Nuestra Los Angeles

Michael Nevin Willard

In his 1949 book North from Mexico: The Spanish Speaking People of the United States, Carey McWilliams notes that the “settlers” who established Los Angeles in 1781, and whom city elites would later celebrate as “Spanish,” were, in fact, two Indians, two mulattos, two Spaniards (each married to an Indian), a Negro, an Indian married to a mulatto, an Indian married to an Indian, a mestizo married to a mulatto, and “‘a Chino’ . . . probably of Chinese descent” (36). Rather than assimilate (or whitewash) Los Angeles’s multiracial founders within a Spanish fantasy heritage, as had become common by the time North from Mexico was published, McWilliams notes the racial categories used to classify them. Highlighting their marital status to evoke a doubly mestizo history of Los Angeles, he counteracts the national/racial purity in Spanish origin narratives of the city. From the standpoint of current American studies scholarship, McWilliams’s counternarrative of Los Angeles’s origins relocates the city’s beginnings to an intersection of the Spanish Borderlands, the Black Atlantic, and the Pacific Rim. In all of his writings, McWilliams sought to convey the complexities of the West, California, Southern California, and especially Los Angeles. The range of issues to which he turned his pen remain central to Los Angeles scholars today.

“Titles have always bothered me and never more so than in selecting a title for this book. How is one to characterize, in a phrase, a people so diverse in origin?” McWilliams declares in the first sentences of North from Mexico. “I was told that ‘Americans from Mexico’ would be an appropriate title. . . . But, strictly speaking, the Spanish-language minority did not come from Spain and Mexico,” he continues. “They were already very much a part of the landscape when the Anglo-Americans came to the Southwest. . . . (I)n the end, I was driven to the conclusion that the title would have to refer to a process, a movement, a point on the compass” (7–9). McWilliams would ultimately reconcile the paradoxes of identity inherent to Mexican migration by emphasizing culture as a whole way of life: “For it is the direction in which the people have moved that has given unity to their lives. . . . ‘North from Mexico’ . . . implies the extension of a way of life rather than a crossing or a jumping of barriers” (10).
McWilliams’s solution to the contradiction of a singular national identity that belies great heterogeneity is a useful starting point for a review essay on recent Los Angeles scholarship, for it historicizes key aspects of the city itself, then and now. Additionally, his early attention to the centrality of race—Michael Denning and Nikhil Pal Singh best explain the underappreciated significance of his writing/activism in the history of twentieth-century American pluralism and racial thought—is an enduring issue explored in a great deal of recent L.A. studies scholarship. McWilliams’s adroit dismantling of the racial-national assumptions underlying L.A.’s Spanish origin myth offers a glimpse of his constant attention to negative racial signification in order to emphasize systematic racial exclusion and class exploitation as the defining factors in the development of California society. Such historical observations were reconfirmed by his personal experiences. During the early 1930s he wrote articles for national magazines and traveled the state delivering speeches to labor organizations in an effort to stop xenophobic Mexican repatriation campaigns and exploitation in farm labor. As California’s chief of the Division of Immigration and Housing from 1939 to 1943, he devised means to hold farmers and growers accountable for their treatment of laborers by increasing labor camp inspections and holding wage rate hearings (Sachs, 239). In 1943 he used his skills as a lawyer and writer to chair the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee. During the early 1940s he also wrote condemnations of the Japanese internment and the zoot suit riots as incidents that scapegoated Japanese Americans and race-baited Mexican Americans.2

Although McWilliams cited Chicago School figures such as Robert Park or Chicago-trained U.S.C. sociologist Emory Bogardus when it suited his purposes, his observations about California’s multiracial demography and cultural heterogeneity often differed from prevailing academic models of individualist ethnic succession and assimilation. In North from Mexico, he implicitly rejects the Chicago School’s model of linear progression from contact through conflict, and accommodation to assimilation, when he asserts that “it is . . . misleading . . . to assume that . . . [Mexicans] occupy a relation to the majority element which is like that, say, of Poles in Detroit or Italians in New York. . . . Mexicans have never emigrated to the Southwest: they have returned” (58). For McWilliams an adequate explanation of human movement that populated Los Angeles (whether from Sinaloa or Iowa) required overlapping scales from the regional (the Southwest and Midwest) to the hemispheric, and attention to multivectored causality.

North from Mexico anticipated diasporic or transnational models of migration and cultural exchange. Chapter titles such as “The Fan of Settlement”
and "Heart of the Borderlands" reveal a spatial approach. In McWilliams's view, the extensive history of social interactions along the two-thousand-mile border from Matamoros/Brownsville to Tijuana/San Diego, but also extending north to Los Angeles, inextricably bound Mexico and the United States, Hispanic and Anglo, together. He understood the borderlands as a place determined by cultural combination and intermediate identity rather than a rigid boundary creating polarities of nation that required homogeneous, assimilated, indeterminate identity and hierarchies of race. In this regard McWilliams's attention to the diversity of peoples in California places him in a tradition of others who critiqued racial hierarchy and embraced their multiracial circumstances, such as Cuban poet/journalist/essayist José Martí. His famous 1891 essay "Nuestra América" (Our America) called attention to a hemispheric pattern of racial-colonial rule common to North and South American nations, and championed a multiracial ideal that would acknowledge the diversity, intersections, and divergences between and among the many peoples and nations of North, Central and South America.

Virtually all of Carey McWilliams's writings have become a touchstone, because they prefigure key aspects of current work in L.A. studies. Contemporary L.A. scholars have mined his near-universally cited study of greater Los Angeles, Southern California Country, an Island on the Land, for his analysis of topics ranging from planning, housing, and industrial location (Hise), to the Hollywood film industry (Moran), and religious diversity (Peter). Similarly, Aaron Sachs singles out McWilliams's 1939 book Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California as anticipating central concerns of the environmental justice movement, which argues that in places where environmental damage occurs it is often simultaneous with the suppression of local workers' and residents' civil liberties (220–21, 244). Laura Pulido's work on environmental racism in Los Angeles (and Arizona) develops and extends such insights today. Recent/forthcoming books on the myths and symbols of Spanish "fantasy heritage"—a term that McWilliams coined in North from Mexico—by Kate Phillips, William Deverell, Matthew Bokovoy, and Phoebe Kropp chronicle the influence of Southern California's first culture industry. Virginia Marie Bouvier in Women and the Conquest of California, 1542–1840 has since explained in greater detail the relationships "between and among men and women . . . Europeans and Indians" (xv) that McWilliams highlighted in his description of L.A.'s first settlers that opens this essay. Drawn to the example of L.A.'s first settlers, like McWilliams, in order to note L.A.'s "segregated diversity," Philip Ethington asserts that "Los Angeles has two parallel traditions: the earliest being diversity and the most dominant being seg-
regation.” Ethington continues, “These contradictory traditions begin with the multiracial and mostly nonwhite founders of the city in 1781, and with the self-consciously racist dreams of a white metropolis voiced by many Anglo leaders in the 1920s” (2000a, 7).

Some L.A. scholars echo McWilliams’s argument that Los Angeles is exceptional when they claim that the city is now a paradigmatic example of contemporary urbanism. In his book Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions, Edward Soja more subtly differentiates Los Angeles, claiming that it indexes all other places when he emphasizes the city’s “generalizable particularities, the degree to which one can use the specific case of Los Angeles to learn more about the new urbanization processes that are affecting, with varying degrees of intensity, all other cityspaces in the world” (154). Janet Abu-Lughod, author of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America’s Global Cities, points out (and Soja would agree) that the economic, social, and spatial effects of global-economic restructuring are different in these three cities because “common forces originating at the level of the global economy operate always through local political structures and interact with inherited spatial forms” (417). As the essays in this special issue of American Quarterly demonstrate, Los Angeles embodies American studies’ ongoing exploration of racial/gender formation, hybridity and cultural exchange, and counterhegemonic expressive cultural practices. Similar in cosmopolitan diversity to, yet different in specific demographic composition from, New York, New Orleans, Miami, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Seattle, and many other cities that have distinct histories of multi- and interracialism, Los Angeles exceeds the white/nonwhite or biracial common sense that so dominates mass media and public policy debate. Whether exceptional or paradigmatic, as we learn from L.A.’s founders, from Carey McWilliams, and the books reviewed in this essay, learning from Los Angeles, past or present, is important for illuminating and attaining “Our America” today.

