

# **The Boyle Heights Landscape:**

The Pressures of Gentrification and the Need for Grassroot

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because my older sister was scheduled to give birth soon and we had no



## **Chapter 1: History of Mexican Displacement and Boyle Heights**

In order to fully understand the impact of current development in Boyle Heights, we must first look at the history of Mexicans in Los Angeles. Historically, Mexicans have been forced out of their homes in various neighborhoods in order to “revitalize” the community by bringing in Anglos. The treatment of Mexicanos/as and Latinos/as in L.A. today is a product of their past. According to Raul Villa in *Latino Urban Cultures*,

For Mexicans in particular...their contradictory social location-being simultaneously in the geographic center and the economic margins of the city-has meant that they are constantly having to react to the disparate impacts of metropolitan restructuring in defense of their urban needs (8).

Since the beginning of Los Angeles’ history, Mexicanos/as and Latinos/as have been pushed aside in the name of progress, with its racist implications.

### ***The Plaza***

The Mexican community in Los Angeles originated in the city-center. In the 1820s, while still part of Mexico, construction of the Plaza began



the 1880s, the area was a suburb of Los Angeles, with 300-400 businessmen and their families living there (6).

It is important to note that “businessmen” were not in fact the only inhabitants of Boyle Heights at that time. Many Mexicanos/as had for several years lived along the Los Angeles River, which currently serves as a border between Boyle Heights and Downtown. In *Whitewashed Adobe*, William Deverell observes, “The riverbed itself, for at least much of the year, had also been claimed as Mexican space, home to poor communities or *colonias* forged from scrap wood or abandoned rail boxcars” (130). Deverell’s observation contrasts with the assumption that Boyle Heights was settled by Anglo frontiersmen, since in fact Mexicanos/as had already settled in or near the area.

Mexicanos/as moved in to Boyle Heights as a result of racist policies and high rents in the city-center. Mexicanos/as moved to the new barrios because “Restrictive racial covenants typically excluded the Spanish-speaking from desirable suburbs. The new barrios were established in sections of town that other, more affluent groups refused to inhabit” (Bustamante and Castillo 127). Mexicanos/as were then and have continued to be segregated into particular neighborhoods like Boyle Heights due to the dominant Anglo policies and practices that reinforce segregation patterns.

### **Boyle Heights Before the Blight**

The number of employers in Boyle Heights has diminished significantly. Before the 1950’s and 60’s, Boyle Heights was an active industrial zone. Industrialization in Los Angeles and more specifically in Boyle Heights began with the arrival of the railroads in the 1880’s. Most of the industry that located in Boyle Heights was connected to the railroads and also included light manufacturing and the brickyards. The working class, composed of



industrial area which was east of downtown and west of the river. Mexican labor was intensely recruited by businesses as well as the railroads. This caused the dramatic increase of the Mexican population in Boyle Heights. (BH Community Plan I-1).

Between 1900 and World War II, Boyle Heights was inhabited by Mexicans, Japanese, Jews, Russian Molokans and Blacks. The section where most Black community members lived was a “neighborhood bounded on the north by Brooklyn Avenue, on the east by the Evergreen Cemetery, on the south by Michigan Avenue, and on the west by Mott Street (Romo 62). The Jewish community lived near Brooklyn Avenue. Ricardo Romo notes that “Boyle Heights, which had counted 3 Jewish families in 1908, grew to an estimated 1,842 Jewish households in 1920 and nearly 10,000 by 1930” (65). During this time, Boyle Heights businesses and residents were mostly Jewish. Russian Molokans arrived in Boyle Heights around 1905 fleeing the war in Russia (Romo 66). They settled in the flats of Boyle Heights, the area closest to the central Plaza district and very close to Downtown (Romo 66). Most of the Molokans were employed near Downtown in the lumberyards and later the shipbuilding industry (Romo 66). Molokans had a very high homeownership rate, 26 out of 50 families owned a home, and rented extra rooms in their homes to Mexicans (Romo 67). As the neighborhood became more industrialized, the Russians began to move out of Boyle Heights. Boyle Heights also had a large Japanese population prior to World War II and the relocation policies that were establish esv3ring thi

leave Boyle Heights. It was during the 1950's that Boyle Heights started to become blighted and populated mostly by Mexicans.

The Mexican population in Boyle Heights and Los Angeles had steadily been increasing. Acuña notes, "During the 1910's, large numbers of Mexicans arrived in Los Angeles, escaping the bitter fighting and violence of the Mexican Revolution"(9). The Mexican population in Los Angeles went from 5% in 1900 to 20Top ]/B5tv.3fRm



team, the Brooklyn Dodgers. By labeling the public housing project as communist, the Mayor was eventually able to give 315-acre Chavez Ravine to Walter O'Malley, the owner of the Dodgers, for an old 9 acre stadium (Hines 140-41). There was resistance to the sale, but ultimately the community was demolished in May of 1959 along with the social networks that had been established in the area (Acuña 75). Similar to what developed in

east of the Los Angeles River. Freeways ultimately displaced ten percent of the area's inhabitants" (Acuña 12).

A lesson we can learn from the development of the freeway system is the intimate connection between elected officials and private corporate interests. Elected officials are willing to subsidize corporations but are not providing essential services to their residents. At the time the freeways were being built through Boyle Heights, many people lived in

## **Chapter 2: Boyle Heights Community Profile**

The demographic information in this report is primarily derived from East L.A. Community Corporation's (ELACC) study "Boyle Heights, A Community Profile: Emphasizing the Housing Needs and Conditions" by Mónica Gomez. The ELACC study used twenty-four census tracts to define Boyle Heights, including two tracts that were counted to the block level to correctly identify the community living within the Boyle Heights boundaries (Gomez 4). Sources for the data include the United States Census Bureau, the Planning Department of the City of Los Angeles, FedStats, Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), and UCLA's NKLA and NKCA Research Centers.

### **Demographics**

#### **Boyle Heights Residents**

The Boyle Heights barrio is located approximately 1 mile east of downtown Los Angeles and encompasses approximately 6 square miles. Its boundaries are the Los Angeles River to the West and Indiana Street on the East as well as Washington Boulevard to the South and Marengo to the North (Community Plan I-1). Approximately, 86, 770 residents live in Boyle Heights. Of these residents, 98% are people of color and 95% are Latino/a. 50% of the resident population is female and 50% of the population is male (Los Angeles Department of City Planning, Census 2000 Profile 2). Immigrants make up 53% of the population, while 60% are U.S. citizens. Population statistics for the undocumented population in Boyle Heights are unknown. Furthermore, 38% of households in Boyle Heights are monolingual, mostly in Spanish but also other languages like Japanese and Korean. 82% of the households in Boyle Heights are families. Additionally, the average family size is significantly larger than the average family size for the City of Los Angeles.



best evidenced in the 380 public housing units demolished at the Pico Gardens, Pico-Aliso (Aliso Extension) and Aliso Village that have been replaced with some market rate housing. According to HUD, there are currently 12-20 affordable housing developments and 30 single-family homes for low-income families in Boyle Heights and unincorporated EAST LA in addition to Aliso Pico, Estrada Courts and Maravilla public Housing. This is also exemplified by a fa



is 46% while the homeownership rate in Boyle Heights is a mere 25%. This also shows that much of the housing in Boyle Heights is owned by people who live outside of the community.

