"It’s important to remember what started it":
Conserving Sites and Stories of Racial Violence in Los Angeles, 1943-1992

By

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Abstract

Like every megacity, Los Angeles has histories of both triumph and shame. But these pasts are not told equally. Lurking beneath empty lots, nondescript intersections, and even this city’s most stately landmarks are stories of strife and oppression, largely invisible. This thesis inspects three moments of racial conflict in Los Angeles: the Zoot Suit Riots (1943), the repression of the Southern California Chapter of the Black Panther Party (1969), and the 1992 Uprising. Analyzing sites associated with these events makes clear that conventional, government-based tools for preserving the past are poorly designed to handle painful history, producing stories that are avoidant or reductive.

This past is told more fully, however, from the grassroots. Through community organizing, performances, digital catalogues, alternative tours, vigils, and art, people are grappling with these memories in real time. But the current legal approaches to preservation—which privilege tangible buildings over intangible actions—are not equipped to recognize this work. This thesis argues that calling attention to these practices could help heritage conservation break away from the role it has played in upholding the narratives of society’s most powerful groups, both intentionally and unintentionally.

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Introduction

This thesis starts from a simple assumption: there is no such thing as objective history, and thus, no such thing as an objective heritage. The past and its interpretation are inherently political. We owe it to ourselves to be forward about our biases and recognize that even our most mainstream historical narratives are slanted. This thesis seeks to chip away at some of these stale stories by bringing difficult, suppressed histories to the foreground.

The project begins by defining heritage and providing a brief literature review for deconstructing this concept. Three case studies of racial strife in Los Angeles are then discussed: the Zoot Suit Riots (1943), the repression of the Southern California Chapter of the Black Panther Party (1969), and the 1992 Uprising. One chapter is dedicated to each, generally following the same format: a discussion of the events and their context, an analysis of significant sites, and an inspection of some alternative, grassroots engagements with these pasts. By comparing mainstream heritage engagement with some alternative approaches, it becomes clear that governments are woefully underequipped to tell these stories. Designed to protect grand pieces of monumental architecture, both local and national preservation policy fail to give these marginalized events the voice they need. Complex and painful pasts confound tools like landmark designation, particularly when significant sites have already been destroyed. While this issue is slowly improving, the narratives associated with these case studies still remain underrepresented and at risk.

Their memory does persist, however, outside the purview of the government. The alternative approaches analyzed here reveal that through things like political organizing, commemorative gatherings, and the creation of public art, people continue to shape and maintain these pasts. Independent of historic sites and professional preservationists, these social practices are particularly adept at maintaining collective memory in the face of erasure. But these actions go unrecognized by mainstream heritage approaches, which continue to privilege buildings over these forms of intangible heritage. An analysis chapter discussing what role the government should play in protecting and catalyzing these practices follows the three case studies. Bridging this gap could help heritage play a more robust role in spurring social change.

Terminology and Identity

In the effort to shed light on these sites, identity is paramount, particularly because the dynamics that caused much of this strife are alive and well. The sites discussed here mean something
different to every race and class. Gender is also no doubt a factor. As a white, cisgendered, heterosexual man, it is important that I discuss how I plan to handle these stories of oppression.

Racial terminology changes rapidly and is best selected by the groups being discussed, to which I do not belong. I am providing some background on my decisions here for clarity in advance: I use the term “Mexican American” during my discussion of the Zoot Suit Riots even though many of those discussed were not naturalized citizens. I believe this phrase implies that these people belonged in Los Angeles, considering the land of Southern California was once theirs and that they maintained well established communities there. I avoided the term “Mexican” because it implies foreignness and was used by the press during this time as a means to otherize. Pachuco/a was also used during the events, often to imply gang affiliation. Chicano/a/x was not yet in use, and I was uncomfortable with applying retroactively, particularly as a white person. I also decided against Latino/a/x because, while useful as an umbrella term, its inclusivity would downplay the fact that it was Mexican Americans in particular that were targeted by sailors during the riot. In Chapters Three and Four, when discussing the Black Panther Party and the 1992 Uprising, Latinx becomes useful for capturing the diverse group of Central and Southern Americans involved.

While the Black Panther movement started as an African-American one, as Marxists, their ultimate aspiration was international revolution. With this in mind, I use the term Black throughout this project because it signifies unity between people of Black ancestry as a transnational group. I also capitalize Black—another contentious decision—because capitalization is afforded to most other nationalities, races, and cultures. If Black is uncapsulated in a quote, it was written as such originally. Lastly, I use the phrase “of color” when the intersections between non-white people are important to note. Otherwise, I try to remain as specific as possible.

Heritage conservation is a broader term than historic preservation, which handles buildings as well as social practices. When I do use “historic preservation,” it describes heritage approaches focused on architecture. To avoid repetition I sometimes use the word “preservation” as an umbrella term for all heritage engagement, including both the preservation of buildings and less tangible forms of heritage. I define these concepts and elaborate on this distinction in the first chapter.

**Research Methodology**

This thesis relies mostly on books, journal articles, and newspapers, as well as some government documents like landmark designations, commission reports, and policy memos. Occasionally, I use some ephemeral materials and alternative publications accessed through the Southern California Library, an
archive in South Los Angeles that collects material on social resistance. I unfortunately did not have the capacity to support this research with oral history interviews. This project provides only a survey of alternative heritage engagements, all of which deserve their own in-depth study. Further research on these approaches would benefit from direct engagement with residents and activists, and the use of more non-institutional source material.

I hope the angle I took makes clear I do not aim to speak for anyone other than myself. I also sincerely hope that I have avoided voyeurism and the fetishization of violence, poverty, or the lived experience of people of color. But that is not for me to decide. This is the push and pull of academic work interested in social change. The idea that one day a researcher of color may tear this thesis to shreds excites me. In the meantime, one less research project on a white aristocrat’s estate is a step in the right direction.
Chapter One: Heritage, Difficult History, and Social Change

“...it’s not possible to be objective, and it’s not desirable if it were possible.”
— Howard Zinn

"To vilify heritage as biased is thus futile: bias is the main point of heritage."
— David Lowenthal

There are as many heritages as there are people. I say this not to avoid defining heritage, but to highlight its vulnerability. This chapter argues that heritage plays a vital role in narrative building—heritage sites and stories are essential to how we understand ourselves, each other, and the spaces we occupy.

Because I discuss heritage here in the abstract, some examples used are distant from Los Angeles. However, by defining heritage and breaking down some of its main frameworks and approaches, I develop the lens with which I inspect the case studies of this project. I begin by providing some different perspectives on what heritage is, followed by a literature review for background knowledge on its use as either a tool of exclusion or social change.

Defining Heritage

Heritage has only been formally studied since the 1980s. Since then, many authors have tried to define the phenomenon and what it does to and for people. Because it rests between disciplines—history, geography, anthropology, etc.—putting boundaries around this field in a way that is inclusive or universal is difficult.

The most useful definition of heritage for this project is simply the selective use of the past for present and future gain. Prominent heritage scholar J.E. Tunbridge elaborates: “The present selects an inheritance from an imagined past for current use and decides what should be passed on to an imagined future.” The goal is to maintain a relationship with the past that suits present needs and helps secure an understanding of self for future generations. Within this broad of a context, heritage can take many

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forms, ranging from architectural relics to less tangible traditions like dance, music, or food. Oftentimes, these significant pieces of a culture have a spatial component—a business, a city block, a region, or a nation. In each of these contexts and combinations, people receive knowledge about their pasts that helps build identity. In the words of David Lowenthal, one of the founding thinkers of heritage studies, “To know what we were confirms what we are.”

Heritage plays a critical role in representing identities and holding space for their performance. In their anthology on heritage and identity, editors Marta Anico and Elsa Peralta argue that “Through heritage, people not only experience community; they simultaneously legitimize and consent to the agendas of its builders and caretakers.” This fact brings heritage from kitsch to something far more significant. It also makes clear that to cut someone off from an important aspect of their past can inflict great harm. This is explored in the following section.

Literature Review: Deconstructing Heritage and its Uses

Societies have always grappled with how best to remember and pass on history. This thesis is one small piece that builds off of centuries of work on this topic. Tracing the roots of this effort would require diving into theories of famous thinkers—Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, etc. But such an approach lies outside the scope of this project and would only bog its prose down with a background not necessary for understanding its argument.

It is mandatory, however, to highlight some prominent scholars of heritage studies and urban planning to criticize how these fields handle the painful history of these case studies. These namely include David Lowenthal, Laurajane Smith, and Dolores Hayden. In The Past is a Foreign Country and Possessed by the Past, Lowenthal formalized heritage studies, calling attention to its complexity and problematic independence from the field of history. Years later, Smith deconstructed this concept further in her book Uses of Heritage, criticizing how powerful people use heritage in a self-aggrandizing way, suppressing many marginalized perspectives in the process. Lastly, through The Power of Place Hayden permanently changed how history and urban planning interact. She beautifully articulated the important role these fields play in creating a sense of belonging and empowerment in neighborhoods and demanded that more work be done to enshrine underrepresented narratives in all communities.