The L.A. School and Los Angeles Urbanism: From Anomaly to Paradigm

books, Mike Davis’s 1990 book *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* almost single-handedly brought L.A. School ideas, but not an awareness of the combined scholarly efforts of other L.A. School urbanists, to a broader audience. Davis was one of a group of twenty-some geographers, urban planners, architects, labor historians, and economists at Southern California universities who, in the middle 1980s, convened a meeting to consider the possibility that their common research interests constituted an L.A. School. Geographer Michael Dear, a member of this group, explains that they “became convinced that what was happening in the region was somehow symptomatic of a broader socio-geographic transformation taking place within the United States as a whole” (2002a, 10–14).

To explain the changes they observed in Southern California, the L.A. School consistently emphasized what Edward Soja calls “crisis-generated restructuring” (2000, 96). This explanation of urban-economic change, though not invented by the L.A. School, is one of the hallmarks of L.A. School urban theory. It has been taken up by subsequent L.A. scholars who have extended its explanatory power to make sense of social, political, and cultural processes. Soja argues that urban/spatial development makes economic transformation possible. He details a well-rehearsed history of the shift from the Fordist city of large-scale manufacturing for a national economy (the L.A. region was home to major rubber, auto, steel, and aircraft plants) to the de- and reindustrialized post-Fordist city characterized by small-scale, less-unionized manufacturing (textiles, furniture, light metals), flexibly adapted to production for rapidly changing, global markets. In this regard, as Soja, Allen Scott, and Janet Abu-Lughod point out, Los Angeles differs from “global” cities that have lost industry over the last twenty to thirty years. Los Angeles today is a city with an hour-glass class profile polarized between the predominantly white affluent and the predominantly nonwhite disadvantaged. The affluent are members of a growing corporate service sector. The disadvantaged, largely immigrant (Asian and Central American through the portal of 1965 immigration reforms) are members of the manufacturing/service (janitorial, gardening, domestic) sector.

In the collection edited by Michael Dear, *From Chicago to L.A.: Making Sense of Urban Theory*, Dear and Steven Flusty usefully schematize the contradictory conditions resulting from economic restructuring and globalization that Mike Davis first narrated in *City of Quartz*. Diversity and hybrid cultures exist concurrently with political/economic polarization. Urban space becomes increasingly mono-functional and exclusive. Amusement/consumer zones, privately governed and gated communities, and single-use, membership communities defined by wealth, age, or leisure, constitute the insular spaces of
privilege. For the poor and working classes, urban space is increasingly secured, policed, and defensively fortified. Recapitulating the concerns of Davis's 1999 book *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*, as well as those of other L.A. environmentalists, Dear and Flusty outline L.A.'s urban-environmental contradictions. Southern California's unpredictable, often extreme weather combines with poorly regulated development to ensure damage from earthquakes, fires, and floods of apocalyptic proportions. As an urban ecosystem, Los Angeles abuts precipitous mountains and canyons, leading to "habitat loss" and a wild edge of urbanization where "encounters between humans and . . . animals" (63–71) have become increasingly frequent and deadly. In *Ecology of Fear*, Davis details the racialization of L.A.'s environmental extremes: wildfires are attributed to gangs and the homeless, and terrified residents blame the victims of their encroachment into mountain foothills when they compare marauding mountain lions to gangbangers. Throughout his tour of the "literary destruction of Los Angeles," in which L.A.'s demise has been imagined through invasion, disaster, and nuclear war, Davis uncovers the xenophobic and supremacist fantasies of Los Angeles's white racial unconscious.

Like McWilliams, L.A. School proponents have countered the Chicago School of urban sociology that dominated urban studies for most of the twentieth century. The authors in *From Chicago to L.A.* critique the Chicago School on several counts: for the naively modernist assertion of a city as a "unified whole" whose areas are oriented to its center; for an overemphasis on the individual whose "personal choices ultimately explain . . . the overall urban condition, including spatial structure, crime, poverty and racism"; and for the too linear assertion of an "evolutionist paradigm" of ethnic succession and acculturation into modern society (vii–ix).

Rather than the Chicago School concentric circle model of organic urban growth and development oriented toward a city's center, Dear and Flusty liken recent urban growth to a game of keno. In their model, urbanization resembles a checkerboard pattern made up of rapidly built, single-use parcels dropped willy nilly into the city, in which the periphery organizes the center. Here, the presence of postnational, global entities (e.g., transnational corporations, migrant networks, or networks of terrorism) influence urban planning priorities and the allocation of municipal resources (71–80).

While such conceptual models usefully condense processes of urbanization, cities are not organisms or gaming boards. In the final analysis, they are lived in and built by people who carry out their urban lives interacting with fantasies, myths, images, symbols, and structures over which they have vary-
ing degrees of control. As Raymond Rocco puts it, “We need to view each ‘Los Angeles’ as constituting a particular, specific, and concrete way of living in and through the city that is both bounded and linked to other sectors by its particular configuration of factors such as race, class, gender, immigrant status, political access, and economic resources” (366). Recent L.A. studies both following and diverging from the L.A. School conceive of the city in such a way as to reveal such contingent qualities: social constructions of the urban and spatial constructions of the social.

Yesterday’s Tomorrowlands:
Historical Geography of Land Use and the Built Environment

Apocryphally, if inaccurately, described as any number of “suburbs in search of a city,” Los Angeles, in its diffuse sprawl, is not the antithesis of planned urban development as such core-periphery phrases imply. Rather, planning led to the multicentric city of nodes and parcels condensed in Dear and Flusty’s “keno board” metaphor. Recent studies of public housing and community-scale suburban development help to revise the misconception that L.A.’s urban form is the result of only housing development. L.A. city builders pursued and implemented divergent, and thus highly political, “master plans” for urban Southern California. Beginning in the 1930s, and becoming more controversial during the late 1940s and early 1950s, public housing in Los Angeles became an obstacle to pro-business growth coalitions who advocated for federal assistance to private development, namely central-city urban renewal.

In The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism, Dana Cuff uses L.A. City Housing Authority photos to show how housing officials, prevented from building on open sites, “constructed” the housing crisis in working-class neighborhoods in order to legitimate their plans for removal of old stock housing. Though housing authority officials were well intentioned, their visual justification for new housing racialized and pathologized East L.A. residents. Housing removal ruined coherent neighborhoods and dislocated hundreds of predominantly Mexican American families. The Provisional City affirms cultural studies theories that representation is not secondary to economic, material (and in this case architectural) reality, but is constitutive of it.

That said, during the 1940s and 1950s the community-scale, superblock, self-contained public housing developments that the L.A. Housing Authority built presented new political opportunities for their occupants and residents from surrounding neighborhoods. Prior to Cuff’s book, L.A. scholars have long relied on a series of superb articles by Don Parson as almost the only
recent scholarship on urban redevelopment in central city Los Angeles. In *Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles*, Parson contrasts the community modernism of public housing advocates and the corporate modernism of urban renewal advocates. One of the many strengths of Parson's book is his emphasis on the agency of housing directors and residents who used tenant organizations and the physical space of public housing itself as important platforms for labor and civil rights struggles. Public housing developments were important places for mid-twentieth-century interracial alliance and political activism. For example, the Aliso Village housing development became a place of temporary protection for Mexican American youth fleeing vigilante violence during the 1943 zoot suit riots. After the riots, housing directors formed organizations that provided local youth with important social capital (social and political skills, recreational opportunities) that was otherwise severely limited in the working-class neighborhoods of East Los Angeles. During the 1940s, L.A. public housing was a place where *pachucos* were not draft dodgers but, in Parson's estimation, "colorful revolutionists."

