tourists, which helped to foster a booming population of Anglo Americans especially.<sup>224</sup> Between 1870 and 1880, the total population of Los Angeles had doubled from 5,728 to 11,183. By 1890 it had increased to 50,395.<sup>225</sup> City leaders and urban planners created racial covenants in outlying cities, such as South Gate, and Glendale, that restricted the sale of property to nonwhites.<sup>226</sup> Housing restrictions reflected visions amongst white newcomers of an idea Los Angeles made up of single-family homes inhabited by white Americans.<sup>227</sup> Due to restriction and proximity to work, nonwhites became increasingly segregated, notably in the plaza area. The settlements farther from the plaza area attracted the Anglo elites of the city and newcomers alike, further displacing the plaza as the center of economic and political power, and creating an urban system based on a racialized geography.

The rise of an industrial district near the plaza also cultivated the rapid growth of a diverse immigrant workforce that demanded additional housing. Sonoratown was a

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<sup>224</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 123, 127.

<sup>225</sup> United States, Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1870); United States, Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1880); United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1900).

<sup>226</sup> Becky M. Nicolaidis, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 16-17.

<sup>227</sup> Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?*, 18-21.

popular destination for Mexicans and Chinese as well as Southern and Eastern European immigrant industrial workers, notably Italians and Russians. While the adobe house courts continued to house much of the industrial workforce, the rapid rise of immigration to the plaza area demanded the construction of additional living quarters. Whether these newcomers constructed the homes themselves, or lived in homes built by property owners or industries themselves, new housing took on a variety of architectural frames: house-court style buildings with their long barrack-like arrangements, shacks, box cars and other kinds of “tenements.” Railroads built their own housing near the rail yards, often converting box cars into two-family homes for workers and their families.<sup>228</sup> Mexicans, Chinese and Italians were the most common residents who found a home in the buildings vacated by Californios. Many of the adobe buildings that used to be the homes of Californio elites were then spatially reconfigured into multi-unit house courts, that became home to numerous families as well as single working men. Courtyards also became sites on which to construct additional buildings, which also fell under the city’s house court category.<sup>229</sup> According to the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California’s *Annual Report* in 1916, many industrial workers were men who arrived alone so a good deal of these living quarters were used as lodging houses, sometimes exclusively of men and boys, but at times families also took in boarders.<sup>230</sup> Additionally, with the building of new housing for these working-class populations, the

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<sup>228</sup> In one short story, Amanda Mathews described a box-car camp constructed by the railroad company for workers. Each box-car was assigned to two families. Mathews, “The Kidnapping of Maria Luisa,” 66.

<sup>229</sup> Stoddart, Sonoratown article (1906) 296. See also Monroy, Rebirth 16-17.

<sup>230</sup> Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, *Second Annual Report of the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, January 2, 1916* (California State Printing Office, 1916).

area that was known as Sonoratown expanded considerably and came to encompass the buildings surrounding the plaza as well as areas farther away from the plaza.

The vast majority of this workforce that settled in the plaza area was Mexican, with Italians making up the second largest group. Together Mexicans and Italians accounted for approximately seventy-five percent of the plaza area population, according to a 1912 study.<sup>231</sup> One scholar has estimated that in 1900 some 3,000 to 5,000 Mexicans lived in Sonoratown and other smaller Mexican immigrant settlements in the city.<sup>232</sup> By the 1890s railroad companies recruited workers from Mexico to work the tracks. After arriving in the United States, many went on to work various and sometimes seasonal jobs in other industries of the region, such as agriculture and brick manufacture. Men alone and with families settled in and around the plaza area, expecting to find steady work and earnings, but they were often discouraged by the low wages industries offered and the ever-increasing numbers of recruits arriving from Mexico. From 1910 to 1930, the Mexican population in the city grew from roughly 5,000 to 33,000.<sup>233</sup> The Mexican population began to increase exponentially during the Mexican Revolution beginning in 1910 and with increasing labor recruitment at the border. Between 1910 and 1920, the Mexican population increased from 10,000-30,000

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<sup>231</sup> Olive P. Kirschner, "The Italian in Los Angeles" (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1920), 7; George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 72; Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983).

<sup>232</sup> The exact numbers of Mexican residents in Los Angeles during the early twentieth century are difficult to account for. The nature of much Mexican labor demanded that they move around frequently in search of work or to follow industries' seasonal work. Additionally, census data for these years did not always account for all Mexicans who lived in the area, and categorized Mexicans as racially "white." Historian Pedro Castillo estimated these figures using a combination of sources. Pedro G. Castillo, "The Making of a Mexican Barrio: Los Angeles, 1890-1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1979), 19-20. See also Romo, *East Los Angeles*, 61.

<sup>233</sup> Romo, *East Los Angeles*, 61; G. Bromley Oxnam, "The Mexican in Los Angeles from the Standpoint of the Religious Forces of the City," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 93 (January 1921): 130.

to 30,000-50,000.<sup>234</sup> With this increase Mexican residences expanded outward from the plaza into the Flats area—still close to the plaza, but farther to the east.

Italians made up a smaller settlement to the northwest of the plaza. From the late nineteenth century through World War I, Italians lived in many areas of the city, but Sonoratown was a popular destination for newcomers who worked in railroad industries alongside Mexicans. Sociologist Alexander Bridge emphasized in his 1920 study that Mexicans formed the large majority of the Sonoratown district (not including Chinatown), accounting for over sixty-one percent of the population, while Italians made up twenty-one percent and the remaining eighteen percent he identified as “other.”<sup>235</sup> In contrast to the Mexican working population, Italian industrial workers were more often “skilled” industrial workers and so had more choices as to where to live, such as in working-class suburbs. As European immigration declined after World War I, and Italians moved to other parts of the city, Mexicans took over their residences in the plaza area.<sup>236</sup> With prohibition in 1917, the Italian wineries on Olvera Street were forced to close business. By the 1920s, the Italian population of the plaza area moved away, forcing the Italia Unita Hotel (mentioned earlier) to close down, as well as the Italian Hall which also stood on Olvera Street at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Castillo, “The Making of a Mexican Barrio,” 19-21.

<sup>235</sup> Bridge identified “other” to include a wide range of white ethnic immigrants as well as Japanese and Blacks: “Americans, Armenians, Austrians, Belgians, Croatians, Danes, English, Finns, French, Germans, Irish, Japanese, Negroes, Russians, Poles, Scotch, Serbs, Spaniards, Swedes, Swiss, Syrians, and Welsh.” David Alexander Bridge, “A Study of the Agencies which Promote Americanization in the Los Angeles City Recreation Center District” (Master’s thesis, University of Southern California, 1920), 8-9.

<sup>236</sup> Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 28-29; Romo, *East Los Angeles*, 70-71.

<sup>237</sup> Gloria Ricci Lothrop, “Southern California People: Italians in Los Angeles,” *Historical Society of Southern California*, 2009, <http://www.socalhistory.org/bios/italiansinla.html> (Accessed August 10, 2010); Marge Bitetti, *Italians in Los Angeles* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), 14.

A growing Chinese settlement in Sonoratown on the east side of the plaza accompanied late-nineteenth-century industrialization, although they did not usually work in these industries, due to anti-Chinese labor agitation. From the mid-1890s through the 1920s, both Chinese and Mexican populations had grown significantly. Due to severe local and federal exclusion policies aimed to keep Chinese migrants from crossing into U.S. borders, the Chinese population in Los Angeles County decreased from 4,424 in 1890 to 2,032 in 1920. Still, Chinatown continued to be a favored location for housing among new arrivals and those seeking to escape anti-Chinese violence in outlying areas.<sup>238</sup> For these reasons, while the county's Chinese population decreased, the city's population actually increased with the vast majority settling in Chinatown. The majority of the geographical area that came to be known as Chinatown belonged to Californio families and their descendants. Although the numbers of Chinese in the city remained small, Chinatown had limited space on which they could build homes. While some adobe house courts did exist in Chinatown, most buildings were tenements, often two stories, built very close together.<sup>239</sup> Because the anti-Chinese movement often targeted U.S. industries for their reliance upon a contracted Chinese labor force since the 1860s, industries often turned to Mexico as a source for cheap labor. Thus, the decades following the Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1876 and 1880, and

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<sup>238</sup> These figures are based on the census research of Cheng and Cheng, as well as my own research. United States, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920* (Washington, D. C.: Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, 1920); Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, "Chinese Women of Los Angeles, A Social Historical Survey," in *Linking Our Lives: Chinese American Women of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1984), 2.

<sup>239</sup> Icy Smith, *The Lonely Queue: The Forgotten History of the Courageous Chinese Americans in Los Angeles* (Gardena, CA: East West Discovery Press, 2000).

the Mexican Revolution in the 1910s saw a marked increase in the Mexican population throughout Los Angeles and in Sonoratown specifically.<sup>240</sup>

With more people and commerce in the city—specifically more single men and tourists—the plaza area had become home to the city’s red light district.<sup>241</sup> Zoning and corruption contributed to the clustering of saloons, brothels, and gambling dens in the district generally, and especially in Chinatown and surrounding streets.<sup>242</sup> The 1916 Report of the California Commission of Immigration and Housing (C.C.I.H.) noted that the Macy Street district which bordered the plaza on the east, “had all the brothels and one-third the saloons of the city.”<sup>243</sup> That same year, Emory Bogardus estimated some 1,202 house courts accommodated some 16,510 residents in Los Angeles. Of the 850 courts in his study, he accounted for 6,490 men, 4,920 women, 2,640 boys and 2,460 girls. Mexican immigrants made up the majority of the house court population, particularly single men and men who were separated from their families.<sup>244</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, the plaza area became not only an industrial zone, but also a working-class and immigrant ghetto, in which people, industry and vice proliferated—things that were unwanted in the city’s Anglo suburbs and subdivisions.

With this dramatic metamorphosis of urban space, the majority of Californio elites moved away from the plaza area, having lost political power through land loss, intermarriage with Anglos and Mexican immigrants, or simply seeking to build lives

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<sup>240</sup> Migrants from Mexico continued to settle primarily in the Sonoratown area until the 1920s. See Romo, *East Los Angeles*, 70-71.

<sup>241</sup> W. W. Robinson, *Tarnished Angeles: Paradisiacal Turpitude in Los Angeles Revealed*, Printed for members of the Roxburghe Club and the Zamorano Club (Los Angeles: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1964).

<sup>242</sup> Nora Sterry, “The Sociological Basis for the Re-organization of the Macy Street School” (Master’s thesis, University of Southern California, 1924).

<sup>243</sup> Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, *Second Annual Report of the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, January 2, 1916*, 228.

<sup>244</sup> Bogardus, “The House-Court Problem,” 391.

and homes on their ranchos. These spatial and economic changes—the establishment of an array of industries in the plaza area, the increase in immigrant working-class populations, and the increase in businesses and storefronts including vice—marked a transition from Spanish-Mexican agrarian economy to U.S. industrial capitalism. This process of what historians have called “incorporation” signaled the installation of a U.S.-based social order and culture in the area, which could be seen in the physical restructuring of homes themselves to meet the needs of the city’s modernization schema.<sup>245</sup> Incorporation did not involve the complete replacement of one colonial economy for another. The conversion from Californio elite adobes to working-class house courts demonstrates the creation of new modes of living that included aspects of Spanish colonial ideologies of space as well as working-class residents’ needs for housing under U.S. rule. Furthermore, through this spatial rearrangement in home spaces, it is possible to see how there were multiple colonial forces (U.S. and Spanish) at play, even as they United States already claimed this territory within its geopolitical borders. House courts—whether old adobes, brick buildings, or wooden shacks—were “modern” architectural creations, built in response the city’s specific approach to modernization.

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<sup>245</sup> For a discussion of the process of incorporation and the shift from Spanish-Mexican pastoral economy to capitalist economy under U.S. rule, see Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*, n.d.; David Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Stephen J. Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).



## **Housing, Family and National Borders.**

National borders may no longer have been in flux by 1906 when Mathews published *The Hieroglyphics of Love: Stories of Sonoratown and Old Mexico*, but the process of incorporating Los Angeles into the story of the nation was in flux. While reform workers critiqued the industry side of modernization in the region, they simultaneously focused their attention on modernizing the culture of living space – the Sonoratown and Chinatown households – a location they thought could be and should be transformed toward moral American values. The reformers who were most active in housing reform in the early twentieth century were white women, who, along with their white men colleagues, constructed spatial imaginaries of the housing in the city’s central area as both a feminine and a racial one.<sup>246</sup>

Reformers’ discomfort with the “progress” that industry brought to the city became a point of reference for their ideas about the possibilities for housing reform in the plaza area communities. As this section will explore, the writings of reformers, researchers, and city and state officials reveal contradictions in their spatial imaginaries of what an ideal home should be and how the homes of plaza area were actually created. On one hand, they criticized industrial development for the creation of poor housing conditions, which manifested in a large immigrant workforce with few choices. On the other hand, they considered residents’ supposed lack of family values for the creation of “un-American” homes, which kept Los Angeles from becoming the ideal modern city they hoped it could be. Reformers became localized mediators of national borders in the

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<sup>246</sup> Dana Cuff has noted that Los Angeles’ housing problem, particularly concerns about house courts, “was both feminized and racialized” by the “prominent players of the housing scene,” most of whom were women and almost all were white. Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 130.

plaza area, which became a locus of mixed “foreign” peoples whose home spaces became the arena for reformers’ battle to exert and maintain national boundaries.

Mexican and Chinese populations continued to be the primary residents of the plaza area and these populations were growing as a result of continued migration and U.S.-born children of both communities. The C.C.I.H. reported that in the Macy Street School District, “there are two distinct housing problems, the tenements and lodging houses in Chinatown and the single dwellings and house-courts in the remainder of the district.”<sup>247</sup> As I explain with more detail in the next section, house courts in Sonoratown were single-story dwellings with a common courtyard. Chinatown dwellings were more often two-story brick buildings built one next to the other, with little space in between; as such, Chinatown included much more high-density housing. Based on these architectural differences, which reformers equated with “traditional” cultures brought to Los Angeles from Mexico or Sonora, Sonoratown and the house courts in particular were racialized as a “Mexican problem,” while Chinatown was racialized as a space with a “tenement problem” intrinsic to Chinese cultural practices and different from that of Mexicans. Reformers and city officials often equated “family” and “home,” ideologically barring “foreign” people from the possibility of having “American” homes.

Stoddart wrote of the industrial transition with an air of nostalgia for the Spanish- Mexican past. She was not alone amongst settlement workers who wrote of a romanticized past that had been lost due to the development of industries.<sup>248</sup> In

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<sup>247</sup> Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, *Second Annual Report of the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, January 2, 1916*, 229.

<sup>248</sup> As historian Phoebe Kropp has argued, the “Spanish fantasy past” served as a mechanism of comfort for Anglo Angelenos who “embraced the Spanish era’s apparent romantic chivalry, preindustrial

Stoddart's estimation, the Sonoratown adobe homes of the Californio elites that had "plenty of room for gardening and back-yard work, and for the play of big families of children" had transformed into "tenement[s] for several families, and the courtyard has been honey-combed with shacks, and tents, and nondescript barn-tenements of one and two rooms" often occupied by multiple families. As I already have noted, Amanda Mathews, one of Stoddart's coworkers at the College Settlement, expressed similar sentiments when she wrote, "behind the adobes occupied by the descendants of proud old Spanish families, poor now, but with traditions of halcyon days before the gringo invasion, are numerous courts concealed from the street and swarming with the despised cholos, imported by the railroads for cheap labor."<sup>249</sup> With that Stoddart positioned working-class Mexican men and families as a new and hidden danger, unknown to white "Americans" who could be threatened by it.

Although they often expressed nostalgia for the Spanish "past," reformers imagined that Los Angeles was in a position to avoid the perils brought about by modernity in other cities. Stoddart emphasized the newness of this industrial transformation and the particular ways in which Los Angeles' unique position as an urban center in the West gave local housing reform specific advantages that eastern and Midwestern cities did not have. She posited that the dry, sunny climate was both beneficial from a public health perspective, and detrimental for the improvement of poor housing conditions. "If it were not for the friendly Southern sun destroying disease germs the day long, frequent epidemics would draw attention to these places of

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innocence, and harmonious hierarchy as a respite from the ugliness of modern times." Kropp, *California Vieja*, 3.

<sup>249</sup> Mathews, "The Kidnapping of Maria Luisa," 67.

incubation, and better sanitation and housing laws would be enacted.”<sup>250</sup> She claimed that the dry climate in the sun, she wrote, kept diseases at bay, but because of this, it also encouraged the community’s continued “tolerance” of unsanitary conditions. “If no laws are enacted to prevent the one-story crowding,” she continued, “the many-storied crowding which will undoubtedly follow in its wake, we shall indeed be confronted by such conditions as have done incalculable harm in the older cities, and which with just a little foresight and common sense might be prevented here.” As a new city, in her estimation, Los Angeles could still be saved from “physical ill-health and moral depravity.”<sup>251</sup>

Local advocates of the city beautiful movement shared with social workers concerns about the negative effects urban development had on housing. Reverend Dana Bartlett, a sociologist and an ardent local advocate of the city beautiful movement, promoted the idea that a moral city – a “New Los Angeles” – could be built in the midst of industrial and commercial development provided that architectural and civic plans were designed to promote single-family home ownership. “The crowded tenement, the rookery, a city’s ill-kept streets and yards are not incentives to higher living.”<sup>252</sup> Furthermore, he argued that “industrialism” caused the “importation of alien workers” which promoted the development of “slum life.”<sup>253</sup> Bartlett believed that the rapidity of industrialization had contributed to immorality by creating poor housing conditions, something that social workers and other civic groups worked against.

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<sup>250</sup> Stoddart, “The Courts of Sonoratown,” 298.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>252</sup> Bartlett, *The Better City*, 27. For more discussion on Bartlett and the city beautiful movement in Los Angeles, see Wild, *Street Meeting*, 44-45.

<sup>253</sup> Bartlett, *The Better City*, 84.

Despite this critique of industrialization and its detrimental impact on immigrant housing, Bartlett was exceedingly optimistic about the possibilities for social change. He promised that a “New Los Angeles” would be “a city of homes and therefore a city without slums.” House courts had conditions “as vicious as the tenement conditions in the eastern cities,” but with a significant exception: “fresh air and out-door life could be had year-round.”<sup>254</sup> To that end he called upon artisans, teachers, merchants and social workers to play a role in urban planning geared toward city and civic beautification. Such a goal, he thought was based in governance of residents, physical construction of the homes and public spaces in a way that promoted “less crime and more of the normal, spiritual, and healthful life which is the product of the ripest civilization.”<sup>255</sup> For Bartlett, aesthetic beauty of living spaces went hand-in-hand with morality and healthiness, which together created conditions reflective of good citizenship. In this sense, he believed citizenship based on interlinked beauty, morality and health formed the basis from which to combat the poor conditions of working-class housing in the plaza.

Bessie Stoddart’s deep concern for the impact of industrialization on Los Angeles’ central communities, exposed the ways in which ideas about modernity and housing were inextricably linked to economic and cultural processes underway as the United States continued to establish its foothold in the region. In her 1905 article published in the *Charities and Commons*, a nationally respected journal among the settlement and welfare reform movements, Stoddart emphasized the specificities of the conditions for the populations she served in Los Angeles – especially those who lived in

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 27. See also Lewthwaite, *Race, Place, and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles*, 5, 72-74.

the Mexican quarters.<sup>256</sup> She faulted railroad companies for their continued recruitment of workers who left Mexico to work the tracks in Los Angeles, and for their unfulfilled promises of steady work and wages. It was with this in mind that Stoddart wrote, “And so the [house]courts shift and change like a kaleidoscope, and nobody is to know the amount of hardship that is suffered in stoical silence.”<sup>257</sup>

In the early 1920s, Nora Sterry wrote that the Macy Street School district, which, as mentioned earlier, included all of Chinatown and parts of Sonoratown that bordered it, was “situated at the north-east corner of the business portion of the city, in the heart of an industrial section.” The area was about one-fifth of a square mile and was bounded by “the river to the east, the Southern Pacific railroad yards to the north, and three streets to the south and the west which carry heavy traffic – Main, Arcadia and Aliso.”<sup>258</sup> Literally “encircled” by railroad tracks and yards, packing houses and the city’s gas plant, the district was also a primary site for industrial growth because of the riverbed. Sterry argued that by the 1920s, industries “have so polluted the air with poisonous gasses as to stunt all vegetation and to make the process of breathing at times disagreeable because of the disgusting odors.”<sup>259</sup> In fact, Sterry wrote that because Chinatown was bordered on one side by railroad yards and on another side by railroad tracks, the constant smoke and soot emitted by trains and commuter traffic along with other industries were largely responsible for Chinatown’s “housing problem,” accounting for the “a heavy cloud of smoke [that] always [hung] over the

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<sup>256</sup> Cara Finnegan, “Social Welfare and Visual Politics: The Story of Survey Graphic,” *New Deal Network*, n.d., <http://newdeal.feri.org/sg/essay.htm>. (Accessed September 4, 2009.)

<sup>257</sup> Stoddart, “The Courts of Sonoratown,” 298.

<sup>258</sup> Sterry, “The Sociological Basis for the Re-organization of the Macy Street School,” 13.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

neighborhood.”<sup>260</sup> As Sterry’s discussion demonstrates, the Chinese and Mexican quarters of this part of the city shared space and air with the city’s industries. Industry and all of the “evils” that came with it contributed to the racial geography of the city through its location in the very same place as immigrant and working-class communities.

Some fifty years after the U.S.-Mexico War, the writings of reform women workers and other progressives of Los Angeles’ central communities reveal contradictions between notions of “progress” and the “low life” of Mexican residential areas that they recognized was a consequence of such progress. “The old Mexican life of Los Angeles has been overflowed by the tide of American progress,” wrote Mathews. To her mind, this progress was responsible for creating the poor housing conditions in Sonoratown and Mexican women and children were its biggest victims. And yet, progress could not be attained without white American configurations of household space. The house courts, box car homes, shacks and other tenement housing were themselves products of modernization. Reformers believed that what was keeping Mexican residents from attaining modernity in the home was their Mexicanness: Those who came to work the railroad tracks “duplicated” the “low life of Mexic[o]” in modern Los Angeles within their homes and neighborhoods.<sup>261</sup> This was a widespread opinion amongst a number of the city’s progressives, as the house-courts came to symbolize the worst of Los Angeles’ poor industrial housing conditions. In fact, Jacob Riis, nationally renowned housing advocate and author of the famed 1901 treatise on tenement housing

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<sup>260</sup> Nora Sterry, “Housing Conditions in Chinatown Los Angeles,” *Journal of Applied Sociology* (December 1922): 70.

<sup>261</sup> Mathews, “The Kidnapping of Maria Luisa,” 67.

conditions in New York *How the Other Half Lives*, agreed, saying that “the house-court has given rise on a large scale to as unsanitary and anti-social living conditions...as have existed anywhere in the United States, not even excepting the New York tenements.”<sup>262</sup> More than that, house-courts with their crowded living spaces, lack of city infrastructure, and overlapping home and work spaces, became associated especially with the Mexican working class. Comparable housing configurations amongst Chinese residents meant that Chinatown was similarly associated with tenement housing conditions. While overcrowding and sanitation were real concerns for the city’s plaza area residents, Sonoratown reformers and researchers focused on the configuration of household space as a site of moral and racial inadequacy.

In a 1920 article “The Mexican Housing Problem in Los Angeles,” published in the U.S.C. journal *Studies in Sociology*, the settlement worker and sociologist Elizabeth Fuller wrote that Mexicans had “lax moral standards” due to the commonality of single mothers raising children alone in the city. While Fuller’s area of interest was slightly more to the south of Sonoratown, she shared definitions of “home” with other settlement workers of her time. In fact, her definition of “home” was so narrowly defined that she expressed difficulty in counting the number of Mexican families per home in her study because there were so many absent fathers, so that it was often the case that “two unmarried mothers with their children are frequently housed together.” This was of such concern to her that she wrote of this “confusion” as one “exception” to the validity of her study overall. “Since the home, strictly speaking, includes the father, mother and children, it has been difficult to tabulate the “number of families per house,”

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<sup>262</sup> Referenced in Bogardus, “The House-Court Problem,” 391.



when the father is not present as a member of the family.”<sup>263</sup> According to these standards, single mothers could not properly keep public and private spheres separate, as they had to work either outside the home space or within the home space to support their children.

As the local press demonstrated in a story highlighting the work toward “intelligent citizenship” that the College Settlement had been spearheading in the “Cholo courts” in 1906, particularly their work with women and children, settlement workers believed that a proper “American” home was one in which women and men, boys and girls, played specific gender roles in the familial structure. The private sphere of the home was ideologically, to them, a space in which women were to do domestic work. Reporting on what it called “an experience not to be forgotten,” a *Los Angeles Times* article titled “New Energy, More Work” described how Mexican mothers came to the College Settlement on Tuesdays, children in tow, where they would take domesticity classes that would instruct them on how to properly make use of their home space. The children – girls and boys alike – would take sewing classes, although for the boys, “sewing was disguised as a manly occupation” through the use of soldier dolls. More than sewing, “the little housekeepers are taught to cook and to wash, and to serve a meal. Then they play family at the table, one is father and another is mother, and then there are the children.”<sup>264</sup> In this idealized setting away from their homes, Mexican children participated in gender role-playing that demonstrated the ideal home configuration reformers hoped they would recreate in their actual homes.

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<sup>263</sup> Elizabeth Fuller, “The Mexican Housing Problem in Los Angeles,” *Studies in Sociology, Published by the Southern California Sociological Society, University of Southern California* 5, no. 1 (November 1920): 2.

<sup>264</sup> “New Energy, More Work.,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1906.