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The remainder of this chapter pulls from these works and others to highlight the shortcomings of mainstream heritage approaches and the role difficult history could play in improving them.

*History, Heritage, and Power*

There has been an outgrowth of interest in heritage conservation since the Second World War. Many nations and cities throughout the world now have bureaucratized the protection of historic sites. Entire industries have developed to answer questions regarding best practice for preserving aged buildings. But, as the prolific geographer David Harvey points out in his article on the history of heritage, these recent changes are built on foundations that run deep in human society.

Harvey traces the use of the past for present gain throughout history, with the practice typically being associated with empires or influential institutions like the Catholic Church. The takeaway point of his broad summary is that heritage is a “discursive construction with material consequences” that has always been “interwoven with power dynamics.” For both this project and any other that engages with heritage, these two points are critical: a) heritage is a social construct, and b) it is controlled by powerful people. The formalization of heritage management after the Second World War left these facts unchanged.

Many have argued that in the post-war era, heritage became associated with the decline of highly visible twentieth century imperialism. As countries in Western Europe lost their stature globally, aristocratic classes became nostalgic for their days of grandeur. These groups, in the words of geographer Dennis Hardy, valued “a *pastiche* version of history, articulated in everyday products ranging from wallpaper designs to best-selling historical novels…” States also became involved in this nostalgia. The United Kingdom, for example, allocated new funds to its aristocratic country homes, and opened them to visitors. This gave post-war engagement with heritage a conservative character from the onset. This was noted by Lowenthal, who criticized the concept’s role in nation building, its commodification through the growth of globalization and tourism, and the role the wealthy play in protecting their own narratives of grandeur while downplaying the damage their class did during their centuries of oppressive power. He summarizes: “Heritage normally goes with privilege: elites usually own it, control access to it, and ordain its public image.”

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11 Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past*, 90.
The problem, however, is worse than one of elites and their self-image. Those that affect heritage influence not only how we remember, but what. By preventing the preservation of certain sites and stories, those with power can “suppress the identity of minority or less powerful groups.”\textsuperscript{12} This process can take many forms, from a passive lack of funding, to more malicious acts like the intentional destruction of significant sites during wartime.\textsuperscript{13}

In nations throughout the world this sanitation gives the hegemonic culture “a more long-standing or deeply historically rooted sense of belonging,” according to Jo Littler.\textsuperscript{14} Conversely, these mainstream histories usually exclude indigenous populations, enslaved people, and immigrants. For decades, interpretive panels at Thomas Jefferson’s stately home of Monticello ignored the work of enslaved Black people by claiming that meals simply “were served” and furniture “was built.”\textsuperscript{15} In his analysis of immigration and heritage in The Netherlands, Keld Buciek argues that the legacies of “cultivators, workers, [and] ethnic groups” are “overlaid by . . . national narratives . . . to such a degree that the legacy of ‘the stranger’ is more or less invisible.”\textsuperscript{16} Through heritage, the powerful can erase the less powerful. This not only eliminates pieces from the story, but invalidates marginalized people in the present.

This is particularly troubling because heritage is often seen as uncontentious and fixed. Certain perspectives become deeply entrenched and challenging to criticize. Visitors to controversial sites may even dismiss alternative interpretations as fake or taken out of context. In the anthology \textit{Slavery and Public History}, an article reported that a visitor stormed off a tour of Monticello when presented with information about the Jefferson’s relationship with his enslaved “concubine,” Sally Hemings, asking “We’re not going to fight the Civil War again, are we?”\textsuperscript{17} And, when the National Park Service began


\textsuperscript{13} For more information on the relationship between memory, heritage, and war, see: Robert Bevan, \textit{The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War} (London: Reaktion Books, 2016).


\textsuperscript{16} Keld Buciek and Kristine Juul, “‘We Are Here, Yet We Are Not Here’: The Heritage of Excluded Groups,” in \textit{The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity}, ed. Brian Graham and Peter Howard (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 121.

\textsuperscript{17} I use concubine here for lack of a better term. I believe it implies a lack of consent, or sexual subservience. Horton, “Avoiding History: Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemings, and the Uncomfortable Public Conversation on Slavery,” 141.
pushing content related to slavery at Civil War battlegrounds in the 1990s, visitors submitted comments like the following:

I do not believe the battlefield parks should become laboratories for sociological or ‘cultural’ discussion and education. Issues of political, cultural, or ideological interest should be left to school classrooms...

It is not one of the functions of NPS [the National Park Service] to change history so that it is politically correct. When we do that, we ape the Soviet government of the 1930s through the 1960s.\textsuperscript{18}

The problematic phrase “change history” is at the crux of this entire project, because it shows how effective fixed approaches to heritage conservation are. Through exclusion, powerful interests consistently leverage heritage to their advantage, and eventually their narrative becomes seen as fact, rather than a single piece of a larger discourse. This makes turning the machine of heritage slow and often uncomfortable.

Berthold Molden elaborates on this process in his article on the relationship between hegemony and memory, writing that “The past as we know it from history is depicted as the only possible one because this serves to justify the present order...”\textsuperscript{19} Heritage sites play a critical role in this. The issue is that, as Lowenthal showed in \textit{Possessed by the Past}, these places are actually quite fraught:

It [heritage] is a jumbled, malleable amalgam ever reshaped by this or that partisan interest. Flying in the face of known fact, it is opaque or perverse to those who do not share its faith. Those who do share it, though, find heritage far more serviceable than the stubborn and unpredictable past revealed by history.\textsuperscript{20}

Heritage is associated with institutions of stability—museums, historic houses, etc.—that feed us some of our most treasured, “serviceable” narratives. But despite their appearance, the heritage consumed at these places is dominated by subjectivity and exclusion.

\textit{The Flaws of Heritage Policy: Expertise and Exclusion}

Power imbalances plague not only historic sites, but governments. Laurajane Smith unpacked the role exclusion plays in heritage policy in her book, \textit{Uses of Heritage}. Smith inspects fundamental


\textsuperscript{20} Lowenthal, \textit{Possessed by the Past}, 147.
ideas about who designs the heritage management systems of the West, including its most prominent face, UNESCO, which continually assigns Western ideals of monumentality and historical significance to sites that could be assessed by different criteria.\(^2\) Additionally, she criticizes the role that expertise plays in the field, arguing that cumbersome state designation processes often exclude communities with less political or intellectual capital.\(^2\)

The issue of historic “integrity” is a perfect example of how current heritage approaches automatically dismiss many significant sites. The seven aspects of integrity used by the National Park Service and emulated in many local historic preservation ordinances assess ideas like workmanship, material, and association with history to vet a building’s ability to impart its connection with the past. The problem is that not every community has the resources needed to maintain its historic sites in such specific ways.\(^3\) Private actors and governments frequently demolish buildings deemed lacking in integrity even if they hold social significance in a community. Highway construction in post-war America embodied this trend, in which transportation planners razed communities of color across the country in the name of “progress.”\(^4\) Smith does a good job of demonstrating that in contexts like these, government preservation methods fail to protect many marginalized sites and the sense of place they produce. This leaves certain stories and their potential for memory work completely unrecognized, or worse, erased.

These problems affect both how sites are preserved and who preserves them. The United States’ Secretary of the Interior requires that professional preservationists hold advanced degrees.\(^5\) Conservationists consult with materials scientists, structural engineers, and professional architects to maintain aged buildings. Designating a site as a landmark on any government register—often a necessary step for obtaining tax breaks or preventing demolition—requires hours of research and the navigation of unwieldy bureaucracies.\(^6\) Thus, while heritage is vulnerable to manipulation and bias, the amount of intellectual and political labor needed to preserve sites of significance should not be ignored—it is a very real barrier to entry that can exclude many people and the places they cherish. The end result is clear: professional standards that started as a well-intended measure to hold heritage to

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 107.  
\(^{24}\) Eric Avila, The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).  
\(^{26}\) Page, 47.
the more rigorous standards of professional history can divorce less privileged people from pasts they deem theirs.

These systems allow heritage experts to assign narratives to groups, rather than hold space for communities to organically produce their own relationship with the past. As noted by Smith, this happens frequently to indigenous populations as part of a broader systemic pattern of erasure.\(^{27}\) This leaves little room for discourse in which heritage owners could work through and reformulate their pasts—a process essential to collective memory, particularly in cases where history is painful. Once a site is designated on a register, for example, its associated narrative is essentially frozen and stowed somewhere out of direct view of the public. Statements on a building’s “character defining features” are then used to maintain a particular moment in time, as opposed to letting the space continue to have a symbiotic relationship with the people that find it significant.\(^{28}\)

This reliance on experts and professionals is especially troubling because heritage is much larger than the management of buildings—this concept impacts people’s everyday lives and is an important component of identity. Wallpaper, postage stamps, television shows, historical fiction novels—the list of media that impart the past is endless. Raphael Samuel explored these pieces of what he calls “unofficial knowledge” in his book, *Theatres of Memory*, arguing that the practices that surround them are an essential aspect of socialization, and can be quite intellectually valid. But such ephemeral engagements with the past are often ignored by professionals in heritage and history alike.