The community builders Greg Hise studies in *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* are the corporate modernists from Parson's account of the battle for affordable housing in 1940s and 1950s Los Angeles. *Magnetic Los Angeles* opens a window onto the parcelization of the Los Angeles urban landscape and is a major revision of American suburban history. Hise argues that the history of mid-twentieth-century neighborhood development in Los Angeles forces a reconsideration of the city's dispersed urban form. He corrects the common misperception that it was housing and suburbs that lead to L.A.'s sprawl. Sprawl was intentional, carried out by city planners and companies such as Kaiser Community Homes, who built community-scale housing developments according to regional master plans that advocated balanced decentralization. While superblock housing developments were to be self-contained, with space for recreation, schools, churches, and retail consumerism, their builders also believed that they should be laid out in coordinated proximity to local industries. It was industry as much as housing that produced L.A.'s urban form, Hise argues. In countering misperceptions about L.A. sprawl, Hise leads us to a better understanding of L.A. as a polymnucleated, multicentric city.

Caff and Parson lead us to a better understanding of the development of areas within central city Los Angeles as a history of its transformation from an urban core to "discrete land use parcels" (Dear 2002b, 88) occupying partitioned squares on the L.A. keno-scape. Originally planned for central city
sites, public housing projects were pushed to the industrial districts on the eastern periphery of downtown from original sites at Bunker Hill and Chávez Ravine. Where affordable housing would have been built on Bunker Hill, downtown growth coalitions initiated plans for office buildings barricaded by freeways from inner-city, working-class neighborhoods. Where affordable housing would have been built in Chávez Ravine, Dodger Stadium, surrounded by a sea of parking lots, was erected as a replacement for an older Wrigley Field located in South Central. To extend Cuff’s and Parson’s analyses, unlike Dodger Stadium but like its Chicago namesake, I.A.’s Wrigley Field—as a venue for other uses such as outdoor pro wrestling and boxing matches, and especially rhythm-and-blues concerts featuring performers from nearby Central Avenue like Johnny Otis, Dinah Washington, Big Jay McNeely, and Roy Milton—was closely linked to its surrounding neighborhoods and the mixed-use urban fabric of early-twentieth-century Los Angeles.

**Zoöpolis**

While L.A. decentralization was planned on a regional scale, Hise notes in *Magnetic Los Angeles* that it was not as balanced as it should have been. Profit-driven community builders could not or would not adequately integrate agriculture or green space into their residential-industrial vision of land use. In *Eden by Design: The 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region*, Hise and coeditor William Deverell have reissued, with an extensive introduction and an interview with a former Olmsted firm planner, a regional master plan for L.A. parks that was never implemented. The plan, *Parks, Playgrounds, and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region*, is an example of decentralized planning informed by a vision of integrated land use. The highlight of the plan for 70,000 acres of park space was to have been a 440-mile system of “continuous parks and parkways interpenetrating the region and connecting it with the countryside” (95). Locating greenbelts of parks and open space within easy travel distance of any Los Angeles resident by following the river channels and streambeds that cross the L.A. basin would have served the double purpose of providing both recreation and flood control.

*Eden by Design* also contributes to a growing body of urban-environmental work on Los Angeles that includes important recent essays by Jennifer Wolch, Stephanie Pincetl, and Laura Pulido, and two books, Blake Gumprecht’s *The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death and Possible Rebirth* and Jared Orsi’s *Hazardous Metropolis: Flooding and Urban Ecology in Los Angeles*, which recount the massive public works projects that straightened L.A.’s rivers and creeks, lined
them with concrete and consigned them to the single use of flood control. Los Angeles decentralized even further when suburban development of flood plains became possible, adding more streets, parking lots, and runoff, requiring more flood control (Orsi, 1/8). Rapid delivery of untreated sewage, grease, oil, chemicals, and refuse to Southern California beaches when major storm runoff overtaxed the flood control/sewer systems compromised public health (Gumprecht, 123–29). Admittedly, single-use flood control also contributed to the local economy, youth subcultures, and the housing crisis in unplanned ways when movie makers, performance artists, drag racers, skateboarders, and the homeless recognized the opportunities to be had in the empty, paved space of these often-dry urban arroyos. Orsi notes the ways that racialization led to environmentally unsound urban development. During the first decades of the twentieth century, before L.A.'s rivers were turned into flood control channels, Anglo Angelenos contributed to flood disasters. Because they accepted L.A.'s Spanish fantasy and discounted Mexican residents' memories of unpredictable weather as the product of an archaic culture, they built where they shouldn't. City boosters ignored generations of accumulated knowledge about drought, flooding, and erratic rivers in favor of another myth they held dear: that of Southern California having an idyllic climate free from natural disasters, favorable to health, agriculture, and industry (13–16).

White Houses

William Frederick's study of one of Los Angeles's most influential, early-twentieth-century real estate developers, Henry E. Huntington and the Creation of Southern California, shows how Los Angeles grew. Huntington's practice of buying land and building homes along his Pacific Electric streetcar lines, the largest electric interurban system in the United States, demonstrates that when Southern California became suburban throughout the first half of the twentieth century, far-flung residential nodes were positioned to become insular in ways that either foreshadowed or contributed to the current city of parcels. Similarly Clark Davis's book on corporate culture in the early twentieth century, Company Men: White Collar Life and Corporate Cultures in Los Angeles, 1892–1941, shows that moving up at work and attaining solid middle-class status also meant moving up and out of the wrong kind of white neighborhoods (mixed-class and mixed-ethnicity) to more class and ethnically homogenous tracts that matched prevailing ideals of Anglo Saxon homogeneity. In Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles, Eric Avila shows how popular culture institutions contributed to post-war suburban whiteness. Finally, as of 1990, more than 54 percent of whites,
nearly 40 percent of African Americans, 37 percent of Latinos, and 17 percent of Asians lived in census tracts dominated by their ethnic group (Soja 2000, 291–94).

Two recent books about mid-twentieth-century suburbanization reveal the social logic of white Los Angeles’s most pronounced mono-racial group. In My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920–1965, a community-labor history of the Southeast L.A. County working-class suburb of South Gate, Becky Nicolaides locates workers’ construction of white identity in the social-material fact of suburbanization itself: the realization and then defense of their material dreams. In the 1920s, white migrants from the South and Midwest came to South Gate to work in L.A. industries. They moved to homes built explicitly to support and attract local manufacturing industry. Using their homes as a hedge against unemployment, they supplemented factory incomes in rural terms with backyards devoted to self-sufficient activities such as gardening and auto repair. Continuing into the postwar period, relative affluence from stable jobs in the booming Southern California auto and rubber industries allowed South Gate residents to transform their yards into spaces of privacy that signaled middle-class status. Predominantly white throughout the forty-five years Nicolaides covers, South Gate differed from more racially diverse working-class districts such as Watts on its western border. Nicolaides’s attention to city politics in South Gate and social strife with black residents of nearby Watts shows that, like working-class white home owners in Detroit or Chicago, South Gate residents defended their property values (by ballot and violence) and actively maintained the white homogeneity of their community by segregating schools. My Blue Heaven is significant for Nicolaides’s attention to the history of the “possessive investment in whiteness.” More often told as the story of white working-class ethnics in northeastern cities, the history of the silent majority revealed in My Blue Heaven shows that such racial resentment was well-established in the West. For these blue-collar workers, who supported unions but also voted for Barry Goldwater, home ownership, as much as work, defined class and racial identity.