To that end, reformers often supposed that Mexican women were at worst willful, and at best passive, participants in their own hardships inside the home. “Why women invite pain and court suffering is one of the unsolvable problems,” wrote Mathews.<sup>265</sup> Supporting this contention, the women characters in Mathews’ anthology were generally bound by what Mathews interpreted as traditional gender norms that had been transplanted from a perpetually old Mexico to the new, modern space of Los Angeles. Mathews’ collective stories paint a picture of Sonoratown as dusty, dirty remnant of Mexican rule maintained by continual Mexican migration in contrast to the nearby downtown municipal buildings that epitomized U.S. modernity, and even the success of U.S. conquest at the turn of the twentieth century. In her estimation, Mexican homes were spaces in which Mexican men were down-on-their-luck industrial workers, while women, especially young women, were innocent subjects to their economic instability which often manifested in abusive relationships.<sup>266</sup> With this logic, Mexican women characters became the perpetuators of poor housing conditions by maintaining supposedly traditional “Mexican” gender relationships inside their homes. These ideas linked race and class with gender not only in the home space, but also for the creation and recreation of neighborhood space. Mathews then contrasted the “Mexican” space—industrial zone, Sonoratown and the house courts—with the city’s newly created Anglo “American” center of political power symbolized in the new court house just blocks to the south of the plaza area.

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<sup>265</sup> Amanda Mathews, “The Potter’s Wheel,” in *The Hieroglyphics of Love: Stories of Sonoratown and Old Mexico* (Los Angeles: College Settlement of Los Angeles, 1906), 22.

<sup>266</sup> Mathews, *The Hieroglyphics of Love*.

In their descriptions of Chinese and Mexican households along with the kinds of programs they offered, reformers revealed as much about their understandings of how home spaces *should* be configured and used, as they did about how it should *not* be. “The best way for any family to live is alone in a house situated on a lot where there are no other houses,”<sup>267</sup> claimed Alice Bessie Culp, another worker at the College Settlement house in 1921. Like many reformers and politicians, she was concerned with overcrowding in the city’s core neighborhoods—especially the Mexican quarters. She cited common practices among Mexicans of sharing the limited housing space they could afford with extended family, relatives and friends. As another settlement worker noted, “Mexican hospitality invites cousins, uncles, and aunts to room and board with the fortunate possessor of a shelter.”<sup>268</sup> These were, to them, unacceptable ways of making households because she believed, “the Mexican family should normally consist of the father, mother, and the children.”<sup>269</sup> Culp based these definitions of normalcy on white middle-class constructions of an ideal “American” home—two heterosexual parents and their children living in single-family houses with plenty of beds, one for each family member, “sufficient windows...approximately nine feet square” as well as an ample yard with flowers and shrubbery for children to play.<sup>270</sup> Without these, Mexican homes had no chance to be acceptable demonstrations of the city’s leap toward modernization.

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<sup>267</sup> Alice Bessie Culp, “A Case Study of the Living Conditions of Thirty-five Mexican Families of Los Angeles with Special Reference to Mexican Children” (Master’s thesis, University of Southern California, 1921), 29.

<sup>268</sup> Fuller, “The Mexican Housing Problem in Los Angeles,” 2.

<sup>269</sup> Culp, “A Case Study of the Living Conditions of Thirty-five Mexican Families,” 6.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-11.

Likewise, Nora Sterry expressed a similar spatial imaginary about the Chinese quarter which maintained ideologies of racial exclusion, even as she insisted Chinese residents were here to stay. As principal of the Macy Street School, she was also concerned with overcrowding in her district—a “general neighborhood condition” she wrote. Where Culp championed normalcy, Sterry attributed “indecent” to the social conditions that led many Chinese families to take in boarders, creating non-nuclear-family living situations. “The abnormally high rents and the low and unsteady incomes combine to prevent the majority of families from having sufficient space for any privacy or decency of living. Few houses shelter but one family.”<sup>271</sup> Combining work and home in literally the same rooms by taking in boarders prevented the level of privacy that Sterry and other reformers presumed was necessary for decent living. Beyond the family structure, Sterry’s interpretation of the spatial configuration of Chinese homes and Chinatown in general was built upon the ideology that Chinese people, cultures, and places were inherently foreign and their everyday lives built environment derivative of anti-modern cultural practices. “The streets of Chinatown were laid out and the houses were constructed by the Chinese according to their old world ideas,” she wrote. “Directed by superstition and ignorance, the buildings are models of all that is undesirable.”<sup>272</sup> Although Sterry maintained that Chinese neighborhoods were “undesirable” due to the design of their buildings and their household geography, which she presumed they brought from China—a place not as modern as the United States in her estimation—she also suggested that Americans

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<sup>271</sup> Nora Sterry, “Social Attitudes of Chinese Immigrants,” *Journal of Applied Sociology* (August 1923): 45.

<sup>272</sup> Sterry, “Housing Conditions,” 72-73.

should not think of Chinese as “a people permanently alien.” “With few exceptions,” she wrote, “they are settled residents of Los Angeles with a life time here.”<sup>273</sup> Sterry’s spatial imaginary revealed her notions about the link between modernity, race and space in the 1920s; Chinese living spaces were “undesirable” products of the modernization of Los Angeles the city and the U.S. nation.

Like Bessie Culp who wrote, “the greatest evil in the housing conditions of the Mexican child is the crowding of many persons into one small house,”<sup>274</sup> Elizabeth Fuller saw moral transformations of high-density housing configurations as essential to the welfare of youth. Due to privacy, warmth and light, she posited, young people were often “forced to go elsewhere for recreational activity.” Fuller wrote: “All experts on housing conditions agree that a house is overcrowded when there are more than two persons to each room and when there does not exist a space ten feet square and eight feet high for each individual.”<sup>275</sup> Reformers saw boys in particular as victims – and soon to be threats – to the morality of high-density households because “the monotony and dinginess of his shelter decrease the[ir] health, cheerfulness, and optimism,” encouraging them to spend more time on the street rather than contributing to a “proper” household.<sup>276</sup> According to Fuller’s study, “Manuel,” one of the boys she interviewed, expressed frustration at the conditions of his home life: “I might just as well be a bum and chase the streets, as be in the home I have.” Like Jacob Riis, Los Angeles reformers associated “overcrowding” with both poor sanitation and immorality, and they believed the city had a responsibility to change these homes “more conducive

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>274</sup> Culp, “A Case Study of the Living Conditions of Thirty-five Mexican Families,” 6.Ibid., 6.

<sup>275</sup> Fuller, “The Mexican Housing Problem in Los Angeles,” 4.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 7.

to...moral reformation.”<sup>277</sup> Thus, she racialized Mexican housing as a product of material conditions at the same time that she pathologized Mexicans as immoral, but able to be assimilated. “If when they [Manuel’s family] came to the city ten years ago, the city had offered them a well-built home, charging them what they could afford, Manuel would today be more ambitious.”<sup>278</sup> Like her fellow progressives, Fuller believed that the state and city had a responsibility to attend to the housing concerns of its residents. However, she equated this responsibility as not only a moral one, but one that would prevent the poor physical housing structures as well as the morality of the Mexican population. Still, despite these racial biases and contradictions, progressives’ criticism of industrialization also recognized, at least in part, the social construction of plaza area housing.

Taking the house court as an artifact of working-class history, how might we differently interpret the house courts? In the following sections I show that reformers’ description of the everyday practices and arrangements of house court residents might do more to reveal their own anxieties than describe the realities of house court life. Reformers’ writings reveal the contradictions of their nostalgia for a past and lost Mexican life, their desire for Los Angeles to be incorporated into the modern nation, and the racism underlying their frustration with the house court residents. In fact, these everyday practices and arrangements can be seen as alternate ways of being and living that were products of and resistance against conquest, rapid industrialization, and manifest domesticity. As we shall see, reformers reported yet failed to see that one space served multiple purposes. While the house courts were portrayed by them as

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

spaces that seemed to lead inevitably to domestic violence, idleness, prostitution, primitive living, and too many children, these very same spaces could also be seen as places of communal gathering and building, small farming, and protection from racist violence.

### **The Worlds of the House Courts and Lodging Houses**

Betty Wong Lem returned home from grammar school one day to find that her father had passed away in their home on North Alameda Street in Chinatown, leaving behind her mother and thirteen siblings. Around 1920, Wong Lem remembered that their home and their family's relationship to the Chinatown community was one her parents had built together. "It was a nice little house," she recalled, with a "little yard in the back...surrounded by a fence all around" where her mother planted a vegetable garden and some fruit trees. Attached to their home, was the herbal medicine shop that her mother operated after her father died. In addition to the store that mostly catered to a white clientele, her father had started "the first Chinese School in Chinatown" located on Los Angeles Street immediately behind their house and a community bathhouse, three doors down that, according to Wong Lem's recollection, was used by "just Chinese."

In the aftermath of her father's death, Wong Lem remembered how her home became a gathering place for her family's community. During the mourning period, her mother taught the children how to play "Chinese dominos" [mahjong?] and they "stayed up all night." Things had changed in their household and Wong Lem's recollection focused on how her mother made their home. "With no father around, she just living

the life of variety I guess, just having a good time showing her children how to play dominos, you know. Cause she have all the say then, see?" Young people and older women from the neighborhood came to their house to cook together and play "Chinese dominos." "My mother, she a lovable lady," recalled Wong Lem as she recounted their household activity. In the spatial imaginary of Chinese residents, this was one familial home that served multiple purposes: work, business, death and mourning, childbirth and child rearing, play, and gardening. Due to their herbal medicine shop, Wong Lem's home was, perhaps, more economically well-off than most in Chinatown, yet it was still subject to some of the housing concerns reformers spoke of: Theirs was quite a large family with many children living in a small space. After their father passed, it became a single-mother household. Only a fence separated their backyard from the railroad tracks where Wong Lem remembered playing ball as a child.<sup>279</sup> Wong Lem's recollections in her oral history interview suggest that residents imagined their living spaces, their neighborhood spaces and home spaces, in ways that reformers did not or even could not imagine—as communities, rather than as nuclear families.

Emory Bogardus, however, wrote that the style of architecture of the house courts was a "modification of a type of Spanish architecture" that had been common in the city's Mexican neighborhoods for decades. Additionally, as migration to the area increased, this was the architectural design was the basis for the building of many subsequent house court structures. "In order to maintain cheap rents in spite of rise in land values the custom became common of building several cheap houses after the house-court pattern upon the same lot. It became customary also to lease land to the

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<sup>279</sup> Betty Wong Lem, interview by Jean Wong, Oral History, August 5, 1979, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.



Mexicans and others upon which they were free to build whatever dwellings they chose.” Within these dwellings, wrote Bogardus, “developed the worst form of housing conditions.”<sup>280</sup> Likewise the Los Angeles Housing Commission—which included among its membership many sociologists and settlements workers—reported in 1910 that the house courts were “the lowest form” of the housing “problem.” In fact, the Commission described house courts as “the dry goods box shack and the gunny-sack, tin-can tent house, often set on the bare ground, and so primitive in type that the original cave dwellers possessed at least a more water-tight roof and greater protection from heat and cold, winter floods and flies.”<sup>281</sup> Still, the Commission reported that landlords generally tended to the houses, with the exception of “a court on Buena Vista Street and those of Chinatown.”<sup>282</sup> Although other ethnic groups also made homes in house courts, this category of housing was mostly identified as a problem of Chinese and Mexican neighborhoods.

In the 1910s there were a number of male lodging houses located nearby the plaza—an area that one scholar in 1914 called “the cheap lodging houses of the Plaza district.”<sup>283</sup> Although some lodging houses were home to working men of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds, census records show that the majority was segregated by race. Some of the houses on North Main Street mostly housed white men of different European ethnicities. There was quite a number of male lodging houses on North Main Street in 1910, housing primarily white ethnic men who worked in various occupations.

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<sup>280</sup> Bogardus, “The House-Court Problem,” 392.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Los Angeles Housing Commission, *Report of the Los Angeles Housing Commission, 1910*, 6.

<sup>283</sup> William Wilson McEuen, “A Survey of the Mexicans in Los Angeles” (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1914), 42.

In contrast, New High Street—a few blocks to the west of North Main—was the location of lodging houses that catered to primarily Mexican men residents. Sociologist William McEuen, who spent some time doing research and observation in near the Plaza, found that a number of Mexican male lodging houses were located along North Main Street, which ran adjacent to the Plaza. While his study focused primarily on Mexicans, he conducted the majority of his research close to the plaza. Had he expanded his study geographically a bit to the west further into Sonoratown from the Plaza, he would have found that large numbers of Mexican men lodged on New High Street in 1910.<sup>284</sup> José María Contreras, a railroad laborer who lived in a male lodging house on New High Street in Sonoratown in 1910, was one of them. In this house, he lived with his two younger brothers, Antonio and Marces Contreras, and nine other male lodgers between the ages of 20 and 46, all of whom worked for the railroad and all had migrated to the United States from México after 1900.<sup>285</sup>

At their most basic, a lodger might have rented a bed in a room with a number of other beds. A “typical” lodging house presented poor and crowded conditions for Mexican men who stayed there.<sup>286</sup> Advertisements for Mexican lodging listed in both English and Spanish the price, number of linens, and furniture included. Most of these houses were large. In some cases, small rooms were created with the erection of partitions; these rooms often included a bed, a nightstand and a stool. In other situations, one large room accommodated up to thirty-two beds. Lodgers could rent a

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<sup>284</sup> The 1910 census data illustrates that Mexican male lodging houses were extremely common on New High Street and other streets west of North Main. *U.S. Manuscript Census 1910*.

<sup>285</sup> The U.S. Census of 1910 lists the following residents of the household headed by José María Contreras: Antonio Contreras, Marces Contreras, Juan Parras, Manuel Blanco, Blas Ramírez, Manuel Ortega, Rodrigo García, Roberto García, José Fierro, Francisco Torres and Ramón Torres. *U.S. Manuscript Census 1910*.

<sup>286</sup> McEuen, “A Survey of the Mexicans in Los Angeles,” 42.

room for twenty cents or just a bed for ten to fifteen cents. If the house included a toilet and sinks, they were shared among the residents.<sup>287</sup> Both Chinese and Mexican lodging houses that housed large numbers of men were prevalent in the Plaza area. What is striking about these lodging houses is how they blur the boundaries of home and work, as well as those of nation and modernity—both for men, and for the women who often ran them. They also created a sense that public space in the area was particularly male. The men who rented beds in these buildings were mostly workers who had recently migrated from China or Mexico. These spaces were used for sleeping—which suggests that these lodgers spent a lot of time in other parts of the city during work time or leisure time. Chinese working men often depended on boarding houses for affordable residence. In 1924, Lieutenant R. E. Steckel, an LA policeman who worked in Chinatown recalled a man who had a small space behind his store that he rented out to a number of men. “Old Jim down here has a little store with a sort of balcony at the back where he has beds which he rents to other Chinamen and makes his living that way.”<sup>288</sup> Living situations, in which several Chinese men lived in shared and cramped quarters, were common.

The Los Angeles Housing Commission (L.A.H.C.) was formed in 1906 and was sponsored by the joint efforts of the Municipal League and the College Settlement, and was “intended to handle the dwellings of the poor in whatever form they might appear.”<sup>289</sup> The city council passed the “House Court Ordinance” in 1907, outlined

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<sup>287</sup> Errol P. Janes, “The Shack Problem in Los Angeles.” Investigation made for the Department of Economics and Sociology of the University of Southern California, 1913-1914, quoted in *Ibid*.

<sup>288</sup> Catherine Holt, “Information Obtained from Lieut. R. E. Stackel of Los Angeles Police Force, Vice Division, Chinatown Squad,” July 29, 1924, 2, *Major Documents*, 298:11, *Survey of Race Relations*, Hoover Institute, Stanford University.

<sup>289</sup> Los Angeles Housing Commission, *Report of the Los Angeles Housing Commission, 1910*, 4. The Los

codes aimed at preventing overcrowding and regulating drainage, ventilation, flooring, and toilets. The ordinance specified that building owners were responsible for tending to repairs and meeting these regulations.<sup>290</sup> Responding to these concerns over increasingly crowded tenement conditions, the L.A.H.C. took particular issue with the house courts surrounding the plaza, ordering several to be demolished within the first few years of its operation, forcing residents to find other housing and contributing to the eastward expansion of the plaza area neighborhoods. In 1910, the L.A.H.C. reported that “the old courts which could not be remodeled or repaired have been either vacated or demolished” counting “seven vacated, twenty-one demolished, and twenty-eight abolished.”<sup>291</sup> While this accounted for the displacement of residents of some fifty-two house courts, the Commission noted that it was only able to build eight new ones that met the state housing ordinances, thus failing to meet the needs of residents.<sup>292</sup>

In an effort to promote a “city without tenements, a city without a slum,” the L.A.H.C. advocated single-family dwellings, which it contrasted with the majority of Mexican and Chinese housing. To be sure, the Housing Commission did not advocate the complete eradication of the house court style of living. Rather, they pointed to beneficial qualities that the architectural design of house-court space afforded these residential communities. They sought to reconfigure house court designs in a way that

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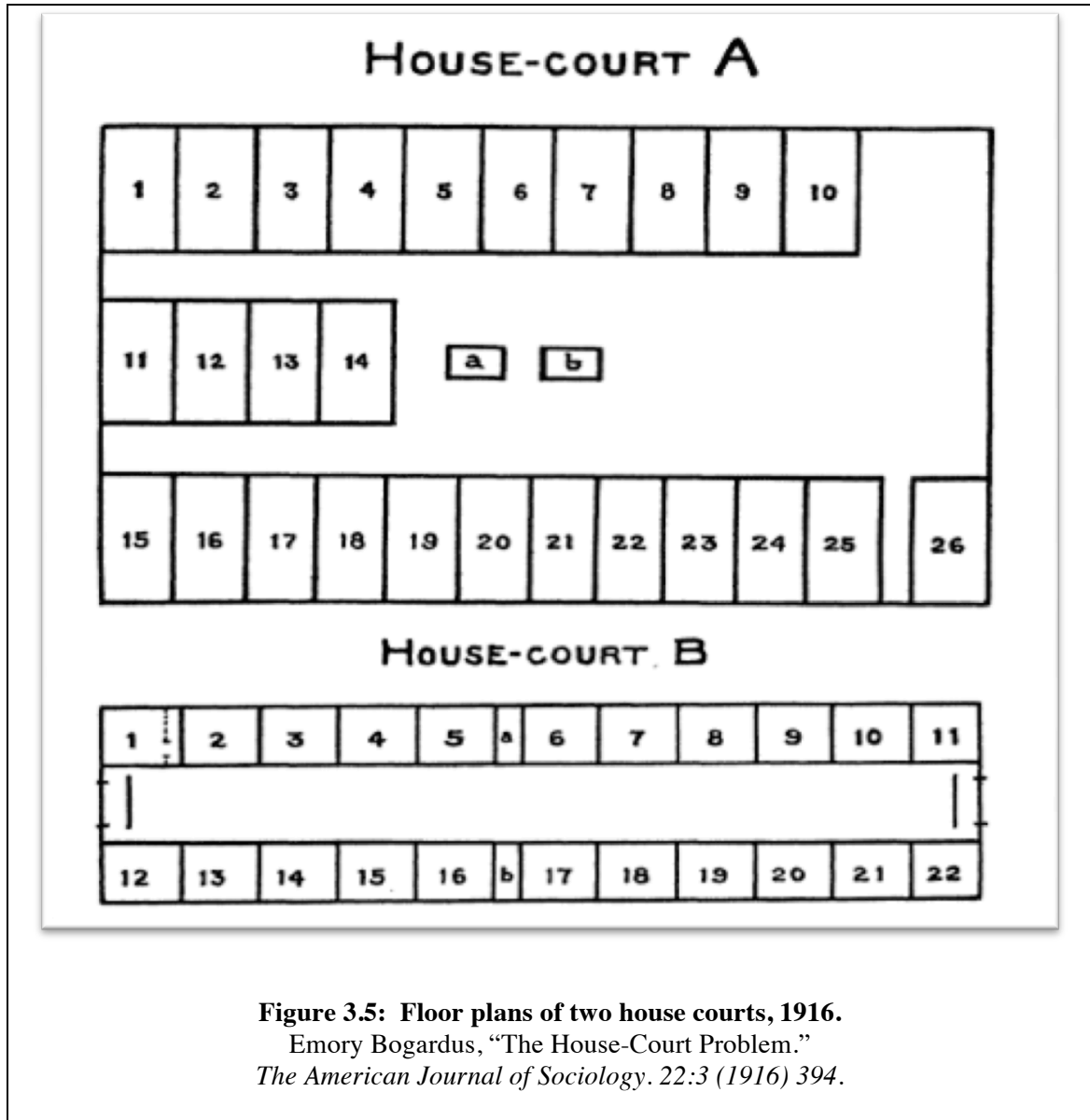
Angeles Municipal League was an organization independent of partisan loyalties, devoted to “civic betterment” in arenas such as city infrastructure and education system. Like settlement workers, the Municipal League was dedicated to reforming Los Angeles’ public services. C.D. Willard, “Los Angeles Municipal League in Notes on Municipal Government, Civic Organizations and Municipal Parties: A Symposium on Reform Organizations in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, New Orleans, Minneapolis, Kansas City, Mo., Denver, Los Angeles, Seattle.,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 27, no. 2 (1906): 155-156.

<sup>290</sup> Koslow, *Cultivating Health*, 64-65; Dana Cuff, “The Figure of the Neighbor: Los Angeles Past and Future,” *American Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2004): 563.

<sup>291</sup> Los Angeles Housing Commission, *Report of the Los Angeles Housing Commission, 1910*, 6.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

promoted “American” ideals of how the home spaces should be used, in the form of “industrial villages and garden villages.”<sup>293</sup> Thus, they oversaw the reconstruction of house courts, as a means of materially and ideologically rehabilitating the house court for community living among the city’s poor and working-class communities.



<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 14.

Many of the house courts consisted of many “shacks” or long buildings of multiple side-by-side units with a common courtyard space in the middle. One map, created by Bogardus, showed that communal toilets were located in the courtyard or in a row of units. (See Figure 3.5, a and b) Depending on the court, there may or may not have been separate toilets designated by sex. According to Bogardus’ description, “faucets and hoppers are located in the open court and the family washings, children's playground, toilets, woodyards, garbage cans, and so forth take up any vacant space that is to spare.”<sup>294</sup> He went on to say that the court yard space was usually unpaved, and many had drainage problems after rains; however, pavement, he argued, was often “more dangerous and injurious” for children who fell while playing.<sup>295</sup> While pavement was a material indication of infrastructural modernization in streets, he saw it as detrimental to modernization in the courtyard.

The L.A.H.C. reports and efforts were buttressed by the formation of a similar statewide approach to housing and Americanization with the formation of the California Commission of Immigration and Housing (C.C.I.H.) in 1913. While residents of the entire plaza area experienced overcrowded conditions, the L.A.H.C. reported in 1908 that the owners of the house court on Buena Vista and New High Streets, and of Chinatown buildings, were especially reticent in tending to structural improvements. Of this house court at Buena Vista and New High, the Commission expressed that it had, in fact, “shown the least improvements of any of the courts in town.”<sup>296</sup> Two years later, the 1910 *Annual Report* of the L.A.H.C. corroborated that this site continued to

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<sup>294</sup> Bogardus, “The House-Court Problem,” 393.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Los Angeles Housing Commission, *Report of the Housing Commission of the City of Los Angeles, February 20, 1906 to June 30, 1908*, 1908, 12.

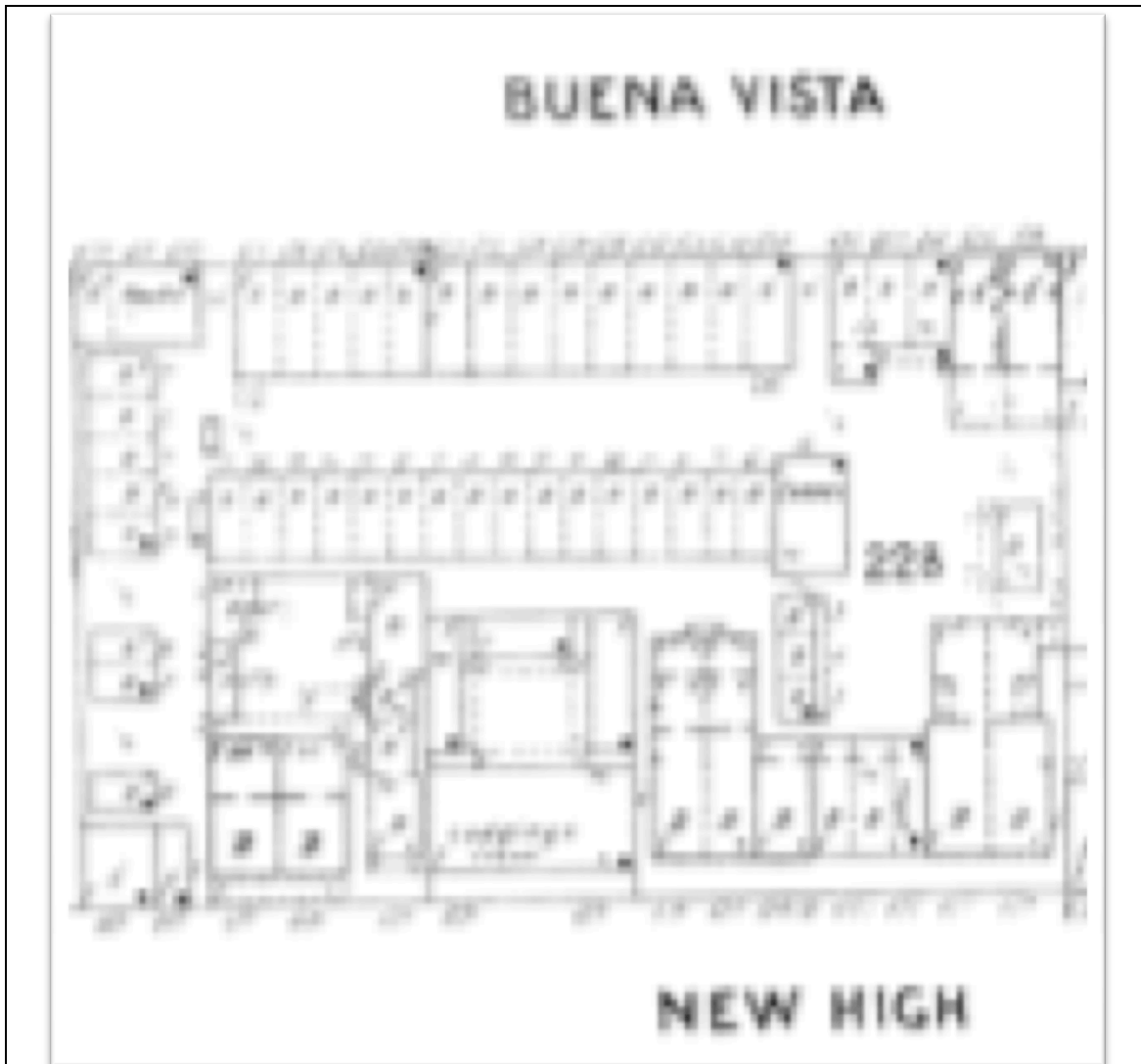
violate the ordinance, noting again that a house court on Buena Vista Street and those of Chinatown represented the worst of housing conditions in the plaza area, having landlords who had been resistant to making improvements in their buildings.<sup>297</sup> Although these reports identified both Chinatown and Sonoratown as sites of the “housing problem,” the C.C.I.H. argued in 1916 that “though housing and living conditions were bad throughout the [Macy Street] district, the real housing problem was found in that section occupied by the Chinese.” The report explained this as a problem of racial difference, suggesting that there was a “separate housing standard for the Chinese.”<sup>298</sup>

Such claims on the part of these municipal and state officials beg the question, what did the homes look like in Sonoratown and Chinatown? Who lived there and how might they have made use of their living spaces? Through a material analysis of housing spaces, using maps in relation to census data and the annual reports of the Commissions, we can see how dense the populations in these areas were, and the kinds of housing conditions they lived in. More than that such a spatial analysis of architecture and usage allows us to get at the spatial imaginaries of residents who did not leave much written record of their social worlds.