Boyle Heights has a 33% poverty rate, which is double the rate for the City of Los Angeles (United Way). Of those living in poverty, just a little under half are under 17 years of age. In addition, Boyle Heights is

There are many places to shop in Boyle Heights offering many unique products and *antojitos*. Most of the retail establishments are small mom and pop businesses owned by families as well as auto-repair businesses with one grocery store (Community Plan I-6). The majority of retail is located along Avenida Cesar Chavez between St. Louis Street and Fickett Street. All the businesses along this corridor are small mom and pop businesses. The *Boyle Heights Community Plan* developed in 1998 by the Department of Planning of the City of Los Angeles, recommends “that pedestrian oriented uses be encouraged along this segment and auto oriented uses such as auto repair or drive-through esta between St. Loe31i8.5 1

people that Boyle Heights are most closely connected to are those also on the eastside like unincorporated East L.A., Commerce, Monterrey Park and Montebello. Commerce, Monterrey Park and Montebello have a much greater presence of shopping centers, chain retail and large chain supermarkets, which, because of their proximity, could be driving Boyle Heights dollars into those communities.

### **Largest Employers**

The number of employers in Boyle Heights has diminished significantly. Before the 1950's and 60's, as stated in the previous chapter, Boyle Heights was a productive industrial zone providing significant employment opportunities to its different residents. After the “white flight” patterns emerged, industry activity diminished and only some light manufacturing remained. In 2001, a group of East/Northeast community stakeholders was assembled by the City of Los Angeles and Economics Research Associates under subcontract to Barrio Planners, Inc. where they were asked to identify the largest employers in their community. The largest employers identified by the group were:

- § Hoffs-Hoffman Bros. Packaging
- § Sears
- § Mobil Oil Company
- § Livingston Graham
- § Ellis Paint Co.
- § Import/export industry
- § Felbro
- § Acorn Paper Products
- § Continental Mills
- § Verizon
- § White Memorial Medical Center
- § USC/LACMC and University Hospital
- § Dependable Highway Express
- § Dial Industries
- § Doheny Eye Clinic
- § Cecil Saydah Company
- § Exide Technology (City of Los Angeles. “CED Strategy Notes: Employment Trends, Needs and Opportunities”)



### What Boyle Heights Looks Like to Me:

To me, Boyle Heights is made up of poor immigrants and first generation Xicanas/os and many other Latinos. There are paisas, roqueras, punkers, cholos y cholas, *un monton de chamaquero*, *lesbianas*, babies, *las doñas*, *las sra's*, *los senores*, Christians, Catholics, Budhhists. Mexicas, taggers, hip hoppers, *viejitos*, artists, singers, mariachis, *danzantes*, athletes, nerds, druggies, dancers, writers, actors, students, activists, Goths, and even some *profesionales*. But above all, the largest group of people in Boyle Heights are the *trabajadores*, workers whose biggest worry is paying the rent and providing food for their family just like everyone else. Workers that want their children to go to college regardless if they are a gay cholo or a mowhawked ponketa.

Boyle Heights is the place where you can go and eat some (pom on, salt and chili powder at the *mercadito* bucks. It is where you can always buy tama enjoy on a Sunday morning. Or if it's ITte at night, you can go eat some King Taco on our most famous corner Cesar Chavez and Soto. Wait, if you need your mom to make you a special dress, you can walk a little past the King Taco to Las Tres Ninas e material. Boyle Heights is ma fferent people with different personalities are more than expressions of love, they are a form of survival.

### **Chapter 3: Downtown Development and its Eastside Revitalization Efforts**

#### **Downtown**

In the early 1990's amidst a blighted downtown, the City of Los Angeles created the *Downtown Strategic Plan*. The goal of the plan was to invigorate the Downtown area by creating housing for 100,000 people through the renovation of historic areas (Schoenberg, Karl "Bringing Life Back to City's Heart" 2). The downtown revitalization plan, promoted by key economic and political elites, gave L.A. its new Central Library, wntownStaps A



Boyle Heights borders downtown and will soon have the Metro Gold Line running through it.

It is important to maintain a critical perspective regarding the changes occurring in the city-center and remember that the new aesthetic improvements do not equal long-term change. The homeless are very slowly disappearing from the revitalized areas, but not because they found homes. Downtown revitalization efforts have merely shifted the “dead” part of downtown; the drugs, crime and homeless, a couple of blocks away. Even if all the homeless had been ticketed and arrested to the point that they disappeared, it does not mean that the city succeeded in eliminating homelessness. If the city wanted to eliminate homelessness, it would fund programs and non-profit organizationcc4 460.5597 Tm(12 387.en



It is especially important for people in Boyle Heights to learn from the revitalization that occurred in Downtown because it will have a direct effect on the future of our community. In an LA Times article by Reed Johnson, Adolfo Sauya, one of the owners of a planned hotel, asian-theme restaurant, bar and nightclub observed, “We can’t go west anymore because we have the ocean...We can’t go in the middle [of L.A.] because you can’t buy a piece of dirt for less than \$3 million. The only place we can go is east” (Reed, Johnson. “Downtown Like Never Before” Oct 16, 2003).

### **The Dollars Trickle Down: Boyle Heights and Redevelopment Funds**

There is a visible connection between downtown revitalization dollars and the shift in revitalization funds towards Boyle Heights. According to the authors of *Latino Metropolis*, in 1993 “the courts halted the Community Redevelopment Agency from diverting any further property taxes to downtown projects” (122). The CRA had used “more than \$1.6 billion of property tax money-or more than twice the amount stipulated in the 1977 court ruling [that prevented no more than \$750 million tax dollars from being invested in the Central Business District]” (122). The authors note that this ruling prevented the CRA from subsidizing their favorite downtown developers which ultimately made the CRA a poorer and weaker agency. We can interpret the shift in dollars towards the Boyle Heights community as a direct effect of this ruling. Regardless of whether the shift in dollars to the inner-city neighborhoods occurred intentionally or unintentionally, the city, politicians and private developers will continue to be the biggest beneficiaries from revitalization projects.