Similar to working-class residents of South Gate, middle-class residents of Orange County explained and defended their affluence in individualist terms. Lisa McGirr’s Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right focuses on the suburban, middle-class roots of the New Right in postwar Orange County. Although they benefited directly or indirectly from the fact that Southern California enjoyed the highest level of federal defense funding for any region in the United States, these conservatives attributed their success and relative affluence to hard work, not government defense funding. Like
South Gate residents, many among Orange County's first suburban residents were recent arrivals from the Midwest. They experienced homogenous housing developments as devoid of the traditional values of church and community they had left behind. Political activism as a means of reinventing their sense of community helped to resolve the contradictions they felt between their affluent "modern" consumer lifestyles and their traditionalist, individualist, antimodern beliefs. Through John Birch Society meetings held in their homes, church organizations, and grassroots Republican Party organizations, Orange County's politically conservative residents worked against communism, liberalism, and cultural relativism, which they identified as threats to American society. Honing their beliefs and strengthening their sense of community in local battles over education, conservative Orange Countians would fashion the political ideology at the grass roots that would eventually take over the California Republican Party, deliver the governorship of California to Ronald Reagan in 1966, and give the presidency to Richard Nixon in 1968 and Reagan in 1980.

Shades of L.A.

There are two sides to the coin of whiteness. Nicolaides's and McGirr's studies of working- and middle-class suburbs are examples of defensive and exclusionary attempts to secure white privilege, submerged under class and conservative political ideologies in the case of McGirr's middle-class Orange County residents. The other side of the white coin is offensive, imprinted by police, media, and legal tactics of repression and segregation. Edward Escobar's comprehensive study of Mexican Americans and the L.A. Police Department, Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity, expands our knowledge of the extent of the repression the police carried out against Mexican Americans throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century. João Costa Vargas's forthcoming Blackness as Blueprint: Resistance and Social Transformation in Los Angeles similarly illuminates police brutality in African American South Central. Three books by Eduardo Obregón Pagán, Ian Haney-López, and Josh Sides chronicle the political/spatial struggles for inclusion and community self-determination that challenged white repression (Pagán, Sides) and the collective logic of whiteness (Haney-López).

In Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A. Eduardo Pagán places a dual emphasis on urban imaginaries and spatial location to provide new insight into the Sleepy Lagoon murder case and the zoot suit riots. Whereas previous studies of these events—Carey McWilliams's North
from Mexico and Mauricio Mazón’s The Zoot-Suit Riots—established the extent of racial animosity directed toward Mexican American, African American, and Filipino youth, Pagán contextualizes these two Los Angeles wartime events socially and geographically, providing greater insight into dynamics of identity formation among Los Angeles Mexican Americans.

Effectively contrasting productions of “Mexicanism,” Pagán shows how the meaning of the city and Mexican presence in it were contested. During the interwar period Mexican expatriates and Mexican Americans expressed a “Mexico Lindo” nostalgia for a lost homeland through mutual aid societies, social clubs, and community service organizations. Influenced by Roosevelt’s Office of the Coordinator of Inter American affairs, Mexican American community leaders such as Manuel Ruíz claimed Latin American identity and promoted “a Pan Americanism founded on a common western heritage” (33) as a wartime solution to L.A. racial strife. Pagán reveals the deeper geographical factors and expressions of place commitment that were at issue during the events leading to the death of José Díaz at the Sleepy Lagoon and the events of the zoot suit riots. In the face of anti-Mexican sentiment, Mexican American youth asserted their presence in public places through distinctive hair and clothing styles, and in L.A.’s parks, streets, movie theaters, and nightclubs. Claims to public places, such as city streets or the Venice beach boardwalk, were linked to neighborhood social networks, established through weekly dances sponsored by neighborhood associations, “home parties,” and at school or church. Pagán carefully maps the Williams Ranch area to reconstruct the coincidence of events that led to José Díaz’s death, providing a perspective on the Sleepy Lagoon defendants that had previously been buried in court records, overshadowed in historical memory by police brutality and racism (police, judicial) and by the political advocacy conducted by the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, who countered portrayals of the 38th Street youth as a gang by portraying them as wholesome innocents. Similarly, Pagán recovers a history of clashes over control of public space that preceded and was the opposite of the vigilantism, neighborhood invasion, and spatial repression of the zoot suit riots. He shows that the provocations Mexican American youth directed at servicemen on Figueroa Boulevard—misperceived as unpatriotic acts of juvenile delinquency—were really attempts to defend their neighborhoods from insensitive outsiders. The young men from these neighborhoods who skirmished with sailors and other men on downtown streets, Pagán emphasizes, felt downtown to be an adjunct to their neighborhoods worth defending.

A few years later in 1949, just before the Bishop, La Loma, and Palo Verde neighborhoods commonly known as Chávez Ravine would be bulldozed to
make way for Dodger Stadium, photographer Don Normark conducted a year-long visual study of this semirural Mexican American community tucked into the hills in the center of urban Los Angeles. Finally published in 1999 as Chávez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story, Normark’s ethnographic social realism recovers the now-lost community’s sense of coherent place. The networks of sociability rooted in homes, yards, storefronts, and street corners documented in Normark’s photos and interviews, vividly echo Pagán’s careful reconstruction of 38th Street youths’ neighborhood life. Normark’s photos and testimonies render zoot-suiters’ resistance as part of larger, more complex lives. Like Carolyn Kozo Cole and Kathy Kobayashi’s Shades of L.A.: Pictures from Ethnic Family Albums, a selection from the extraordinary archive of family snapshots compiled at Los Angeles Public Library, Normark’s and Pagán’s books show that the Mexican American identity that was politicized in moments of repression and asserted/claimed in moments of resistance was inseparable from social worlds of neighborhood, friends, and family.

Josh Sides documents another history of commitment to place in L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present. In this labor-community study of black L.A., one of the most important but understudied postwar African American cities, Sides traces the history of shifts in geography and class within South Central Los Angeles’s African American community as it grew from its original location in Watts to adjacent communities like West Adams, Compton, Leimert Park, and Ladera Heights. As black workers’ labor struggles secured gains in the war/postwar defense and heavy manufacturing industries, and successful court battles began to open up formerly segregated neighborhoods, some African Americans left Watts to purchase homes in adjacent, all-white Compton. For the time during the 1950s that defense plants remained open near Compton, the city was a blue-collar, middle-class community of blacks and whites. Heavy industry (steel, auto, rubber) shut down or suburbanized from the 1960s through the 1980s, and defense manufacturing converted to high-tech electronics and aerospace and moved to suburban locations like Orange County. Compton’s remaining white residents, who had initially stayed when black families began to buy houses, followed industry to neighborhoods closed to blacks. Inadequate education and training made it difficult for many African Americans to gain high-tech jobs. With no jobs, no industrial tax base, and rising crime, new businesses were reluctant to locate in all-black Compton and the city spiraled into decline. When Los Angeles’s urban crisis led to rebellion in 1965, Compton, like Watts, came to be associated in the popular imagination with poverty and urban disorder. Throughout L.A. City Limits, Sides details civil rights struggles...
against workplace discrimination, housing segregation, industrial relocation, and white flight. Sides points out that many whites erroneously believed that black civil rights struggles were motivated by a desire to “intermingle with whites” (132) when in reality they were motivated by the desire for total access to public institutions. Where African Americans did settle, the community was often biracial or multiracial. Watts residents were black, Mexican American, Japanese American, and white during the 1940s and 1950s, and the black middle-class neighborhoods of Baldwin Hills and Inglewood formed organizations to preserve the integrated character of their black/white neighborhoods. Douglas Flaming’s Bound for Freedom, on early-twentieth-century African American Los Angeles, contributes further to this underpublished area of L.A. history.