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<sup>297</sup> Los Angeles Housing Commission, *Report of the Los Angeles Housing Commission, 1910*, 6.

<sup>298</sup> Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, *Second Annual Report of the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, January 2, 1916*, 626.



**Figure 3.6: House Court on Buena Vista Street**

Sanborn map showing a large house court in 1906 located in Sonoratown to the northwest of the plaza, between Buena Vista Street (also known as Broadway) and New High Street, on the block between Sunset and Ord Streets.

Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California, 1906*. Volume 3, Sheet 338. New York: Sanborn Map Company. From the University of Michigan Map Library, ProQuest Digital Information and Learning.  
<http://sanborn.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu> (Accessed February 17, 2009).

The 1906 Sanborn map of a house court on Buena Vista that was quite enormous, spanning the entire block between Buena Vista Street (also known as



Broadway) and New High Street on the block between Sunset and Ord Streets. (Figure 3.6) Although it is not certain whether this house court on Buena Vista Street is the same one identified in the L.A.C.H. reports for having reticent landlord, the spatial layout provides a frame to understand the spatial imaginaries of house court residents. In the upper left corner, the small stand-alone building adjacent to the building labeled “Restrt [Restaurant]” was likely the location of a shared toilet and the house court’s water supply. The map accounts for fifty-seven dwellings (denoted by the letter “D”) and one lodging house (“Lodgings Cheap”) in this house court alone. In addition to the water supply, the presence of a chapel indicates a site of possible community-building in the central courtyard.

While the Sanborn map does not indicate the number of rooms in each dwelling, researchers noted that the majority of house court units had one or two bedrooms. In his 1912 study of Mexican housing, U.S.C. sociology student and housing inspector John Emmanuel Kienle investigated some 700 dwellings and found that 146 of them were single-room units and 422 were two-rooms, accounting for a total of approximately eighty percent of those dwellings he visited.<sup>299</sup> He noted the large number of male industrial workers among the residents in these one-room homes he investigated, which he explained was due to the large numbers of men who “live[d] as bachelors, having their families in Mexico or some other place.”<sup>300</sup> In these one- and two-room units, he counted 735 men, 507 women and 653 children. There were few three-room units, which Kienle suggested were occupied by families and “usually are of

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<sup>299</sup> John Emmanuel Kienle, “Housing Conditions among the Mexican Population of Los Angeles” (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1912), 9.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

a better class.”<sup>301</sup> The convenience to rail yards and other industries in the area indicate that this house court on Buena Vista might have housed a number of single male industrial workers.

Census data for 1910 corroborates that there was a large number of men, as well as some families, living in close quarters in this house court. The unit listed at the address of 624 Broadway (middle unit facing Buena Vista Street on the sanborn map), for example, shows that Catarino Morales, a laborer at the gas company, lived there with his wife Anita, two daughters Amelia and Teresita, and two sons Vicente and Pedro. All except the two youngest were born in Mexico. At this same address, the census lists seventeen male lodgers, all having migrated from Mexico within ten years. All seventeen men were laborers in varying industries including railroad work, street railway, and brick yards.<sup>302</sup> Although the census does not provide an accurate account of which individuals lived in which units, it is clear that the number of “solos”—men who migrated to Los Angeles alone for work—living in the house courts of Sonoratown was quite large.

This house court was home to not only Mexicans, but also to Italians. The 1910 census shows that at a unit located in the far right corner of the house court facing Buena Vista Street was home to two Italian families and three Mexican families, as well as several male lodgers.<sup>303</sup> Although only one unit was listed as having only male lodgers, almost all the families at this address took in one or two lodgers as well.

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1910).

<sup>303</sup> The census is difficult to read. The address listed was 63\_, with the last digit of the address having been blotted with ink. In comparison to the Sanborn map, the addresses numbered in the 630s were in the upper right corner of the house court facing Buena Vista Street. Ibid.

Mexican men living there worked as laborers in railroad, packing, and metal manufacture (foundry). Of the Italians, two men were listed as shopkeepers and fruit merchants, while the remaining seven worked in railroad, lumber, street railway and cement.<sup>304</sup> Looking at this small slice of the house court population, although not necessarily indicative of all of the house courts in Sonoratown, shows not only that Mexicans and Italians lived close to each other even in single house courts, but that only Italians were listed as merchants or shopkeepers, while Mexicans were only listed as laborers. Additionally, as I will discuss later, taking in lodgers was often a way to supplement the household economy.

The court yard space was not visible from the street; rather, there were narrow passageways through which residents entered the house court area. Stoddart suggested that these “narrow alleyway[s] running back between two houses” were the entry points for residents into the homes whose doors faced the courtyard. Such a set-up, she posited, hid a world that most Anglos could not see from the main street.<sup>305</sup> Often this common space was only eight to ten feet, located between rows of homes. Stoddart described this by saying, “You may walk in the middle of a ‘street’ and touch two rows of houses facing each other, or follow a winding path between habitations, tripping over tubs and clothespoles and outdoor fire-places, over dogs and cats and children at play and the tinier tots just creeping about.”<sup>306</sup> Amanda Matthews, another settlement worker, described the “common” court as a “row of one-room tenements, a court swarming with bronze infants rolling in the sun and permeated by the odor of parched

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Stoddart, “The Courts of Sonoratown,” 296. Stoddart, “The Courts of Sonoratown,” 296.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid. Ibid.

corn and the soft spat, spat of tortillas between the women's hands."<sup>307</sup> Social workers understood the house court spaces as both a space in which motherhood was racialized—where Mexican women, in particular, did the work of making the household.



**Figure 3.7: Adobe House Court in Sonoratown**

Children standing on the street in front of a house-court style adobe building, located on San Fernando, north of Ord Street. This particular house court had doors that opened onto the street. The children look posed, while a woman stands in an open doorway behind them. Note that from this street view, it is not possible to see the court yard area behind.

“Adobe in Sonora Town,” Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, n.d.

Despite reformers' critiques of them, common spaces like the courtyard created opportunities for shared work, collective childcare, child play and communal living. In

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<sup>307</sup> Mathews, “The Hieroglyphics of Love,” 14. Amanda Mathews, “The Hieroglyphics of Love,” in *The Hieroglyphics of Love: Stories of Sonoratown and Old Mexico* (Los Angeles: The Artemisia Bindery, 1906), 14.

fact, Mexican women often took in laundry, sewing and boarders to help support their families. Their work washing and hanging laundry most often took place in the courtyard spaces. Stoddart went on to observe that in these house courts, “the hungry family is shared with, that the sick stranger is cared for and housed, and that one big family occupying two tiny rooms not infrequently offers hospitality to another big family that cannot pay its rent-money.”<sup>308</sup> Mexican girls did a great deal of work after school caring for younger children, cleaning and preparing meals. Mary, a Junior High School student mentioned in a survey given by her vice-principal, that when she was not at school, her time was spent doing the work of caring for her family. “When I go out of school I go straight home and I dont [sic] fool around in the street. I help my mother to get the supper and when they all finish eat[ing] I clear the table. I wash the dish and put the dish away. When I come to school I leave the clothes iron and some[times] I scrub the floor and some[times] I go to play. After that I go to sleep in the bed. That the end of the story.”<sup>309</sup> The courtyard space is significant because women and girls especially spent time together there.

Because the house court’s water supply was there, the courtyard also served as a space for laundry, washing, gardening and keeping animals.<sup>310</sup> Culp maintained that the courts were “more of an evil than a benefit to the neighborhood,” but she also admitted that the spatial configuration allowed possibilities of community-building when she

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<sup>308</sup> Stoddart, “The Courts of Sonoratown,” 296. Stoddart, “The Courts of Sonoratown,” 296.

<sup>309</sup> Florence Gordon Mason, “A Case Study of Thirty Adolescent Mexican Girls and Their Social Conflicts and Adjustments within the School” (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1929), 14. Florence Gordon Mason, “A Case Study of Thirty Adolescent Mexican Girls and Their Social Conflicts and Adjustments within the School” (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1929), 14.

<sup>310</sup> Wild, *Street Meeting*, 43. Wild, *Street Meeting*, 43.

wrote, “it is true that a court promotes friendliness.”<sup>311</sup> Bogardus offered a similar assessment of the court yard space, describing it as having “unlimited possibilities for wholesome social contact and group development.”<sup>312</sup> While reformers might have argued that the house courts made for unacceptable living spaces, the combination of work and home fashioned circumstances in which the making of community was central to the spatial imaginaries of Mexican women and girls.

In contrast to house courts where Mexicans and Italians lived, Chinatown was not only much more racially segregated, but also had different architectural and spatial arrangements. Chinatown housing included a mixture of two-story brick buildings and wooden additions or shacks attached, mostly “tenements and lodging houses.” The 1916 *Annual Report* of the C.C.I.H. mapped the buildings of the Chinatown block that faced the plaza from the east. (Figure 3.8) It noted that the majority of the building structures were brick, with wooden additions lining the street sides of the buildings. Another map of a Chinatown block showed many more wooden additions in the back of brick buildings, which the C.C.I.H. noted were “flimsy” and “unsafe” porches that often served as kitchens with “open Chinese brick stoves.” Laundry and make-shift gardens for vegetables lined these porches and alley spaces. Unlike the house-court style units that opened into court yards or onto the street, the entrances to homes in Chinatown often opened only to fire escapes in the back of the buildings. The C.C.I.H. reported that “only 76 of the 252 apartments opened directly onto the street.”<sup>313</sup> Thus, the alleys

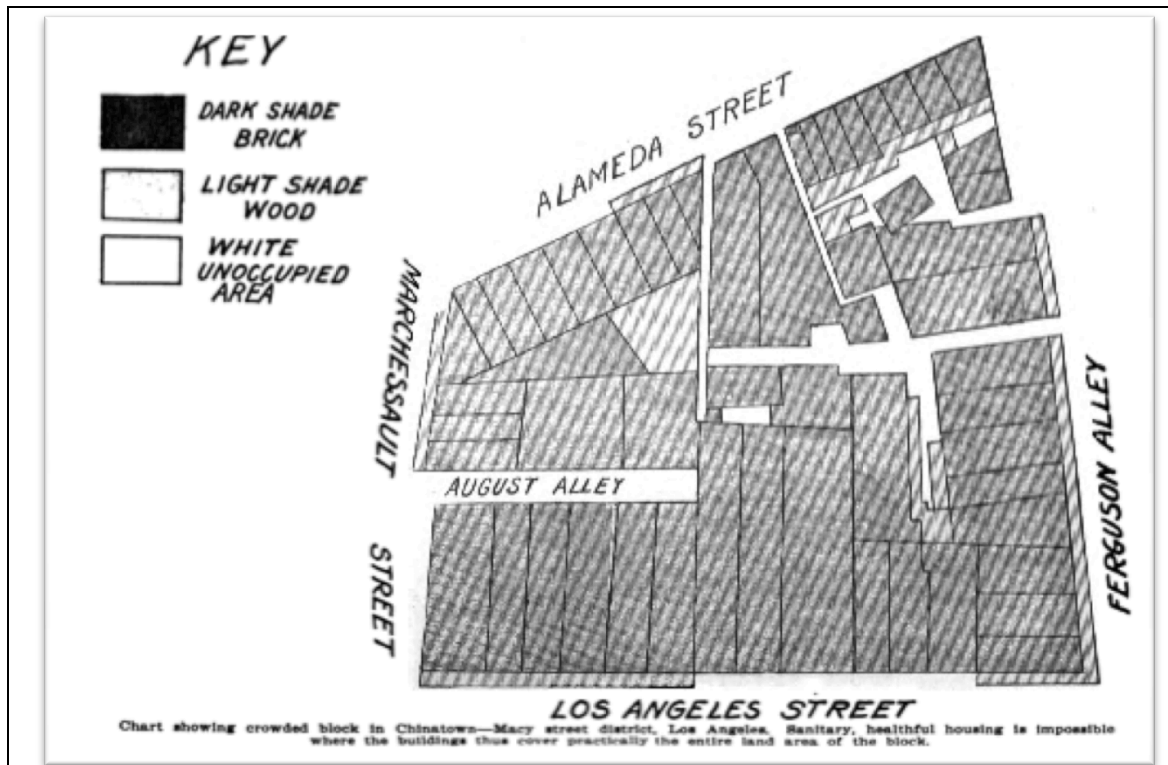
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<sup>311</sup> Culp, “A Case Study of the Living Conditions of Thirty-five Mexican Families,” 29. Culp, “A Case Study of the the Living Conditions of Thirty-five Mexican Families,” 29.

<sup>312</sup> Bogardus, “The House-Court Problem,” 399. Bogardus, “The House-Court Problem,” 399.

<sup>313</sup> Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, *Second Annual Report of the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, January 2, 1916*, 262.

created in between buildings became shared space for coming and going. Also, with the location of kitchens and stoves on the back porches facing the alleys, suggests that meal preparation and perhaps eating, as well as laundry, took place there, possibly encouraging community formation through everyday neighborhood interaction.



**Figure 3.8: Map of Chinatown, 1916**

Map produced by the Commission of Immigration and Housing, showing a block in Chinatown and detailing the tight space in which Chinatown buildings were laid out. From this block, the plaza was located across Los Angeles Street.

The caption reads: “Chart showing crowded block in Chinatown—Macy street district, Los Angeles. Sanitary, healthful housing is impossible where the buildings thus cover practically the entire land are of the block.”

Commission of Immigration and Housing of California. *Second Annual Report of the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, January 2, 1916*. California State Printing Office, 1916, 246.

Chinatown buildings served multiple purposes, for both housing and storefronts. Many buildings had shops, restaurants or other businesses that faced the street, while the dwellings were located in the back. The 1906 Sanborn map of the same block shows that almost all the buildings in Chinatown had storefronts that faced the streets. (Figure 3.8) It appears that additions to buildings might have been built starting from the street level and moving toward the interior of the block. As the C.C.I.H. map illustrates, small alleyways provided access to the main streets from the fire escapes. Like the Sanborn map of the Buena Vista Street house court, this map of the Chinatown block also shows the location of a “Joss House” or temple for residents to worship, which was concealed from the main streets. Linking race and space, the C.C.I.H. attributed this spatial arrangement to a supposed “Chinese custom,” rather than to a way of making use of limited space in the midst of racialized segregation.<sup>314</sup> The city and state officials, however, paid little attention to the ways in which Chinese residents interacted with each other within these spatial arrangements. Where the L.A.H.C. recognized some merits to the house court style architecture for community space, no such possibilities were entertained for Chinese.

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid.





**Figure 3.8: Map of Chinatown, 1906**

Sanborn map showing the layout of buildings on the Chinatown block bounded by Los Angeles Street, Ferguson Alley, Alameda and Marchessault Street. (Same block as Figure 6.7.) The map illustrates that buildings on the perimeter of this block were storefronts, indicated by the letter "S." Although this map lists very few dwellings, most of these buildings had housing located above and behind the storefronts. Note also the narrow alleyways between buildings.

Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California, 1906*. Volume 3, Sheet 301. New York: Sanborn Map Company. From the University of Michigan Map Library, ProQuest Digital Information and Learning.

<http://sanborn.umi.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu> (Accessed February 17, 2009).

Although it difficult to discern with accuracy the number of residents in relation to the locations on the maps, the census data for 1910 shows evidence of the large

numbers of Chinese male lodgers in Chinatown who, like the male lodgers of the house courts, lived in crowded rooms. The census data for 1910 shows that in the middle of the block along August Alley, there was housing for a number of Chinese male lodgers. For example, according to the census Young Chew, Young Chee, Oee Na and Hoe Ming shared a room or a small apartment on there. All were Chinese men between the ages of thirty-two and fifty-seven. Young Chew was a grocery merchant, while Young Chee was a cutter who worked in clothing industry. Oee Na and Hoe Ming, like their neighbor, Lum Jam, worked as agricultural laborers. Many more male lodgers found homes in the blocks farther to the east of Alameda.<sup>315</sup> The C.C.I.H. *Annual Report* described the “two to three hundred Chinamen” living around the corrals and stables where they kept the vegetable wagons, as “a peculiar problem to the city.” The Chinese produce wagons were responsible for a great deal of the city’s fruit and vegetable market. the C.C.I.H. reported that the produce was contaminated by the “filth and disorder” of the Chinese living quarters that were close to the stables, and thus threatened to spread the contamination to the entire city, especially the Anglos.<sup>316</sup>

Although the residents of Chinatown were overwhelmingly adult men, there were some families and children by the 1910s. (Figure 3.9) The C.C.I.H. counted 116 children living in Chinatown.<sup>317</sup> Along Alameda in the middle of the block between East Marchessault and Ferguson Alley (Figure 3.8), there were three families listed in the census as living within the single building next to a restaurant, along with a few

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<sup>315</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*.

<sup>316</sup> Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, *Second Annual Report of the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, January 2, 1916*, 264. For more discussion about the Chinese grocer wagons and their relationship to public health, particularly the idea that they carried and spread diseases, see Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?*, 15-45.

<sup>317</sup> Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, *Second Annual Report of the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, January 2, 1916*, 464.

lodgers and business partners. For instance, Ng Gow lived at 757 North Alameda with his wife Ng Chin Shee, daughter and four sons, all under the age of ten. Ng was an herbal medicine doctor and lived also with his business partners, Ng Henry Gung and Ng Henry Toi, who were listed as “druggists.” It is likely that the three of them ran an herbal medicine store that faced the street, with the help of Chin Shee and the children.<sup>318</sup> Without a courtyard space, as the house courts had, it is likely that Chinese had other places for interaction. Aside from gambling dens, where mostly men spent time, herbal medicine stores may have been one place where a more mixed group might have gathered. The combination of house space and business and work space complicates the role of the home in the city’s broader economy, suggesting that not only Chinese men, but also women and children contributed to the work of both household economy and city economy.

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<sup>318</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*.



**Figure 3.10: Children playing behind Chinatown house courts.**

This photo shows children playing in Chinatown at the corner of North Alameda and Aliso Streets. Although the photographer is unknown, the photo was titled “Rear of Chinatown,” suggesting that this area was possibly in the enclosed alley area that was concealed from street view. Architecturally, these buildings resemble the adobe house courts, but they are made of brick, as most buildings in Chinatown were.

“Rear of Chinatown,” Photo, n.d *Photographic documentation of pneumonic plague outbreak sites and rats in Los Angeles*, BANC PIC 1988.052--PIC, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

<http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf0c60078m/?layout=metadata&brand=oac> (Accessed June 2, 2008.)

Chinese homes, like the house courts, had common spaces where residents shared everyday activities. A great number of families took in lodgers—men and boys who often shared common spaces with family members. As a teenager, Tyrus Wong lived with his father in all male living quarters in Chinatown. Although they had a small room to themselves, he remembered that his building also housed a number of men who worked in farming. According to his description, there were often five or six

men living in one large room, and other men often slept in the hallway.<sup>319</sup> The kitchen sometimes served both as a place for meals and a sleeping room for boarders. Sterry described a “typical” lodging house, which had “thirty-two rooms on one side and thirty-four on the other, alternate store and living rooms; upstairs all the rooms are occupied by lodgers.”<sup>320</sup>

In these boarding situations, women and girls did a great deal of the work to maintain the household. Ying Wong Kwan recalled that when she was a young girl, her family took in and cooked for lodgers who worked in her family’s laundry business. She emphasized that the spatial construction of their home was proper because there was privacy despite the large numbers of people living in small space. “We had proper living quarters there,” she said. “Divided. You know, with walls, partitions and doors.”<sup>321</sup> One resident remembered that his family shared their apartment with a number of single men who worked at their restaurant. “Apartment also consists of all the workers also from the restaurant. We always had a lot of people at the...apartment...I would say five or six, plus the family. Most of them [were] singles...They would get married. They left their wives in China.”<sup>322</sup> These childhood memories reflect the ways in which families configured their home spaces in order to serve multiple functions—living quarters, business, cooking, and child rearing. While reformers may have condemned using the home for both business and family, for

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<sup>319</sup> Tyrus Wong, interview by William Gow, October 6, 2007, Chinatown Remembered Community History Project, Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

<sup>320</sup> Sterry, “Housing Conditions,” 73.

<sup>321</sup> Ying Wong Kwan, interview by Jean Wong, May 16, 1979, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>322</sup> David Lee, interview by Suellen Cheng, December 5, 1979, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, UCLA Special Collections.

Chinese residents, it was a regular way making use of space in order to serve the household economy as well as provide communal living.

## **Conclusion**

As this chapter has shown, industrialization had a tremendous impact on the spatial configuration of the plaza area homes under U.S. rule. While scholars have well addressed the role of reformers and public health officials, for example, in the racialization of plaza area spaces, my analysis shifts the discussion to focus as well on the everyday lives of the working class communities themselves. Material and spatial analysis demonstrates the ways in which residents produced knowledge through their daily activities, their arrangement of living spaces, and their multiple uses of living spaces.

Reformers, researchers and housing authorities used the ideology of modernity to understand these living spaces, casting Mexican and Chinese modes of living in their homes as “traditional” and “foreign” in contrast to what they thought of as “modern” and “American.” Yet, the realities of modernity—industrialization, labor recruitment, segregation—contradicted this ideology. The house courts and Chinatown buildings were created in the context of Los Angeles’ industrialization and restrictive immigration policies at the geopolitical borders. As such, the spatialization of these homes—their changing architecture, populations, and everyday usage of these homes were, in fact, “modern” creations.

While reformers critiqued industrialization, and even capitalism at times, for producing the poor housing conditions of the plaza area, they also held fast to idea that

both Mexicans and Chinese housing conditions and lifestyles could be Americanized—although to an extent—through state sanctioned public services. As Stephanie Lewthwaite has shown, progressives used housing as a way to “define Mexicans as assimilable, yet racialized subjects.”<sup>323</sup> They cast Chinese, on the other hand, as less assimilable, even as they advocated for the goal of equal housing standards between whites and Chinese, arguing that “the Chinese should receive the same protection as the white man against unsanitary conditions.”<sup>324</sup> Within the next two decades, as the Mexican immigrant population drastically increased and fears waned of a great Chinese population increase due to Chinese Exclusion Acts, Mexicans became the new immigrant “threat” to the nation based both on numbers and on sanitary concerns.<sup>325</sup> As the remaining chapters will address, shifting and interrelated racializations, class dynamics and gender constructions transformed the ways in which children traversed the varyingly segregated landscape of the city in the 1910s-30s, as well as how city progressives wielded state and national power through the local policing of national borders in Los Angeles during the 1930s.

One direction in which I look forward to taking this research on housing is to expand the discussion of national borders, citizenship and industrialization amongst reformers toward a larger global context of global imperialism. While citizenship is certainly the language with which reformers discussed national belonging, modernity and race, the restriction of U.S. geopolitical borders involved a relationship between nation-states that shaped the experience of migration both across geopolitical border

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<sup>323</sup> Lewthwaite, *Race, Place, and Reform in Mexican Los Angeles*, 90.

<sup>324</sup> Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, *Second Annual Report of the Commission of Immigration and Housing of California, January 2, 1916*, 265.

<sup>325</sup> Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?*, 128-129.

lines, but also geocultural borders within urban space. The spatialization of race, class and gender with regard to housing occurred not only at the local level—homes, neighborhoods, streets—but also at the city, state, national and global levels, which I hope to explore more.