The relocation of revitalization funds to inner-city communities could be interpreted in two ways. The most obvious explanation for the inner-city revitalization

efforts is that, neighborhoods had organized and fought for many years to get the city to invest in their communities. Until recently, they had not been successful because the City and the CRA's main priority had been the revitalization of Downtown. After the CRA was banned from investing any more money in the Central Business District, the communities who did not agree with the trickle down theory of revitalization were finally able to steer dollars their way. Another interpretation of the shift in dollars to these communities could be that in order to keep their created "Live/Work" Downtown plan flowing smoothly, the "blue bloods", as they are referred to in *Latino Metropolis*, needed to find way to keep control and subsidies flowing to their partners and their customers while not breaking the law. The "blue bloods" could have strategically planned to funnel funds into areas bordering Downtown because they could simultaneously keep receiving public subsidies from the CRA, the state, and federal government while silencing the critics of their top-down revitalization. The CRA, amidst a wave of criticism, also wanted to keep subsidizing their favorite developers, but could no longer legally invest in downtown projects. The best solution would be to create project areas like Adelante Eastside that would complement the downtown projects while also expanding the service area of the downtown developers and the "work/live" community. The infrastructure to support the Downtown "work/live" community like grocery stores is currently substandard in Downtown. By revitalizing Boyle Heights, developers are providing the grocery stores and shopping centers that are currently missing in Downtown. This long overdue influx of money to Boyle Heights could be an important benefit for the community. Boyle Heights has been hoping for increased funding since the birth of the barrio. Yet, due to how these plans have been developed, the millions of dollars in public funds instead could

well generate community residents' suspicion about the intent of these funds. Boyle Heights' residents need to be engaged in monitoring and ultimately influencing the city's publicized revitalization goals and sort out both hidden and not so hidden agendas. The community has to especially monitor and analyze the role of Latino politicians and conservative community groups that claim to represent the needs of all Latinos in Boyle Heights but who have become part of the process in pursuing the type of development associated with these agendas.

## **Chapter 4: Redevelopment in Boyle Heights**

The Boyle Heights community is currently undergoing a facelift. Our skin is being sliced, pulled and tightened in various directions in order to make our community aesthetically pleasing for others. The ultimate goal of the redevelopment process in Boyle Heights is to make our community accessible to businesses and other residents in the larger city of Los Angeles. In this chapter I will discuss five major development projects that are being proposed or are under construction in Boyle Heights to analyze the implications of these redevelopment projects in an inner-city community of low-income Latinos.

### **The Gold Line**

Construction is currently proceeding for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Gold Line Eastside Light Rail Extension. The contractor for the project is Washington Group International. The light rail will have a six mile long route with a total of eight stations, mostly at street level, from Union Station in Downtown L.A. to Pomona and Atlantic Boulevard in Unincorporated East L.A. 1.8 miles of the Light Rail will run underground through twin tunnels in Boyle Heights. The metro will be underground from 1<sup>st</sup> and Gless Street to 1<sup>st</sup> and Lorena and above ground from there to Pomona and Atlantic. 4 of the 8 metro stations will be located in Boyle Heights. They will be located on 1<sup>st</sup> and Utah, 1<sup>st</sup> and Boyle (Mariachi Plaza), 1<sup>st</sup> and Soto, and 3<sup>rd</sup> and Indiana. The budget for this project is \$898.8 million. The rail line is expected to be in operation in the year 2009 (MTA).

The MTA has been planning for the Gold Line since 1991 but was not able to start construction until 2004. One of the biggest obstacles to the construction start was an objection by Congressman Ernest J. Isotook, a Republican from Oakland, to the allocation

of federal funds. Finally in May of 2004, the Congressman approved the \$490 million grant agreement (Chong, Jia-Riu L.A. Times May 27,2004 B4). Another obstacle faced by the MTA was community opposition. The Bus Riders Union opposed the project because they felt it was neglecting bus riders across the county. Manuel Criollo, a Bus Riders Union spokesman, believed that the MTA was failing to improve bus service like they had promised in a 1996 consent decree stemming from a Title VI court suit, as well as shortchanging about 1.5 to 2 million bus riders county wide (Chong B3). In Boyle Heights there were some people opposed to the project because it meant the demolition of at least 17 housing units (not including the one project be hot, 12 0m1[

housing and commercial space within five years. A safety campaign should be initiated prior to the completion of the Gold Line so that East L.A. residents, especially children, become familiar with the safety precautions that are necessary near the Gold Line whether it is underground or above. A possible ripple effect of the Gold Line will be to increase the value of land and homes in the Eastside, making the land more desirable for outsiders and ultimately raising rents around the area. The secondary effects of the Gold Line should be carefully monitored so that mechanisms are employed that will help maintain, not exploit, the culture of the community







Another promise made to the community by MJW was a Project Labor Agreement (PLA). A PLA is a contract between the developer and a union which guarantees union labor for the construction of a project. In contrast, a Local Hire Agreement is an agreement made by the developer to hire a certain percentage of workers or have a certain percentage of hours worked by residents from a selected area surrounding the development. A Project Labor Agreement is an important tool that can inadvertently

MJW will be receiving approximately 50 million dollars in public funds that are marked for community redevelopment in Boyle Heights. The tax breaks are given for building in that specific zone as an incentive for developers who are willing to take the chance and build in disinvested communities. However, MJW staff have indicated that the condos planned for Olympic and Soto are also designed to attract people on the waiting lists for developments in downtown. On a television interview for the PBS program *Life and Times*, Weinstein pointed out, “The building over here, 315 A Street, is being built as condos right now. The demo is underway. There are sixty-four for sale condos. The waiting list is 720 people, so that's why we're building more condos”. Another member of the MJW team argued that they are now “giving back” to the community by elevating the importance of the total number of units that are planned. Based on the proportion of condos in the development, it is reasonable to assume that the Sears Town Center is catered for middle income residents who would like to live in downtown but are priced-out of the downtown market instead of Boyle Heights residents.

*Meeting the Need?*

Mr. We

developer should explicitly inform residents that of the 772 housing units only 40 of the units are being designed to meet the need in the community. In essence, Boyle Heights is donating 50 million dollars to a for-profit real estate firm for 155 “workforce affordable” condominiums and only 40 completely affordably priced apartments. Depending on the firm’s definition of workforce affordable, the only units proposed by the project that really address the need in the community are the 40 affordable apartments. Despite this minimal offer, MJW is promoting the project as the thing that the Latinos in Boyle Heights have been waiting for. The people of Boyle Heights have not been waiting for luxury condos.