While Sides emphasizes racial discrimination as the ultimate barrier to greater African American spatial/economic mobility, in Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice, Ian Haney-López analyzes the logic that informed such discrimination. He brings a critical legal studies and racial formation analysis to key trials generated by police repression of Chicano movement protest. In both the trial of the East L.A. Thirteen (members of the Brown Berets as well as other Chicano activists arrested after more than five thousand high school students walked out of Wilson, Garfield, Roosevelt, and Lincoln High Schools in East Los Angeles in March 1968 to protest terrible educational conditions) and the trial of the Biltmore Six (arrested after a demonstration and fire disrupted a speech by Governor Ronald Reagan at the downtown Biltmore Hotel in 1969), Haney-López identifies a pattern of beliefs and assumptions about nonwhites that informed judges’ and grand jurors’ conclusions. He analyzes trial transcripts and defense lawyer Oscar Acosta’s strategies to expose grand jury members’ “unconscious racism.” In so doing, Haney-López shows the active production of white racial ideologies as part of the processes of unconscious and institutional racism/segregation in Los Angeles.11 Racism on Trial is complemented by Burton Moore and Allesandra Cabello’s Love and Riot: Oscar Zeta Acosta and the Great Mexican American Revolt, a recent biography of Oscar Acosta, and Ernesto Chávez’s “¡Mi Raza Primero!”, Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966–1978, which is an exceptional historical overview of the Chicano movement.

Mestizo City

If Los Angeles has dense nodes of racial aversion and conservatism, its development has also led to equally dense sites of diversity and interethnic contact.
As a result of immigration law reforms in 1965, Los Angeles is now one of thirty-seven multiethnic metropolitan areas “where at least two of three minority groups exceed their percentage in the U.S. population as a whole” (Bobo et al., 11). Indeed, the two most diverse cities in the United States are the South L.A. County cities of Carson and Gardena, with an almost “perfect quartering of the population into white, black, Asian, and Latino” (Soja, 2000, 295–96).

Studies of racial interaction in Carson and Gardena have yet to be written; however, Monterey Park, a middle-class suburb inhabited by Japanese American, Chinese American, Chinese, Mexican American, and white residents has been the subject of monographs by Timothy Fong, John Horton, and Mary Pardo. One of eighty-four incorporated cities within Los Angeles County, it “has the particular distinction of being the only city in the continental United States with a majority Asian population: some 56% of its 60,000 inhabitants are of Asian origin” (Palumbo-Liu 2003, 260).

Leland Saito, author of Race and Politics: Asian Americans, Latinos, and Whites in a Los Angeles Suburb, explains that as part of the longer history of collaboration between Latinos and Asians in California from “agricultural struggles to urban politics,” political alliances developed in contexts of similar class and racial positions where Asian Americans and Latinos held shared interests (126–27). Monterey Park became multiracial during the 1950s and 1960s when Japanese Americans and Mexican Americans moved from nearby East Los Angeles and, despite illegal restrictive covenants, purchased homes. Although they had experienced white opposition when they first moved to Monterey Park, Asian American (Japanese and Chinese) and Mexican American residents in turn became alarmed at the increasing presence of Chinese immigrants and businesses in Monterey Park during the early 1980s, but then found common cause with Chinese residents when, white, slow-growth leaders backed city council candidates who espoused anti-immigrant rhetoric. Saito argues that class and ethnicity can be understood only in the context of the specific “conditions that create different interests and conflicts between groups” (122–23).

If San Gabriel Valley cities like Monterey Park remained segregated in housing well into the 1960s, Matt Garcia's analysis of San Gabriel Valley popular culture shows that cultural production and popular consumption comprised a differently inflected landscape of race, beyond segregated entertainments within L.A. city limits. A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900–1970 is a history of Mexican American citrus workers in the colonias and suburbs of the San Gabriel Valley, an agricultural hinterland east of the Los Angeles metropolis. Garcia addresses the relationship
between the form/creation of the landscape and the social relations that occur in it. Two of the most innovative chapters in the book are his studies of the Padua Hills Theater during the 1930s, and the rock-and-roll dance halls of El Monte during the 1950s. Through negotiation with the white owners and theatergoers, Mexican American actors at the Padua Hills Theater not only helped create the plays they performed, but they also used their participation as a means to make money for school or future careers. Similarly, El Monte dance halls became for Mexican Americans, whites, African Americans, and Asian American/Pacific Island youth important nodes of cultural intersection within a suburbanizing Southern California landscape increasingly partitioned by freeways. Exploiting new opportunities of greater mobility afforded by freeways, youth came from many parts of greater L.A. to El Monte Legion Stadium and Rainbow Gardens, which were located in L.A. County beyond the more restrictive laws of Los Angeles City that prohibited racial mixing. They traveled across zones of residential segregation to listen to rock and roll performed by multiracial bands such as the Mixtures. If Los Angeles was the metropolis to the San Gabriel Valley citrus hinterland, the L.A. County city of El Monte was Los Angeles’s suburban rock-and-roll borderland. A World of Its Own is one among many books on Southern California music by Sherrie Tucker, Clora Bryant, Josh Kun, Anthony Macías, Philip Pastras, Deborah Wong, Eric Porter, Horace Tapscott, David Reyes and Tom Waldman, and Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje and Eddie S. Meadows. Garcia’s study is also part of a growing body of literature on Los Angeles’s multiracial past and present by scholars such as Scott Kurashige, Kevin Allen Leonard, Natalia Molina, Daniel Widener, Brian McGuire and Duncan Scrymgour, and Mark Wild.

While these works have examined L.A.’s multiracial complexity from a cultural and historical perspective, Prismatic Metropolis: Inequality in Los Angeles, edited by Lawrence Bobo, Melvin L. Oliver, James H. Johnson Jr., and Abel Valenzeula Jr., deploys social science to focus on the effects of economic restructuring on racial and ethnic groups in the present. The essays in the collection are the distillation of 4,025 survey questionnaires administered in 1994 to a multiracial sample of adults in order to document the “social processes and interactions among and between recent arrivals and more established ethnic and minority groups” (5). The book covers three aspects of inequality: “labor market processes, residential segregation, and intergroup attitudes and relations” (6). Bobo and his coauthors assert that the totality of their research “implies that urban inequality is heavily racialized” (7). Most significant, the book’s fifteen essays confirm the L.A. School’s refutation of Chicago School explanations of urban poverty within an individualist framework. These neo-Chicago School scholars dismiss spatial mismatch and racial discrimination
explanations of urban poverty in Los Angeles, citing instead statistics of upward mobility as proof that cities need only make human capital investments, such as education and public health, so that people can lift themselves out of poverty.11

If Prismatic Metropolis provides a statistical snapshot of interracial attitudes/tensions, the ethnographic picture Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla present in Seeking Community in a Global City: Guatemala and Salvadorans in Los Angeles shows those attitudes in practice. Noting that many migrants maintain bicultural identities and transnational ties to their homelands, Hamilton and Chinchilla document the history of the economic institutions (restaurants, travel agencies, and financial and legal services), and labor, refugee assistance, political, and community organizations through which Guatemalans and Salvadorans have shaped their neighborhoods and influenced metropolitan/state policy. Many Central Americans live in mixed Latino-Korean neighborhoods in Westlake and Pico Union, mixed Latino-African American neighborhoods in South Central, and mixed Mexican, Mexican American, and Central American neighborhoods in East Los Angeles. While there have been tensions, living in multiethnic/racial proximity has also led to cooperation, mutual recognition, and cultural exchange. The Korean Immigrant Workers Association organizes Koreans and Latinos who work for Korean firms (187). As part of the Multiethnic Youth Leadership Collaborative, the Central American Refugee/Resource Center works with agencies that serve Koreans and African Americans to "provide leadership training in interethnic relations for youth from Pico Union, South Central, and Mid Wilshire" (187). Some Central American youth living in mixed Latino–African American neighborhoods in South Central Los Angeles identity with African American culture and see figures like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X as role models (199). One central-city Guatemalan youth from Belmont High School, who encountered assumptions that he was Chicano, used Cuban poet José Martí's concept of "Nuestra América" as the organizing principle for Unión para Nuestra América, a pan-Latino organization that works with Chicano students and others in a third world/Native American coalition (201–2). For indigenous Guatemalans who feel isolated from Latinos and their ladino (Spanish-Indian) compatriots, affirmation of Mayan identity is important. Conversely, Guatemalan ladino youth are inspired by both Mayan culture and en español (204). If diversity in Los Angeles is distinct in its demographic composition from other multiracial cities, that diversity is also influenced by the history of L.A.'s dispersed communities. Borders and border crossings within the L.A. metropolis occur between both neighborhoods and cities within this vast conurbation.
Taking Place and Making Space

Throughout this essay I have followed the L.A. School’s emphasis on spatiality. Central to this aspect of L.A. School urban theory is the idea that space is not a container for social and political action, that places are not merely backdrops to the dramas that unfold within them. Three books in particular demonstrate the relationship of identity and space in Los Angeles studies. Rick Bonus, in Locating Filipino Americans: Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Space, Raúl Villa, in Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture, and Moira Rachel Kenney, in Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of Place and Politics, posit the concrete and geographical materiality of the city itself as an agent of sociopolitical and cultural struggles. In different ways, these studies delineate the lines of connection between distinct places and their location within larger areal networks of identity. Los Angeles residents’ active use of space as a resource for negotiating the circumstances of their daily lives is foregrounded in these books to show identity being made.