This process tends to push out not only questionable sources or unsubstantiated claims about history, but also legitimate forms of underrepresented heritage. By generally relying on scholarly sources as opposed to ephemera from small actors like oral histories and alternative publications, heritage policies can block marginalized groups from legitimizing their pasts.\(^{29}\) Additional questions about how this dynamic interacts with political situations arise: What if the knowledge deemed “unofficial” is not that of amateur collectors at flea markets, but of people associated with social movements that the police made explicit efforts to crush? Does that make these stories and sites unworthy of designation by default? If the process of designation in these cases does begin, might a government sanitize narratives before they reach public record, or even deny the designation outright?

\(^{27}\) Smith, 280-281.

\(^{28}\) Page, 33-40.

\(^{29}\) As mentioned in the introduction, this is a shortcoming in this thesis as well. In the final chapter I make suggestions for further research and elaborate on the role participation and non-institutional sources should play in future analyses of grassroots heritage. But for this project I mostly focus on acknowledging that these approaches exist and how they are pushed to the margins of heritage management.
on political grounds? Moreover, is a designation from the government meaningful for sites associated with events of anti-state violence or oppressive action from the police or military? I list these questions here not only because they will be useful for inspecting later case studies, but to highlight how blunt the tools of heritage conservation are. Ultimately, expertise in heritage can propagate a dangerous idea: that politicians and government-backed experts, rather than communities associated with sites, should have the final say on what is worthy of preservation efforts and incentives.

To clarify, this project is extremely critical of official designation while still recognizing its usefulness. The case studies that follow are organized to call attention to how limiting designation can be—both in terms of who the process involves, and how landmarks are framed and enshrined. While this policy approach can be adjusted, it becomes clear in later chapters that entirely new tools are also needed. Chapter Five offers recommendations, but, for now, it is most important to note that exclusionary policies and the expertise they demand preserve only a small piece of the past: in 2010, the National Park Service reported that just eight percent of the 86,000 listings on the National Register for Historic Places were designations associated with women or people of color. These same tools also struggle to recognize difficult history. The result is a selective memory that avoids important stories of oppression and discord.

Alternative Approaches: Grassroots Heritage and Social Change

In his book, How Societies Remember, Paul Connerton argues that the “struggle of citizens against state-power is the struggle of their memory against forced forgetting.” Fear of future unrest, the delegitimization of a certain group, or denial of responsibility—there are many motives behind why a government might turn a blind eye to a painful past. But there are alternative approaches that maintain underrepresented narratives despite this avoidance. By conducting memory work from the grassroots, the alternative heritage engagements analyzed in later chapters circumnavigate the problems of expertise and exclusion. In these contexts, heritage can help in fights for social and spatial justice. If Lowenthal’s words are true, and heritage is “ever reshaped” by multiple partisan interests,

32 Lowenthal, Possessed by the Past, 93.
calling attention to these methods could help move heritage away from its role in maintaining the status quo.

“Heritage from Below” and Intangible Heritage

In each of these case studies, activists and everyday people conduct a form of “heritage from below,” to borrow a phrase from heritage scholar Iain Robertson. Rather than relying on professional experts or bureaucrats, people can preserve their own memory, a process which “offer[s] an alternative construction of the past,” as a means to “celebrate and memorialize from within the lives and thoughts of those otherwise hidden from history.”\(^33\) Taking control of their own heritage allows marginalized groups to maintain important narratives that are too politically charged or shameful for governments to endorse.\(^34\)

Aside from their political baggage, another significant barrier to recognition for these approaches is the issue of tangibility. Preservation policy throughout the United States is designed to recognize and protect tangible heritage—namely, sites and buildings—over forms of intangible heritage, like oral traditions, performances, etc. The grassroots approaches discussed here—which include gatherings, public art, and digital heritage—are largely intangible. This means that even if the political will did exist to recognize their work, there are no legal mechanisms with which to do so.

Although the United States’ approach to intangible heritage is particularly lacking, most of the Western world has long privileged grand monuments over these practices. Heritage scholars and policymakers alike are struggling with this issue in real time and debating what role governments should play in safeguarding intangible heritage, if any.\(^35\) Chapter Five’s analysis unpacks some of the politics behind this dynamic. For now, it is only important to note the contrast between tangible and intangible heritage, and how this binary interacts with power and preservation in the case studies discussed later.

Heritage and Dissonance

Another important concept for this thesis is dissonance. J.E. Tunbridge and G.J. Ashworth first coined the term “dissonant heritage” in 1997. The central argument of their book by the same name is

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that the past must be recognized as a resource in conflict.\textsuperscript{36} Essentially, places and events mean different things to different people. Friction can come along racial, political, economic, linguistic, or religious lines. Recognizing and embracing these divisions is a critical first step for moving heritage from a place of nostalgia and comfort to one of social action. Tunbridge and Ashworth argue that this process is particularly important at sites of difficult history, where memory “can so dominate the heritage of individuals or social and political groups, as to have profound effects upon their self-conscious identity…”\textsuperscript{37} When heritage is particularly divisive, like in the case studies inspected here, its interpretation is both challenging and influential.

The following chapters make clear that government approaches to heritage conservation are poorly equipped to handle disagreement, adding yet another motive for avoidance of these difficult pasts. Landmark designations are often reductive and static, leaving little room for new interpretations of sites. Additionally, on-site commemorations and interpretive materials struggle to capture the different nuances and contexts to historic events. Each of the following three chapters shows how complex and racially charged these narratives are. Capturing their intricacies is difficult, even in a document as large as this thesis. This challenge leads to representations at historic sites that are woefully incomplete, or even boosterish. Freed from constraining bureaucracies and political feasibility, the intangible practices analyzed in later chapters confront this problem head on by embracing multiple perspectives to tell richer, more discursive stories.

**Leveraging Difficult History**

The stories analyzed here are painful.\textsuperscript{38} The goal is not to celebrate oppression, subjugation, or violence, but to show that the fight for liberation is a continuous one. Powerful people benefit from separating those interested in justice from the history of previous struggle. Drawing connections between events of oppression and resistance demonstrates that progress is not linear, nor is it guaranteed. When heritage is used to keep these connections alive and accessible, it becomes an essential component in the fight for social change.

The goal is to become comfortable with discomfort. Michael Landzelius elaborates on the role heritage should play in social healing: “the aim should surely be to achieve an unsettling experience, in which immediate closure is forestalled and which would encourage us to engage in the creative act of

\textsuperscript{36} Tunbridge and Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage*.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 94.
\textsuperscript{38} An anthology that inspired parts of this thesis can be found here: William Logan and Keir Reeves, eds., *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with “Difficult Heritage”* (London: Routledge, 2009).
thinking the social differently...” 39 Thus, through sites of pain and contention, people can inspect how society works and the role injustice plays within it. In the words of Max Page, “We cannot heal, once and for all, injuries of the past,” but it is the “duty of historic preservation to lead our fellow citizens to historic buildings and landscapes that represent our very worst histories, or capture our most fundamental disagreements and . . . hold us there with creativity and compassion, and make us think again about who we are.” 40 It is the heritage of shameful pasts that can inspire this introspection.

There are many who want the uncomfortable histories explored here to fade. This is unfortunately not possible, nor is it actually happening. This past is being preserved, but not in a way that calls attention to the victims of these events. Dominant narratives glorify the perpetrators of violence inspected in these case studies, namely the police and military. In Los Angeles, residents can visit several museums dedicated to these institutions. 41 While the language at these interpretive sites does not explicitly glorify oppression, the victims of their violence continue to struggle for recognition.

Political recognition may not feed or shelter people, but alternative heritage projects like this thesis can have quite tangible effects on communities. The act of repatriating indigenous burial remains in settler colonial nations, for instance, is a heritage-based action that lends political legitimacy to a people historically ignored by their colonizers. This step, Laurajane Smith argues, can “aid the material processes and strategies needed to remedy injustices.” 42 Organizing around a collective identity can offer groups more direct control over their representation and even give footing to other social movements.

In the community of Gårda, Sweden, years of bad social policy tarnished the image of a neighborhood, painting it as derelict and crime-ridden. Local policymakers slated large swaths of the neighborhood for demolition. Feras Hammami and Evren Uzer note that this tactic of defamation followed by violent removal is common: “The stigmatisation of a place or territory has always been a mechanism for creating social spaces with dark histories or narratives and to thereby enable new urban development and displacements.” 43 Resistance groups in Gårda began curating an alternative narrative for their community with slogans such as “have a coffee in Gårda” and “upgrade Gårda,” asking people

41 Los Angeles Police Museum, American Military Museum, etc.
42 Smith, 296.
to engage with the neighborhood in ways not depicted in the media. Hammami and Uzer argue that this process of self-reflection and display helped residents better understand how their neighborhood related to “broader socio-political and historical contexts,” and created a greater “capacity to contest, resist, and suggest.” Ultimately, the government canceled the widespread demolitions, instead preserving the neighborhood as a heritage site. In today’s urban moment of housing crises, rising rents, and rampant gentrification, the work in Gårda, in which a community managed its own representation, could be useful elsewhere.