**Chapter Four**  
**(Re)imagining Geography:**  
**Youth and Mobility in the Early Twentieth Century**

When she was sixteen years old, Ying Wong Kwan traveled regularly from her family's home on Figueroa Street just outside Chinatown to downtown Los Angeles, where she worked as a "stock girl" at an upscale department store. Specializing in women's sportswear and catering to a white clientele, the New York-based department store specifically sought out Chinese girls to carry goods between the display room where white sales women helped with customers, and the stock room where merchandise was kept. "They wanted us, especially us oriental persons because we had to work [in] Chinese costume, the popular pants dress," recalled Ying.<sup>326</sup> This store required Ying and other Chinese young women workers to wear cheongsam [Chinese dresses], which they purchased with their wages from a store in Chinatown or from a Chinese tailor who custom-made them. In 1918, the store paid stock girls ten dollars each week for six eight-hour days of work. As the eldest child in the family, Ying also used her earnings to pay for lunch and transportation as well as school clothes and supplies for her younger brothers and sisters. "I didn't mind," she recalled, "thought it was part of my responsibilities." Through her work, Ying's social and spatial world

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<sup>326</sup> Because the next vignette is about Norbert, a young man whose last name was not documented in the archive, I refer to Ying Wong Kwan by her first name for purposes of continuity.

extended beyond home and school. For her, work was “another social get-together” as she formed social ties with the “many” Chinese girls who worked at the store.<sup>327</sup> Ying was like many Chinese young people whose work in the newly forming service industries of the city required them to travel farther from home during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Similarly, in the mid-1920s Norbert, a fourteen-year-old Mexican boy, also traveled daily from his family’s home in the Flats to the bustling business district of downtown Los Angeles, where he worked on the street corner of Seventh Street and Central Avenue selling newspapers. He lived with his mother and siblings in the Flats area on the “Eastside” of Los Angeles—to the south of Chinatown, alongside the railroad tracks and near the river. (See Figure 1) Like Ying, Norbert contributed his earnings to supporting his family. His father, who lived in Mexico, was not able to provide for them financially. In addition to his work as a newspaper boy, Norbert participated in various programs held at the All Nations Community House located at a few blocks from the corner where he sold newspapers, at Sixth Street and Gladys Avenue, where he was captain of the baseball team as well as a group leader. One of the program directors wrote that Norbert expressed frustration at the ways in which whites perceived Mexicans when he stated, “I all the time hear people speak about those dumb Mexicans. I don’t want to be a dumb Mexican.”<sup>328</sup> Ying’s and Norbert’s stories suggest that their mobility also allowed them a variety of social interactions, ranging from building friendships with other youth who frequented the same spaces, to being

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<sup>327</sup> Ying Wong Kwan, interview by Jean Wong, May 16, 1979, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>328</sup> “Norbert,” Boys Work, All Nations collection Box 1: Folder 4, University of Southern California Special Collections. Emphasis in original document.

exposed to racial ideologies that were conveyed by others and structured into the Los Angeles landscape.

In addition to confronting the geographical limits and social meanings of the city, Chinese and Mexican young people also negotiated familial and community expectations regarding work, sexuality and education. While modern innovations in transportation and the rise in commercial and retail spaces offered youth work opportunities, racial and cultural ideologies limited complete fluidity for Chinese and Mexican youth. As teenagers, Ying and Norbert traveled regularly across Los Angeles' urban terrain and navigated racialized geo-cultural boundaries for work, school, play and social functions. In the first decades of the twentieth century Chinese and Mexican youth increasingly found work in areas of the city farther from their homes and neighborhoods—experiences that required young people to imagine their relationships to urban space in different ways than their parents. While both Chinese and Mexican boys had been working outside the home and often lived and worked with adult men, the entry of girls and women into these public work environments was fostered by the city's increase in commercial industries.

Ying's and Norbert's experiences illuminate how the city's geo-racial landscape reflected the growth of Chinese and Mexican populations during the early twentieth century as Chinatown and Sonoratown expanded into other areas of Los Angeles. Both lived in Chinese and Mexican areas of the city that were farther from the centers of Chinatown and Sonoratown of the late nineteenth century. Like these centers the satellite neighborhoods were both produced by Los Angeles's industrial and commercial expansion, and cultivated by Chinese and Mexican populations who made

home there and often worked nearby. Chinese exclusion policies and the eruption of violence at the border during the Mexican Revolution, along with racial segregation and booming industries, ushered in the migration of more families, creating a distinct increase in the numbers of U.S.-born and U.S.-reared children. Thus the changing relationships between U.S. border, and Chinese and Mexican migrants had a profound impact on the formation of these newer neighborhoods and the ways in which young people experienced, challenged and understood the urban landscape.

This chapter draws on the writings of social workers, oral histories and sociological studies to gain a sense of what the daily lives of Chinese and Mexican young people might have been like during the first few decades of the twentieth century. While identity formation and racial formation are important to their stories, the ways in which Chinese and Mexican young people experienced, shaped and made meaning of the city's geography was largely based on how they negotiated both familial expectations and power structures. Chinese and Mexican youth daily confronted the realities of anti-Chinese exclusion policies, border solidification, deportation campaigns and anti-Chinese and anti-Mexican racism, all of which were spatial functions of domination and conquest that placed restrictions on Chinese and Mexican migration and settlement, with crucial consequences for the relationships between these young people and city space.

### **Greater Chinatown and Greater Sonoratown**

When he arrived in Los Angeles, Arthur Chung's father, Yick Hong Chung first settled in Chinatown because he wanted to live near other Chinese. There he met and

married Nellie Yee, a U.S.-born Chinese woman who came to Los Angeles from Ventura, and began to work in herbal medicine. After some time he moved to a two-story house on Seventh and Hill Street, across the street from Hamburger's Department Store, where he opened an herb shop called "Chinese Herb Company, Y. H. Chung, Manager." Arthur and his siblings all worked in the store, which was located on the first floor of the family home. Because Chung developed a reputation in Chinatown, he maintained his Chinese clientele, and the new location increasingly drew more whites.<sup>329</sup> Eddie Lee's family had a similar story. His father worked as a cook until he saved enough money to open a curio shop downtown. He moved the shop twice before settling on Hill Street in 1907, a few blocks down from where Arthur Chung lived, where he ran the curio shop on the first floor of their family home.<sup>330</sup> Eddie and Arthur were examples of many Chinese young people whose families had settled south of Chinatown near the downtown market district. More than that, his generation of Chinese youth represented the first large-scale population of U.S.-born Chinese children. Both Chinese and Mexican migration patterns in the early twentieth century were significantly different from those of the late nineteenth. The early twentieth century saw significant changes in the immigration of both Chinese and Mexican women and children in Los Angeles' Chinese and Mexican communities.

Populations of both Chinese and Mexican women and children in Los Angeles changed significantly during the first few decades of the twentieth century due to changes in the restriction of the U.S. border. Anti-Chinese immigration policies and

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<sup>329</sup> Arthur W. Chung, interview by Beverly Chan, October 1979, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, UCLA Special Collections.

<sup>330</sup> Eddie E. Lee, interview by Jean Wong, Oral History tape, January 20, 1979, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, UCLA Special Collections.

practices, along with the increased recruitment of Mexican workers for U.S. industries and the large numbers of Mexican migrants fleeing violence due to the Mexican Revolution, meant that both Chinese and Mexican communities experienced a great increase in the numbers of families and children living in the United States. While there had been Chinese children, especially boys, in the United States for decades, the start of the twentieth century saw a new increase in the population of Chinese children, including girls.

Los Angeles' first Chinese district was located within the city's industrial zone and grew alongside industries that were located near the L.A. River and the railroad tracks. Although Chinese had settled in a historically Mexican and Spanish-Mexican area since the 1860s, by the 1920s there were identifiable boundaries delineating a geographical area known as Chinatown, most notably the railroad tracks and rail lumber yards that ran along two sides of the district. Zoning and corruption contributed to the clustering of saloons, brothels and gambling dens in Chinatown and surrounding streets. Additionally, a second Chinese settlement grew farther south of Chinatown near the Produce Market area, at Ninth Street, east of San Pedro and west of Central Avenue. According to school enrollment records, as many Chinese children lived in Chinatown as in the Ninth Street district. Seeking to escape the poor conditions of Chinatown, these Chinese residents were often unable to purchase homes in white areas. However, one researcher noted that residents of both the Chinatown and Ninth Street neighborhoods lived in poor housing conditions. This second Chinese settlement was racially mixed as Chinese children there grew up alongside Blacks, Mexicans, Japanese, whites and others. Thus, in the early twentieth century containment due to city policy

and everyday practice created firmly established conditions of segregation in Chinatown as well as semi-segregated area at Ninth Street.<sup>331</sup> Despite the distance between the two neighborhoods, Chinese American youth often participated in the same social events.

The gender politics of Chinese Exclusion had a profound impact on the migration and experiences of Chinese women and children. Prior to 1882, the vast majority of Chinese migrants were men—laborers who were recruited to work in the booming industries of the West. After the passing of the Page Law in 1875 and the subsequent Chinese Exclusion Acts beginning in 1882, the general Chinese population in the United States saw a significant decline. Under exclusion, the majority of Chinese women entering the United States were wives of merchants or students—both categories that U.S. immigration legislation allowed legal entry. Although the general population of Chinese in the United States declined in this period, the numbers of women and children increased. Even so, the Chinese population of the United States continued to be mostly male. In 1920 the ratio of males to females was 18 to 1; whereas in 1900 men accounted for over 96% of the Chinese population and women only 3.7%.<sup>332</sup> In 1929, the Los Angeles School Census recorded 1,027 Chinese children under the age of eighteen living in the city.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Kit King Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles” (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1931), 16.

<sup>332</sup> United States, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920* (Washington, D. C.: Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, 1920). Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, “Chinese Women of Los Angeles, A Social Historical Survey,” in *Linking Our Lives: Chinese American Women of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, 1984); Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles,” 17. On immigration and the impact of Chinese Exclusion laws on Chinese women, see for example, Judy Yung, *Unbound Voices: A Documentary History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>333</sup> Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles,” 19.

During the period from 1900 to 1924 exclusion laws continued to be successful in barring Chinese migrants from crossing into U.S. borders, but the numbers of Chinese Americans born within U.S. borders increased. Before 1924, most Chinese women in Los Angeles were China-born and migrated to California as wives of U.S. citizens or merchants who fell within the special classes allowed legal immigration under the Chinese Exclusion Acts. The 1924 Immigration Act barred the passage of the wives of aliens who had become U.S. citizens, having the “most important impact” on Chinese communities. After 1924, Chinese women mostly entered the U.S. legally as daughters of U.S. citizens or as wives of merchants.<sup>334</sup> In local contexts like Los Angeles, the increased migration of wives and children meant that there were also parallel increases in the numbers of Chinese families and of U.S.-born children during the 1910s-30s, the majority of whom were of merchant-class status rather than laborers.<sup>335</sup>

As the boundaries of Los Angeles’ Sonoratown expanded, there was an increase in the numbers of Mexican children whose families settled farther from the plaza. After 1924 U.S. Immigration policies restricting European migration generated an increased demand for Mexican workers among U.S. industries. Thus, the expanding Mexican neighborhoods of Los Angeles were increasingly of laboring families who migrated from Mexico and other parts of the United States. However, the 1930s repatriation movement severely decreased the number of Mexicans migrating to Los Angeles and

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<sup>334</sup> The years from 1920 to 1924 saw the highest numbers of Chinese women legally entering the United States. After the 1924 Immigration Act, the number of legally admitted Chinese women to enter the United States dropped from 938 to 195 in 1925. Roderick Duncan McKenzie, *Oriental Exclusion: The Effect of American Immigration Laws, Regulations, and Judicial Decisions Upon the Chinese and Japanese on the American Pacific Coast* (New York: American Group, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1927), 34.

<sup>335</sup> On immigration and the impact of Chinese Exclusion laws on Chinese women, see for example, Yung, *Unbound Voices*; Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*.



other parts of the United States. While I will discuss repatriation more at length in a later chapter, it is significant to note here because of its impact on the numbers of the city's Mexican children, the neighborhoods in which they lived, and the racialization of the city's ever-increasing spatial segregation.

After 1900, the general population of Mexicans who migrated to the United States from Mexico increased tremendously to work in booming U.S. industries. In Los Angeles and other urban centers of California there was a significant increase during this period not only of Mexicans migrating from Mexico, but also from other parts of the United States. Companies such as the Southern Pacific Railroad utilized labor recruitment companies with agencies in El Paso that sent *enganchistas* to Mexico where they would speak of the high wages available for work in Los Angeles.<sup>336</sup> While in the late nineteenth century the city's industries were located in the river bed and in the heart of Sonoratown and Chinatown neighborhoods, the turn of the twentieth century saw the industrial zones expanding farther south along the river bed. As Los Angeles' industries began to expand farther from the area surrounding the plaza, so too did Mexican residential areas as the rapidly increasing Mexican population sought out housing near places of employment. As one historian has argued, during the first two decades of the twentieth century, work and settlement were inextricably linked in the formation of Mexican barrios.<sup>337</sup>

In addition to increased commerce and industrialization in Los Angeles and other parts of the United States, the violence and economic upheaval caused by the Mexican

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<sup>336</sup> Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 92.

<sup>337</sup> Pedro G. Castillo, "The Making of a Mexican Barrio: Los Angeles, 1890-1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1979), 27.

Revolution during the 1910s also contributed a great deal to the tremendous increase of Mexican migration. From 1910 to 1920, the Mexican origin population grew exponentially—an estimated 285%.<sup>338</sup> “The *Annual Reports* of the Commissioner General of Immigration gives as 330,000 the total number of Mexicans who entered the United States and were registered between 1910 and 1920. Figures from the Mexican government put the number at 450,000. It is possible that anywhere from 700,000 to 1,700,000 Mexicans actually crossed the border during this decade.”<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 57. For more on the role of the Mexican Revolution on the migration of Mexicans to the United States, see also George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>339</sup> Castillo, “The Making of a Mexican Barrio,” 62.

**Table 4.1: Populations of Chinese, Mexicans and Whites in Los Angeles<sup>340</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Chinese</b>	<b>Mexicans</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Total</b>
1860	16	2,069		4,385
1870	179	2,160		5,728
1880	604	2,166	10,379	11,183
1890	1,871	498	47,205	50,395
1900	2,111	817	98,082	102,479
1910	1,954	5,632	305,307	319,198
1920	2,062	21,598	546,864	576,673
1930	3,009	97,116	1,073,584	1,238,048
1940	4,736	36,840	1,406,430	1,504,277

<sup>340</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1930); United States, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*; United States, Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1870); United States, Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1880); United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1910); United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1900); United States, Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860); Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 7 (figures for Chinese and Whites from 1880-1940, and for Mexicans from 1890-1940); Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Los Angeles Barrio, 1850-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 35 (figures for 1860-1880); Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, "Chinese Women of Los Angeles," 2.

**Table 4.2: U.S.-born Chinese Population in the City of Los Angeles<sup>341</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
1914-1915	12	20	32
1915-1916	11	10	21
1916-1917	15	16	31
1917-1918	10	27	37
1918-1919	19	17	36
1919-1920	19	17	36
1920-1921	13	14	27
1921-1922	29	25	54
1922-1923	31	19	50
1923-1924	37	32	69
1924-1925	46	36	82
1925-1926	32	39	71
1926-1927	47	41	88
1927-1928	42	42	84
1928-1929	41	33	74

### **Sociologists and Social Workers**

In the first decades of the twentieth century, social workers concerned with the city's youth focused their attention on keeping children from spending time on the street. Overcrowded homes and poor living conditions, they thought, contributed to the amount of time children—especially boys—spent “unsupervised” and/or on the “street.” But the relationship between “home,” “neighborhood,” and “city” was perhaps less stark than social workers understood. For Chinese and Mexican young people, the city's cultural geography was shaped by relationships with their parents, their siblings, work responsibilities (at home or elsewhere), peers, teachers and social workers, as much as it was by local and national policies of exclusion.

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<sup>341</sup> Records based on Kit King Louis's research in the Annual Reports of the Department of Health in Los Angeles City, Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles.”

Like Chapter Three, this chapter draws significantly on the rich studies conducted by sociology and social work graduate students at the University of Southern California, many of whom also worked in the communities that were the subjects of their research. As social workers and teachers, many of these writers interacted regularly with Chinese and Mexican young people and their parents. Their research methods included interviews and surveys, which they used to record the perspectives of these youth during the early twentieth century.<sup>342</sup>

Because social workers were, for the most part, interested in Americanizing Chinese and Mexican communities by transforming their young people, their descriptions were saturated with theoretical frameworks that positioned “foreignness” as something that could be made more “American” but which could never be fully attained. My interest here lies not in Americanization, but rather in the ways in which Chinese and Mexican young people understood, made and traversed racialized and nationalized geographical boundaries in the urban space of Los Angeles. That said, social workers’ critiques of Chinese and Mexican youth culture were largely about how they spent their time, and significantly for this discussion, *where* they spent it. They believed that the spaces they provided, such as schools, settlement houses, missions, and churches, offered children opportunities to learn “American” customs that would impact the children’s home spaces. Sociologist Margaret Fuller, for example, wrote, “When the Mexican first arrives, he is according to our standards, dirty, shiftless, and lazy. His children go to school, to improvement clubs, to the mission, and it is to these

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<sup>342</sup> It should be noted that these authors only included selected quotes or descriptions of their interviewees’ testimonies. Still, they are some of the only documentation of children’s perspectives produced during the time period.

institutions that the improvement in the home is due.”<sup>343</sup> Additionally, the assimilation campaigns and programming designed by social workers in the early twentieth century were among many city-, business- and community-created spaces of social interaction in which youth became acquainted with other ideas and other people (both Chinese and non-Chinese origin) aside from their families. In this sense, their Americanization discussions reveal much about the interplay between the spatial imaginaries of Chinese and Mexican young people, and how power, structured by race, gender and class, shaped their abilities to interact with urban space.

Sociologist Kit King Louis presented a different approach to the subjects of her study than the majority of her white social worker/sociologist colleagues.<sup>344</sup> A China-born graduate student at the University of Southern California, Louis’s 1931 study addressed the lives and perceptions of Chinese American young people in Los Angeles.<sup>345</sup> One of the few scholars to study Chinese Americans in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Louis’s work provides a rich source for understanding Chinese American youth experiences. Like the writing of her reformer-scholar colleagues who also conducted research among L.A. Chinese such as Nora Sterry (1924), Lei’s thesis research was shaped by her educational training. However, as a Chinese American woman, Louis’s study presents a slightly different perspective on the same communities. During her time in Los Angeles, Lei was not only a student, but she also worked for several

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<sup>343</sup> Elizabeth Fuller, “The Mexican Housing Problem in Los Angeles,” *Studies in Sociology, Published by the Southern California Sociological Society, University of Southern California* 5, no. 1 (November 1920): 4.

<sup>344</sup> As Historian Haiming Liu has noted, “‘Lei Jieqiong’ is the contemporary spelling of her name in pinyin,” while Kit King Louis is based on a Cantonese spelling. I’ve decided to use her published spelling based on Liu’s discussion. See Haiming Liu, “The Identity Formation of American-Born Chinese in the 1930s: A Review of Lei Jieqiong’s (Kit King Louis) Master’s Thesis,” *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 3, no. 1 (2007): 99, 119fn1and6.

<sup>345</sup> Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles.”

Chinese families teaching Chinese language to their children while she went to school. Having built a rapport with L.A. Chinese families and as a Chinese woman fluent in Cantonese and English, she was able to conduct her research among U.S.-born Chinese and their parents as an “insider.”<sup>346</sup> Significantly, her insider perspective allowed her to ask intimate questions regarding how Chinese American children and their parents felt about the intersections of race, sexuality and gender in their experiences with school, work, marriage and friendship. It is significant to note that while white social scientists assumed a perpetual “foreignness” among Chinese and Mexican residents which prevented them from the ability to fully actualize “Americanization,” Louis’s approach was slightly different in that she argued that U.S.-born Chinese were *already* Americanized. Louis approached Americanization as the process by which “social distance” *between generations* was forged, rather than *between races*.<sup>347</sup>

In addition to scholarly studies and social workers’ testimonials, as well as census data and city records, this chapter also draws on oral histories conducted in the 1970s-80s provide another rich source from which to understand children’s perspectives. Different from the graduate theses, interviewees gave their testimonies as adults reflecting on their experiences as young people. As Yolanda Chávez-Leyva has discussed, oral histories reveal the complex intersections of memory and power. Memories are shaped both by lived experiences later in life, and “made even more

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<sup>346</sup> Liu, “The Identity Formation of American-Born Chinese in the 1930s.”

<sup>347</sup> Louis argued that American-born Chinese, as second generation immigrants, experience a “problem of assimilation and Americanization” because of a supposed oppositional difference between Chinese and American cultures. Additionally, she argued that U.S.-born Chinese had to confront ideologies of anti-Chinese racism figured American-born Chinese as foreigners based on their appearance regardless of their citizenship status. This, she said, was the “so-called American-born Chinese problem.” Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles,” 2,4. For a longer discussion of Kit King Louis and her research as a master’s student, see Liu, “The Identity Formation of American-Born Chinese in the 1930s.”

complex by the fact that individual memory and collective memory are intimately tied. They create each other in many ways.”<sup>348</sup> These adult recollections are quite different from children’s perspectives in that adults drew on life experiences and sometimes demonstrate more articulate self-awareness of race, class and gender relationships than they did when they were children.

### **Sexuality, Generational Differences and Community**

Parents negotiated the experiences of racism and segregation along with their children. Being in Los Angeles presented parents and children with additional ways to conceive of gender relationships. Because they often had different ideas and understandings of where young people should go and with whom they should interact, Chinese and Mexican parents and young people often had conflicting spatial imaginaries and cultural expectations. Lei noted that Chinese parents often did not speak English and young people often did not speak Chinese, which created a complex problem of parental control. “There is no way for them [children] to communicate to their parents the ideas and ideals which they get at the public schools. This creates an alarming gulf between the second generation and their parents.”<sup>349</sup> However, when analyzed with an eye toward the city’s geography, this “gulf” between parents’ and children’s ideas had a profound impact on how they differently understood space and how space functioned in their lives.

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<sup>348</sup> Yolanda Chávez Leyva, ““Que Son Los Niños?": Mexican Children Along the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1880-1930” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arizona, 1999).

<sup>349</sup> Louis argued that this “gulf” between generations was an example of “social distance.” Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles,” 18.



In their interviews with Lei, several Chinese American boys and girls spoke about their frustrations with their parents' ideas, which they often designated as "more Chinese" than their own. One Chinese American boy stated, "I don't think my parents understand me. We seem to have nothing in common."<sup>350</sup> A Chinese American girl similarly wrote that she and her parents had contrasting cultural practices which had become opposing after she began to attend high school. She noted that the time she spent in school and other places away from home allowed her to "adjust" to spending time amongst "Americans" more easily than when she spent time with Chinese—something she thought her parents were less able to do. While she remarked that her parents thought U.S. culture was detrimental for their children, she also noted a sharp awareness of anti-Chinese attitudes. "I did not see anything wrong in the American environment, except that some of the Americans do not like Chinese" she wrote. This suggests that in her exposure to non-Chinese spaces in the city, anti-Chinese racism limited her mobility by marking her body as foreign. Perhaps her parents, in an effort to shield her from anti-Chinese ideologies and violence "insisted that the American environment was not good for [her]." "The more contact I make with the Americans in school and elsewhere the more I incline to the American ways.... [My parents'] interest in China and my interest is American; so how would you expect us to understand each other?"<sup>351</sup> In this way, she associated space with nation and saw herself as someone who regularly traversed urban boundaries that were defined by race and nation, even if at times she was cognizant that the racialization of urban space, in addition to familial expectations, may have limited her mobility.

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 30.

Even so, as Louis's interviewees revealed, not all children felt the same about their relationship with their parents and each home was configured differently. One U.S.-born Chinese boy, whose father was a merchant and ran a business in the "American business district," where he interacted daily with U.S. Commercial markets, described his family home as "modern," Christian, and using "all occidental conveniences." Because his business was located in a white business zone, his father also traversed geo-cultural boundaries on a daily basis. Thus, his father's spatial imaginary was similar to his own. Thus, this boy remarked that he did not see the kind of difference between himself and his parents that other Chinese young people described. "There is no gap between my parents and myself. They have always allowed me as much freedom as they thought I deserved."<sup>352</sup>

For some Chinese American young people, home space was a place of discipline in which their parents taught them morals and manners. One U.S.-born woman recalled that her mother was very strict because she was a girl, teaching her proper Chinese woman behavior, restricting her from spending time out with friends and arranging her marriage. In short, her mother understood the family's home space as one for child rearing and teaching her daughter how to be a proper Chinese woman. "She told me the girls in China are very careful about their manners," she said, and described how her mother expected her to eat at the table. "When I take food, I have to take just enough for a mouthful of rice. If I take more than what she thinks I should take, another spank

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 31.

from her chop-sticks.” She recalled that she rarely had time to play with other children.<sup>353</sup>

Sociologist Florence Mason proposed that for Mexican girls, who often contributed a great deal of time to household work, schools were places that provided a “freedom” from the household work or strict parental discipline they experienced at home. In her estimation, too much work at home encouraged Mexican girls to misbehave at school—from fighting with classmates to excessive giggling. However, these stories also suggest that girls may have had different senses of time and space. Mary, a junior high school girl who was born in Los Angeles to Mexican-born parents, noted that all of her time was spent at school or at home, where she helped her mother with the household work. At night her father worked in the textile industries, while during the day he slept and her mother worked at home. Mason noted that Mary giggled a lot because, she surmised, school was an escape from the hard work she did at home, “the only place where Mary could act natural.”<sup>354</sup>

Oftentimes dances were youth-created spaces for peer interaction and sexual expression. Studies in the 1930s suggest that Chinese youth in Los Angeles enjoyed attending dances, but that the expectations of their parents and community elders sometimes limited the kinds of interactions youth could have across gender lines. Among social workers and parents alike although for different reasons, they were often spaces of potential risk to community morality and familial reputation. Both Chinese girls and Mexican girls often attended dances only with a chaperone, at the insistence of

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>354</sup> Florence Gordon Mason, “A Case Study of Thirty Adolescent Mexican Girls and Their Social Conflicts and Adjustments within the School” (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1929), 14-15.

their parents and other community elders. Dances allowed young people to become aware of and negotiate the limits of sexuality placed on their social interactions in community spaces. The majority of dances among the Chinese young adults were held in Chinatown and were sponsored by Chinese organizations such as Chinese American Citizens' Alliance or the Chinese Student Club of USC, and the turnout usually included far more boys than girls.<sup>355</sup> Mexican young people attended dances sponsored by churches, held in private homes and at public dance halls.<sup>356</sup>

Lei attributed the gender disparity at Chinese dances, in part to traditional gender ideologies and in part to the fact that there were generally many more Chinese men than women in Los Angeles at the time.<sup>357</sup> Another girl who felt similarly described how she felt at Chinese parties and banquets, when her parents and other Chinese elders attended along with the youth. At these community events, boys and girls were often separated, having to sit at different tables. She recalled that she and her boyfriend were not allowed to dance together at these events, without risking their reputations as the adults ridiculed and gossiped about them. "For this reason," she said, "I don't like the Chinese parties and banquets.... We would rather dance without the presence of our parents, out of their sight. We much prefer to have a party of our own, and have no old folks around."<sup>358</sup> Another girl found her parents' ideas about interacting with boys to be old-fashioned. "[My parents] would say that girls are the opposite sex from the boys and if we wish to talk to them, we should talk in a business-like manner, and not laugh

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<sup>355</sup> Louis, "A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles," 98.