Locating Filipino Americans explores the social and spatial meaning of Filipino identity created in “Oriental stores” that sell diverse Asian products, community center politics, beauty pageants, and newspapers in Los Angeles and San Diego. Serving as the portal to a transnational connection to their Philippine homeland, Oriental stores sell familiar products that “market difference.” Frequenting these consumer spaces is an expression of Filipino identity within the largely hostile anti-Asian landscape of Southern California. Bonus analyzes the give-and-take of “Palengke”-style politics at community center meetings. When understood in the context of such community activity, pageants take on political significance beyond ideals of beauty. Newspapers foster identity through their presentation of news not covered in the mainstream press, information about events in the Philippines, and Filipino advertising. These community newspapers also allow for a delineation of differences within the Filipino community or among Filipino Americans.

Place making is also key to the historical and spatial sweep of Chicano cultural production in greater East Los Angeles that Raúl Villa presents in Barrio-Logos, including place-representing expressive practices ranging from newspapers to poetry, punk rock, and murals. Villa highlights social networks and place attachment in Mexicano and Mexican American communities. He traces the persistent emphasis on social location that Chicano/a writers, artists, and musicians foreground in their cultural expressions. Dramatizing the dynamic, dialectic interplay between “barrioization” (the combined use of the law, the media, and the built environment in sociospatial repression) and
“barriology” (the culturally affirming, place-specific, hybrid knowledges and practices that result from interaction with destructive urbanization that form the basis of Chicano sociospatial opposition). Villa’s study shows that cultural work not only produces counter-narratives and knowledges to challenge and reframe urban growth and racial segregation, but in so doing produces alternate places that form a resource for identity formation and community politics. In Villa’s re-reading of popular institutions, cultural associations, and “small scale networks of support” that provide self help, or the exchange of goods, services, and information, traditional aspects of community studies are reconsidered for the paths of connection people traverse between them.

Similar to the Chicano urban experience analyzed by Villa, urban places have been integral to gay and lesbian community and identity since the early twentieth century. Moira Kenney’s attention to the influence of L.A.’s vast and diffuse urban form on gay and lesbian community activism in Mapping Gay L.A. shows the relationship between spatiality and social movement politics. Unlike enclaves in more geographically compact cities like Manhattan or San Francisco, Los Angeles’s multicentered gay and lesbian communities follow its centerless urban form. Kenney’s four case studies—West Hollywood as a symbolic location of gay and lesbian Los Angeles, AIDS service organizations and the redevelopment of Hollywood Boulevard, the downtown art space Women’s House and the Connexus lesbian community center, ACT UP and Gay Liberation Front street protests—show that mapping social space and politicizing public places result in the creation of spatial networks and lived geographies of a gay and lesbian city. In all these case studies, the assertion of a public presence within the spatial landscapes of the city is central to political practice.

Bonus’s, Villa’s, and Kenney’s emphasis on the processes that turn places into connected networks (real or imagined) offers a rich way to think about questions of exclusion and segregation. Identity in actual practice, as the product of spatial network creation, is different from identity theorized as a response to alienation or marginalization. It is more grounded in social structure, and perhaps less open to criticism from opponents of multiculturalism who would dismiss “identity politics” as arbitrary expressions of symbolic ideals.

Expressive Cultural Practice: Los Angeles Performed

Disseminating spectacular images of the city as exotic, or undifferentiated images of the city as anyplace U.S.A., Los Angeles’s entertainment industries and institutions of high culture reinforce the misperception of L.A. as place-
less: all spectacle or all suburb. Recent and forthcoming studies of Hollywood by Saverio Giovacchini and Philip Ethington are significant for their authors’ efforts to ground this global culture industry in its urban location. Equally important are recent books that consider non-mass cultural efforts to produce culture in Los Angeles.

The commodified myths and images of Los Angeles overshadow a history of expressive cultural practices. In contrast to the commercial dissemination of L.A. imagery, the intent of expressive cultural practice is to produce collective representational aesthetics (iconographies, formal techniques), contingent identities, and enacted place simultaneously. The place-based cultural production that results from such expressive cultural practices has been documented in a number of recent books. Taken as a whole, these books trace the history of changing emphases in processes of identity formation: from emphasis on group identity through the 1970s (Lon Kurashige and James), to explorations of hybridity, situational, and contingent identity during the 1980s (James and Cheng), to explorations of location, spatial networks, and place consciousness from the 1990s to the present (Leclerc, Villa, Dear; and Leclerc and Dear). Recent scholarship recognizes the importance of the intracommunity negotiations, municipal political interventions, and institutional organization that occur prior to a final cultural product. The value of expressive cultural practice, whether intentionally performative or not, lies in its social, political, educational, and psychological transformative power.

In *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival, 1934–1990*, Lon Kurashige traces competing notions of group identity from integration to radical cosmopolitanism within the community of Little Tokyo as Japanese Americans sought wider “acceptance, legitimacy, and class status” (6) in relation to anti-Japanese racism. As the face of the community, Nisei Week festivals presented an idealized and unified version of Japanese/Japanese American culture and history to the broader public. Nisei Week began in the 1930s when first-generation Issei sought to regain the ethnic and consumer allegiance of second-generation Nisei, whose bicultural knowledge of English and familiarity with American mass culture drew them away from Little Tokyo businesses that were the vital center of the Japantown enclave. Issei and Nisei leaders came up with a final roster of promotions and events that balanced community economics with expressions of Japanese ethnic tradition and expressions of Americanism. Emphasizing cultural adaptation and employing the concept of racial rearticulation—the process by which racially subordinated groups reinterpret racist discourse—Kurashige shows how parades, beauty pageants, talent shows, and cultural exhibitions challenged
stereotypes. Always the product of compromise, public festivities often left the concerns of women, blue-collar workers, disadvantaged youth, and those with less education unaddressed. As a result—unresolved youth violence and “gang” activity during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, student radicalism during the 1960s and 1970s, car cruisers (from Gardena) during the 1980s, women’s critiques of beauty pageants during the 1980s, Sansei activists opposed to Japanese foreign investment and redevelopment of Little Tokyo in the 1980s and 1990s—those whose concerns were not adequately addressed took to the streets of Little Tokyo, disrupting and challenging official proceedings. The concept of community and Little Tokyo itself have thus always been contested.