People have a right to shape their city and the heritage projected onto it. By enshrining social history into public landscapes, communities can create their own theatres of memory and belonging, as opposed to simply accepting the dominant narrative. No one argued this as effectively as Dolores Hayden in her seminal work, The Power of Place: “Creating public history within the urban landscape can use the forms of the cultural landscape itself, as well as words and images, to harness the power of places to connect the present and the past.” She recognized the role public history could play in calling attention to marginalized groups, giving people “places to spend time that connect them to the possible meanings of city life as a social bond.”

For Hayden, the aim is to hold space for everyone and welcome the friction that this process entails. In this framework, challenging history is not ignored, but “recorded, pondered, and perhaps debated.” She continues: “Any historic place, once protected and interpreted, potentially has the power to serve as a lookout for future generations who are trying to plan the future, having come to terms with the past.” The stories inspected here have the potential to do this work, but are currently being held back. Historian Ranajit Guha concisely summarizes what lifting this barrier requires: “If the small voice of history gets a hearing at all in some revised account [...] it will do so only by interrupting the telling in the dominant version, breaking up its storyline and making a mess of its plot.” The following chapters make just such a mess.

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44 Ibid., 454.
46 Ibid., 451.
49 Ibid., 247.
50 Ibid., 247.
Chapter Two: The Zoot Suit Riots

For nearly a week in June of 1943, white sailors attacked young Mexican American men in the streets of Los Angeles. Sailors stripped their oversized zoot suits—a symbol of their refusal to assimilate into white, wartime society—from their bodies, sometimes burning them. Well over one hundred people were injured, and the police arrested just as many Mexican Americans, most of them victims rather than perpetrators of violence.

Both contemporary source material and accounts created by researchers since recognize that racial tension was running high in Los Angeles in the 1940s. Social changes brought on by the wartime economy, visiting sailors on leave, the murder of a young Mexican American man, issues with juvenile delinquency, and racial discrimination—different parties with varying motivations have come up with a long list of causes for the Zoot Suit Riots. This chapter maintains that race was the main motive behind the violence and analyzes historic sites associated with this painful history through such a lens.

This chapter demonstrates how this polarizing past has been reduced to something politically palatable, largely absent from Los Angeles’ built environment. Mainstream heritage approaches have glossed over sites associated with the Zoot Suit Riots by designating them for unrelated reasons or allowing for their demolition. However, less tangible heritage practices from the grassroots keep this past alive despite this avoidance.

The Riots

Violence began in earnest on June 3. There is still much debate about its beginnings. Carey McWilliams, contemporary journalist and leftist advocate, argues that the riots began when the Alpine Club, a group of young Mexican American men, met with police officers to discuss issues in their community, namely how to preserve peace in their neighborhood. Afterwards, police officers dropped the boys off, and they were assaulted by members of the military.52 Other sources cite the origins as a scuffle between sailors and Mexican American men in Chinatown over the verbal and sexual harassment of a Mexican American woman.53 Ultimately, the exact moment of the riot’s origins are not important for this thesis. In the words of historian Mauricio Mazón: “It is a sad commentary, indeed, on the status of American historiography, when the most important domestic upheaval of military personnel in the history of World War II is reduced to the lame equation of ‘who started it first,’ and the even weaker

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53 Melissa A. Esmacher, “The Riotous Home Front: Contested Racial Spaces in World War II Los Angeles, Detroit, and Harlem” (Ph.D., University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, 2013), 93-94.
The finger pointing that exists in much of the scholarship on this topic is a red herring that sidesteps the true issues at hand, which are race and the power dynamics between the state, the military, and the governed.

The violence was mostly one sided. For five days, throngs of sailors moved throughout the neighborhoods of East Los Angeles, downtown, and South Los Angeles with makeshift weapons, beating and disrobing Black and Mexican American men wearing zoot suits, some as young as twelve years old. They raided theatres and stopped streetcars in search of their victims, blooding them and removing their clothes in the street. In one instance, a group of white sailors entered homes in East Los Angeles to inflict damage. To add insult to injury, one oppressive arm of the state aided the other when the police arrested ninety-four Mexican Americans compared to only twenty servicemen. Taxi cabs gave free rides to sailors on their way to join the fracas. Fighting also broke out in San Diego and San Bernardino. The violence did not end until the Navy begrudgingly forced sailors to remain on base.

Most of the mainstream press across the country heralded the sailors for their actions.

**Causes and Context: Dissonance from the Outset**

*Migration, Race, and Discrimination*

Even though most of the contemporary coverage of the riots avoided the topic of race altogether, researchers have since made clear that this issue was central to the unrest. The economic demands of America’s war machine caused widespread movement of goods and people both domestically and internationally, exacerbating existing racial tensions in cities across the country. As land annexed from Mexico in the nineteenth century, Southern California maintained a fraught, racially charged past. Mexicans and Mexican Americans had played a centuries-long role in this narrative. The *bracero* program, which brought large numbers of guest laborers to Southern California during World War II to sustain the economy while many American men were abroad, was just one chapter of this

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Despite the inextricable link between this culture and the region, these arrivals heightened white xenophobic fears in Los Angeles, which affected both migrants and second-generation Mexican Americans alike.

An article from historian Eduardo Obregón Pagán argues that the unequal distribution of the city’s resources and the social costs of its expansion in the interwar era were directly related to the outbreak of violence in June of 1943. The placement of a Naval Armory through eminent domain in the Chavez Ravine, an historically Mexican American community, was one manifestation of such discrimination. This construction forced Mexican Americans to share space with sailors who moved through their neighborhoods on their way downtown sometimes in numbers exceeding 50,000 per weekend, an influx large enough to frustrate any community, racial tension aside. This particular development embodied the social anxiety produced by the war: it forced sailors from all over the country to share space with local residents who were frustrated with the government and its treatment of their neighborhoods. Small scuffles along racial lines became increasingly common between sailors and residents.

Despite this obvious tension, the reliance of the American domestic wartime economy on Mexican labor created pressure to minimize the role race played in the Zoot Suit Riots. As argued in a dissertation from the University of Texas at Austin, the local dominant narrative “disregarded race as a factor in the uprising and blamed minority communities for the violence, in order to align with the federal government’s goal of maintaining an industrial alliance with Mexico.” Newspapers, their editorials, and press releases from the local government argued intensely that juvenile delinquency was the primary cause of the unrest and almost never blamed the sailors for their actions. This evidence of differing interpretations from the onset on an issue as large as race is important, and must be thoroughly understood before discussing any preservation efforts since the riots.

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64 Mazón, 73.
65 Pagán, 241.
Juvenile Delinquency

White Angelenos perceived men of color as gang members because of their presence on the streets, their distinctive clothing, and the color of their skin. Researchers continue to debate the role that juvenile delinquency might have played in the riots, but many academics agree that the issue was overblown, particularly in Mexican American communities. At any rate, it was the wartime economy which left many young people without caretakers throughout much of the day. As Stuart Cosgrove argues, “The rapid increase in military recruitment and the radical shift in the composition of the labour force led in turn to changes in family life, particularly the erosion of parental control and authority. The large scale and prolonged separation of millions of families precipitated an unprecedented increase in the rate of juvenile crime and delinquency.” With little access to resources of education and recreation, a presence on the streets was inevitable for many young men regardless of race. But this did not necessarily entail violence. Carey McWilliams would likely pushback against Cosgrove’s strong language were he still alive, as he insisted that these groups were not gangs, so much as “boys clubs without a clubhouse.” Regardless of behavior, their presence on the streets allowed police to demonize these groups as part of a larger “Mexican crime wave.”

Even though some researchers argue that crime in predominately Mexican American neighborhoods was decreasing, other writers have no qualms with conceding that this was a period of general frustration for communities of color. Even racist contemporaries like Los Angeles Police Captain E. Duran Ayres, who argued that Mexicans were inherently violent because of certain “inborn characteristics,” recognized Los Angeles as a city of discrimination. In a report to his colleagues at the Los Angeles Police Department’s (LAPD) “Foreign Relations Bureau” (interesting phrasing for a municipal police agency) he conceded that Mexican Americans “are restricted in the main only to certain kinds of labor, and that being the lowest paid.” He continued: “It must be admitted that they are discriminated against and have been heretofore practically barred from learning trades . . . Discrimination and segregation, as evidenced by public signs and rules, such as appear in certain restaurants, public swimming plunges, public parks, theaters, and even in schools, cause resentment among Mexican people.” Police activity in ethnic enclaves did not help. Historian Eduardo Obregón Pagán described respect for the police in working-class areas of Los Angeles as “alarmingly low,” with their authority

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69 Cosgrove, 79.
70 McWilliams, “The Zoot-Suit Riots,” 819.
being “openly challenged” by residents in the early 1940s. In this climate, it took little cause for the state to jump on a chance to conduct broad, racially motivated crackdowns in communities of color. A prominent murder trial discussed later in this chapter provided just such an excuse.