<sup>356</sup> Alice Bessie Culp, "A Case Study of the Living Conditions of Thirty-five Mexican Families of Los Angeles with Special Reference to Mexican Children" (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1921), 61.

<sup>357</sup> Louis, "A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles," 98.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

and joke around like that. They think that girls should be with girls and should not mix with the boys.”<sup>359</sup>

In some case, Chinese girls found their parents open to considering the redefinition of gender expectations. Chinese parents had a different sense of the social world of their children and how to raise them to be moral. Of the dances, one Chinese mother indicated that she felt ambivalent about how to treat her children. “I realize that America is different from China,” she said. “But if I treat them too leniently, I don’t know what would become of them. The American custom is unmoral, especially their ideas concerning the sexes.” Dancing was a particular concern for her. “I don’t like my children to learn to dance, especially those fancy dances which require shaking the body with enticing expression.... The girls who dance that way really belong to the class of prostitutes.”<sup>360</sup> Another girl noted that her mother allowed her to attend dances and go out with boys once she gained their trust and explained “American” ideals. “Although at first my mother did not approve of my going out with boys and dancing, I educated her by showing her there is no danger in going with boys and that dancing is not immoral. Finally I secured her confidence, and she lets me have freedom.”<sup>361</sup> For other girls, the subject of attending dances brought about intense contention between themselves and their parents. Although her father “treat[ed] her very liberally,” one girl recalled that he did not approve of the dances. “He thought it was a terrible thing for a

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 38.

girl to do, but I lectured him.” They yelled at each other and she attended dances against her father’s wishes.<sup>362</sup>

One U.S.-born Chinese boy explained that he and his peers enjoyed attending parties and dances, but that his parents did not approve of or understand such activities. “Nowadays the young people want to go out to parties, dances, and have a good time. My parents sometimes forbid me to go because they don’t understand the parties and dances.” However, unlike the his female counterparts, he explained his parents’ disapproval as a result of their lack of knowledge about U.S. cultural practices rather than an attempt to restrict his sexuality. “They had none of these things in China,” he said. Because he felt that he could not fully explicate his interest in going to dances using Chinese language, he simply would not attend. “When they do not want me to go, I just don’t go.”<sup>363</sup>

For Mexican young people, dance halls also served as a place of to spend time with each other outside the home when they were “old enough.” The Mexican dance halls were, according to sociologist Bessie Culp, one of the only commercial establishments Mexican children went for amusement. However, Culp expressed extreme criticism for the dance halls because she believed they were improperly supervised and thus “a menace to the welfare of these young boys and girls.” The dance halls were places where young people interacted with other youth as well as adults. Like other social workers and teachers who served Mexican children, Culp believed that the public spaces of the dance halls introduced young people to “associations” that got them “start[ed] on a downward path.” However, she believed

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 32.

that her fellow settlement workers could combat this by sponsoring activities at the settlement house that might encourage Mexican young people to spend time there, rather than the dance halls or the street.<sup>364</sup> School teacher Annie Callaghan likewise reported that the Mexican students in her class often attended dances, which in her estimation, contributed to “the problem of juvenile delinquency” among Mexican youth. “Let us make our dances of the right kind—properly supervised with the right kind of music and encourage the chaperoning,” she wrote.<sup>365</sup>

The creation of public spaces for dancing was a daily part of life in Mexican neighborhoods. In the crowded conditions of Sonoratown living, for example, familial and community social gatherings, attended by both young and old, featured dancing and celebrating together into the night. Sterry marveled at the simplicity and spontaneity of all-night dances, which could be organized at the last minute, as they moved furniture out of the way to clear a dance floor, borrowed chairs from neighbors to line the perimeter, secured a duo of a violinist and guitarist, and invited all friends and neighbors. Indeed these bailes were spontaneous creations of semi-public spaces that drew Mexican neighbors across age and gender together into each other’s private home spaces. For instance, the bailes highlighted what she thought was a contradiction between conditions of poverty and the willingness to create spaces for community celebration. “Their enjoyment seems singularly independent of material considerations. They may not know how to work according to our standards but they certainly know how to play with a whole hearted abandon that finds no counterpart in our lives.”

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<sup>364</sup> Culp’s emphasis, Culp, “A Case Study of the Living Conditions of Thirty-five Mexican Families,” 63.

<sup>365</sup> Annie E. Callaghan, Student Report, Economics 52 (July 9, 1920) Bancroft Library, Commission of Immigration and Housing, File 93:4 UCLA Summer Session, Econ 52 Student Reports A-F, July 1920

Sterry herself wrote that the bailes were cultural practices that she and her white American counterparts could not understand, because they “most widely separate[d] [Mexicans] from our comprehension.”<sup>366</sup>

Most Chinese parents in Los Angeles at this time were married before they migrated to the United States through arrangements made by their families with the assistance of a matchmaker in China. Expectations about marriage were often the source of conflict between Chinese American children and their parents. One Chinese American boy said that his parents felt Chinese American girls did not make ideal wives because they had become too Americanized. “They thought the girl from China would be more obedient and not so independent as the American-born Chinese girls,” he said. In his estimation, his parents perceived American-born Chinese women to have too much flexibility to spend time outside the home and not at home doing the work that most Chinese mothers did. “The American-born Chinese girls like to have good times and freedom, and do not want to stay at home with them to help around with the house work.” Rather than have an arranged marriage with a China-born woman as his parents preferred, this young man opted to marry a U.S.-born woman.<sup>367</sup>

According to Lei’s study, Chinese parents often changed their ideas regarding the sexuality and marriage of their children between older and younger children. One Chinese American woman recalled that although her sister’s marriage was arranged, her own was not. According to her description, her mother regretted having arranged a marriage for her older sister because it turned out to be an “unhappy one.” For this

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<sup>366</sup> Nora Sterry, “The Sociological Basis for the Re-organization of the Macy Street School” (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1924), 51.

<sup>367</sup> Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles,” 40.



reason, her mother allowed her the flexibility to date boys. “I have all the liberty to go out with boy friends as my sister had none when she was under my mother’s care,” she said.<sup>368</sup> Many of the Chinese American young women in Lei’s study indicated that their experiences with marriage, dating and family would have been quite different had they been raised in China instead of in the United States. “He [her father] expected that we would have a big banquet and grand celebration like all Chinese people here, but we cannot afford to do it. Here it is America, not China. If I were in China, my father could marry me as he wanted to.”<sup>369</sup> Having been exposed to different marriage practices in Los Angeles, both parents and children negotiated new gender and sexuality expectations.

Dating and marriage were especially points of negotiation for Chinese young women. One girl stated that after a heated argument with her father, she was able to gain more flexibility to come and go from the family home as she pleased. “I can go any place I want,” she said, “I have so many boy friends.” One girl stated that after a heated argument with her father, she was able to gain more flexibility to come and go from the family home as she pleased. “I can go any place I want,” she said, “I have so many boy friends.” For her, such flexibility was largely about her ability to date boys.<sup>370</sup> Some girls, however, did not have such flexibility with their parents, contributing to their decisions to go outside the home despite their parents. “When I was old enough to have

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 38.

boy friends my parents entertained them in our house; so I don't have to sneak out to meet them at the street corner like some of the girls."<sup>371</sup>

### **School, Work, Play and Neighborhood Boundaries**

School, work and play were often overlapping pastimes that shaped the spatial imaginaries of Chinese and Mexican young people. They were activities tied to places where they interacted with others, crossed racial boundaries, confronted racial ideologies, and traveled outside their homes. The ways in which these youth spatially confronted their worlds were constrained by social structures of gender, race and class.

Schools shaped the spatial imaginaries of Chinese and Mexican children in multiple ways. For one thing, school districts that served Chinese and Mexican students had boundaries that encompassed multiple racial/ethnic neighborhoods. The Macy Street School district, for example, encompassed all of Chinatown and a large portion of Sonoratown. The majority of the children who attended Macy Street were Mexican, followed by Chinese and a small number of Italian and Serbian students.<sup>372</sup> In the western part of Sonoratown, the Castelar Street School was located in the "old adobe quarter" at the turn of the twentieth century. Like the Macy Street School, the local neighborhood was primarily Mexican and also included some Italians.<sup>373</sup> Miss Manley, principal of the Ninth Street School, stated that her students were "almost exclusively Mexican."<sup>374</sup> For another, public schools were seen as primary ways in which to create

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Sterry, "The Sociological Basis for the Re-organization of the Macy Street School."

<sup>373</sup> Amanda Mathews, "The Hieroglyphics of Love," in *The Hieroglyphics of Love: Stories of Sonoratown and Old Mexico* (Los Angeles: The Artemisia Bindery, 1906), 72.

<sup>374</sup> Letter: Wilson D. Wallis, Research Worker, LA Office, State Commission of Immigration and Housing of Calif. To Henry K Norton, Executive Secretary, San Francisco, Calif. (September 23, 1919) Carton

upstanding citizens, which, for the city's "foreign" children, often meant intensive Americanization programming. Thus, schools were places away from home where children spent a lot of time, where they interacted with children from their own and other racial groups, where they encountered classmates who lived in other neighborhoods, and where they learned about race, gender and their relationships to the city's racial geography.

For Mexican children, interactions with white children at school forced them to understand how they were socially located in the race and class hierarchy. In 1929, fifteen-year-old Trinidad told her sewing teacher that she preferred not to eat the lunch she brought because her classmates ridiculed her for eating Mexican food. When her teacher inquired as to why the other girls laughed at her, she said, "We're Mexican. My mother hasn't anything to give me for my lunch but tortillas and Spanish food.... I'd rather not eat any lunch." She went on to explain that her family could not afford to buy "American" food. Her teacher encouraged her to work piecemeal selling felt flowers she made in sewing class to the teachers, so that she could afford to purchase "American" food for her lunch. Trinidad expressed that she was similarly embarrassed during gym class because of her underwear. Like many Mexican young people in Los Angeles, her family left during the summer to follow agricultural jobs. The eldest child of seven, Trinidad had a great deal of responsibility to contribute to the household work, helping care for her younger siblings and preparing meals for both her own home and her grandmother's home.<sup>375</sup> In this sense, race, class and gender was compounded in

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15:12, California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Immigration and Housing Records, Bancroft Library.

<sup>375</sup> Mason, "A Case Study of Thirty Adolescent Mexican Girls," 18-22.

Trinidad's differential sense of home and school. In her teacher's and principal's perspectives, school provided her with an opportunity to assimilate into "American" culture via practices associated with the home introduced through homemaking tasks and peer pressure. In her study of adolescent Mexican girls, Florence Mason, junior high school vice principal, asked the girls why they liked to go to school. A number of them listed activities such as the weekly assembly, gym class, and homemaking class, and the ability to spend time with their friends. One girl especially liked to talk with her girlfriends in the hallway and in the stairwell.<sup>376</sup> Although these interactions with white classmates and teachers were difficult, some girls expressed appreciation for school activities. School offered them a space away from home to spend time with peers and develop friendships.<sup>377</sup>

School programming also contributed to the ways in which children throughout the city learned about the relationship race, class and geography went hand-in-hand. Children of the "Eastside" schools often became the targets for Christmastime programming sponsored by P.T.A.'s based in wealthier districts of the city, through which mostly white children of the wealthy districts would hand out "treats" to their poorer counterparts of the Mexican districts. Minnie Lommen, a teacher who helped execute such programming, explained that although her district was "one of the better districts [with] very few foreigners and very few poor," the majority of the "foreigners" who did reside in her district were Mexicans. She expressed frustration that the

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>377</sup> Mason posited that the girls who appeared in her study participated in special curricular program for students who fell behind the grade associated with their age group, were "typical and not unusual" of Mexican girls, making up the vast majority of the children in the program. Of the students who participated in this program, Mason calculated ninety percent of "foreign parentage and eighty percent of the ninety percent are Mexican." Ibid., 7.

Mexican parents did not participate in the P.T.A. functions, and in fact were uncooperative despite paying dues. This lack of participation prompted some of the active P.T.A. members to individually encourage Mexican mothers' participation. Annoyed, perhaps, with the persistence of the PTA women, one Mexican mother attempted to protect her work time by asking her six-year-old daughter to request books from Lommen, who was her classroom teacher, so that her daughter could teach her to read English. Recounting the story, Lommen recalled that the student told her "I must teach my mother to read. These women bother her so she cannot do her work."

Although the student attended school in a mostly white "American" area, it is probable that she contributed to the household economy by working with her mother at home like the majority of Mexican girls in Los Angeles at the time. Time spent working with her mother was an opportunity as well to teach her mother to read English. The programming in the Mexican district likely made her aware that she and her family were considered "foreign." But it also acquainted her with the racial geography of the city — although she did not live in the Mexican area, she was aware that the racial categorization of her family was both economically and geographically configured.<sup>378</sup>

Social workers and teachers alike expressed concern regarding school attendance of Mexican children whose families migrated for work. Mexican laborers' incomes and homes were tied to industries such as the railroad and agriculture, which relied on a seasonal work force. R. C. Avery, superintendent of the Los Angeles County Employment Department, reported that his office saw a large number of Mexican

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<sup>378</sup> Minnie Lommen, "Personal Experience in Community Service," 1920. UCLA Summer Session on Americanization courses for teachers, California Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Immigration and Housing Records, Bancroft Library.

laborers without work during the winter months.<sup>379</sup> One of the biggest employers of the men in this area was the Southern Pacific. In her semi-fictional account of Sonoratown residents and spaces, settlement worker Amanda Mathews wrote of the railroad boxcar homes in which many students of the Castelar Street School lived. “The village of sidetracked freight cars, utilized as dwellings for the peon railroad laborers, was visible from afar. The town on wheels was swarming with brown humanity, and garlanded with multi-colored garments drying in the sun.”<sup>380</sup> The seasonal and temporary nature of wage work in these industries meant that children often spent their time working to contribute to their family income rather than attending school. Alice Bessie Culp, sociologist, settlement worker and investigator for the County Charities, wrote in 1921 that because many Mexican families moved around frequently, the “majority” of Mexican children in Los Angeles did not attend school after the sixth grade.<sup>381</sup> Likewise in 1929, Florence Gordon Mason, sociologist and Vice Principal of a junior high school, wrote that education in good citizenship was most important at the Junior High School level because Mexican children often stopped going to school before ninth grade.<sup>382</sup> For children of migrant laborers, home spaces were just as temporary as school spaces. Their spatial imaginaries were intensely tied to industry, even as school offered them an additional space in which to interact with other children, including children whose family wage labor was not tied to mobile industrial jobs.

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<sup>379</sup> Paul S. Taylor Papers (Bancroft) Fiscal Year Report, Los Angeles County Employment Department, Outdoor Relief Division, Department of Charities, Los Angeles California, July 1925 to July 1926, Mr. R.C. Avery, Supr.; California—Los Angeles, Miscellaneous, 1927-1932 Carton 10, Folder 31

<sup>380</sup> Mathews, “The Hieroglyphics of Love,” 77.

<sup>381</sup> Culp, “A Case Study of the Living Conditions of Thirty-five Mexican Families.”

<sup>382</sup> Mason, “A Case Study of Thirty Adolescent Mexican Girls,” 3.

Chinese American girls negotiated generational differences with their China-born parents that informed how they viewed their relationship to their homes, their neighborhoods and to their social worlds. One Chinese American woman who grew up in the earlier part of the twentieth century recalled that her childhood experience was different from those of Chinese American girls of the late 1920s and 1930s. “My father was an old-fashioned Chinese and he did not believe in sending girls to school,” she said. “He thought that girls were supposed to stay at home until it was time for them to marry.” Although other Chinese girls attended school, she was not allowed, but she was able to learn English with the help of her cousins who did. “Now the Chinese have changed,” she noted. “They send their girls to school as well as the boys. The girls of today are certainly lucky.”<sup>383</sup> Another girl recalled that her mother did not believe girls needed as much education as boys and thus encouraged her sister, who did not like school, to stay home and work. However, this Chinese American girl chose to continue school because she liked it and her mother did not discourage her.<sup>384</sup> Girls who attended school often went to public schools for five hours a day and Chinese school afterward for another two or three hours and sometimes on Saturday.<sup>385</sup> School increasingly became a common way for girls to spend time outside the home. While their mothers, for the most part, passed time inside the home doing housework or helping out with family businesses that were often attached to the home, school allowed girls to expand their spatial imaginaries beyond their homes and neighborhood.

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<sup>383</sup> Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles,” 55.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>385</sup> See for example Mabel Sam Lee, “The Recreational Interests and Participation of a Selected Group of Chinese Boys and Girls in Los Angeles, California” (Master’s thesis, University of Southern California, 1939).

U.S.-born Chinese young people attended Chinese school at the behest of their parents, sometimes against their own volition. At these schools, Chinese children learned Chinese language (reading and writing) as well as Chinese literature. Parents chose to send their children for a number of reasons. Among those listed by Chinese young people, parents most often saw their families as transnational, and reasoned that they would travel between China and the United States as adults. In 1931 there were four Chinese schools in Los Angeles with an average attendance of 250—approximately one-fifth of the school-age Chinese population.<sup>386</sup>

Many U.S.-born Chinese children resisted their parents' requirement that they attend Chinese language school. One boy indicated that the language was very difficult to learn—more difficult for him than English. He preferred “American” school to Chinese school because he felt it was easier and “great fun,” whereas he said, “Chinese school is no fun at all.” In fact, he wrote, “I wish that I were not a Chinese, so that I would not have to learn Chinese.” Another girl wrote that she disliked studying Chinese so much that she dreaded when her parents tried to teach her. Some decided to skip Chinese school, opting for a chance to spend time with their friends on their own. Others felt that speaking Chinese differentiated them from whites making them vulnerable to racist taunting. “I don't want any Chinese people to talk Chinese to me when the Americans are around. They usually laugh at me.”<sup>387</sup>

One teenaged Chinese boy wrote that while he did not appreciate his father's insistence on his learning Chinese language, he came to appreciate it more as he got

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<sup>386</sup> The Chinese Consolidated Association ran two of them, while the other two were operated by the Congregational and Methodist Churches. The teachers were “required to take an oath of allegiance to the United States.” See Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles,” 19.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-34.



older. In addition to speaking it more with other Chinese young people, he also began to use it more at home with his family. In fact, he wrote that education in the Chinese language was important for U.S.-born Chinese children because it helped to strengthen their identity as Chinese. “I think all Chinese children should learn Chinese because it builds a foundation for them in later life whether they are in China or America because the knowledge of Chinese will distinguish them as members of the Chinese race.”<sup>388</sup>

Another student wrote that as an adult, she envied those U.S.-born Chinese who were able to speak the Chinese language. “I am ashamed now because I don’t know how to speak Chinese well or to read or write.”<sup>389</sup>

Chinese school presented young people with opportunities to create Chinese American spaces among their peers, even if they did not always speak to each other in Chinese, as well as to navigate Chinatown and other adult Chinese spaces. One boy remarked that he did not use the Chinese language among his siblings or friends, but he did use it among “old men and women” in Chinatown.<sup>390</sup>

Social workers who worked with Mexican and Chinese children were deeply concerned with the amount of time these children spent working to help contribute to their family income. Children who worked outside the home, they thought, did not have enough time to spend under “supervised play.” Likewise, they posited that children—especially girls—who spent much of their time after school doing household work, did not have enough time to play. They were also concerned with children who spent too much time being “idle” on the street, who were sure to be involved in

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 34.

“delinquency” or become “dependent” on the state. As one scholar has argued, “social reform and juvenile delinquency were inextricably linked in early-twentieth-century California.”<sup>391</sup>

Many Chinese living in the United States provided financial support for their families in China. Arthur Chung recalled that the depression years were quite difficult for his family because his father had responsibilities to sending yearly money to his brothers and relatives in Canton. Although his father managed an herbal medicine shop called the Chinese Herb Company that was attached to the family home, Arthur remembered that “there were times when [his father] could hardly pay the rent.” Arthur and his siblings offered to work in order to contribute to the family income, but his father, coming from a family of wealthy educated class in China in which children did not work, insisted that they not work as laborers. He believed that because racism blocked them from obtaining many jobs, it was important for Chinese in the United States to be “entirely independent” workers, owning their own businesses by “go[ing] into the professions rather than into manual labor.” “We Chinese in the United States. It is very difficult to get a job because we are Chinese.”<sup>392</sup>

Among Chinese young women of the early 1900s, marriage and work largely informed their spatial imaginaries. In 1900, single women more often than not worked outside the home in sewing and other domestic service. Married women who lived with their spouses often did non-wage work that was unaccounted for in census data, while married women who did not live with their husbands worked outside the home more. In

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<sup>391</sup> Miroslava Chávez-García, “Youth, Evidence, and Agency: Mexican and Mexican American Youth at the Whittier State School, 1890-1920,” *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 31, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 58.

<sup>392</sup> Chung, interview.

1910, Chinese women stopped participating in the labor force as much. One study estimates that “Only 4 out of 147 Chinese women were employed, listing their occupations as ‘family cook,’ ‘dressmaker,’ ‘interpreter,’ and ‘vegetable dealer.’ Many women did gainful work through subcontract such as rolling cigars, sewing, shelling shrimp and abalone, and sorting walnuts and vegetables but did not report them to the census taker.”<sup>393</sup> By the 1920s, Chinese girls like Ying Wong Kwan found work opportunities in the commercial service sector rather than in Chinatown businesses. One Chinese man noted in 1927 that jobs for Chinese girls often required them to wear cheongsam, which they did not like: “The Chinese colony is not so large, of course, and does not offer any opportunity to the Chinese girls; so they find positions in the American community as ‘figure-heads,’ as the girls themselves say, where they wear their Chinese costumes. And oh, how they hate to wear them! But they know they would not be wanted except for the costume.”<sup>394</sup>

Conditions of segregation also limited the spatial imaginaries of Chinese young people, who along with Mexicans and Blacks, were barred from patronizing a number of public spaces and institutions such as pools, gymnasiums, tennis courts, and golf courses, which were reserved for whites. One girl spoke of a friend who went to a community pool in order to fulfill a university requirement, but the office told him, “orientals are not allowed.” While on a class field trip to Venice Beach, another girl recounted that she was turned away at the ticket office. Such experiences were embarrassing for Chinese American youth who had white friends or classmates. After

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<sup>393</sup> Lucie Cheng and Suellen Cheng, “Chinese Women of Los Angeles,” 5.

<sup>394</sup> Paul S. Taylor Papers (Bancroft), William C. Smith, [University of Hawaii] “The Second Generation Oriental in America,” Institute of Pacific Relations, Preliminary Paper Prepared for Second General Session, July 15-29, 1927. p 18. Carton 41, Folder 29, Bancroft Library.

being turned away, one girl spoke of feeling indignant, and decided not to go anywhere with her white friends unless she was sure they were going to a place that was not segregated.<sup>395</sup> For girls, whose parents limited their flexibility to spend time outside the home, the racial segregation of these public spaces placed additional limits not only on their mobility but on the types of social relationships they could maintain.

Both Mexican and Chinese children frequently attended the movie theaters that lined Main Street (see Chapter 2). One study noted that it was the “chief sort of commercial recreation sought by the Mexican children.” For families that could afford to attend, it was a regular way to spend Sundays together in public space. Although schools sometimes showed “high grade films” for the neighborhood for a lesser price, the theaters on Main appeared to be more popular because their showings catered to the Mexican audience and advertised in Spanish and English. There were also some children—particularly boys—who skipped school in order to watch a movie at the theater.<sup>396</sup> Eddie Lee recalled going to the movie theater with his friend, George Hong, when he was a teenager.<sup>397</sup> The proximity of the theaters to the plaza and other commercial spaces contributed to Mexican children’s spatial imaginaries.

There was one playground in Chinatown located near the railroad tracks. Chinese young people participated in extra-curricular activities that created other opportunities to spend time with each other and build community. Boys joined basketball, football, and volleyball teams, as well as a Chinese American band and an orchestra that

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<sup>395</sup> Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles,” 103.

<sup>396</sup> Culp, “A Case Study of the Living Conditions of Thirty-five Mexican Families,” 62-63; William Wilson McEuen, “A Survey of the Mexicans in Los Angeles” (Master’s thesis, University of Southern California, 1914).