In The Sons and Daughters of Los: Culture and Community in L.A., editor David E. James and his fellow contributors document the formation of a different kind of community. Focusing on institutional histories of art communities, James and his coauthors provide numerous examples of the differences between community-based art making and art-based community making. Each chapter is a snapshot of the development of one of L.A.’s most durable/successful community cultural institutions: Self Help Graphics, Highways, LACE, and lesser known places such as the African American cultural district of shops, galleries, jazz clubs, and restaurants in Leimert Park, the Foundation for Art Resources, the Vedanta Society of Southern California, and L.A.’s popular cinemas. These institutions had greater and lesser degrees of engagement with the exploration/definition of formal aesthetics, political intervention, and community service. In its early years Beyond Baroque promoted an aesthetic-based but open-ended definition of poetry that generated multiple poetic communities. The L.A. Women’s Building encouraged feminist explorations of identity that merged art and politics, such as Suzanne Lacy’s late 1970s public performances about rape and violence against women. Her collaborations with artists and city officials resulted in “public policy changes, including city sponsorship of free self-defense training for women and the publication of rape hotline numbers by the telephone company” (48). Primarily emphasizing professional art, the Korean Cultural Center (KCC), run by the Korean government, combined commercial motives, orientation to the L.A. Korean immigrant community, and the promotion of Korean culture to greater Los Angeles. In every case these institutions made room for art as expressive cultural practices that linked aesthetics to identity and place. As a result they had to adapt their artistic vision and organizational purpose through interaction with the diversity of L.A.’s residents who made claims to their resources. The KCC is a case in point. In the late 1990s the KCC began to mount cross-cultural exhi-
bitions as a means to form social and cultural alliances with Mexican American and African American communities.

In her analysis of L.A. performance art, *In Other Los Angeles: Multicentric Performance Art*, Meiling Cheng foregrounds the particular relationship between geography, identity, and aesthetics that performance art enacts. Developing case studies of Suzanne Lacy, Elia Arce, the Highways performance space, the Sacred Naked Nature Girls, and “art performance,” Cheng follows the development of the feminist and multicultural ideals that animate the majority of such expressive culture in L.A. She employs an analytical framework that allows her to consider the reflective function of performance art (its multiple/dispersed development mirrors L.A.’s multiple/dispersed geography), its repressive function (as a response to social/political inequalities), and generative function (creation of aesthetic properties and communities of expressive practitioners). While conceptual and process-oriented performance art occurred in other cities as well, Cheng makes a strong case that it is especially appropriate to Los Angeles. Her reconceptualization of multiculturalism as multicentricity provides a theoretical framework for cultural analysis that departs from a center/margin model of identity formation in the same way that L.A. School urban theory departs from a core/periphery model of urbanism. In form—a “flexible mode of expression” (18)—and content, performance art “is most directly linked with [L.A.’s] other cultures” (19).

**Postborder Metropolis**

While all of these books on expressive cultural practices foreground issues of place and space, two edited collections explicitly take up the relationship between art and urban knowledge as it reveals an increasing emphasis on place and spatial networks in expressive cultural practice. *Urban Latino Cultures: La Vida Latina en L.A.*, edited by Gustavo Leclerc, Raúl Villa, and Michael Dear, and *Postborder City: Cultural Spaces of Baja California*, edited by Gustavo Leclerc and Michael Dear, are notable for their efforts to integrate two forms of urban knowledge: the more abstract knowledge of academics and planners and the everyday, experiential knowledge that comes from living in L.A.’s neighborhoods and moving through its multiple nodes of activity.15

The expressive practices of cartoonists, artists, photographers, filmmakers, musicologists, architects, poets, performance artists, and literary scholars that Leclerc, Villa, and Dear have collected in *Urban Latino Cultures* display an explicit spatial aesthetic/ethos common to all genres of Latino artistic cultural production and modes of daily life. Latino art in Los Angeles displays a dis-
tinct attachment to place that spans personal experience, collective memory, and modifications of the built environment. Spoken word/performance artist Teresa Chavez recounts her personal connections to the history of Southern California. Through her family genealogy, Chavez traces her connection to Southern California, not to claim priority of place (as say, the Daughters of the American Revolution would, or promoters of anti-immigrant ballot referenda like Proposition 187 would) but to explore the way her mestizo history links her to conflicting visions of Los Angeles. Chavez returns to 1781, as McWilliams and others have done, but looks farther back to Jewish and Moorish, Middle Eastern peoples of Spain to understand the ways in which Los Angeles’s history makes us multiple in the present. Carlos Avila and Harry Gamboa draw on the popularity and spatial ubiquity of fotonovela comic books—they are for sale everywhere in L.A.’s Latino retail districts. Avila uses fotonovelos as a vehicle for urban stories that repopulate L.A.’s mass-media landscape with figures other than stereotypical gangbangers, gardeners, household maids, and supervixens. In “Acid Reign,” one of Gamboa’s photographic tableaux, he draws connections between urban decline, environmental pollution, and indifference to Latinos. Everyday Latino urbanism produces a Latinization of the city itself. From Spanish language signage, gang plazas (graffiti), and murals, to polateros (drivers of ice cream trucks), the conversion of gas stations to taco stands, and home modifications, urban space is literally rewritten according to a distinct Latino urbanism. Homes are altered according to a Latino spatial sensibility: stucco laid over clapboards, columns replaced with wrought iron or stuccoed arches. When carried out on early-twentieth-century Craftsman bungalows, such alterations alarm Anglo preservationists. Urban Latino Cultures maps the nodes of activity and representational practices that constitute the spatial networks of contemporary Latino urban identity.

In Postborder City: Cultural Spaces of Baja California, editors Gustavo Leclerc and Michael Dear characterize the Los Angeles–San Diego–Tijuana–Mexicali metropolis as an urban and cultural borderlands of global significance, a contemporary continuation of the Spanish borderlands, but the first time “Baja California” has been an “integrated region” (2). They assemble essays on the parallel histories of settlement and development of Baja and Alta California, the distinct nodes of globalization that mark a city like Tijuana, art history essays on Mexican/Chicano border films and visual/performance art, and representative examples of multimedia art itself. Historians, urban theorists, artists, and literary and media critics together document the ways in which border representations and simultaneous experiences of multiple places
generate a postborder aesthetic that emphasizes bodily performance, resistance, memory, hybrid identity, and creation of structured places (institutions). In his contribution to the volume, "Hybridities and Histories: Imagining the Rim," David Palumbo-Liu argues that art and literature are places that first articulate such new historical moments and conditions. Analyzing Vietnamese artist Dinh Q. Lê's digital montage Self Portrait 15, in which Dinh stands as a scrambled but distinguishable composite image woven from the interpixelation of the Buddhist icon on his right and the Christian icon on his left, Palumbo-Liu points out that such mestizo identity is not simply a matter of the juxtaposition of two distinct entities to produce a third entity that replaces the originals, but rather a process through which the distinct entities from which a third entity is derived remain distinct and also change in meaning.

The Bus Stops Here: Nuevo L.A. and Areal Worlds

In 1997/1998 Sergio Arau and Yareli Arizmendi released their short film, *A Day Without a Mexican*, a "mockumentary" about the economic and social consequences when all "Mexicans" (American and undocumented transnationals) suddenly disappear from the state of California: in brief, the state shuts down, highlighting Latino presence at every societal level. Through counterintuitive logic, Arau and Arizmendi place Latino California in bold relief. Similarly in *Banda: Mexican Musical Life across Borders*, Helena Simonett outlines the broad spatial dispersion of Latino newcomers in Los Angeles beyond historic East L.A. into "the San Gabriel Valley in the east, San Fernando in the north . . . San Pedro in the south . . . into African American South Central, Watts, Compton, and Inglewood . . . [and] in the industrial heartland of the county: Huntington Park, South Gate, Bell Gardens, Cudahay, and Maywood" (33). Among the Latinos who live there but also in their home countries, which they return to frequently, this city within a city is known as "Nuevo L.A." Such spatial extension and invisibility is a defining condition of Los Angeles, for immigrant workers, or performance artists—engaged in cultural work throughout the city yet rendered invisible by entertainment culture industries—or labor organizers.

At the beginning of her book, *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*, about Mexican, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan women who work as domestics and nannies in middle-class and upper-middle-class homes throughout Los Angeles, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo poses the question put to us by Arau and Arizmendi's film: "Can we conceive of a Los Angeles where . . . there is 'A Day Without a Mexican'?" (ix). Hondagneu-Sotelo makes visible the work performed by immigrant women. Faced with
the impossibility of meeting domestic workers at their places of work, homes scattered throughout Los Angeles, Hondagneu-Sotelo and her fellow researchers conducted interviews and handed out questionnaires at parks and bus stops, nodes in the spatial networks of domestic workers' daily lives. Rather than approach these women's invisibility as a problem of "academic" research, Hondagneu Sotelo approaches her academic work through social justice.