The issue of the 40 affordable apartments also leads us to examine the mo.898 Tm(been waitouds2279 Tw 1

recommend that MJW designate a “political godfather” for the project that will help garner public support. Councilmember Villaraigosa appears to be the ideal candidate for this role because any projects that occur in or are planned for the 14<sup>th</sup> district will benefit his 2<sup>nd</sup> Mayoral attempt and possibly Villaraigosa’s dream of being Governor of California. In addition to this, he is, for the most part, a very well respected political leader in the Eastside, the City and among other Latino elected officials.

#### Is Villaraigosa Selling Us Out?

Antonio Villaraigosa inspired hope in the community. With a progressive past, people voted for him thinking that it could not possibly be worse than Councilman Nick Pacheco brief term. People in Los Angeles speculated that Antonio Villaraigosa was running for council district 14 because it would increase his chances to become the Mayor of Los Angeles. Now that Antonio Villaraigosa is in office, we were able to see that regardless of a person’s ethnicity or grassroots past, all elected officials must be held accountable.

The new investment in Boyle Heights brings many complications of Los Angeles Latino politics to the forefront. In “Class and Culture Wars in the New Latino Politics” Victor M. Valle and Rodolfo Torres point out, “Increased Latino political representation will mean greater access to the levers of government and, as a result, a larger niche in the state’s ecology of representati

religion of narrow political pragmatism. As in the major parties, raising money, winning elections, and holding on to political office were their method, objective, and reward ” (170). Currently, Boyle Heights is represented by Councilmember Antonio Villaraigosa with maximum service in July 2006, County Supervisor Gloria Molina with maximum service in 2015, State Senator Gilbert Cedillo, termed out in 2008, Assemblymember Fabian Nunez termed out 2008, and Congressmember Lucille Roybal-Allard with 2 year terms and no limits on the amount of terms she can serve in office. In Boyle Heights we are currently represented by progressive politicians as well as conservatives. Having political representation is important and a monumental achievement but Latino/a politicians are still politicians that will sell us out given the realities of running for office and dealing with powerful interests once elected.

Last year, MJW went to Councilmember Villaraigosa to look for support for his project and to identify community stakeholders to meet with during the community input process. At the meetings, Villaraigosa promised to push for local hire, a living wage and to help find money for the project. He did not however, advocate for affordable housing. Through this process, Antonio Villaraigosa has positioned himself as an active supporter of MJW’s Sears Town Center. Yet, his position thus far does not mean that he cannot be swayed to demand more benefits for the community. Because he can potentially become the Mayor and has higher political aspirations, Anotonio Villaraigosa should be viewed as a politician over who organized community groups can have a lot of leverage.

### *Framing the Project*

Mark Weinstein knows that there will be significant delays in his plans if he does not secure community approval. For this, he has hired Victor Griego of Diverse Strategies

for Organizing for public outreach consulting services for the Sears Town Center. Victor Griego, who has run for City Council in Boyle Heights in the past, is working with Antonio Villaraigosa to hold meetings with key stakeholders in the community (*DSO News* Fall 2004). The list of 20-30 stakeholders includes Homeboy Industries, Mothers of East Los Angeles-Resurrection Chapter, Jovenes Inc., Breed St. Family Shelter, Inqu

shop. Boyle Heights could become multicultural without excluding the existing community. A more effective and long-term strategy to make Boyle Heights a mixed-income community would be to give youth equal access to a college education so that they will become the middle-class residents of Boyle Heights.

During a Sears community meeting that occurred on April 19, 2004, one of the first things that was noted by the more conservative resident panel was that they did not want family housing because of the negative impact it would have on schools. Instead, the community wanted the new housing to be catered to professionals and the elderly. At the end of the meeting, some residents raised a concern about no youth being present and the lack of publicity about the meetings (Community Meeting Notes-Isela Gracian). A housing development designed for Boyle Heights demands larger family housing units, not lofts and 1 bedrooms. Additionally, the developer would need to create more rental units than ownership units because 75% of Boyle Heights residents are renters. The comments made by groups at the Sears community meeting do not match the needs indicated by the demographics and social and economic conditions in Boyle Heights.

Three very important organizations were excluded from the community input process at the Sears Community Meeting. East L.A. Community Corporation (ELACC), Union de Vecinos and InnerCity Stuggle. ELACC could have been excluded on two grounds; either because MJW, as advised by the ULI study, identified them as the potential non-profit partner to build the affordable apartments or because the Councilmember did not see them as representative of the community. InnerCity Struggle and Union de Vecinos are progressive organizations that focus on grassroots community organizing. Union de Vecinos organizes throughout Boyle Heights, especially around Pico-Aliso, and

InnerCity Struggle organizes youth at Roosevelt High School. Union de Vecinos and InnerCity Struggle could be identified as being some of the few progressive organizations in the community, with ELACC recently reestablishing itself in that direction. Union de Vecinos, ELACC and InnerCity Struggle could have been excluded from the community meetings because they are the organizations that have the greatest potential to organize opposition to the project. Additionally, if ELACC, Union de Vecinos and InnerCity



“Environmental Racism and Urban Development” the author explores the connection between whiteness and environmental racism. She explains,

Because most white people do not see themselves as having malicious intentions and because they associate racism with malicious intent, whites exonerate themselves of racist tendencies, all the while ignoring their investment in white privilege. It is this inability to sever intent from outcome that allows whites to acknowledge that racism exists yet seldom identify themselves as racists”. (73)

In the study, Pulido establishes a set of criteria by which to determine the racist implication26 6tion26 6tion2o416e peo



associate the redevelopment with the presence of white professionals even if Latino professionals are also present.

There is general consensus that Boyle Heights is a community that needs some revitalizing. People are saying that Boyle Heights needs to be revitalized because it's full of poverty, students are not graduating high school, and very few people go on to college. People have complained for years that there is too much crime and that the city does not "fix" the neighborhood. Yet, no one is explicitly recognizing that the social and economic conditions that exist and have existed in Boyle Heights have been caused by racism against Mexicanos and Latinos. In Boyle Heights there are too few employers and a lack of diversity, yet the lack of jobs and a multi-ethnic community is not because there have not been homes in Boyle Heights for people of all colors to live in, nor is it because there was no workforce for the industry. Simply put, the blight in Boyle Heights was caused by racism. People did not want to be near Mexicans. In a television interview on the PBS show *Life and Times*, Mark Weinstein comments, "[Boyle Heights residents] believe they deserve what the other areas of Los Angeles have gotten. You know, they've been long neglected and left out and they want their piece of the pie" (Television Interview, Sept. 2004 ). Boyle Heights has been neglected for many years but the neglect was a product of the city's preoccupation with creating the suburbs for middle-class professionals. Some suburbs are now starting to decay which provides a great marketing opportunity for Downtown. Many people organized to get money to the eastside and now the government is dishing it out in large amounts only to try to bring those same middle class families back to the inner-city/central city area so that once again, barrio residents will bear the cost.