<sup>397</sup> Eddie E. Lee, interview.

included young men and boys among its members. Although girls and women did not participate as members of the sports teams or in the music groups, they often attended practices. In fact, Chinese band and orchestra practices often offered an occasion for spontaneous dances among Chinese young people.<sup>398</sup>

When it came to leisure time, girls tended to experience more parental restraints than boys who were permitted to play ball in the street with friends and attend parties. Lei found that parents who upheld more “traditional” ideas about girls understood leisure as time to be spent in the home, assisting their mothers with housework or learning to cook and sew. They were not to “mingle freely” with boys or men. Thus, Chinese American girls were quite aware of how gender shaped their mobility and their personal relationships, and understood that boys were more able to move about the city. This led one girl to state, “Ever since I was very small, I have wished I were a boy. Among the Chinese the boys can do everything, but the girls are prohibited from doing this and that. . . . My parents sometimes permit us to go out with a group, but they do not permit me to go out alone with a boy.”<sup>399</sup> This was a stark contrast to boys who listed a variety of social activities outside the home such as playing sports with friends at the playground, reading at the library, spending time at the beach, or watching moving picture shows at the theater, and even visiting a girlfriend’s home.<sup>400</sup> Whereas boys experienced a greater amount of playtime outside the home, girls, especially older girls, were responsible for working in the home, cooking cleaning and caring for younger

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<sup>398</sup> Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles,” 22-23.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-99. *Ibid.*, 97-99

siblings.<sup>401</sup> While the expectation for girls to stay home and help their mothers with the housework served to create particular relationships among Chinese women and girls, it also served to limit the geographical spaces in which girls could spend time. Most girls understood this restriction as a way for their parents to control their interaction with boys and men, as well as to maintain good reputations for their families.

At settlement houses, “the children enjoy listening to good stories and music, and playing quite games...Music is the drawing card which brings the children to the settlements; then when they are once there, they are given stories presenting high ideals of life. Best of all, the settlement clubs give the children a few happy moments away from a noisy crowded home and away from housework and small children.”<sup>402</sup>

The three churches serving Los Angeles’ Chinese residents—the First Presbyterian, Congregational and the Methodist—were additional places where Chinese young people interacted outside their homes. Lei observed that although Chinese pastors often conducted their sermons in Chinese language, other church-related occasions, including youth meetings, were run in English language.<sup>403</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Race and gender together shaped the experiences of Chinese and Mexican youth in their social worlds. While segregation and racism limited the mobility of these young people, familial responsibilities and parental expectations regarding “proper” social interactions along gender lines also contributed to how girls and boys, and young

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<sup>401</sup> Lee, “Recreational Interests and Participation,” 2.

<sup>402</sup> Culp, “A Case Study of the Living Conditions of Thirty-five Mexican Families,” 61.

<sup>403</sup> Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles,” 21.

women and men, experienced the cultural geography of the city. Although their lives were significantly impacted by power structures that sought to contain and control their mobility, their stories highlight the limits of power by showing how child residents understood, interacted with and impacted the city's racial geography. More than that, it shows that Chinese and Mexican youth were highly mobile despite racial segregation. This mobility informed their knowledge about the interrelatedness of race, class and space.

## Chapter Five

### “Shaken as By an Earthquake”<sup>404</sup>:

#### Modernity and the Policing of Racial Boundaries in the Depression Era

“We were born where the Union Station is. In fact, where I was born was right next to the stables. They used to have stables, all the grocery, they used for horse-buggy and wagon and then put their grocery and then go to district to sell. And that’s where [we] begin, where the stables are, in the early part of the 1920s.”

—David Fon Lee, Chinatown resident<sup>405</sup>

Lee was born in 1920, and his childhood bracketed the metamorphosis of the Los Angeles Plaza area that occurred in the 1920s and 30s. In the 1920s, as Lee described, Chinese residents lived and worked in the several-block area to the east of the plaza. By 1938, Union Station—the city’s premier railroad depot—stood in the very spot where Lee’s family once made its home in a bow wong low (apartment) near the railroad tracks.<sup>406</sup> The same was true for the Mexicans whose neighborhoods by the 1930s surrounded Chinatown and expanded northward and eastward beyond the river. At the start of the 1930s, the plaza, along with the Chinese and Mexican neighborhoods surrounding it, were vibrant residential, community and business spaces. By 1938,

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<sup>404</sup> Garding Lui, *Inside Los Angeles Chinatown* (Los Angeles, 1948), 38.

<sup>405</sup> David Lee, interview by Suellen Cheng, December 5, 1979, Southern California Chinese American Oral History Project, UCLA Special Collections.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*



these neighborhoods, for the most part, had been removed and transformed into a center for the city's display of modernity—the combined site of a new railroad depot, civic buildings and tourist zone featuring Olvera Street and China City (Hollywood-style characterizations of Mexican and Chinese market spaces without the blemish of actual Mexican and Chinese people).

That year, sandwiched between the newly fashioned representation of the city's Spanish fantasy past, figured in the El Pueblo Historical Monument at the plaza, and the shiny art deco, faux-adobe architectural masterpiece featured in the new Union Station railroad depot, Chinese residents continued their daily lives in the small blocks that were all that remained of Chinatown homes and businesses. One account of the Chinese communities of Los Angeles noted the severe impact this displacement had on the people who lived there. "The old men were shaken as by an earthquake when they learned that a modern Union Depot with expansive grounds was going to dislodge them from their long established habitations," wrote Garding Lui.<sup>407</sup> Likewise, Mexican men continued to meet on the benches in the plaza and North Main Street continued to be a site of businesses and community meeting for many ethnic groups, especially Mexicans. Although some part of these neighborhoods remained, the obliteration of Chinese and Mexican bodies from this space and the recasting of Chineseness and Mexicanness in sterilized ways, begs the question, what were the national and local politics of race regarding Chinese and Mexican bodies and neighborhoods that made this overhauling of space possible? And given that much of the public spaces of the plaza area were shared across racial lines, in what ways did the experiences of removal overlap?

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<sup>407</sup> The area of Chinatown located between the plaza and Alameda Street was not torn down until 1949-1951. Lui, *Inside Los Angeles Chinatown*, 38.

Historians have discussed how city elites orchestrated the construction of civic and tourism centers in downtown Los Angeles during the 1930s as a means of both boosting the city's economy and recasting the city's modern image, and in the process removed "undesirable" populations. The city's romantic portrayal of a Mexican past did not go without having to contend with Mexican people of the present whose very existence on the plaza posed a hazard to such imagery, and who continued to use the plaza space as they had before. Despite their protests and struggles to maintain their communities Chinese and Mexican residents were forced out through repatriation campaigns and bulldozers, thus enabling the emergence of a tourist space based on imperialist nostalgia.<sup>408</sup> William Estrada, for example, has shown how the construction of Olvera Street contrasted with the realities of Mexican hardships during the Depression and the repatriation campaigns, which David Alfaro Siqueiros portrayed in a mural commissioned to celebrate the project.<sup>409</sup> Additionally, Phoebe Kropp has shown how the simultaneity of the repatriation raids and the opening of the Olvera Street tourist center "appear at odds."<sup>410</sup> And yet, the simultaneity of newly executed Mexican repatriation campaigns and the ongoing Chinese exclusion practices suggest that this relationship between modernity and removal reflects larger processes of U.S. border formation.

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<sup>408</sup> As William Estrada has illuminated "the tensions between the historical narratives that were reflected in the lives of the diverse working-class immigrants who made their homes at the Plaza and the efforts to control space with the growing heroic Anglo birth legend of the city and the advent of tourism." William David Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 203-204. Phoebe Kropp likewise argues that Los Angeles' self-promotion as "the most modern metropolis in the land" was meant to be exemplified in the re-configuration of Mexican space for white consumption. Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 207-260.

<sup>409</sup> William D. Estrada, "Los Angeles' Old Plaza and Olvera Street: Imagined and Contested Space," *Western Folklore* 58, no. 2 (1999): 107-129; Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 203-230.

<sup>410</sup> Phoebe S. Kropp, "Citizens of the Past? Olvera Street and the Construction of Race and Memory in 1930s Los Angeles," *Radical History Review* 81 (Fall 2001): 45.

This chapter builds on the historiography of the plaza area in this time period by asking how local manifestations of national border policing affected the Chinese and Mexican residents and neighborhoods, at a moment when city boosters and urban planners sought to make room for modernization, even as economic crisis threatened to turn this image of modernity on its head. Rather than reexamining the municipal politics surrounding the construction of the civic and tourist centers and the marked contradictions and contestations that took shape in relation to it, my interest here is in exploring the relationship between the Great Depression and overlapping Mexican and Chinese exclusion practices in the shared space of the plaza area.

I begin by looking at how in the midst of declining employment opportunities, local and national forces turned to the removal of “alien” populations in order to confront the problem of widespread unemployment and the increasing populations needing public assistance. From there the chapter turns to an examination of Mexican repatriation campaigns, and how city representatives and municipal departments sought emphatically to maintain an sense of “progress” by policing the U.S.-Mexico border in ordinary spaces. Finally it looks at the so-called “Doll Bride” case in 1934-35 during which police occupied Chinatown in a supposed attempt to protect the city from a possible “tong war,” following the indictment of a Chinese woman and Chinese man for violating immigration laws. Looking at Chinese Exclusion and Mexican Repatriation as related and simultaneous moments of nation building sheds light on how the centers of these communities were displaced in the 1930s.

## Depression, Modernity and Borders

During the 1920s, Los Angeles experienced a boom in both population and industry that was underscored by booms of its past, but which took new shape with city boosters' efforts. As I have discussed earlier, for decades after the 1870s, Los Angeles experienced tremendous population growth, largely due to the efforts of city boosters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who cast the city as modern so as to attract white settlement. "Improvements" such as the Pacific Electric route, beach resorts, and subdivisions were built toward the city's expansion. Booming populations encouraged the growth of construction industries, which, in turn, increased household income along with new industries and more commercial businesses. In the 1920s, along with the arrival of highway construction, oil production, motion picture industry, and automobile tire manufacture, Los Angeles' population increased by more than two-fold, from 577,000 to 1,272,037. Carey McWilliams characterized the decade as a "truly bonanza affair" in which the influx of newcomers and the prosperity of the city's economy "undermin[ed] the social structure of the community, warping and twisting its institutions."<sup>411</sup> In the plaza area, city modernization projects continued into the 1930s, as did the dramatic cultural and social transformation of the local landscape.<sup>412</sup>

The depression threatened the economic prosperity of the city, as well as its image as a paradise for whites not found in eastern cities. As previously prosperous

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<sup>411</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land*, 1973rd ed. (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1946), 136.

<sup>412</sup> For more discussion of the "booming" population and economy, see McWilliams' discussion of the "Years of the Boom." Ibid., 113-137. For a discussion of the clash between the oil industries and beach promotion in the interwar years, see Paul Sabin, "Beaches Versus Oil in Greater Los Angeles," in *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 95-114. For additional discussion of 1920s Los Angeles, see Jules Tygiel, "Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s," in *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s*, ed. Tom Sitton and William Deverell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

industrial employment waned, more and more residents were without jobs. The mass migration of poor whites from states to the east was compounded by a dearth of employment opportunities, and threatened to dispel city boosters' myths that the problems of indigence lied with nonwhite "alien" populations. Where just decades before state and municipal concerns over housing focused on the house courts and shacks of Chinese and Mexican residents, now the makeshift housing of poor white migrants was also a concern. In particular, the language of "indigence" and "dependency" became common ways to describe the populations who the city labeled as "problems" incongruous with the city's imagined community.<sup>413</sup>

By the late 1930s, the portion of Main Street that lay south of the plaza became the primary location for the city's growing "skid row." One study noted that the amiable weather of the region "attracted not only desirable tourists and home seekers, but also those who do not possess the economic, physical or mental equipment with which to maintain themselves. This class of people eventually comprises the bulk of the relief rolls." In addition to draining the local economy by depending on relief services, the study argued, they formed the population that most frequented the growing vice district on Main Street.<sup>414</sup> The changes on Main Street itself during this period demonstrates this disjuncture between local manifestations of the nation-wide economic

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<sup>413</sup> For more general discussions of the impact of the Depression on Los Angeles, see Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Leonard Leader, *Los Angeles and the Great Depression* (New York: Garland, 1991). For a discussion of the city's attempts to keep out poor migrants through the use of border patrol and city police, see H. Mark Wild, "If You Ain't Got that Do-Re-Mi: The Los Angeles Border Patrol and White Migration in Depression-Era California," *Southern California Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 317-334.

<sup>414</sup> Merrill Leonard Harrod, "A Study of Deviate Personalities as Found in Main Street of Los Angeles" (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1939), 90.

crisis and the city's attempts to maintain its idyllic and modern image as a haven for middle- and upper-class white U.S. Americans.

The geopolitical borders of the United States in the early part of the twentieth century had different meanings for Mexican and Chinese migrants seeking to cross them. Since the passing of the Chinese exclusion acts starting in 1875, borders both by sea (the San Francisco and San Pedro ports on the Pacific Ocean) and by land (the constructed border between U.S. and Mexican nation-states) were regulated to prevent illegal migration of Chinese laboring men and unwedded Chinese women. For most of the Chinese Exclusion Era, Mexican migrants traveled back and forth across the U.S.-Mexico border with relative ease, while for Chinese migrants, the same border posed a physical and legal barrier of exclusion, even if many found loopholes and were able to cross despite border enforcement.<sup>415</sup>

The interwar period also saw increasing stringency on Mexican migration across the U.S.-Mexico border. During this time, the increasing Mexican origin population—including immigrants as well as those born and raised on the U.S.-side—had changing relationship to the U.S.-Mexico border. Following World War I, wartime nationalism fostered increasing hostility toward immigration of Germans, and more generally eastern and southern Europeans. In response, U.S. Congress passed an immigration act, which required a literacy test for legal migration into U.S. borders, as well as a head tax of \$8. In addition to Chinese and Japanese who were already excluded through Chinese

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<sup>415</sup> For more on the role of the U.S.-Mexico border through the lens of U.S. Chinese exclusion policies, see Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007); Erika Lee, "Enforcing the Borders: Chinese Exclusion along the U.S. Borders with Canada and Mexico, 1882-1924," *Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (June 2002): 54-86. See also Robert Chao Romero, "Transnational Chinese Immigrant Smuggling to the United States via Mexico and Cuba, 1882-1916," *Amerasia Journal* 30, no. 3 (2004): 1-16.

Exclusion Acts (1875, 1882, 1892, etc.) and the Gentlemen's Agreement (1908), the 1917 immigration law was also known as the "Asiatic Barred Zone Act" because it designated most of Asia and the Pacific as regions of the globe from which migration into the United States was prohibited. That same year the Mexican Constitution required that Mexican laborers who were seeking to leave the country show proof of labor contract, which was approved by both municipal authorities and the Mexican consulate of the place where they would work.<sup>416</sup>

U.S. Congress again revised immigration laws in 1924 with the National Origins Act. Although no quotas were placed on migration from the Republic of Mexico, the 1924 Act changed the function of the U.S.-Mexico border for Mexicans seeking to cross it. Whereas Mexicans had previously been able to cross back and forth, the 1924 act required them to pay an entrance fee and, at times, submit to an examination. Just three months following the passage of the National Origins Act, Congress also established the Border Patrol to police the illegal entry of Mexican migrants. Even so, that year the Commissioner General of Immigration reported from Los Angeles District that while there were adequate measures to control the illegal entry of Chinese and Japanese, no such apparatus could control such unsanctioned entry of other aliens. In an attempt to address the organized "smuggling rings" that affected the city, the Los Angeles district assigned local officers to duty as "patrol inspectors," so as to provide added policing in the city and at the local port at San Pedro. Much of this "smuggling" was of non-

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<sup>416</sup> For more on the Immigration Act of 1917, see Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 19; Kelly Lytle Hernández, "'Persecuted Like Criminals': The Politics of Labor Emigration and Mexican Migration Controls in the 1920s and 1930s," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 219-220.

Mexicans, especially Chinese.<sup>417</sup> Another revision of the immigration act in 1929 further criminalized illegal entry by assigning a first offense as a misdemeanor and a second offense as a felony. As Kelly Lytle-Hernandez has argued, these changes to immigration meant that Mexican labor migrants, who had over the last few decades crossed into the United States, became illegal aliens.<sup>418</sup> The 1924 Act also barred the “alien” wives of U.S. citizens, which had particular meaning for Chinese American residents, as wives of merchants could no longer cross into the United States.

Even following the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act and the formation of the Border Patrol that same year, Mexican migrants continued to cross into the United States. During the 1910s and 1920s first- and second-generation Mexicans, who migrated to Los Angeles by the thousands to work in railroad, citrus and other industries, accounted for some 368,013 of the population.<sup>419</sup> Scholars have estimated that the Mexican and Mexican American population in the United States accounted for “more than 10 percent of Mexico’s entire population” and became the United States’ “largest new immigrant group.”<sup>420</sup>

Los Angeles’ Mexican population was especially vulnerable to the economic downturn of the Great Depression. They were often the first to lose their jobs, as

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<sup>417</sup> United States Department of Labor, *Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration to the Secretary of Labor, 1924*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924) 20-21. On the smuggling of Chinese across the U.S.-Mexico border, see Chao Romero, “Transnational Chinese Immigrant Smuggling to the United States via Mexico and Cuba, 1882-1916.”

<sup>418</sup> Lytle Hernández, ““Persecuted Like Criminals”: The Politics of Labor Emigration and Mexican Migration Controls in the 1920s and 1930s,” 219-220, 229.

<sup>419</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930* (Washington, D. C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1930).

<sup>420</sup> Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*, Revised edition. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 9.



industries downsized and sometimes prioritized hiring whites.<sup>421</sup> Additionally, the Department of Charities began to reduce the relief provided to Mexicans under the assumption that Mexicans' dietary practices cost less than whites'.<sup>422</sup> Although Mexican migrants were again considered "non-quota immigrants," the Survey of Race Relations reported concern for the exponential increase in Mexican migration into U.S. borders, noting that "clandestine" crossing of the U.S.-Mexico border posed a hazard to the nation due to the migration of not only working men, but families as well, who often lived in poor housing. The Survey proclaimed that "the problem of living conditions in the neighborhoods where Mexicans have settled in large numbers [was] of increasing concern for the common welfare" and that Mexicans were "another racial group with whom amicable adjustments must be made in industry and in the community at large."<sup>423</sup>

While the state advocated the elimination of Mexican residents from impinging on the U.S. nation, capital sought to maintain cheap labor sources found in Mexican migrant communities. In an effort to rid the country of all "aliens," the federal, state and local governments took measures in 1931 to alleviate the effects of the economic depression by creating ways to diminish unemployment. "During the same year, the Bureau of Immigration deported the largest number of aliens in its history, nearly half

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<sup>421</sup> Emilia Castañeda de Valenciana, interview by Christine Valenciana, transcript, 1982, September 8, 1971, Mexican American Collection, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton; George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 210-212.

<sup>422</sup> Emily K. Abel, "From Exclusion to Expulsion: Mexicans and Tuberculosis Control in Los Angeles, 1914-1940," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 77 (2003): 838.

<sup>423</sup> "Mexicans," in "Office File, 1914-1927" Box 20:3, Survey of Race Relations, Hoover Library, Stanford University.

of whom were Mexican.”<sup>424</sup> U.S. industries had for several decades been relying on the unlimited migration of Mexican workers to labor in their fields, in their plants and on their tracks. Los Angeles industries were no exception. Los Angeles County farm adviser M.B. Rounds was cited in the *Los Angeles Times* as having noted that the repatriation campaigns would cause a “serious shortage of labor” in the local citrus and walnut industries. Additionally, George P. Clements, who at the time headed the agricultural department of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce discussed the severe impact that repatriation would have on the industries of Southern California that depended on Mexican labor. “They [Mexicans] are not county charges, but are the honest working element that has helped develop this country. They certainly deserve some consideration, for they are absolutely necessary to us and their absence is bound to be sharply felt by employers generally.”<sup>425</sup>

While U.S. industries advocated against the limitation of immigration in order to maintain their source of cheap labor, others such as the American Federation of Labor strictly opposed unlimited immigration because they argued, Mexican laborers competed with “American” (white) laborers. Indeed, as Manuel Gamio noted in 1930, “The American government and people, as a whole, are not in favor of Mexican immigration. There is a general belief that if this continues indefinitely it will create difficult problems—economic, racial, and cultural.”<sup>426</sup> In support of such claims, the California State Legislature, in a 1929 joint assembly, wrote a resolution calling for

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<sup>424</sup> Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 78.

<sup>425</sup> “Great Migration Back to Mexico Under Way,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 1931.

<sup>426</sup> Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 175.

federal restriction of Mexican immigration, stating that “the influx of laborers across the Mexican border causes unfair and unjust competition to American labor.”<sup>427</sup>

These anti-Mexican campaigns echoed the anti-Chinese campaigns in the 1860s-1880s in the sense that they drew on similar notions of racialized labor competition. In the mid-nineteenth century, working class whites opposed the unlimited migration of Chinese workers because they argued Chinese workers took jobs that white “American” workers should rightfully have.<sup>428</sup> The anti-Chinese movement succeeded in stopping the free migration of Chinese laborers into U.S. borders with the passing of a series of federal policies of Chinese exclusion. It is crucial to note that in the 1930s, just as similar racialized debates were reaching ascendancy around the migration of Mexican laboring families, the policy of Chinese exclusion was quite underway.

This overlapping of Mexican and Chinese exclusion had critical consequences for the spatialization of culture in geographical spaces where both Chinese and Mexican communities lived together, as they did in the Los Angeles plaza area. As this dissertation has discussed, although federal and local policies and practices of Chinese exclusion succeeded in vastly decreasing the general immigration of Chinese workers to the United States during the first few decades of the twentieth century, the local population in the city of Los Angeles actually increased. Thus, although the Chinese population of in the City of Los Angeles was significantly smaller than the Mexican population, as was its rate of migration, both populations were on the rise during the

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<sup>427</sup> “Assembly Joint Resolution, No. 11—Relative to restricted immigration, Introduced by Messrs. Anderson, Jones, Lyons and Bernard. Referred to Committee on Federal Relations, April 23, 1929,” Carton 10, Folder 2, Paul S. Taylor Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>428</sup> Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Sucheng Chan, “The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870-1943,” in *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 94-146.

1910s and 1920s. While the Chinese population was much more localized in Chinatown, the Ninth Street district and West Adams, the Mexican population was more dispersed amongst the growing industries. Despite the expanded geographical areas in which Chinese and Mexican residences could be found, the plaza area in the 1930s became a symbolic and material space from which both Chinese and Mexican residents were removed from the city and their living and business spaces physically replaced by architecture representing the city's achievements of U.S. and global modernity.

### **Repatriation**

At the start of the Depression, Emilia Castañeda de Valenciana lived in the house her parents owned just across the river from the plaza in Boyle Heights. Her mother, Gregoria Castañeda, worked as a domestica for a wealthy white Jewish family in West Los Angeles, which required her to commute daily. When she became ill with “la gripa,” Gregoria could not stop working because her husband, Natividad Castañeda, although skilled in stonemasonry and bricklaying, had some trouble finding work after the economic downturn. “She used to go earn the living and he used to stay home and keep house for us,” Emilia recalled. “He told her to stay home, but she wouldn’t listen.” Gregoria passed away in 1934 on the same day that Emilia made her First Holy Communion. Earlier that day, Natividad had “used [white] shoe polish to cover the black [part of her shoes],” because they could not afford white shoes for Emilia to wear to the mass. After Gregoria passed, like many others in their neighborhood, the family lost their house and they moved several times to various dwellings in the area.

Eventually Natividad asked the County Charities for help with transportation to move with his three children to Mexico, where they joined relatives for many years.<sup>429</sup>

Most of those whose transportation was paid for by the County Welfare Department were families like the Castañedas, in which one or both parents were born in Mexico and the children were born in the United States, and who faced difficult decisions about whether and how to move.<sup>430</sup> Unlike many adults relocating alone or in groups, families with mixed citizenship statuses were faced with a different set of choices about relocating that involved either moving the entire family, or being split up by putting children in state custody or leaving them with family or friends who stayed. Mexican families that were particularly hard hit by the economic downturn and turned to the County Welfare Department for relief, became the specific targets of the Welfare Department's "humanitarian policy" through which they encouraged Mexicans to "voluntarily" repatriate and covered the costs of one-way train tickets to Mexico.<sup>431</sup> Significantly, along with these complex stories of the choice to emigrate, police deportation raids also became a central part of the "repatriation" story, as many decided to move to Mexico for fear that they would be arrested and jailed. Local police joined federal immigration authorities in raiding Mexican residential and business spaces on Main Street and the plaza, which also prompted many to leave the United States. This contrast between the narrative of "humanitarian" relief and stories of neighborhood

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<sup>429</sup> Emilia Castañeda de Valenciana, interview.

<sup>430</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

<sup>431</sup> County Welfare Department, Los Angeles County Charities, *Annual Report July 1, 1930 to June 30, 1931*, and *Annual Report July 1, 1932-1933*, Jesse Dean Papers, Special Collections, University of Southern California.

policing and depression-era hardship, complicate how the nation and its relationship to capitalism were imagined in 1930s Los Angeles.

At a time when economic catastrophe resulted in the mass migration of thousands of whites from the Midwestern and Southern regions of the United States *into* California, local and state governments executed systematic repatriation and deportation campaigns culminated in the mass migration of thousands of Mexicans *out* of California to Mexico. With the increase in the white population in the city, especially poor whites, local officials and boosters were forced to reckon with the question of how to accommodate these newcomers. The depression left fewer employment opportunities available for all, but the concern on local and national levels was with the employment of the white working class, to keep them out of poverty, and thus maintain American identity. Camille Guerin-Gonzalez has argued that the “belief in a shared definition of the American Dream hid deep splits along class, gender, ethnic, and racial lines over who had access to economic security and freedom in California...and over the meaning of the dream itself.”<sup>432</sup> Both nationally and locally, civic leaders and government authorities turned to employment and relief as two sides of the same coin in their efforts to mitigate the problems of the depression. In practical terms in California, and especially in Los Angeles, they turned to anti-immigrant deportation campaigns as a solution. With Mexicans being the largest immigrant population that had arrived in huge numbers during the 1910s and 20s, anti-Mexican sentiment gave way to anti-Mexican movement.