*The Zoot Suit and Wartime Hysteria*

The oversized suit that gave the riot its namesake was much more than clothing. The draped fabric coded identity and resistance for men of color in cities throughout the country. Stuart Cosgrove describes the suit simply as “a refusal,” and “a spectacular reminder that the social order had failed to contain their [referring generally to men of color] energy and difference.” Oftentimes decorated with gold chains and accents, shiny shoes, and a wide brimmed hat, the zoot suit was the direct opposite of white, middle-class fashion (Figure 2.1 and 2.2). But when wartime rationing restricted the usage of fabric, the zoot suit became hated as both an emblem of racial difference and anti-patriotism. In a moment when domestic unity was seen literally as a matter of national security, zoot suiting revealed cracks in the system. Combining this fact with concerns about juvenile delinquency and rising crime made zoot suiters deeply unsettling for much of white America.

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73 Presses often dehumanized men of color by referring to them simply as “Zoot Suiters.” Reducing their identity to their clothing enabled the racist press to demonize this demographic while skirting the issue of race. I use this language sparingly here, only when the presence of the zoot suit is of central importance to my argument. Otherwise, my prose handles people as people, not clothing.

74 Cosgrove, 78.

75 Alvarez, 15.
As with the supposed wave of Mexican American juvenile delinquency, there are always social reasons for individual behavior. Luis Alberto Alvarez contends that “At a time when police brutality, employment discrimination, poor housing, and lack of social services were common features of everyday life, zoot suiting created a series of cultural engagements where minority youth voiced displeasure with their poor life chances and manufactured ways to make their lives more livable.”

Clothing, then, becomes resistance in micro. In a world that conditions those outside of the mainstream social order to believe they have little control over their lives and futures, a fashion statement can be a form of subversion. Both in terms of fashion and politics, donning a zoot suit was a very bold act—one that put pressure on social environments that were already strained from wartime production and labor migration. It is telling that while white sailors did great physical harm during their assault, they killed no one. But it was the suits they used to identify their targets and usually the suits that they destroyed.

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76 Alvarez, 5.
Gender

Gender’s role in the Zoot Suit Riots is understudied. Women were both directly engaged in the riots and victims of the cultures of toxic masculinity present on both sides. Multiple writers have argued that sexual harassment and assault of both white wives visiting sailors and Mexican American women living in Los Angeles led to the outbreak of violence. One altercation in particular over the harassment of a Mexican American woman in Chinatown is often cited as the beginning of the riots, and left one sailor unconscious with a broken jaw.\(^77\) The sailors then retreated to the Armory and reemerged in large numbers with makeshift weapons.

But despite how some recount this event, women were not just victims. Mexican American women also wore zoot suits throughout the 1940s to push back against the same norms forced on them as their male counterparts. Their rejection of American and Mexican ideals about womanhood as well as patriotism shocked Angelenos. Elizabeth Escobedo argues that “By August 1942, the Los Angeleno populace recognized young Mexican American women as an integral element of the gang menace allegedly plaguing city streets.”\(^78\) Throughout the riots themselves, local papers reported that these women supported zoot suiters in their efforts against sailors through assault and petty theft.\(^79\) Police arrested several Mexican American women both during gang sweeps in 1942 and the violence of June 1943.\(^80\)

Differing ideals surrounding the performance of masculinity are also a root cause of this outbreak of violence. The gaudy zoot suit versus the understated military uniforms, conscripted life versus hangouts on street corners and in jazz clubs—the defiance of young men in zoot suits was an attack on American manhood. Mauricio Mazón argues that the suit represented a freedom soldiers lost in military life, and a deviant performance of masculinity that they detested as much as the men who wore the outfit.\(^81\) This may be a reach that downplays the role of race, but it does reveal how the demands of conscription and wartime production challenged the white American hierarchy in regards to both race and gender. Any form of heritage conservation work that engages with these events should attempt to capture the breadth of this upheaval.

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\(^77\) Esmacher, 93-94.
\(^79\) “Girl 'Zoot Suiters' Gird to Join Gangland Battle, Pachucas Stand by Beaten Pachucos,” Los Angeles Evening Herald, June 10, 1943.
\(^80\) Pagán, Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon, 77-78.
\(^81\) Mazón, 101.
At this time the vast majority of Los Angeles’ press was owned by a small group of private actors, most famously, William Hearst. Hearst’s readership control in the 1930s was astounding: in Los Angeles it rose to 60%, and in San Francisco, 62%. Even in the most established cities of the Midwest and east coast—Chicago, Detroit, New York—his control ranged from 30 to 40%. Many of these cities also experienced some form of widespread racial violence in the summer of 1943. Academics and social critics have argued repeatedly that conservative, incendiary publications like Hearst’s had a direct impact on these violent outbursts.

Contemporary activist Carey McWilliams summarized how the derogatory treatment of Mexican Americans in the press worked in the leftist publication *The New Republic*:

For more than a year now, the press (and particularly the Hearst press) has been building up anti-Mexican sentiment in Los Angeles. Using the familiar Harlem anti-crime wave technique, the press has headlined every case in which a Mexican has been arrested, featured photographs of Mexicans dressed in zoot suits, checked back over criminal records to ‘prove’ that there has been an increase in Mexican ‘crime,’ and constantly needled the police to make more arrests….Mexican names and pictures of Mexicans had the effect of convincing the public that all Mexicans were zoot suiters and all zoot suiters were criminals; ergo, all Mexicans were criminals.

McWilliams’ perspective is only that of one man, but is easily corroborated by even a surface level perusing of contemporary headlines. On June 7 the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article titled “Zoot Suiters Learn Lesson in Fights with Servicemen,” describing the victims of the violence as “gamin dandies” draped in a “garish costume that has become a hallmark of juvenile delinquency.” According to the writer, the sailors taught these men “a great moral lesson” through their violence. In the same paper, an article described how challenging it was for police to identify which zoot suiters were in gangs when in beach attire. “Some of them had long hair, which curled up at the back like a drake’s tail,” explained one police captain. The press lamented that the removal of the suit made gang members hard to identify—unintentionally demonstrating how targeting Mexican Americans for gang activity was obviously based on little more than their appearance.

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82 Susan Marie Green, “‘Give It Your Best!’: The Zoot Suit Riots of 1943” (M.A., University of Minnesota, 1995), 75-76.
83 For an article on this topic that uses the Zoot Suit Riots as a case study, see: Terry Ann Knopf, “Race, Riots, and Reporting,” *Journal of Black Studies* 4, no. 3 (March 1974): 303–27.
84 McWilliams, “The Zoot-Suit Riots,” 819.
85 “Zoot Suiters Learn Lesson in Fights With Servicemen,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1943.
Throughout the attack, presses described the events as “Zoot Suit Warfare.” On June 8, the Los Angeles Daily News ran a particularly brazen headline: “Zoot-Suit Gangsters Plan War on Navy.” Several articles argued that the young men of color were working with the Axis powers. Papers as far removed as The Washington Post ran headlines about people in zoot suits “prowling” the streets “grotesquely clothed.” In each case, the retaliations of Mexican Americans are discussed at length, with descriptions of weapons used and the victims named. The activities of the sailors, however, are minimized. Researchers must turn to alternative publications, like the Black-run California Eagle to find stories like Lewis Jackson’s, the twenty-three-year-old Black man whose eye was reportedly gouged out by a group of sailors on June 7, or Joseph Nelson’s, a sixteen-year-old boy pulled from a streetcar, beaten, and disrobed. An open letter to Mayor Fletcher Bowron from the same publication calls for solidarity between Black people and Mexican Americans, demanding the state provide real police protection from the “white heat of lynch fury . . . whipped up by these newspapers.”

With the dominant press companies controlled by so few, these differing interpretations were effectively suppressed. When the rioting began to die down after the Navy finally forced sailors to stay on base, the Los Angeles City Council began studying the possibility of banning zoot suits, while the mayor maintained that the issue was never racial. The relationship between the media and social behavior is of particular interest during times of upheaval. The press will be studied in each of the cases in this project to demonstrate the role it often plays in eliminating marginalized voices from polarizing histories.

**Sleepy Lagoon and the Police**

The causes detailed above find a common ground in the Sleepy Lagoon murder and trial from 1942-1944. The relationship between the LAPD and communities of color has always been hostile. A murder at Sleepy Lagoon, a natural spring near what is now the City of Commerce, helped city officials

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91 Ibid.
and newspapers frame Mexican Americans as a dangerous group. The killing also indicated to some that the LAPD was strained by conscription and unable to control crime.