**MTA Properties**

In February 2004 the MTA developed a set of guidelines for the future development of all MTA owned property in Boyle Heights. The specific areas are; First and Boyle, First and Lorena and Cesar Chavez and Soto. These guidelines were developed based on community input from Mothers of East Los Angeles, Abuelitos de Boyle Heights, Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative, Boyle Heights Chamber of Commerce and East Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. A very important thing to observe is that one of the developers of the approved proposals for the Cesar Chavez and Soto properties is Frank Villalobos of Barrio Planners, a member of all of the above referenced community groups.

**Cesar Chavez and Soto**

Based on the fact that the MTA Gold Line project received public subsidies, the development guidelines require the development of affordable housing. The plans for this area recommend a mixed-use project. The guidelines recommend the development of multi-family and senior housing. The community members involved in the community input process expressed a great need for a major grocery store, drug store, major cinema theatres, restaurants, housing and retail. They agreed the housing component should incorporate condominiums to increase the area's homeownership rate.

The Cesar Chavez/Soto area is the heart of Boyle Heights. It is the commercial center as well as a historic cultural center. The multitude of establishments housed in this area, include a fabric store, a clinic, tattoo shop, pharmacy, general retail, botanicas, jewelers, optometrist, salons and barbershops, restaurants and a pet shop. There is a lot of

pedestrian activity in the area as a result of a



L.A., if for no other reason than "I'd go broke trying to work here as an architect and planner. There's no money here. So we have to make it, and then recycle it in the community" (Ohland). As we can see by his bid to the MTA for the Cesar Chavez and Soto land, he does not just talk the talk, he walks the walk. He is not a community decision maker; he is a businessman who gets involved in economic development issues to make sure he has business. Villalobos doesn't care that renters will have nowhere to go when they are evicted from the last affordable housing in Boyle Heights. Mr. Villalobos exonerates gentrification in the L.A. Weekly because there was no money on the line, yet to the City, MTA and possibly other funding sources he says he is comm

homeowners as well as glossy pamphlets that guarantee money no matter what condition your home is in. In light of all the construction and renovation, the community has to come up with a movement that will make sure that developments are designed to meet the need in the community. Boyle Heights is tired of breadcrumbs and the new developments provide an opportunity for residents to organize to create progressive long-term sustainable change.



## Chapter 5: Gentrification

Gentrification is defined as “the process by which higher income households displace lower income residents of a neighborhood, often, but not always, gentrification has a very clear racial component replacing lower income minority residents with higher income white residents and households” (L.A. CAN Flyer). According to Kalima Rose in *Beyond Gentrification: Tools for Equitable Development*, gentrification occurs in three stages.

Stage 1: The first stage of gentrification involves some significant public or non-profit redevelopment investment and/or private newcomers buying and rehabbing vacant units. At first, this causes little displacement or resentment. This process may occur over several years, and initially may cause little change in the appearance of long-disinvested communities.

Stage 2: In the second stage, knowledge of the neighborhood, its low housing costs and its other amenities spreads. Now displacement begins, as housing costs rise and landlords begin to evict long-time residents in order to garner greater revenues by renting or selling to the more affluent.

Stage 3: In the third stage, as rehabilitation becomes more apparent, prices escalate and displacement occurs in force. New residents have lower tolerance for social service facilities, industrial and other uses they view as undesirable. Original residents are displaced along with their industries, commercial enterprises, faith institutions and cultural traditions.

In “A Class Analysis of Gentrification” by Neil Smith and Michele LeFaivre, gentrification is defined as “the rehabilitation of working-class inner-city neighborhoods for upper-middle class consumption” (Smith and LeFaivre 44). Both definitions are applicable in terms of this study. Kalima 53n-efinitio



The capitalist class facilitates gentrification when certain capitalist groups within the class discover they can make substantial profits by destroying working-class communities and moving in middle class homeowners (Smith and LeFaivre 46). Smith and LeFaivre describe several steps in the gentrification process. One of the steps is landlord control. According to them, “Under landlord control, the neighborhood’s housing stock is used for a completely different purpose. No longer is it owned for direct use as a domicile; rather, it is owned simply as a means of producing a certain percentage of profit” (Smith and LeFaivre 49). This is seen in Boyle Heights by the proliferation of “flipping”, a process where individuals and real estate agencies buy homes with the sole purpose of selling them to make a profit. This process is sped up in neighborhoods with rent control with a provision for vacancy decontrol.



be able to afford rents or may be evicted by landlords to avoid rent control. Gentrification is a process that hurts renters but benefits homeowners. It disproportionately affects seniors and people with disabilities. Displacement may increase as some homeowners begin to sell their homes to the new residents who can afford to buy them. Boyle Heights has many beautiful Victorian and Craftsman homes that some homeowners cannot afford to rehabilitate which could be ma

Already gentrification has showed its face in Boyle Heights with the displacement of mariachis who used to live in the historic Boyle Hotel located in front of the Mariachi Plaza, a future Metro Gold Line station. Their displacement was a result of

Xicano/a middle-class. Because much of the communities' opposition to gentrification has been framed around whites, little attention has been paid to gentrification by middle and upper-class members of the neighborhood's predominant ethnicity. Gentrification will still bring whites into the neighborhood, but in Boyle Heights, like in Harlem, the process will also include middle-class members of the predominant ethnicity. Revitalization efforts in Harlem have concentrated on getting upper-income Blacks back into the community. These efforts have been successful in Harlem because Harlem is a symbol of Black culture for the entire Black community in the U.S. In *Harlem: Between Heaven and Hell*, Monique M. Taylor interviews a member of the Black gentry as to why he feels Black professionals are coming in to Harlem. He says,

‘They ran away from their culture. Well they’re going to be running back. There’s guilt that comes from the re-awareness of people saying, ‘Hey, I ran off and did all of these things, but I’m still the last hired and first fired...’ (73). In this comment, Carver argues that the tenuous position of the black middle class, coupled with the lingering racism they experience, fuels this longing for a ‘return’ to something of deeper significance (Taylor 73).