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<sup>432</sup> Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams*, 3.

After William N. Doak took office as the U.S. Secretary of Labor in 1930, he declared a solution to solving the United States' growing unemployment concerns. Under his authority, immigration officials carried out raids across the country, in both public spaces and individual homes. Despite a great deal of criticism for these actions, the Commissioner General of Immigration under Doak's office, reported in 1931 that it was unapologetic in defending its "purpose to spare no reasonable effort to remove the menace of unfair competition which actually exists in the vast number of aliens who have in one way or another, principally by surreptitious entries, violated our immigration laws." In doing so, the Commissioner noted that the department was upholding its duty "to foster, promote, and develop the welfare of the wage earners of the United States, to improve their working conditions, and to advance their opportunities for profitable employment."<sup>433</sup> In his estimation, the dichotomy between "wage earners" and "aliens" justified his actions. Historian Abraham Hoffman has argued that Doak's plan had an "obvious contradiction" in that many of the aliens he earmarked for deportation in order to open up jobs for the "wage earners" were already unemployed or receiving relief services.<sup>434</sup>

In Los Angeles, Charles Visel, head of the Los Angeles Citizens Committee on Coordination of Unemployment Relief—a conglomeration of the city's civic and business leaders as well as other interested parties—spearheaded a plan along with the U.S. Labor Department and the Hoover's President's Emergency Committee for Employment "to rid the city of all deportable aliens." Taking Doak's lead, Visel

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<sup>433</sup> United States, Department of Labor, Bureau of Immigration, *Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration, 1931*, 14, quoted in Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 40.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*

coordinated raids that were announced in newspapers and on the radio, reasoning that “it would be a great relief to the unemployment situation if some method could be devised to scare these people out of our city.”<sup>435</sup> At various times, different English-language publications stressed that “deportable aliens” included “Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese and others.”<sup>436</sup> Meanwhile, *La Opinión* stressed that Mexicans were the specific targets.<sup>437</sup> To be sure, in the midst of a monumental crisis of capitalism, ridding the country of “aliens” became a means by which national, state and local authorities could seek to restore order. Visel’s program conducted raids throughout Los Angeles County, targeting Chinese, Japanese and some whites along with Mexicans. With the large numbers of Mexican migration into the city in the prior years, Mexicans made up the majority of those who were apprehended. Notable raids took place in El Monte and East Los Angeles, frightening many Mexicans, regardless of citizenship, to keep out of sight and out of public places like streets and businesses.<sup>438</sup>

One of Visel’s most dramatic raids took place on the plaza. On February 26, 1931, plain-clothed policemen rounded up and detained four hundred people on the plaza. After they demanded information from the detainees proving their legal entry, they took into police custody seventeen people, including eleven Mexicans, five Chinese, and one Japanese.<sup>439</sup> The following day *La Opinión* featured a headline proclaiming, “11 Mexicanos Presos en un Aparatoso Raid a la Placita/11 Mexicans

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<sup>435</sup> Quoted in Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams*, 81.

<sup>436</sup> *San Francisco Examiner*, January 26, 1931, quoted in Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression*, 47.

<sup>437</sup> “11 Mexicanos Presos en un Aparatoso Raid a la Placita,” *La Opinión*, January 29, 1931, quoted in *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>439</sup> See Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 214; Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression*, 61.



Arrested in a Inordinate Raid on the Plaza” and reported that Mexicans had been arbitrarily taken into police custody and assigned travel to Mexico via train. An accompanying photograph showed the scene of the plaza during the raid. Significantly, the caption noted “la multitud que observaba los arrestos/the large crowd that witnessed the arrests.”<sup>440</sup> Later the *Los Angeles Times* reported that immigration agents had been on Main Street near the plaza making a number of arrests.<sup>441</sup> Such policing of the area raised concern amongst Mexican residents who feared being arrested and jailed in the midst of an anti-Mexican campaign.

Indeed it seemed Main Street and the plaza was an ideal site for such raids because Mexicans and Chinese as well as Japanese residents made up the nonwhite population that was viewed as possibly “illegal” in the plaza area. In particular, the plaza space itself—surrounded on all sides by residential and business buildings, and a central meeting place, with entrances that could be blockaded—was particularly vulnerable as the vast majority of its residents were racialized as “alien” bodies that had no place inside U.S. borders. While Chinatown was, through exclusion policy and practice, already identified as a central location for the concentration of “alien” Chinese bodies, through the 1930s repatriation projects Mexican bodies also became understood as “illegal.” Despite the presence of Japanese settlement nearby, the plaza area itself was specifically a site at which the overlapping racializations of Mexican and Chinese foreignnesses in geographical space compounded the presence of border policing in these neighborhoods. It should be noted that federal policies of Japanese exclusion had

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<sup>440</sup> “11 Mexicanos Presos en un Aparatoso Raid a la Placita,” *La Opinión*, February 17, 1931, quoted in Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 209-210; Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression*, 60-62. My own translation.

<sup>441</sup> “Great Migration Back to Mexico Under Way,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 1931.

also been underway since the passing of the Gentleman's Agreement in 1907-08, which put Japanese residents in a similar social location as Chinese through anti-Asian exclusion.<sup>442</sup>

While Chinese exclusion was handled at the federal level, repatriation campaigns were undertaken locally by city, county, and state governments along with the help of local charities both civic and private. Supporters of repatriation campaigns were well aware of the limitations posed by formal deportation, and in the midst of the frenzy surrounding the proliferation of unemployed white working class during the depression, they sought a quicker solution. Deportation required a warrant for arrest, detention, and a court trial before an undocumented person could be charged with a federal felony and deported. This could be seen with the enforcement of Chinese exclusion, as deportation cases often went through lengthy court hearings before a judge ruled that an individual be deported. "Voluntary" relocation presented a faster alternative that would assumedly remove more people without the paperwork and bureaucratic steps necessary to legally enforce removal. The use of intimidation by creating a spectacle of legal enforcement in Mexican neighborhoods was one of Visel's tactics.

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<sup>442</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, Japanese residents generally settled in the area that came to be known as Little Tokyo near Los Angeles Street and San Pedro, just blocks south of Chinatown. Additionally, a handful of Japanese merchants ran their shops on the plaza during the first few decades of the twentieth century. See for example, Los Angeles Directory Company, *Los Angeles City Directory, 1929* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Directory Company Publishers, 1929); Los Angeles Directory Company, *Los Angeles City Directory, 1915, including San Pedro and Wilmington* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Directory Company, Directory Publishers, 1915). See also Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 128-132. For additional works addressing Japanese settlement in Los Angeles, see Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Jeremiah W. Jenks and W. Jett Lauck, *The Immigration Problem: A Study of American Immigration Conditions and Needs*, 3rd ed. (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1911).

His other tactic was to join forces with the Los Angeles County Welfare Department of the County Charities, and the Mexican government to encourage Mexicans, in particular, to leave the country. The Welfare Department along with Mexican Consulates in Los Angeles worked well together in targeting the Mexican population in particular. Both had everyday access to more Mexican men, women and children, than the police and immigration officials could reach through public raids. The County Charities provided a great number of families with relief services. Emilia Valenciana remembered that “a lot of people had to be on welfare then.” In fact, her family along with many others went to “a great big warehouse” to get groceries, clothing and shoes. “Maybe it seemed huge to me because I was a little girl. We went to pick up clothes there. Maybe they were out last clothes that we picked up before we left for Mexico.”<sup>443</sup>

Due to increasing numbers of poor and unemployed residents in Los Angeles, the department’s general services were increasingly stretched thin. The County Welfare Department noted in 1931 that the new applicant pool had been “more and more from the skilled white groups.” The report went on to state that the white working classes “find it necessary to seek assistance from others only when national or world wide catastrophes force such needs upon them,” furthering the notion that Mexicans as a group took unnecessary advantage of the relief services available in the County.<sup>444</sup> Reports of the County Welfare Department centered on the economic benefits of promoting Mexicans to repatriate, which would in turn save the County a great deal of

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<sup>443</sup> Emilia Castañeda de Valenciana, interview.

<sup>444</sup> County Welfare Department, Los Angeles County Charities, *Annual Report July 1, 1930 to June 30, 1931*, Jesse Dean Papers, USC Special Collections

money that could be spent on relief for “citizens.” Providing train tickets for Mexicans to move to Mexico, the department calculated that repatriation saved the County some \$80,000 in 1932-33.<sup>445</sup> Despite the claims that Mexicans disproportionately received relief services, and were therefore more dependent on the state than whites, in 1932, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce wrote that Mexicans only accounted for eleven percent of the relief cases dealt with by the Department of Charities.<sup>446</sup>

As Emily K. Abel has shown, the focus on relief also associated Mexicans especially with the threat of tuberculosis infection as a justification for encouraging repatriation, so that “we can well imagine that long after the raids ceased many Mexicans were unwilling to report symptoms of tuberculosis.”<sup>447</sup> In Huntington Park, the County Charities created a “Mexican Tuberculosis Colony” using the homes that were vacated by repatriados. “The Bureau of County Welfare moved in Tuberculosis families, not only eliminating the necessity for Sanaterium [sic.] care, but enabling a valuable educational program to be carried on among the non-tuberculosis members of such families.”<sup>448</sup> Thus the racial association of Mexicans with tuberculosis inspired the Welfare Department to add another layer to this racialization of dependency by creating a segregated area within the already segregated area. Despite the creation of this “tuberculosis colony” in 1932-33, tuberculosis was more and more a mitigating impetus for repatriation cases in latter half of the decade. While the majority of repatriados left

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<sup>445</sup> County Welfare Department, Los Angeles County Charities, *Annual Report July 1, 1932 to June 30, 1933*, Jesse Dean Papers, USC Special Collections

<sup>446</sup> Letter from Secretary and General Manager of Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce to Mr. C. W. Pfeiffer, Secretary of the Charities Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Kansas City, Mo., March 16, 1932. Paul S. Taylor Papers, Carton 10, Folder 31, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>447</sup> Abel, “From Exclusion to Expulsion,” 843.

<sup>448</sup> County Welfare Department, Los Angeles County Charities, *Annual Report July 1, 1932 to June 30, 1933*, Jesse Dean Papers, USC Special Collections

during 1931-1933, approximately half who left via train in 1938 had been diagnosed with tuberculosis.<sup>449</sup>

Mexico worked in conjunction with the U.S.-based initiatives in support of the repatriation campaigns. With an eye toward its own modernization plans toward excavating natural resources and developing farming and transportation industries, the Mexican government saw in repatriation an opportunity to regain its population and utilize the industrial and agricultural skills learned in the United States. In his 1930 study of Mexican immigration to the United States, Manuel Gamio concluded that while Mexico supported emigration, it objected to the permanent settlement of Mexican migrants in the United States because it meant a loss of labor and blow to the economy that represented “a step backward in the progress of Mexico and a definite loss in useful energy for the development of the country.”<sup>450</sup> The Mexican government placed ads in Los Angeles’ Spanish-language newspapers encouraging Mexicans to move to Mexico. One woman recalled that “the press said that Mexico was very eager to have her people return...I remember the headline, ‘Mexico abre su brazos a sus hijos/Mexico opens its arms to its children.’”<sup>451</sup>

In a display of supposed international cooperation, the Welfare Department celebrated that its “humanitarian policy” demonstrated the establishment of “a program of reciprocity between Mexico and the United States which cannot but redound to the benefit of both countries and to the better understanding and great good will between

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<sup>449</sup> Abel, “From Exclusion to Expulsion,” 847.

<sup>450</sup> Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States*, 176-178.

<sup>451</sup> Maria Bustos Jefferson, interview by Christine Valenciana, transcript, 1988, September 11, 1971, Mexican American Collection, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton. For more discussion of the role of the Mexican government in the repatriation campaigns see Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 209-226; Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams*; Balderrama and Rodríguez, *Decade of Betrayal*.

the United States and Her neighboring sister Republic, Mexico.”<sup>452</sup> In this sense, County Charities packaged their fundamental role in the removal of thousands of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, particularly families, as one that was patriotic in its benevolence. They did, after all, foot the transportation bill for those Mexicans who decided to move to Mexico. Paradoxically, repatriados who decided to leave with the help of the County Charities found themselves aboard the very same trains that travelled on the very same tracks on which many Mexican men had come to work.

The railroad depot played a significant material and symbolic role in the experiences and representations of repatriation. While many traveled by car, those who traveled to Mexico via train gathered by the hundreds at the railroad depot, which was in the early years of the decade, located just blocks southeast of the plaza along the riverbed. According to the article, “a trainload of 345 families” left Los Angeles depot for El Paso the week prior, and that another such load would be “shipped to the border” that week.<sup>453</sup> Spanish-language newspaper *La Prensa* reported that on February 24, 1932, some 1,200 local Mexican residents gathered at the railroad depot waiting to be taken to El Paso, “[a] la frontera a bordo de cuatro trenes especiales/at the border aboard four special trains.” From there, “el gobierno de México les proporcionará pases en los ferrocarriles que puedan continuar su viaje hasta sus lugares de destino/the Mexican government will provide train passes so that they can continue their travel to their places of destination.”<sup>454</sup> Two days later, El Paso newspaper reported that the Mexican Consulate was preparing for the 1,200 Los Angeles repatriados who would arrive in El

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<sup>452</sup> County Welfare Department, Los Angeles County Charities, *Annual Report 1933*, Jesse Dean Papers, Special Collections, University of Southern California.

<sup>453</sup> “Great Migration Back to Mexico Under Way,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 1931.

<sup>454</sup> “1200 Mexicanos se Repatriaran de Los Angeles,” *La Prensa*, February 25, 1932.

Paso on March 1, before crossing the border.<sup>455</sup> While the Welfare Department created its own story of international altruism and public service, Mexican repatriados—U.S. citizens, Mexican citizens, adults, and children—seemed to have different stories. Emilia Castañeda de Valenciana noted that her father requested that the County send the family to Mexico because he thought he was more likely to find work there. Additionally, he did not want to leave the children—all U.S. born citizens—behind to be left to become “wards of the state,” left to foster care. She remembered that they gathered with hundreds of other Mexican repatriados at the train depot.<sup>456</sup> María Bustos Jefferson, a student at Occidental College in the early 1930s, whose parents came to Southern California following track work on the Southern Pacific, organized a committee to provide food and clothing to repatriados who waited at the Union Pacific terminal to board their trains every Wednesday. “There was a great deal of sadness connected with this,” she recalled. “Every seat was taken, every seat. I mean there wasn’t one space left.”<sup>457</sup>

Like Emilia Castañeda’s father, Enrique Vega’s parents voluntarily repatriated with their extended family. Enrique Vega’s family came to Los Angeles in the early 1920s. Vega attended the Amelia Street School on Vignes Street near the plaza, which in the 1930s was home to many Mexican families.<sup>458</sup> During his tenth grade year in 1931, when his family was going through difficult economic time, he stopped attending classes at Lincoln High School for a while in order to work in agriculture, picking apricots and tomatoes with his family in surrounding areas. He returned to school for a

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<sup>455</sup> “Se Preparan Para Ayudar a 1,200 Repatriados,” *La Prensa*, March 1, 1932

<sup>456</sup> Emilia Castañeda de Valenciana, interview.

<sup>457</sup> Bustos Jefferson, interview.

<sup>458</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*.

short time before quitting again to work as a gardener in Beverly Hills and Hollywood, after his brother left home to care for his own family. When times became too rough for his family around 1933, repatriation to Mexico seemed a good option. Vega recalled that the Mexican Consulate in Los Angeles made the arrangements for his family to travel to Zacatecas, Mexico. For the trip, authorities provided the family with provisions; Vega remembered, “Back then they had a place you could go, get whatever you need, flour, beans, food.” The family, “about ten” in all, including his sister’s children and husband, piled into “a Chevrolet truck and a Dodge car” and caravanned through the desert to join their relatives in Zacatecas.<sup>459</sup> For many Mexican repatriados, the decision to leave was due to the hardships of the depression, just as white working class migrants who arrived in the city.

Tremendous numbers of Mexican and Mexican Americans crossed the U.S.-Mexico border to the Mexican side during the virulent repatriation drives of the Great Depression era. From southern California alone an estimated 75,000 left for Mexico by 1932—during the first two years of the repatriation campaigns.<sup>460</sup> Although repatriation was a national campaign, Los Angeles Mexicans were particularly targeted for removal. The Los Angeles County of Charities funded the departure of 350 to Mexico beginning on March 23, 1931. Two years later, it had paid for the “repatriation” of more than 12,700.<sup>461</sup> By the end of the 1930s, Los Angeles County

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<sup>459</sup> Enrique Vega, interview by Christine Valenciana, Oral History tape, September 3, 1972, Mexican American Collection, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.

<sup>460</sup> See for example, Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29.

<sup>461</sup> Carey McWilliams estimated that in the 1930s the County of Los Angeles repatriated 11,000 Mexicans. McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land*, 317.



and City authorities had a hand in the repatriation and deportation of one third of Los Angeles' Mexican population.<sup>462</sup>

In contrast to other industrial urban centers of the United States, Los Angeles did not experience as extensive a downfall of industrial capitalism. The city worked hard to maintain the image of modernity that it had built up in the 1920s. *In the first few years of the repatriation campaigns*, the County Charities reported that they “prevented outbursts, riots, bread-lines, and other demonstrations so destructive to public welfare and property values and so endangering to the safety of its citizens” characteristic of other cities in worst conditions under the Depression. The narrative the County Charities promoted of itself centered on measures to maintain modernity. Programming like the “Mexican Tuberculosis Colony,” and the narrative of dependency, the County Charities promoted an image of modernity through charitable work. While Visel’s fervor regarding the use of coercion, intimidation and police occupation to execute the removal of “alien” bodies was obviously xenophobic, the Charities’ benevolent approach to aiding repatriation travel was more altruistic but perhaps just as violent.

Following on the heels of the institutionalization of the U.S. Border Patrol in 1924, repatriation campaigns, whether promoted by the County Welfare Department or initiated by the police raids, demonstrate a way of policing nation-state borders. The crisis of the Depression prompted civic leaders and government offices to seek ways to alleviate the problem of white working class unemployment. In order to redraw boundaries around the imagined community that is the U.S. nation, they focused on the racializing Mexican populations not simply as “dirty” or “primitive” (categories that

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<sup>462</sup> Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 210.

had been used previously) but as “alien” and “illegal.” Discriminatory discourse, in other words, took on a particularly nationalist valence. The material consequences of such discourse played out in material ways through nation-state policies and government programming that instituted repatriation campaigns.

### **Chinese Exclusion**

On October 23, 1934, eighteen-year-old Toy Fong left her husband Kack Lew Gee, who was a local merchant.<sup>463</sup> Both were residents of Los Angeles Chinatown and had been married for little over a month. Fong’s attorney claimed that he “kept her a prisoner in her apartment from the time of their marriage.” Labeling her a “doll bride,” the *Los Angeles Times* reported in late November that Gee had purchased Fong from her father, Gin Lem, for the price of \$1,800. Gee allegedly threatened to kill Toy Fong and Gin Lem, and noted that he and Lem were members of different local tongs, who would handle the dispute outside the U.S. legal system.<sup>464</sup> Almost two months later in late December, Fong and Lem were reported missing and authorities quickly discovered that they had left the country for Shanghai, purportedly to avoid tong retribution.<sup>465</sup>

Los Angeles police detective department, along with the U.S. Attorney’s office, secured a warrant for the U.S. marshal at Shanghai to arrest Gin Lem and Toy Fong upon their arrival aboard the S. S. President Harrison in Shanghai, and detain them each for \$10,000 bail. Lem, who was a U.S. citizen, was indicted for violation of the Mann

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<sup>463</sup> I have chosen to refer to the woman in this case as Toy Fong. In the newspaper accounts, Toy Fong’s name is spelled in many different ways such as “Toy Fon,” “Toy Fong,” “Toy Fon Lew,” or “Toy Fon Lem.”

<sup>464</sup> “Doll Bride Purchased,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 1934.

<sup>465</sup> “Tong in New Parley Over Doll-Bride,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 1934; “Tong War Clouds Wane,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 27, 1934.

Act under the assumption that Toy Fon was a prostitute and he had illegally brought her across state lines, which constituted human trafficking. The warrant for Toy Fong's arrest included an indictment for falsely claiming to be a U.S. citizen.<sup>466</sup> One article stated that the U.S. Attorney acted "on advises from local Chinese leaders" that the situation over the marriage of Fong and Gee "had precipitated a budding tong war between the Hop Sing Tong and the Four Families Association."<sup>467</sup>

The *Times* reported that the motivation to secure these international warrants for felony charges was less about the violation of immigration law, than it was an attempt to ward off "a Pacific Coast Chinese war" as "trouble [was] brewing" between tongs on a state-wide scale.<sup>468</sup> Despite accounts noting that Chinatown residents appeared unaffected and unconcerned about tong violence, the Los Angeles Police force descended upon Chinatown and occupied the neighborhood, "on a twenty-four hour basis" at times, for more than three months.<sup>469</sup> The so-called "Doll Bride Case" offers multiple lenses through which to understand how national borders mapped onto neighborhood boundaries of Chinatown: the sexual and gender politics of immigration law, the discourse of racial anxiety and the policing of neighborhood boundaries, and the differential spatial imaginaries of Chinese residents.

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<sup>466</sup> "Federal Step Taken to Balk Tong Clash," *Los Angeles Times*, December 28, 1934. cite additional articles re indictments.

<sup>467</sup> "Arrest Near in Tong Case," *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1934.

<sup>468</sup> "Tong Peace Move Fails," *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1934.

<sup>469</sup> See for example, "Federal Step Taken to Balk Tong Clash," *Los Angeles Times*, December 28, 1934; "Tong Peace Move Fails," *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1934; "New Challenge Hurlled in 'Doll Bride' Tong Row," *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1935; "No War Now, Too Busy," *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1935; "Tong Strife Doubt Cast," *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 1935; "Tong Wars No Concern of Quon," *Los Angeles Times*, January 9, 1935; "Chinese Leaders Meeting Today in Tong Peace Move," *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 1935.

Both Lem and Fong were indicted for criminal offenses involving illegal border-crossings—Lem for violating the Mann Act by crossing into the United States with a prostitute, and Fong for perjury in declaring U.S. citizenship. They crossed the U.S. border together at the Port of San Pedro aboard a ship arriving from Hawai'i, then U.S. territory, during which they claimed to be related as father and daughter. The *Times* reported later that Kack Lew Gee had informed reporters that “Toy Fon Lew [was] not the daughter of Gin Lem, but that she had been purchased by Gin Lem in China and brought to this country by him.”<sup>470</sup> U.S. Congress passed the Mann Act, also known as the “White Slave Traffic Act,” in 1910 as a response to Progressive Era reformers who advocated for the eradication of urban vice industries, specifically prostitution. At the behest of reformers the act was intended “to promote the vision of women held in bondage against their will, of mysterious druggings and abductions of helpless young girls, and of unexplained disappearances of innocent and naive immigrants forced into lives of prostitution and vice.”<sup>471</sup> While Congress made no racial distinctions, the act made it a federal crime to transport across state lines “any woman or girl for the purpose of prostitution or debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose.”<sup>472</sup> The indictment of Lem for violating the Mann Act reveals the intersections of race, gender and sexuality in the making and enforcing of nation-state borders. It was based on the assumption that Toy Fong was 1) a prostitute, 2) not Lem’s daughter, and therefore 3) not a citizen, none of which was every clarified in the newspaper accounts. Apparently the spectacle

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<sup>470</sup> “Federal Step Taken to Balk Tong Clash,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 28, 1934.

<sup>471</sup> Marlene D. Beckman, “The White Slave Traffic Act - the Historical Impact of a Criminal-Law Policy on Women,” *Georgetown Law Journal* 72, no. 3 (1984): 1111.

<sup>472</sup> U.S. Congress, *White-Slave Traffic Act*, passed by the Sixty-First Congress, June 25, 1910. Chap. 395, Sec. 1.

and mystery of sexual, national and moral illegality was of greater interest to readers than whether or not she had legally entered the country.

That said, the race, gender and sexual politics of how the U.S. nation-state borders were enforced with regard to Chinese exclusion might shed some light on this categorization and the meanings attached to them. While Chineseness in general was associated with illegal immigration, Fong's gender also presented racial-sexual dimension of anti-Chinese racism that associated Chinese women with prostitution regardless of whether they were involved in sex work industries. During the exclusion era (1875-1943), the children of Chinese American merchants could legally enter the United States. After a 1906 earthquake and fire destroyed the records in San Francisco, many Chinese gained entry into the United States by creating paperwork to prove that they themselves were citizens or that their father was. These border-crossers were known as "paper sons," because the majority were single men or boys.<sup>473</sup> It seems possible that Fong may have been a "paper daughter," since Lem already claimed U.S. citizenship.<sup>474</sup>

For Toy Fong, however, producing false paperwork for citizenship would have come with added risks specific to being a Chinese woman. According to the news accounts, Assistant U.S. Attorney first name Utley stated that his office had transmitted the Mann Act indictment only in response to Gee's assertion that Lem and Fong were

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<sup>473</sup> On paper sons see Estelle T. Lau, *Paper Families: Identity, Immigration Administration, and Chinese Exclusion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Evelyn Nakano Glen, "Split Household, Small Producer and Dual Wage Earner: An Analysis of Chinese-American Family Strategies," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 45, no. 1 (February 1983): 38.