A twenty-two year old Mexican American named José Díaz was beaten and stabbed at Sleepy Lagoon the night of August 1, 1942. He had recently volunteered to join the military. The reasons for his murder are unclear. It appears that Díaz was caught up in a fight for vengeance between two groups, neither of which he was directly involved with.

Unpacking this event in detail is not a central concern for this project. It is more important to note how the state leveraged the murder to rationalize a crackdown involving several law enforcement agencies on a supposed “Mexican crime wave.” Police brought in six hundred people for questioning in the aftermath of the Sleepy Lagoon incident (Figure 2.3 and 2.4). All had Spanish surnames. Several testified that police beat them during their interrogation.

Figure 2.3: An “unusual mass oath-taking,” as described by the Herald Examiner, during the Sleepy Lagoon inquest hearing, August 11, 1942. Herald Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

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95 Acuña, 207-208.
96 Pagán, Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon, 71-77.
97 McWilliams, North from Mexico, 229.
Figure 2.4: Mass arraignment of arrestees charged with various crimes relating to the Sleepy Lagoon murder, 1942. Herald Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

On January 13, 1943, an all-white jury convicted seventeen boys aged seventeen to twenty-one: Henry Leyvas, José Ruiz, and Robert Telles of murder in the first degree; Manuel Delgado, John Matuz, Jack Melendez, Angel Padilla, Ysmael Parra, Manuel Reyes, Bobby Thompson, Henry Ynostroza, and Gus Zamora of murder in the second degree; and Andrew Acosta, Eugene Carpio, Victor Segobia, Benny Alvarez, and Joe Valenzuela of assault. The trial had gained much attention, so to maintain the appearance of wartime stability, those convicted of murder were sent to San Quentin Prison. The young men charged in the first degree were sentenced to life—in the second degree, five years to life.98

Alice McGrath and Carey McWilliams, both prominent activists in Los Angeles, immediately formed the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee. The organization raised a fund to provide new counsel and appeal the case. Two years later, by unanimous decision, the District Court of Appeals overturned the decision for lack of evidence. McWilliams reported that “In its decision the court sustained all but two of the contentions which our defense committee had raised, castigated the trial judge for his

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98 Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, 89.
conduct of the trial, and scored the methods by which the prosecution had secured a conviction." The boys were released ceremoniously at the Hall of Justice in Los Angeles' Civic Center after wrongly losing two years of their youth in San Quentin Prison (Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5: Release of Henry Leyvas, 21, and Gus Zammora, 22, at the Hall of Justice, 1944. Herald Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

This case and its aftermath were a solidifying moment for the Mexican American community in Los Angeles, as well as for the white sailors that conducted their assault the following year. But the event was truly part of a larger trend, as argued by Pagán: “The discourse on juvenile delinquency in World War II Los Angeles, with its all too common references to the imagined biological proclivities of racialized immigrants, reflected reawakened fears among white Californians of the rapidly expanding population of racial minorities in Los Angeles.”100 The hysteria exacerbated by the Sleepy Lagoon murder

99 McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 231.
encouraged white Americans not only to worry about law and order, but directly reassert their power and control in society where they saw the police as unable to.

**Dissonant Past, Conditioned Future**

No list of causes for any historic event is truly complete, but this chapter detailed those above to demonstrate how heritage engagements with the Zoot Suit Riots are lacking. The point is that there is no defined narrative that captures this event’s causes in some objective fashion. Rather, interpretations of these riots come from a large number of perspectives, some powerful and some marginalized, vying for space and attention. This section summarizes these different tensions before analyzing sites associated with the events to demonstrate that poor engagement with difficult history creates a prevailing narrative that is narrow and myopic at the expense of marginalized people. Heritage plays a pivotal role in this.

**Dissonance in the Press**

Newspapers cited thus far show how views on the riot and its causes varied widely. What each paper decided to report and the angle it chose to take affected residents of Los Angeles in ways that are difficult to track and understand. The press’ engagement with the events was so intense that even contemporary publications like the *California Eagle* argued newspapers were directly responsible for the outbreak of violence.\(^{101}\) Other alternative publications also weighed in: prominent Black writer Chester Himes published an essay comparing the riots to a lynching in the American South in the July issue of *The Crisis*.\(^{102}\)

It should also be noted that yellow journalism was a national problem. Newspapers in San Francisco, New York, and Washington all reported on the riots during the month of June. Even First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt drew criticism when she argued in a public statement that racial discrimination caused the riots and that she “worried about the attitude toward Mexicans in California and the States along the border.” To her, it was clear that the events of racial violence had “roots in things which happened long before.”\(^{103}\) The following day the *Los Angeles Times* ran an editorial under the title “Mrs. Roosevelt Blindly Stirs Race Discord,” in which the writer claimed the First Lady’s statement was similar to “the Communist party line propaganda, which has been desperately devoted to making a racial issue

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103 “First Lady Traces Zoot Riots to Discrimination,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 17, 1943.
of the juvenile gang trouble here.”

Reading through these periodicals makes clear to any researcher how polarizing these events were.

**Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee and the State**

The Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee was the group of progressive activists who pooled resources to overturn the conviction of the young men wrongly jailed for the murder of José Díaz. During wartime, governments at all levels hoped to condition the American people to become one bloc of unified domestic strength. Their opinions on affairs both domestic and abroad were a testament to the strength of the nation’s war effort. Stepping outside of this paradigm like the Committee did was quite bold, particularly during war.

The effort was not limited to the trial itself—the Committee released publications during its legal advocacy demonstrating the connections between the press, the police, and the demonization of the Mexican American community as a whole. Their language was quite clear: “These boys are innocent. The court records of the trial contain no evidence to prove them guilty. . . . They were found guilty because they are Mexicans. Anti-Mexican prejudice and hysteria prevailed in the court room, in the press, and most shockingly in an official report submitted to the Grand Jury by Ed Duran Ayres of the Sheriff’s Office of Los Angeles.”

To draw these connections at a time when even the First Lady was lambasted for simply suggesting that discrimination played a role in the Los Angeles’ racial strife is laudable and highlights how extreme both sides of this issue had become.

**Dissonance Between California and Municipal Governments**

One unexpected place of disagreement was between the state government of California and the municipality of Los Angeles. Before the sailors’ violence completely died down, the event gained the attention of the nation and its allies, particularly Mexico. Recognizing that domestic discord and the explicit targeting of Mexican Americans in Los Angeles could harm the federal government’s relationship with a critical economic ally and labor source, officials exerted pressure on California and Los Angeles to study the events. On June 10th, 1943, California Governor Earl Warren assembled a citizens’ committee to do just that.

That very same day, Los Angeles Mayor Fletcher Bowron stated in the New

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105 Pamphlet, Alice Greenfield Papers, Box 2, Folder 2, Southern California Library.
106 For a source that discusses this dynamic in depth, see: Elvia Rodríguez, “Por La Guerra de Marineros y Pachucos: The Zoot Suit Riots in the Spanish-Language Press” (California State University, Fresno, 2008).
York Times that the riots were purely a local issue related to the “activities of youthful gangs,” and that there was “no question of racial discrimination involved.”

Warren’s committee disagreed: “Most of the persons mistreated during the recent incidents in Los Angeles were either persons of Mexican descent or Negroes. In undertaking to deal with the cause of these outbreaks, the existence of race prejudice cannot be ignored.” In discussing the framing of zoot suiters as criminals in the years leading up to the violence, the report argues that “It is a mistake in fact and an aggravating practice to link the phrase “zoot suit” with the report of crime.” Its conclusion recommended law enforcement training for better sensitivity toward people of color and juveniles, more robust recreational facilities in communities of color, increased community control, and more public housing. The local government made none of these changes. Future heritage engagements with the Zoot Suit Riots could be useful for highlighting how these issues remain active today.

110 Ibid., 140.
111 Ibid., 142-144.
White violence was a common response in the 1940s to the migration of people of color in Detroit, New York, and Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{112} These stories undercut what is one of the most salient cultural moments in the American ethos: a unified nation of people from all walks of life coming together to crush a form of evil that the world had never seen before. Stories like Sleepy Lagoon, the Zoot Suit Riots, and the discord detailed above demonstrate that there are massive cracks in this narrative, most of which continue to be avoided.

\textsuperscript{112} A useful dissertation on this phenomenon nationwide can be found here: Melissa A. Esmacher, “The Riotous Home Front: Contested Racial Spaces in World War II Los Angeles, Detroit, and Harlem” (Ph.D., University of Hawai'i at Manoa, 2013).
This chapter covered the causes of and disparate responses to these events to illustrate that there is contention over what happened in the summer of 1943. This is critical to understand and relates back to the discussions of how heritage is constructed in Chapter One of this project. When a polarizing event occurs, there are an infinite number of interpretations. But, once this same event becomes distant, heritage professionals and government officials enshrine one narrative in books and at heritage sites which appears fixed and immutable.