According to this statement, Harlem offers a social safety-net for the black middle-class that could not be acquired outside of the community even after having completed the necessary acculturation rituals. Racism leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of professional Blacks and Xicanas/os which make “coming home”, even if they never lived here before, a soothing experience. This type of marketing is also the case with the Sears Town Center in Boyle Heights. The developer is looking to build for Latino professionals. This rhetoric is used to minimize the perception of ensuing gentrification. In terms of White gentrification, “Many blacks in Harlem see an inherent racism in hearing their community viewed as a place to be ‘discovered’ by white pioneers” (50). This view could encourage members of the Black and Xicano/a middle-class to move into Harlem and Boyle Heights

in order to serve as buffers for the destruction/transformation of the community. This, in turn, can prevent middle-class people of color from seeing their class-associated privilege. Only looking at gentrification by whites, masks the possibility that gentrification by people of the same ethnic background could also be taking place. In Boyle Heights, gentrification by the Xicano/a middle-class will restore class divisions and may trigger conflicts in the development of plans for the future. As with White gentrification, gentrification by the Xicano/a bourgeoisie will increase displacement and eliminate services needed by the community, like clinics and local business. Gentrification is not an issue that is only affecting Blacks and Latinos, it is an issue that applies to everyone because it is a process



there would be more members of the Latino middle-class. In the same article by Gloria Ohland, Rosalie Gurrola a member of the Boyle Heights Homeowners Association states, “We'd love people from across the bridge, from downtown and other parts of this city to come, you know, in and we all mix it up and have that opportunity. But people come in when there is something to come in to”. Ms. Gurrola’s statement is not only self-hating and infuriating but also an example of the challenges we will face trying to organize a movement. Ms. Gurrola views Boyle Heights as a place with nothing to offer middle-class residents like herself and people from outside of the community. I feel Ms. Gurrola is mistaken. Boyle Heights, like Harlem, has been a Mecca for Mexicano/a, Xicano/a and Latino/a culture in the United States and has given its residents an array of services and experiences. Boyle Heights has offered its residents retail establishments, restaurants and everything else a community has to offer. Inequality has caused the social and economic infrastructure that Ms. Gurrola identifies as missing. It seems that what Ms. Gurrola means when she says there is nothing to come into, is that there is no Starbucks, no Chillis, no Wal-Mart for people to come and shop in. Boyle Heights does not have any big-box retail shopping centers like the ones located throughout Southern California suburbs because there had not been free money offered to those willing to build here like there had been in the suburbs. In addition to this, there is another major obstacle that we will face in Boyle Heights which is cultural hegemony. Many people in the community across class lines equate successful revitalization with the whitening of Boyle Heights. When talking to one of my friends in Boyle Heights about the changes, he said he thought it was good that White people are going to start coming into the neighborhood because that means



No one is defending us as of now. Meetings are being conducted that are not widely publicized and the groups most negatively impacted by the developments are being excluded from the process. Already we can see that the types of developments being built in Boyle Heights foreshadow a calculated imposed change. The Gold Line demanded new ridership from people who would need to travel downtown on a daily basis who are most likely professionals because many of the residents that work downtown may still have to take the buses that take them to their jobs in the industrial and garment districts . In turn, those new riders need housing which is more up-scale, resulting in the Sears Town Center luxury condos. Now the residents of the luxury condos will demand increased safety resulting in more police, thus the Hollenbeck Police Station Expansion. The infrastructure is being built for the “new” Boyle Heights that provides a market to its r

resentment towards their living conditions. Mrs. Briseño walked in and out of the room where Mr. Briseño, another organizer and I were talking about community organizing. She had a neck brace on that I would later learn was a direct result of the displacement. After much hesitation, Mrs. Briseño eventually joined in the conversation. She was angry. She explained everything that had happened with the evictions. She told us about her 4 meetings with Councilmember Villaraigosa that never went anywhere. She explained how the desperation of feeling helpless became so unbearable it took a toll on her body. The stress made her sick. She was going to have surgery on her spinal cord 5 days after our meeting. She said she had been healthy up until the second eviction. She was always out and about and now she was too depressed to go anywhere. You could see the bitterness in her face.

We left the Brisenos' trying to figure out a way to find out who was responsible for the relocation. As we were driving off, we saw 2 white males, casually walking their chihuahua. They were dressed in the hip vintage rocker look and looked no older than 25. No, I wasn't in Hollywood. I was in Boyle Heights on 4<sup>th</sup> and St. Louis at around 6:00 p.m. in the evening. The juxtaposition of Mrs. Briseño's story and these two happy go lucky guys filled me with anger. I was so shocked by their presence that I yelled out the car window, "Hey, where do you live?". To my surprise the blonde one answered, "Up there", pointing up St. Louis. I figured these two guys were definitely new to the area since they told me, a stranger, where they lived and also since they were walking their Chihuahua in the dark at Hollenbeck Park, a dangerous place people from the neighborhood would know not to do. The Juxtaposition of the Briseño's experience and the two White males put a face on the gentrification taking place right in front of my eyes.

## **Chapter 6: National Models**

Gentrification has occurred in many cities across the world and in the United States. As a result of this, many communities have organized in order to combat displacement. Below you will find examples of battles that have been fought across the United States against gentrification and displacement. Although not all the strateg

be able to win this battle because they have empowered people to get involved in the planning process who will not stop fighting until they see more affordable housing being built across the city and an end to gentrification. (Center for Community Change).

## **2. Community Benefit Agreement**

A Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) are legal agreements between a developer and a community organization to secure certain benefits from a development for the local community. CBA's have been used in Los Angeles for the Staples Center and a mixed-use project on Hollywood and Vine. A CBA is created through negotiation with the promise of a developer to provide benefits to the local affected community in exchange for support of the project and its request for approvals and subsidies. According to a CBA manual published by Good Jobs First, CBA's should be enforced by the government agency providing the subsidy and should be executed prior to the construction of the project but currently can only be enforced by the people signing the contract. Some of the demands that can be made in a CBAs are local-hire programs, affordable housing, a living wage for jobs created by the development, union labor, child care center, subsidized retail space, parks and recreataional facilities and community input in tenant selection. (Community Benefits Agreements: Making Development Projects Accountable, Julian

Gross, *Published by Good Jobs First*). CBA's should have clauses for each benefit that

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### **3. Housing Trust Fund**

In Los Angeles in 2002, Housing L.A., a coalition of community organizations, labor and housing grou

In Los Angeles, the battle is currently underway for the passage of an inclusionary zoning ordinance. After the establishment of the Los Angeles Housing Trust Fund, 65 organizations came together to form a coalition to go beyond the trust fund to require developers to set aside a certain percentage of new housing units as affordable. Because of



crucial in slowing down the gentrification process caused by the University of Southern California and their students (SAJE. *Displacement Free Zone*).

### **7. Eviction Free Zone**

An Eviction Free Zone is very similar to a Displacement Free Zone but it places a moratorium on all evictions within a certain area. When rent control was terminated in Cambridge, Massachusetts, organizing began to implement the Cambridge Eviction-Free Zone and prevent the eviction of 2,000 families.