<sup>474</sup> Notably, due to the restrictions of the 1924 Immigration Act, Fong also could not have claimed citizenship based on her marriage to Gee who was a merchant and citizen.

involved in human trafficking.<sup>475</sup> The racialization of Chinese women in the United States operated under a sexualized moral binary in which Chinese women could be either wife or prostitute, legal or illegal, but not both. Under the Chinese exclusion acts, women had to show proof that they were married to a merchant in order to gain entry to the United States or to stay in the United States. Unmarried women—whether they were workers, poor or unmarried—had more difficult time crossing the border legally because immigration practices and officials considered their singleness and lower class status immoral.<sup>476</sup> Even so, many Chinese women in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did work as prostitutes as well as seamstresses and domestic servants, or had experienced coerced marriages. As Peggy Pascoe has noted, some women were deceived into marriage as part of a smuggling scheme for entry into the United States..<sup>477</sup>

Chinese prostitution—and the smuggling of Chinese women across U.S. borders for this purpose—was quite common in the U.S. West after the passing of exclusion laws. A combination of coercion, kidnapping and labor contract were common conditions under which many Chinese women crossed into the United States at San Francisco where tongs imported them through a variety of smuggling tactics.<sup>478</sup> Leong Gor Yung, a resident of Chinatown San Francisco, noted in 1936 that drug trafficking

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<sup>475</sup> “Federal Step Taken to Balk Tong Clash,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 28, 1934.

<sup>476</sup> See Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 97; Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 168-177.

<sup>477</sup> Additionally, from the turn of the twentieth century onward, industrial work, along with retail and office labor, created a niche for white U.S. American women, leaving domestic service work positions to immigrant and ethnic women. Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue*, 160, 166.

<sup>478</sup> Lucie Cheng Hirata, “Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs* 5, no. 1 (Autumn 1979): 8-13; Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 42-44.

and human trafficking went hand-in-hand because prostitution was often linked to opium trade. Prior to the regulation of U.S. borders to curtail illegal Chinese crossings, “the girls often came voluntarily as immigrants, but now they are brought in as “daughters” or “wives” of Chinese merchants.”<sup>479</sup> Historian Benson Tong has described these women as “unwilling travelers.” In an attempt to alleviate conditions of poverty, many families saw arranged marriage as an option to lessen the number of mouths to feed, but also sometimes to obtain the bride-price. “For most,” Tong argues, “it was an uncertain future, a period in their lives that would be marked by their struggle to extricate themselves from the chaos of the trade.”<sup>480</sup> Perhaps extricating herself from the trade is what Toy Fong attempted to do when she filed for “separate maintenance” and claimed she had been “kept a prisoner in her apartment.”<sup>481</sup>

While it is entirely possible that Toy Fong was a prostitute, it is also possible that she was not. The *Times* repeatedly noted that the “price” of Kack Lew Gee’s bride was \$1800, which he gave to Gin Lem in order to marry his daughter, thus characterizing it as a “purchase.” Gee demanded a return of the money after Toy Fong filed for separation, and insisted on the return of an additional \$500 sum he had given to Toy Fong after their marriage.<sup>482</sup> The cultural practice of exchanging gifts such as jewelry or money as a gesture in bringing together the families during a marriage was a tradition amongst Chinese communities during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as was marriage arrangements made by matchmakers.<sup>483</sup> Although there was no

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<sup>479</sup> Gor Yun Leong, *Chinatown Inside Out* (New York: B. Mussey, 1936) 22.

<sup>480</sup> Tong, *Unsubmissive Women*, 55, 34-55.

<sup>481</sup> “Doll Bride Purchased,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 1934.

<sup>482</sup> “New Challenge Hurlled in ‘Doll Bride’ Tong Row,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1935.

<sup>483</sup> In her study regarding the culture of gift exchange during marriage among Chinese communities,

reporting about a dowry given to Gee at the time of the marriage, it seems plausible that Gee gave the \$1,800 to Lem as a bride-price. In addition to the “doll bride” trope, the press repeatedly used words like “petite,” “pretty,” to characterize Toy Fong, thereby marking her body as an object in a monetary exchange, which allegedly was the primary issue of concern between the Hop Sing Tong and the Four Families Association.

The figure of the “doll bride” conjures images produced in the well-established narrative genre of the turn of the century that figured Chinese women’s existence at the intersection of slavery and prostitution—the “rescue narrative.” In the earlier decades of the twentieth century, rescue narratives focused on how ostensibly helpless Chinese girls had been sold into a system of sexual slavery either through arranged marriage or through prostitution industries, and their freedom could be found with the help of white women mission workers who claimed a female moral authority, as well as other Western feminists who claimed a modern identity in contrast to the supposed antiquity of Chinese womanhood.<sup>484</sup> During the 1920s, as Peggy Pascoe has noted, a turn-of-the-century focus on Victorian ideals shifted to a culture that seemed more interested in exoticized sexual expression. Stories of “yellow slavery” focused on the unfreedom of

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Selina Ching Chan notes, “In the old days, jewelry gifts were presented as either dowry or bride-price and were of special importance in a marriage. The dowry was received by the bride from her own family, while the bride-price consisted of various gifts presented by the groom’s family to the bride’s. The exchange of jewelry, in the forms of dowry and bride-price, was to mark a transfer of rights over a woman from the natal family to her husband’s family.” She argues that through the process of modernity, the meaning of jewelry giving has changed as has the practice of romantic love marriages instead of arranged ones, but still remains to some extent a symbol of patriarchal control. Selina Ching Chan, “Love and Jewelry: Patriarchal Control, Conjugal Ties, and Changing Identities,” in *Modern Loves: The Anthropology of Romantic Courtship and Companionate Marriage*, ed. Jennifer S. Hirsch and Holly Wardlow (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2006), 37, 39-40.

<sup>484</sup> Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue*; Sarah Paddle, “The Limits of Sympathy: International Feminists and the Chinese ‘slave girl’ Campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 4, no. 3 (2003).



Chinese people in the global market—men as coolie laborers and women as prostitutes—in contrast to the free wage labor system that characterized the definition of the U.S. white working class.<sup>485</sup> In this context, if U.S. national identity and border restrictions in relation to Chinese were centered around notions of freedom, the presence of Chinese female bodies within U.S. borders contradicted that identity through the “slave girl” and “bride doll” images by showing the intersections of labor, sex and morality.

Although she was not directly involved in the tong conflict, Toy Fong and her body became the center of the controversy, spectacle and mystery that whites often used to characterize Chinatown. Discursively, the “doll bride”—in this case Toy Fong—was figured as primarily responsible for creating the friction between antagonistic tongs, in a manner that was strikingly similar to Ya Hit, discussed in Chapter One. Frequently referred to as a “slave girl,” narratives of the 1871 Chinese Massacre positioned Ya Hit as the “cause” of the tong fight over her purchase, which led to events of the riots. Likewise, Toy Fong occupied a symbolically central position in this “doll bride” narrative as a “purchase,” even while her own story was rendered invisible. In 1934 as in 1871, Chinese women’s bodies were figured as a problem for white law enforcement in keeping order among Chinese men in Chinese neighborhoods.

Such discourse surrounding Chinese women was based on whites’ perceptions of lived realities in Chinatown and the geographical boundaries they imagined contained Chinese residents. Although brothels were located in other areas of Los Angeles, whites generally identified tongs as the organizations that facilitated vice industries,

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<sup>485</sup> For more on the discourse of “yellow slavery” in relation to U.S. imperialism, see Yu-Fang Cho, ““Yellow Slavery,” Narratives of Rescue, and Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton’s “Lin John” (1899),” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 1 (February 2009): 35-63.

especially in gambling, opium and prostitution that they associated with the Chinatown landscape. The spatial arrangement of prostitution in Los Angeles took a turn in 1909, with the passing of local reform measures to eliminate the city's crib districts. Regardless, police often turned a blind eye to these operations. In the 1920s and 30s, prostitution along with other forms of vice, were not only concentrated in Chinatown, but were increasingly found in the working class industrial zone between downtown and the River.<sup>486</sup> One researcher of the 1930s noted that prostitution as well as saloons were increasingly located on Main Street especially the blocks farther south of the plaza.<sup>487</sup> Another scholarly observer wrote that in 1924 that "regular houses of prostitution were permitted outside of Chinatown only along Aliso Street," which ran along the southern edge of Chinatown.<sup>488</sup>

The white discourse depicted Chinese organizations universally as "tongs" involved in illegal drug and human trafficking, despite the fact that some were primarily benevolent societies, based on familial or regional ties, that served the U.S. Chinese communities.<sup>489</sup> Historians have described a complicated relationship between the benevolent associations and the illegal activities of tongs. Historian Benson Tong writes that the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in San Francisco was "an umbrella organization for district associations in the city." Meanwhile tongs "represented importers of women" who fought against anti-vice advocates such as the

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<sup>486</sup> Mark Wild, "Red Light Kaleidoscope: Prostitution and Ethnoracial Relations in Los Angeles, 1880-1940," *Journal of Urban History* 28, no. 6 (2002): 722.

<sup>487</sup> Harrod, "A Study of Deviate Personalities as Found in Main Street of Los Angeles."

<sup>488</sup> Nora Sterry, "The Sociological Basis for the Re-organization of the Macy Street School" (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1924), 22.

<sup>489</sup> Leong Gor Yu wrote in 1936 that tongs were significantly affected by the economic downturn of the Great Depression. "With a sharp decrease in their income, fighting has almost ceased, and most of their professional fighters have been forced to take up a trade." Leong, *Chinatown Inside Out*, 82.

CCBA. Chinese prostitutes often got caught between the CCBA and the tongs in the midst of their struggles over local power.<sup>490</sup> According to historian Raymond Lou, the district associations were primarily structured to provide mutual aid assistance to the members, specifically services to attend to members' "social and fraternal needs...such as gambling parlors, brothels, and lounging. At lounging areas members could obtain hot meals prepared by professional chefs, rest, write letters to distant loved ones, often through the service of an association employee who transcribed one's thoughts to a loved one, and the like." Lou also notes that the presence of tongs amongst Los Angeles' Chinese population indicated that Los Angeles Chinatown was significant enough for San Francisco-based associations to have local branches there.<sup>491</sup>

Los Angeles residents Guarding Liu and Kit King Louis both wrote that U.S. Chinese communities created benevolent societies that were based on district, familial, or political party affiliation that they transplanted from China.<sup>492</sup> The Four Families Association was the Los Angeles branch of the San Francisco CCBA, which was also known as the Chinese Six Companies. Guarding Liu wrote specifically about the Four Families Association, which he identified as a mutual aid society that provided varying kinds of assistance to its members ranging from letter-writing to hot meals and apartment-finding. Additionally, he wrote that Family Associations handled their own disputes between each other, somewhat autonomously from U.S. legal structures. Social ties within the Associations were quite strong, and based on the assumption of

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<sup>490</sup> Tong, *Unsubmissive Women*, 66, 193.

<sup>491</sup> Raymond Lou, "The Chinese American Community of Los Angeles, 1870-1900: A Case of Resistance, Organization, and Participation" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1982), 26.

<sup>492</sup> Kit King Louis, "A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles" (Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1931), 26; Lui, *Inside Los Angeles Chinatown*, 139-151.

loyalty “unequalled anywhere.” While conflicts between and among members may have been on an individual level, those individuals carried the weight of the association.<sup>493</sup> Writing in the early 1930s, Louis asserted that these benevolent societies made it “possible for the Chinese to care for their own paupers, invalids, and public charges.” However, she also noted that tongs and “tong fights” “have always been recognized by good citizens as a great evil, which must be done away with altogether.”<sup>494</sup>

Certainly, the narrative presented in the story of Toy Fong was not one of “rescue” from tong exploitation. After all, it was not concern about Toy Fong’s safety, or the safety of Chinese residents in general for that matter, that drew the interest of press or the City’s police department. Rather, it was the supposed menacing tong battle—the idea that the mobility of Chinese male bodies was uncontrollable—that prompted Chief of Detectives Taylor of the Los Angeles Police Department to “order a special detail of officers to patrol the streets and alleys of the local Chinatown as a precaution against any outbreak of violence.”<sup>495</sup> Shocking headlines published from December 1934 through the following March featured the tongs as the main attraction to a scandalous story, referring to the struggle between them using monikers like “Tong War Clouds,” “Tong Row,” or “Tong Threat.”<sup>496</sup> Virtually every newspaper account of the “doll bride” case focused more on sensationalizing the dangers of potential tong violence than on Toy Fong herself. Additionally, the press sporadically reported on

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<sup>493</sup> Lui, *Inside Los Angeles Chinatown*, 150.

<sup>494</sup> Louis wrote that among whites, the benevolent societies whose function was primarily protection of the community were known as “tongs” because they often fought with each other in so-called “tong wars.” Louis, “A Study of American-Born and American-Reared Chinese in Los Angeles,” 24-26.

<sup>495</sup> “Federal Step Taken to Balk Tong Clash,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 28, 1934.

<sup>496</sup> See for example, “Tong War Clouds Wane,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 27, 1934; “New Challenge Hurlled in ‘Doll Bride’ Tong Row,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1935; “Tong War Clouds Fade, Bay City Police Report,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1935; “Chinatown ‘Padlocked’ in Tong War Threats,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1935

truce-making meetings between the tongs that were meant to resolve the dispute between Gin Lem and Kack Lew Gee, noting that the tongs met to discuss a peaceful resolution to the dispute over the ownership of Toy Fong's body.<sup>497</sup>

After Toy Fong and Gin Lem left the United States on a ship bound for Shanghai, Taylor worked in conjunction with Assistant U.S. Attorney Utley to issue federal felony indictments, so that the two would be arrested on arrival in Shanghai.<sup>498</sup> While the *Times* implied that the arrests would aid in the settlement of the tong disputes, its explicit central concern was to keep peace amongst Chinese men. Police squads varying from twenty-four to twenty-eight officers patrolled Chinatown throughout this dramatic narrative. On the eve of New Years Eve, they were joined by ten additional detectives.<sup>499</sup> That night "all other detectives on duty in the squad offices at the City Hall were also ordered to remain at headquarters to be available should an outbreak occur."<sup>500</sup>

White anxiety around tong warfare related to Toy Fong's case did not remain confined to local, or even regional, discourse and state action. Chinese organizations were national ones, with headquarters usually located in San Francisco. With this in mind, public panic about a "Pacific Coast Chinese war" was a leading concern from the start. In fact, on the eve of Lunar New Year in Chinatown San Francisco, police blockaded that neighborhood for fear that the tong disputes in Los Angeles would spread to Chinese neighborhoods throughout California. The use of firecrackers, part of

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<sup>497</sup> "Tong Peace Move Fails," *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1934; "Rival Tongs Talk Peace," *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 1934.

<sup>498</sup> "Federal Step Taken to Balk Tong Clash," *Los Angeles Times*, December 28, 1934; "Arrest Near in Tong Case," *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1934.

<sup>499</sup> "Arrest Near in Tong Case," *Los Angeles Times*, December 29, 1934; "Tong Peace Move Fails," *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1934

<sup>500</sup> "Tong Peace Move Fails," *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1934.

the cultural tradition of new year celebration, was banned “on the fear they might mask gunfire.” Despite this concern, San Francisco authorities lifted the ban the following day because they “anticipated no trouble” and reported that “the ‘crackers’ were already popping merrily.”<sup>501</sup>

Although the press generated dramatic spectacle around Toy Fong and the tongs and the Police Department took extra measures toward policing Chinatown boundaries, no reports of an actual war between the Los Angeles tongs appeared in 1935. In contrast to the narrative of the looming tong-instigated “Chinatown uproar,”<sup>502</sup> the *Times* did, however, report with some measure of perplexity that Chinese residents seemed to go about their lives unaffected. A two photo spread, for example, featured Fay Sing, a Chinatown resident pointing to the public Chinese language news bulletin board known as “the Wall,” with a caption reading “Are tong war clouds gathering in Chinatown? ‘Not so you could notice it!’ ...says pretty Fay Sing.” The other photo showed Elmer Leung inside a Chinatown temple.<sup>503</sup> Additionally an article about Quon Shung Doon, cafe owner and Chinatown leader, said that “Quan Doon is a busy man and has no time for rumors concerning a tong war in Chinatown.”<sup>504</sup> According to the article, Leung Tung who ran the Kong Chow Temple was more concerned with the hard times of the economic depression and critiqued tourists who “mill about his temple, flick cigarette ashes on his precious trappings and then leave without dropping a coin in

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<sup>501</sup> “Chinatown Blockaded, Bay City Police Act in Row Over Flight of Bride From Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 1935.

<sup>502</sup> “Tong Threat Marks Trio, Chinatown Uproar Caused by New Phase of War Over Doll Bride,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 1935.

<sup>503</sup> “‘No War Now, Too Busy,’ Say Chinatown Dwellers,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 1935.

<sup>504</sup> “Tong Strife Doubt Cast,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 1935; “Tong Wars No Concern of Quan,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 9, 1935.

the collection box. And rice and rent are big worries these days.”<sup>505</sup> Indeed, residents continued their daily lives in Chinatown and for some, there were more pressing concerns than a tong battle.

The last newspaper reports about the case noted that Gin Lem had been arrested and brought back to Los Angeles for trial. Toy Fong remained in China because the U.S. government declined to pay for her travel. While the Hop Sing tong offered to pay for the cost of her return, U.S. Attorney General Cummings refused to authorize the payment. Without Toy Fong’s witness testimony with regard to Gin Lem’s indictment of the Mann Act, the case was dropped. Hop Sing tong, in conjunction with the U.S. federal authorities, proposed that “Lem be allowed to voluntarily deport himself to China if the charges are dismissed,” and that Hop Sing would pay for the travel. Over a year later, Kack Lew Gee filed for divorce from Toy Fong.<sup>506</sup>

Hysteria around the possibility of a tong war that never happened underscored the extent to which anti-Chinese attitudes gained new significance during the Depression era. The sensationalized discourse surrounding tong operation in Chinatown demonstrates the racial anxiety about the permeability of Chinatown boundaries—the idea that criminal Chinese male bodies and the illicit sexuality associated with them could not be contained within these boundaries. Discourse, of course, played out in material ways. The police department, with the help of federal legal structures, justified the “lockdown” of Chinatown by using the same racial logics about Chinese immorality that the newspapers portrayed. The focus on the figure of the “Chinese

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<sup>505</sup> “Tong Strife Doubt Cast,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 1935 .

<sup>506</sup> “Chinaman Will Learn Fate in Mann Act Case,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 1935; “Chinese Tong Dispute Over Doll-Bride Ends,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 31, 1935; “Bride Sued by Chinese, Tong War Cloud has Echo,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 1936.

slave girl,” the attention to the possibility that she had been sold into prostitution, and the notion that all Chinese men were associated with the sex trade worked together in white spatial imaginaries of Chinatown neighborhoods and the goings-on there. The ways in which delineations of nation-state borders coincided with ideas about neighborhood boundaries, despite the permeability of both, illuminates how the racialized and sexualized dichotomies with which U.S. nation-state boundaries were drawn: moral versus immoral, free versus unfree and civilized versus uncivilized. In spatial terms, the racial anxiety about the blurring of these categories took material shape in with the literal policing of Chinatown space and control of the mobility of Chinese bodies.

That such alarm erupted in the process demonstrates the anxiety that spatial segregation of communities did not actually segregate bodies, which threatened always to overspill or transgress the neighborhood boundaries. Gender politics of border formation that called into question the legality of both Toy Fong’s and Gin Lem’s physical existence within the United States intersected with local law enforcement, federal exclusion policy, and sensationalized narratives to legitimate the continued criminalization of Chinese residents and neighborhoods. The “doll bride” case inscribed Chinese bodies as “alien” even as the vast majority of them had already been removed to begin construction of Union Station. Like repatriation campaigns, which were at times carried out through police action at the plaza and along Main Street, Chinese exclusion also legitimized local policing of national borders in Chinatown.



## **Conclusion**

The spatialization of culture in Los Angeles' plaza area neighborhoods during the 1930s reveal overlapping and simultaneous local and national government actions regarding Chinese exclusion and Mexican repatriation. Repatriation campaigns through which police and county charities worked alongside each other to ensure the repatriation of thousands of Mexican bodies during the 1930s, coincided with long-established federal policies of exclusion and deportation of Chinese bodies that took shape through the policing of Chinese in the plaza area with the so-called "Doll Bride" case beginning in 1934. These police actions occurred concurrently with the city's removal of the majority of Chinese and Mexican residences and businesses in order to clear space in which to commence the construction of a municipal civic center, new railroad depot, and revamped tourist spaces at Olvera Street and China City. Indeed this transformation of the plaza area demonstrated the ways in which local practices of geopolitical border-formation took on local shape through multiple removal campaigns, as Chinese and Mexican bodies and neighborhoods were replaced with buildings of imperial control and symbolic modernity that depended on the idea that the threat of brown bodies had been contained.

The economic depression called into question the very project of U.S. modernity by illuminating the failure of capitalism. In Los Angeles' plaza area, modernity-in-crisis took on local manifestations through municipal control of nonwhite populations—specifically the Chinese and Mexican residents and neighborhoods in the plaza area—through local policing of geopolitical borders and physical removal of Chinese and Mexican bodies from city space during the 1930s. Regardless of citizenship status, the

city figured Chinese and Mexican residents as foreign, whether they were recent migrants, had been in the United States for a long time, or for generations even. The racialization of both groups as alien bodies, caste their homes, businesses and communities, as antithetical to the logics of urban modernity.

Urban planning ideologies that rationalized the removal of “slum” areas by identifying them as social ills, worked in tandem with racialized immigration restrictions and deportation campaigns, in order execute modernizing schemas.<sup>507</sup> City plans to build a civic center and railroad depot in the plaza area, Chinese and Mexican residents’ daily experiences, as well as their neighborhoods, streets and homes, were inextricably linked to processes of geopolitical border-making. That is, while Los Angeles’ plaza area neighborhoods were not located directly on the U.S.-Mexico border or on the ports at San Pedro or San Francisco, geopolitical border-making played out in local ways through state and federal exclusion policy, police action, and deportation regimes, which built upon a long established system of racialized and industrialized segregation.

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<sup>507</sup> For more on the local relationship between modernity and the economic depression of the 1930s, see Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 20-22.

## **Conclusion**

In many ways the story of Chinese and Mexican people and racial segregation in the Los Angeles plaza area during the 1870s through the 1930s begins and ends with the railroad. Ironically, the railroads brought many Chinese and Mexican bodies to the plaza as laborers, and also removed them through voluntary repatriation and the building of Union Station railroad depot. The displacement of Chinese and Mexican bodies from the plaza area in the 1930s effectively dispersed the multiracial spatial and community centers that had been created there over the previous decades. When plans commenced to build the civic center, Union Station and the Olvera Street/China City tourist centers in 1933, residents received orders to vacate. Those Mexican residents who did not leave during repatriation, mostly relocated east of the Los Angeles River. For many Chinese, the Ninth Street district and the West Adams district became temporary homes until what is known now as New Chinatown was established in 1938.

East Los Angeles and New Chinatown today, as they were before Union Station was built, are racially segregated areas. East Los Angeles is still largely Mexican American and Mexican immigrant community, and it remains an unincorporated area of Los Angeles County. New Chinatown still a center of Chinese American and Chinese immigrant life, is also a tourist center associated (though unofficially) with Olvera Street because of its close proximity. But their different formations reflect how

exclusion policy and industrial labor recruitment shaped the class dynamics of these communities differently. Chinese exclusion policies that limited immigration to merchants and restricted laborers, for example, contributed to the larger numbers of merchant class Chinese in Los Angeles, and less of the working class. Contrastingly, Mexican migration to Los Angeles in the same time period was largely facilitated through labor recruitment, making for a primarily working class population. New Chinatown was established by Chinese merchants with the assistance of lawyers and the Southern Pacific Railroad Company that helped them to purchase land. This land used to be Sonoratown.

The history of segregation in the plaza area demonstrates how nation-state borders were mapped onto neighborhood spaces. Racial segregation for Chinese and Mexican people in Los Angeles was shaped not only by the shift from Mexican to U.S. colonial rule, but also by interrelated Chinese and Mexican exclusion practices. The Chinese Massacre in 1871, for example, demonstrated not only that the nation-state boundaries were in flux, but that Chinese, Mexicans and whites had different relationships to those boundaries through claims to neighborhood space. Over the next sixty years, Chinese exclusion and industries together would shape the migration and settlement of the plaza area.

White national imaginaries defined Chinatown as China and Sonoratown as Mexico—separate foreign spaces located within U.S. borders located at the plaza. Reformers, tourists, researchers and others drew distinct racial boundaries in the plaza geography, often imagining that only Chinese people could be seen in Chinatown, or only Mexicans could be seen in Sonoratown. The plaza itself, as a shared space

between Chinese and Mexican areas, posed a conundrum for whites who found Chinese and Mexicans “strange neighbors.” Most often, they did not attempt to make sense of the multiracial nature of the space, and instead focused on one particular group. For instance, William McEuen, who sat in the plaza to observe the “Mexican,” focused only on collecting data regarding the Mexicans who were there and not on interactions between Mexicans and others.

Despite rhetorical geo-racial boundaries often produced in the white’s efforts toward progress, the confinement of segregation and the proximity of their neighborhoods created spatial possibilities for moments of sharing, conflict and intimacy amongst Chinese and Mexican residents. Whether or not they interacted with each other, shared spaces meant that the geographical boundaries were not as clear as whites would have believed. Chinese and Mexicans both spent time in the plaza, they attended schools together, and often frequented the same shops and restaurants. Despite their shared spaces and close proximity, residents themselves also created spatial boundaries along racial lines in their settlement patterns and everyday interactions. In the plaza itself during the 1910s, for example, Mexican men often sat in the benches on the western side discussing the Mexican Revolution, while Chinese men gathered around “the Wall” to read news that was posted on the bulletin board.

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