Prominent sites associated with the Zoot Suit Riots are analyzed below to demonstrate that this context of racial tension and violence is largely invisible in Los Angeles’ built environment. There is virtually no commemoration for those that viewed these events from a deviant angle and little criticism of the institutions or people that inflicted violence both in this city and throughout the country that summer. Designations for related sites focus on architectural significance, leaving their association with this history unnoted. In short, due to political convenience and inadequate preservation approaches, mainstream heritage engages little with this past.

**Herald Examiner Building (146 W. 11th Street)**

![Herald Examiner Building, 1970. Photo by William Reagh. William Reagh Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.](image)

Figure 2.7: Herald Examiner Building, 1970. Photo by William Reagh. William Reagh Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.
The building associated with Hearst’s *Herald Examiner* is an excellent starting point despite its oblique association with the riot itself. The Spanish Colonial Revival building from famed Julia Morgan was constructed for Hearst in downtown Los Angeles in 1914.\(^{113}\) City Council designated the site in 1977 for its exemplary architecture.\(^{114}\) The paper published its last edition in 1989, leaving the site a vacant filming location.\(^{115}\) Arizona State University recently purchased the structure and is now conducting a rehabilitation.\(^{116}\)

With its stately massing, it is easy for passersby to associate the site with its important architect and this famous publication. The monumentality of the building acts as a testament to the expansion of Los Angeles and its civic infrastructure during the early twentieth century, which included the free press, an essential component of a democratic society. But this paper was monopolistic and openly xenophobic, particularly during wartime. Even if a designation were inclusive in its prose, the average pedestrian would have no idea that William Hearst used this place for nefarious purposes, because they are not legible in the historic fabric of the building. How do preservationists criticize an institution we have frozen in time? How can we reuse and call attention to an architectural artifact while recognizing that the site was used to do harm? These questions will be useful for inspecting all the extant buildings discussed throughout this thesis.


\(^{114}\) Los Angeles Department of City Planning, “Historic-Cultural Monuments (HCM) Listing: City Declared Monuments” (City of Los Angeles, 2007).


Preservation approaches to the Navy Armory located in the Chavez Ravine suffer from a similar problem. Constructed in 1940, the Armory was part of a series of civic expansion projects built in the twentieth century that typically displaced or impinged on communities of color. In the words of Eduardo Obregón Pagán, planners typically “inscribed the growth of public space not over unused or unpopulated lands . . . Much of the reconstruction of Los Angeles would pave over neighborhoods long occupied by predominately Mexican American families.”\(^\text{117}\) Between 1939 and 1942, Union Station leveled Los Angeles’ Old Chinatown, the Navy Armory was placed in the Mexican American Chavez Ravine, and the internment of Japanese Americans forcibly removed an entire population from the neighborhood of Little Tokyo in downtown.

In the Chavez Ravine, the Navy Armory “stood out like an island amid a sea of aging homes.”\textsuperscript{118} The construction of the Armory on land acquired through eminent domain reformulated the social environment for the Mexican American, African American, Italian, and Jewish neighborhoods that lined the downtown district.\textsuperscript{119} Pagán describes the building as an “outpost standing watch over the surrounding enclaves of local population,” which released thousands of sailors on leave into the neighborhood each week.\textsuperscript{120} Between the fall of 1942 and the spring of 1943, incidents of violence between sailors and members of the local enclaves went from an average of once a week to at least once daily.\textsuperscript{121}

It was from this Armory that the sailors exited, hiding their makeshift weapons, riding in cabs that welcomed their cause with free fares toward downtown, as well as East and South Los Angeles. Its designation form lauds the building’s understated civic classicism.\textsuperscript{122} The only mention the document makes of the Zoot Suit Riots is in citing one local historian who claims the police used the building as a headquarters during the attacks.\textsuperscript{123} Its role in Los Angeles’ long history of segregation, displacement, and racial strife is absent. Even someone with an interest in local history would have to dedicate substantial time to uncover this site’s association with these painful memories.

Once heritage and the state coalesce, there is little room for discussing this site’s history and its layers of conflict. Not only does its three-hundred-page designation sit in an office full of files far away from public view, the building itself does not share this rich story. It now functions as a training center for the City of Los Angeles’ firefighters. While repurposing buildings is a core tenant of preservation, how could this space also be activated to highlight its past as an epicenter of racial violence in Los Angeles?

\textbf{Sleepy Lagoon (5400 Lindbergh Lane, City of Bell)}

The location of the original Sleepy Lagoon is disputed and now extremely difficult to locate. A map from Pagán’s book on the murder and its relation to Zoot Suit Riots places it in the City of Bell, just south of Commerce in a heavily industrialized area east of the 710 Freeway.\textsuperscript{124} This area once included

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\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 233.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 232.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 233. Mazón, 73.
\textsuperscript{121} Pagán, “Los Angeles Geopolitics and the Zoot Suit Riot, 1943,” 241.
\textsuperscript{122} “Historic-Cultural Monument Nomination Form: Naval and Marine Corps Reserve Center” (City of Los Angeles, July 29, 2015), 3.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 202.
\textsuperscript{124} Pagán, \textit{Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon}, 60.
\end{flushleft}
some residential and agricultural uses, as well as a reservoir. It is important to note that part of the reason Mexican Americans congregated here was because they were usually barred from formal recreational areas to relax and swim.\textsuperscript{125}

Today, the site is unrecognizable. There is no form of designation and nothing visible in the area that discusses the murders, their mistrial, or the riots that followed. It is generally surrounded by food packing plants and light industrial uses. This represents only a slight change from the other historic industrial uses, also revealing a long chain of environmental racism that took place here.\textsuperscript{126} In a painfully ironic twist, much of the land on and around Sleepy Lagoon is now occupied by a Navy Operational Support Center and an Army recruitment center. Thus, the same perpetrator that caused this demographic so much pain decades ago has physically blotted out this uncomfortable piece of heritage.

It is very telling that an event once seen as a rationale for police sweeps against a Mexican crime wave has now literally vanished from the map. This is an embarrassing location for the government which wrongly and violently interrogated six hundred people on the basis of race before sending seventeen to prison on little evidence. A site that once meant so much to terrified white Angelenos fell out of importance once it was no longer needed.

Heritage work at a site damaged beyond recognition is challenging to imagine. How can one commemorate an event which took place at a lagoon when it is now a sea of concrete with restricted access? Who would be able to view it? Moreover, would it not be more insulting than helpful to engage with this history on a site that now belongs to the main perpetrator of violence during the Zoot Suit Riots, the United States Navy? This use shows that the neoliberal, growth-oriented paradigm which dominates America’s cities tells its story more loudly than other claimants to space. And, unfortunately, once a layer of underrepresented history is gone it can be notoriously challenging to retrieve.

\textsuperscript{125} McWilliams, \textit{North from Mexico}, 228.
\textsuperscript{126} Pagán, \textit{Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon}, 60.
Constructed in 1925, the Hall of Justice is where the seventeen boys arrested after the Sleepy Lagoon murder were convicted and eventually released. The foreboding Beaux Arts structure is a famous testament to state power in Los Angeles’ Civic Center Historic District, which housed both a jail and court facilities until the Northridge Earthquake in 1994.127 The LAPD has conducted some of its most

high-profile work here, including the autopsy of Robert Kennedy and the detainment of Charles Manson.¹²⁸

As the headquarters of judicial enforcement for a major metropolitan area for nearly seventy years, the history of decisions made here by the state could easily fill volumes of books. Finding a way to call meaningful attention to any particular case, whether just or unjust, is challenging in this context. When a history becomes associated with a massive bureaucracy, it also becomes banal. Many of the decisions and their corresponding paperwork filed here are symptomatic of an oppressive violence, but fall into a boring, largely inaccessible place.

Unless stories like that of the Sleepy Lagoon trial are unearthed and displayed in some way, memory work at this site is incomplete. But figuring out what to include and what not to include is the perennial challenge of all heritage. Our current preservation framework recognizes that this site has a rich history, but flattens it by praising only the building’s historic fabric and its association with City power. The building’s association with the darker pasts of incarceration, segregation, and oppressive violence are untold.

Meanwhile, sites of painful history that are architecturally banal, such as Sleepy Lagoon, do not receive even these basic brick-and-mortar preservation efforts. In both cases, important stories are lost. At the Hall of Justice, preservationists have reduced a multi-faced history until only the building’s position as a relic of early civic infrastructure is recognized. At Sleepy Lagoon, a story is ignored because the significance of the site is illegible, particularly in a city that holds the potential for economic growth as the main metric of land’s value. In both cases, sites of conflict and dissonance, oppression and resistance, become superficially engaged with their past.

¹²⁸ Ibid.
Lincoln Heights Jail (421 N. Ave 19)

Figure 2.10: Lincoln Heights Jail. Photo by author.