### **8. Community Land Trust**

A Community Land Trust is a tool designed to specifically combat gentrification. The goals of a Community Land Trust are to help people in the community own their own homes and land, as well as the preservation of affordable housing. Community Land Trusts are not only controlled by the owners of the land and housing but by the community as a whole. Owners and other neighbors all participate in decisions regarding the Community Land Trust. By having direct ownership of land and housing in the community, residents will ultimately gain control over planning and redevelopment.

### **9. Eminent Domain**

Dudley Street was a neighborhood that for years had been redlined by banks, government mortgage programs and insurance companies. Like Boyle Heights, the neighborhood became blighted as Whites and capital fled the central city for the suburbs. In the early 1980's, the community realized that the government was not going to help their neighborhood unless people demanded it.

As a result of this, DSNI organized to win the power of eminent domain. The group was able to get the city of Roxbury, Massachusetts to donate all vacant city land in

the Dudley Street neighborhood for redevelopment as well as granting DSNI the power of eminent domain over all privately owned vacant land (Luther Kildegaard Snow 188). Once the community gained control of their land, community members started to plan and participate in the redevelopment process. The community plan did not just address land-use, it focused on changing the process of land development, calling for local ownership structures and anti-displacement programs as well as integrating human services and economic development components to directly address the community's needs and values, including the racial and ethnic dynamics (Nyden and Wiedel 187). Through DSNI, neighbors were able to redefine the redevelopment process, improving the lives of the current residents.

## **10. Asset Mapping**

Asset mapping is a tool that is developed specifically for current residents. It is a process where community resources are mapped, with or without GIS, that identifies assets already in the community. This is an important tool because it can show specific businesses that can be revitalized rather than simply bringing in new businesses that provide the same products and services. Asset mapping is also important because it can

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rent control to protect the rights of tenants including vacancy control (Los Angeles Housing Department).

#### **14. Cooperatives**

Cooperatives are businesses or housing where ownership is shared by community members. Cooperatives are designed for maintaining long term self-sufficiency and autonomy. Similar to a community land trust, a cooperative is guided by a whole community, not just a single investor. Cooperatives are participatory and promote the common good of a community.

#### **15. Tenant Unions/Neighborhood Unions**

Tenant Unions are organizations created for action and education. They primarily educate residents about their rights as tenants and the rights of owners. They also organize local residents to improve housing conditions in their area. They are powerful because they provide the space for dialogue among residents of a certain area and help establish bonds between neighbors that ultimately manifest themselves through campaigns for a better community.

#### **16. Business Unions**



created to document the changes in the community which can be used as an organizing tool and as a way to assure that the people that live in a community are acknowledged and respected.

## **Chapter 7: Strategies for Community Driven Accountable Development**

“Power concedes nothing without demand”-Frederick Douglas

In Boyle Heights there is a group of a few well organized individuals who are usually called upon during the community input process for major projects in the Eastside. They have an incredible amount of power in the project approval process. These groups claim to represent the community, yet the community interests they really represent are those of business and homeowners. They are, for the most part, conservative and make very few demands that benefit poor people directly. They are NIMBY's when it comes to schools and affordable housing, but advocates for luxury lofts, condos and big chain retail. These groups have been able to gain power and recognition because of the lack of an organized voice that represents renters and that will demand accountability from anyone before the community. This never before seen investment boom in Boyle Heights has the potential to bring low-income residents, businesses, parents, students, artists and homeowners together to demand progressive policy changes that will not just alleviate the symptoms of the ills in Boyle Heights but will work to provide a cure.

### **A Call to Action!**

Historically, grassroots organizing has been the most effective strategy for long-term social change. The Center for Community Change (CCC) has created a list of the attributes of successful community organizing.

1. “Community organizing emphasizes large numbers of people, confronting power and altering the dynamics of power.”
2. “Community organizing is about relationships. Not only altering the relationship of power between community members and unaccountable individuals and institutions, as describe

3. “Community organizing builds community-based leadership. At its best, organizing seeks to give to those who participate in the process the confidence and capacities needed to change their communities.”
4. “Community organizing acknowledges self-interest.”

(Center for Community Change. *Housing Organizing: Inclusionary Zoning and Community Organizing*. Issue 2. Spring 2004).

What we need in the community is to stop believing in reform and actually attempt to change the process that excludes the marginalized even when they represent the majority. As residents, we can not approve plans and developments that keep this system intact. Not approving a plan means that you don't just not show support for it, it means that you act against it. In Boyle Heights we still have time to create alternative policies instead of reacting to policies that we disapprove.

Organizing will only help improve the social and economic conditions in Boyle Heights. It will help marginalized people in the community understand that they have a right to demand change that makes life better for them. They should know they have a right to oppose a project that does not benefit the community equally and that they have the right to support a project that will benefit the community at large. It is no longer business as usual in Boyle Heights. People will begin to organize, and participation in what used to be exclusive negotiations will grow. People in Boyle Heights should understand that they can challenge and question each other as well as their elected officials. Boyle Heights' residents, whether they are have documents or not, have the right to demand development that provides decent affordable housing, quality jobs, and a community without fear of police, politicians or immigration raids. Residents have the right to ask where their money is going and decide what they want it spent on. Politicians



will know that they have an obligation to defend the community or they have no place here. An organized progressive voice demanding equity and change that represents the needs of low income residents is needed in Boyle Heights.

In order to achieve this voice a coalition is necessary. Although the majority of residents in Boyle Heights are renters, there is not currently a large, long-established organization that fights for the rights of low-income tenants. There are few organizations that focus specifically on grassroots organizing in Boyle Heights. One important example is InnerCity Struggle, an organization that works with youth and parents on education issues. They have had many successful campaigns that promote social change but because of their education focus, they cannot provide the critical mass necessary to lead a campaign against gentrification. There are several other non-profits in Boyle Heights and the Greater East Los Angeles area but they mostly provide services. If organizations, like Homeboy Industries, that advocate and provide services to residents form a part of an Eastside Coalition the base of organized, informed and “politicized” people will grow. This will in turn prevent anyone from coming in to Boyle Heights with the sole purpose of reinforcing the trends towards gentrification. In the next section you will find a sample Strategy Chart based on the Kim Bobo model, for a cam

2. Provide adequate funding for schools, community organizations and services necessary to keep Boyle Heights as a cultural center.

Intermediate Goals:

1. Designate Boyle Heights as a displacement free zone, which includes an anti-predatory displacement clause.
2. Enter into an agreement with MJW and Cesar Chavez/Soto LLC that would apply community identified guidelines for redevelopment or face complete opposition.
3. Win support from community organizations and state and local leaders outside of Boyle Heights.
4. Win support from elected officials in Boyle Heights.