Prior to beginning her research, she helped start, with immigrant rights attorneys and community organizers, the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), an organization to inform domestic workers (especially live-in workers) about their rights. Under the auspices of CHIRLA, Latina immigrant workers for the Domestic Worker's Association visited parks and rode buses handing out novelas. One novela features "Super Doméstica," a comic superhero who defends the rights of immigrant workers, informs readers about legal issues, and refers them to appropriate agencies for legal aid. As an advocate and organizer for the women she writes about, Hondagneu Sotelo does not conceive of her work as only producing verifiable research for a professional community of scholars or policy makers, but as a partnership with people who can benefit from her expertise and access to resources and institutions.

Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, in Seeking Community in a Global City, explain similar circumstances and solutions for Central American men. To organize day laborers who congregate on street corners near hardware stores or in vacant lots in the hopes of being hired for a day's work in light construction, gardening, home repair/maintenance, it became necessary to create formal hiring sites. Pablo Alvarado, a Salvadoran organizer, created soccer teams at new hiring sites to encourage cooperation among workers who were placed in unregulated situations of intense competition by employers. Organizers at another site included a cabbage and onion garden maintained by workers.

These examples are significant for the ways in which academics, labor organizers, cultural producers, and workers come together to form networks that allow them to solve problems of work and civil rights compounded by spatial invisibility. More often these groups are separated, moving within their own networks. Arjun Appadurai notes that academic knowledge about globalization is one of the many products that moves in the circuits of global capital but that it is separated by languages of social science from people who could use it. For Appadurai the solution to this problem is spatial. Academics must translate their knowledge into a form that allows them to work with artists and workers to establish what he calls "areal worlds," networks that, through
their creation, bridge diverse ways of knowing and worldviews. This process of translation is fundamentally cultural by any definition of the term, and it suggests that forms of already existing culture, from novelas to soccer teams and gardens may serve as a conduit to bring academics, workers, and artists together.

Carey McWilliams faced similar issues of invisibility in his efforts to publicize major issues of work and civil rights. His writings on Los Angeles, Mexican migration, and California agriculture anticipated American studies' attention to racialized representation, cultural exchange, and hybrid identity in national and transnational contexts, but his work was not part of American studies. McWilliams was part of what Michael Denning calls "the Cultural Front" a loosely associated, broadly coherent, multiracial movement of 1930s and 1940s writers, musicians, artists, and political progressives. Despite the extensive appeal of the Cultural Front, by the early 1950s McWilliams's writings were, writes Denning, "overshadowed by the explosion of studies of the national culture and 'character' of the United States." They were not part of a "new field of American Studies" that, during the 1950s, would take "shape in the rapidly expanding universities."  

At the time when Carey McWilliams published, his attention to racism and class exploitation made even sympathetic readers uncomfortable, for he departed from the racial common sense espoused by most social scientists, intellectuals, and others in American society at large. Then as now, even to pose the question of whether racial oppression was an independent causal factor or whether it could be attributed to some more fundamental determinant such as ethnicity or class required vigorous debate. As Nikhil Singh points out, McWilliams not only posed but decisively answered the question (473–79). For most, however, the significance of race was easily rejected or downplayed. Dominant thinking (ultimately leading back to the Chicago School cycle of race relations) held that race was a subset of ethnicity and that racial inequality was a version of ethnic inequality, attributable to individual prejudice and/or the incompatibility of ethnic culture with modern "American" society.

Attention to place requires a corresponding attention to social structure. American studies' theoretical analysis of the relationship between culture and identity (but relative lack of attention to social structure) is more vital now that the structures of the state that protected civil rights and made affirmations of racial and gender identity more possible have been dismantled and taken apart to create a state that serves the interests of corporations and global markets. Channels and formal mechanisms of political redress have been eroded.
and dissolved in favor of economic policy. Cultural commodities now conform to the logic of this new market-state. Yet, the means for producing and analyzing culture have become opportunities for engaging with people working in other realms of civil society to secure those political gains that are still achievable.

To research his study of farm labor, Carey McWilliams traveled around California in a convertible Dodge Roadster with L.A. schoolteacher Herb Klein to document labor conflicts (Sachs, 237). McWilliams's travels also established connections with farm laborers. At the same time he was reading social science and translating it into a journalistic prose style that would reach a broader audience, McWilliams did this to show the relationship between racial discrimination and exploitation. What is striking about the greater part, if not the majority, of scholars currently researching and writing about Los Angeles, as almost all of the works surveyed in this review essay demonstrate, is their emphasis on Los Angeles as a place formed by race, a place of racial formation. Likewise, the greater part of Los Angeles studies work surveyed in this essay considers culture as emanating from and engaged with social structure, showing the importance of establishing networks and engagements with place through culture to enable the affirmation of diverse identities. Now politicians from George W. Bush to Joe Lieberman, following the logic of Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*, would return us to the "American" identity that overshadowed McWilliams's insights in order to dismiss current multiculturalism as unpatriotic. It is tempting to overstate that scholarship on Los Angeles has caught up to Carey McWilliams. A better way to put it would be that McWilliams's engagement with a specific place, Los Angeles and the state of California, led him to ways of explaining race, culture, and identity that are important for American studies.

Notes

1. Thank you to family and friends for their help with this essay. Mary Kay Van Sistine, Sophie and Sam Willand Van Sistine, David and Janet Van Sistine, the Malers, the Van Sistines, and the Van Sistine-Yosts gave me time to write. A conversation with George Lipsitz and a reading of his essay were very helpful. Matthew Tokumori, *American Quarterly* editors Murita Sturken and Raoul Villa, and an anonymous reader commented on drafts to help me get the writing right. AQ staff members Hillary Jenkins and Cynthia Willis helped to compile the bibliography. Any errors that remain are mine.

2. Garcia discusses the nuances of McWilliams's opposition to the Japanese evacuation. McWilliams also prepared the report for Governor Earl Warren's Committee on the zoot suit riots. See McGucken.

3. In their important study of the 1992 riots, Abingdon and Lie point out that L.A. media persistently portrayed these events that involved Korean, Mexican American, Mexican, Central American, African American, and white L.A. residents as a black-Korean conflict.

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4. In response to the publication of *The City*, review essays marking its importance surveyed key works in L.A. studies from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s. See the essays by Schneider, Engh, Coquery-Vidrovitch, and Ethington in a special Los Angeles issue of the *American Historical Review* 105.5 (December 2000). See also Monahan (2003), Dear (2002a), Keil (1998), Abu-Lughod (1999), and Soja (2000), which are the most comprehensive single-source descriptions and syntheses of scholarship on L.A. published up to 1997.

5. Davis mentions the nascent L.A. School in *City of Quartz* (83–88). The book was one of many published during the 1980s and early 1990s by members of the L.A. School such as Edward Soja, Michael Dear and Jennifer Wolch, and non-L.A. School authors such as George Lipsitz, Vicki Ruiz, George Sánchez, and Kevin Starr. Lipsitz’s influential L.A. writings are published as journal articles or book chapters.

6. Some original members include Dana Cuff, Mike Davis, Michael Dear, Margaret FitzSimmons, Rebecca Morales, Allen Scott, Edward Soja, Michael Storper, and Jennifer Wolch (Dear 2003a, 493–509). See Monahan (2003) and Dear (2002a) for further discussion of factors that define a “school.”

7. Other studies of Los Angeles and globalization include Keil (1998) and Smith (2001).

8. The word *zuzapul* is found in Dear (2002a), 367.


10. See also Schuparra (1998).


12. Of the hundred most diverse urban areas in the United States in 1980, more than half were in California, and of those, twenty were in Los Angeles County (Soja 2000, 295, citing Allen and Turner 1997).


15. Ethington and Mocker (2002b) distinguish between abstract and experiential urban knowledges.


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