Short Term

1. Organize tenants
2. Form an Eastside Coalition of progressive Boyle Heights non-profit organizations and residents.
3. Create autonomy in the community by drafting guidelines for redevelopment that address their needs directly.
4. Begin a community dialogue series where information can be disseminated to and collected from residents.

***Eastside Coalition***

A progressive Eastside Coalition is needed in Boyle Heights to represent the needs of renters. According to the Authors of *Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990s*, “A coalition is defined as an organization of organizations working together for a common goal” (Bobo, Kendal and Max 70). The authors warn that the only

time a coalition should be formed is when there is a need to amass the power necessary to do something one organization cannot accomplish (70). Based on this criterion, a coalition is essential in Boyle Heights because there is currently not one single organization dedicated to grassroots organizing that has the power to work on such a big campaign, much less one with the goal of social change. Furthermore, a coalition is necessary because the campaign issue affects all the work that organizations are currently undertaking. Building a coalition can be difficult because of the different needs of each organization. It is also difficult to maintain a coalition because of the extra work required of staff. Ultimately, the benefits of a coalition in the Eastside will outweigh the negatives because it will establish a link between the few progressive organizations and give residents a new source of power.

***Constituents, Allies, and Opponents***

The constituents for this campaign are Boyle Heights tenants, student and small businesses. The following is a list of possible allies and opponents in Boyle Heights:

**Potential Allies**

- § Homeboy Industries
- § Jovenes Inc.
- § Inquilinos Unidos
- § Union de Vecinos
- § East L.A. Community Corporation
- § Dolores Mission, Proyecto Pastoral
- § InnerCity StrugT

**Potential Opponents**

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***Targets:***

*Primary Targets:* Mark J. Weinstein of MJW Investments and Frank Villalobos, Craig Jones, and Nick Patsouras of Cesar Chavez/Soto LLC.

*Secondary Targets:* Councilman Villaraigosa

***Strategy and Tactics***

*Community Dialogue Series*

The most important tactic in this campaign will be the community dialogue series. “The measure of successful education is that it leads to action” (Bobo, Kendall and Max 38). By educating people about their rights, developments and their potential effects we will build power.

*Anti-Predatory Displacement Project*

This project could be its own campaign or it could be one of the strategies that aim to slow down the gentrification process. Boyle Heights and other low-income communities are being targeted by real estate companies. This could be defined as predatory displacement because realtors are explicitly targeting low-income communities of color to increase profit. A campaign could be launched, similar to the anti-predatory lending campaigns, where particular real estate companies could be confronted in order to change their discriminatory practices. Initial plans for this campaign should include identifying the criteria that real estate companies use to get people in certain areas to sell their home. One tactic that could be used would be a community protection day where community members go out and remove the “Buy your home CASH” signs around their neighborhood to assert their ownership of the community. This would also help identify the realtors that are engaging in these practices and document the gentrification process.



Homeboy Industries can begin to incorporate community organizing into the organization by hiring an organizer or training a member already on staff. They could also form part of a progressive Eastside Coalition in order to familiarize themselves with organizing.

*East L.A. Community Corporation (ELACC)*

ELACC is a non-profit community development corporation (CDC) that develops affordable housing, conducts first-time homebuyer counseling, credit counseling, job training and community organizing. ELACC does not have a great track record when it comes to community organizing but has recently implemented the infrastructure needed to support a strong community organizing department. This is crucial since organizing was not a major focus of the more traditional community development corporation. One of ELACC's strengths and weaknesses is its involvement as a CDC in the housing market. Having an effective organizing department as part of their organization can benefit ELACC by reinforcing its role in the community and their commitment to building communities, not just housing. ELACC

a developer and as a community organization, ELACC will have to be the trendsetter for accountable development practices. They are going to have to create developments that are more innovative and provide significantly more benefits for the community than traditional developments by private developers, possibly at the cost of a smaller profit margin.

#### *Union de Vecinos*

Union de Vecinos is a tenant-based organization dedicated to the empowerment of renters in Boyle Heights. They currently focus their organizing efforts in the area most visibly affected by displacement, the Pico-Aliso neighborhood, which is also the area where they have their largest tenant base. Union de Vecino's story gives the organization a lot of its strength. They formed in 1996 in response to the demolition of the Pico-Aliso public housing complex. One of ELACC's founders, Leonardo Vilchis, is the executive director and organizer. Because Union de Vecinos is a relatively small organization, they would benefit greatly by joining the coalition because they will be able to grow along with the movement. One obstacle that could be faced by Union de Vecinos is that

against gentrification in order to help secure more autonomy in Boyle Heights. Each organization needs to invest time within the Eastside coalition because it will be a vehicle for defining the true needs of Boyle Heights residents.

The coalition will be a great way for the few progressive organizations in the Eastside to show their strength to the rest of Los Angeles and the organized conservatives in Boyle Heights. There are several organization in Los Angeles that Boyle Heights non-profits could work with on an accountable development campaign but it is important to note that a campaign against gentrification must be led by a broad coalition of Eastside non-profits to develop principles that reflect the most urgent needs in the community, including education. Forming a coalition will expose political and private corporate interests that undermine the well being of Boyle Heights residents and show that residents will no longer be subject to the destruction of our community. A coalition is important because in Boyle Heights we never have been or will be represented politically. The only way to improve our substandard living conditions is demanding our human rights to housing and education. We have the right to live with dignity; without fear of the police or secretly planned evictions. We do not want solutions dictated to us from the so-called experts. We have all the experts we need in this community. No one is going to know what the community needs best than those that are most marginalized. We can have the most sophisticated plans to bring money back into the community but who are the plans going to benefit? Having a mall is not going to make Boyle Heights a better, safer place to live. Having police parade their authority on the street is not going to get rid of crime or improve the lives of our youth. Politicians are not going to design long term solutions we need because their re-election is determined by short term community



clean ups and franchise businesses that can start up within a week. Politicians do not create long-term solutions to social problems because they cannot brag about the results of programs and projects that have a longer-life span than 4 or 6 year terms.



community and its people, and will say no when a development will negatively impact the community. People in Boyle Heights understand that these changes are not for them.

As we saw in the National Models section, institutions and their practices have to be challenged and presented with alternatives in order for the needs in the community to be integrated into redevelopment and community processes. Although many other communities may have failed in preventing displacement and gentrification, these communities found a voice through participatory community planning and decision making. Boyle Heights should be seen as a museum. Places like the Mariachi Plaza, should be preserved as if it was a museum, no one would try to improve a museum by throwing all the art pieces away to make room for commercial art pieces. That is the value that I place on Boyle Heights. We have been able to live happy lives amidst the murders, blight and crime because we have close relationships with our neighbors and our families. We want redevelopment in Boyle Heights but we want residents to direct it, directly benefit from it while affirming why we want to live there.

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