The Lincoln Heights Jail is an infamous building located northeast of Downtown Los Angeles, sandwiched between the Los Angeles River and Interstate Five. Built in 1927 and expanded in the 1950s, the Art Deco style jail detained 2,800 prisoners at its peak.\textsuperscript{129} It has famously held Al Capone, hundreds of victims arrested during the Zoot Suit and Watts Riots, and a large number of people detained because of their sexual orientation during crackdowns on members of the LGBTQ community between the 1940s and 1960s\textsuperscript{130}. In 1951, the jail was the location of the “ Bloody Christmas” incident, in which police brutally beat seven young men, five of whom were Mexican American.\textsuperscript{131}

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Decommissioned in 1965, the jail is in disrepair today. Graffiti marks what few windows remain. The Bilingual Foundation for the Arts called the jail home from 1979 to 2014. In 1993, with a threat of demolition looming, preservation advocates convinced City Council to designate the site. In 2016, the City of Los Angeles released a Request for Interest, opening the property for sale and redevelopment. In 2017, a developer went public with plans to turn the site into a residential, commercial, and manufacturing space. Renderings do not call attention to the building’s previous use. It is likely that highlighting this site’s dark past would be seen as politically out of step with the pedestrian-oriented, bustling experience the developers hope to create here.

The City’s decision to release this property to the market—a passive action but nonetheless a calculated one—removes responsibility for the site and its history from the government. While any project on the site will need to abide by the Secretary of Interior’s Standards, which impose limits on how historic fabric is altered during a building’s reuse, there is no guarantee that this building’s past as a center of oppressive violence will be preserved or displayed. Apart from a separate contractual obligation, there is no legal arm to force an engagement with the events that took place here beyond the preservation of the building itself. Current renderings show the architectural embodiment of a violent police force as an ancillary feature to a “Festival Street.” Granted, a standing building is better than Sleepy Lagoon’s concrete lot, but a building by itself cannot tell these stories.

These examples show how the current heritage framework can remove nuance and discord from polarizing history though a static, inaccessible designation form, neglect, or outright demolition. Passively or maliciously, these approaches limit our ability to engage with challenging pasts by making them virtually invisible in Los Angeles’ built environment. However, the dissonance that made these sites painful in the first place continues to exist.

What is particularly frustrating is that the preservation tools are working as designed. Although the project took longer than expected to complete, the Hall of Justice’s rehabilitation following the Northridge Earthquake was landmark preservation in action. When city officials began pushing to revitalize Downtown Los Angeles in the 2000s, the Herald Examiner Building became desirable, and is

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133 Los Angeles Department of City Planning, “Historic-Cultural Monuments (HCM) Listing: City Declared Monuments.”
now receiving a multi-million-dollar facelift. Even the Navy Armory remains intact and in use. In each case, historic preservation helped these buildings remain relevant. But the stories they tell are desperately incomplete.

Recognizing Alternative Approaches

Where does alternative heritage work go, then, when it is pushed out of city space? This project is interested not only in criticizing our current approach but imagining a new one. The following examples of heritage engagements and memory work from small actors provide insight into how people maintain a sense of the past without recognition from the government.

Preservation of Zoot Suit Culture

In 1978, writer and director Luis Valdez debuted his play Zoot Suit at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. It was the first professionally produced Mexican American play in the United States. Valdez, known as the “Godfather of Chicano Theater,” recounted the events of both the Sleepy Lagoon Trial and the Zoot Suit Riots in his work. Critics lauded the production in Los Angeles, and it enjoyed a brief run on Broadway.

Valdez also released a production of Zoot Suit at the Mark Taper Forum in 2017 to celebrate his original troupe’s fiftieth anniversary. Footage of the debut shows audience members filing in wearing zoot suits and other period clothing. In an interview, Valdez stated that he believed in entertainment “with a purpose,” that provokes audience members to “think about what they saw” and reassess “what’s happening in their own lives.” Released just eleven days after the inauguration of Donald Trump, who openly condemned Mexicans and Mexican Americans throughout his campaign, this production was indeed timely.

This is a form of heritage unrecognized by Los Angeles’ current preservation techniques. When people come together and engage with the past through reenactment or dramatization, there is the development of collective memory. Audience members donning the zoot suit is not simple costuming. It is an act of heritage which holds space for reflecting on racial discrimination and white violence—one that has very real impacts in today’s world. Preservationists should hope to capitalize on such

138 Ibid.
engagement with the past, which is fluid and based in connections between human beings rather than forms and bureaucracies. Preserving sites is helpful, but recognizing heritage work that lies outside of our current legal framework could be an important tool of memory work when sites are already lost.

The Grave of José Díaz

Less conventional examples exist digitally. José Díaz’s grave lies in Calvary Cemetery in East Los Angeles. His gravesite is non-descript and makes no mention of the political turmoil sparked by his murder. While temporary, improvisational celebrations of his life and Mexican American resistance could happen here, these ephemeral forms of heritage are difficult to trace. However, through the Internet, people have created new spaces for digitally cataloging grief.

A website entitled “Find a Grave” allows users to write biographies and obituaries, and mark graves on maps for other visitors. Users can also leave “Flowers” with a comment, a digital equivalent to placing items at a gravesite. Díaz’s profile has over 170.139 While many of these could have been left thoughtlessly, comments like the following show that some users understand the significance of Díaz’s death: “I pray your death was not in vain but instead may it serve to remind the world of the evil that discrimination, prejudice and intolerance spawns; and help unite all colors to bring amity, harmony and goodwill to us all. RIP.” “To you Chuco, You [sic] are not forgotten. Watch over your loved ones from Heaven above. And watch over that Raza still out on the streets killing each other. Much respect to you.” “Fighting for us Mexican Americans everywhere, thank you.”140 All comments and flowers left are from the last fifteen years, showing how this issue remains active over seventy years later.

Some might dismiss this example as overly inclusive or meaningless. There is no doubt that the Internet lacks formality. This website could be gone in an instant. But it still demonstrates that despite the destruction of Sleepy Lagoon and the lack of formal heritage engagement with the story of Díaz, people are finding valid ways to engage with this past. This is as much a form of heritage as a formalized tour at any historic site.

140 Ibid.
The Great Wall of Los Angeles is a beautification project along the channelized Tujunga Wash in the San Fernando Valley created by public artist Judith Baca alongside hundreds of community artists organized by the Social and Public Art Resource Center. Completed in 1984, the mural is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.\textsuperscript{141} Its panels include paintings on a wide range of topics such as the Zoot Suit Riots, gay rights activism, the Great Depression, the internment of Japanese Americans, and more.

Facilitated by the Army Corps of Engineers, this example is not as small voiced as the others discussed here. However, the actions surrounding its completion demand attention: While Angelenos now have a space to reflect on the Zoot Suit Riots that addresses this history more directly than any other site in the City of Los Angeles, its creation was also a form of heritage. Baca assembled a team of

\textsuperscript{141} “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Great Wall of Los Angeles, The” (United States Department of the Interior, 2017).
eighty youths out of the juvenile justice program to help paint the mural, a particularly striking fact considering the language used by presses and city officials during the Zoot Suit Riots.\textsuperscript{142} Equally interesting, is the pressure surrounding community members put on the project out of fear of “juvenile delinquents” working in their neighborhood.\textsuperscript{143} This demonstrates that while the program itself was progressive, Los Angeles is still in need of change.

Even though this work is associated with the state, Baca’s act of bringing young people together to engage with public art is an important and replicable heritage act. There is little doubt that this project had an impact on all those involved, no matter how small. This is the type of active engagement with the past that goes unseen by current, formal preservation efforts. Designation on the National Register is a great honor that gives this underrepresented place stature alongside the most mainstream historic sites this country cherishes. But this example also belongs here because it demonstrates how engagement with the past can produce much more than what is tangible or visible. While the City chose not to engage with this history, people still found ways to reclaim this past, place it in the built environment, and work with young people to ensure that this process also had social impact.

\textit{Alternative History Tours}

One final example is a “Zoot Suit Riots” Bus Tour from neighborhood activist Shmuel Gonzales, also known as Barrio Boychik. Of Jewish and Mexican descent, Boychik embodies the ethnic diversity of Boyle Heights, a neighborhood just east of Downtown Los Angeles that held an extremely diverse mixture of immigrants before becoming the Latinx enclave it is today. Boychik runs alternative heritage tours both on foot and by bus throughout East Los Angeles that highlight sites and stories that are far from typical tourist destinations. His itinerary for his “Zoot Suit Riot” Bus Tour includes Sleepy Lagoon, the Hall of Justice, and several theatres in the downtown area from which sailors forcibly removed Mexican Americans during the violence.\textsuperscript{144} Boychik also runs a blog and remains active in his community advocating for better housing and the prevention of displacement due to gentrification.

Tours that call attention to underrepresented narratives are a critical piece of heritage work, but many still find them unsettling. Without the backing of the state, they appear ephemeral and

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  \item\textsuperscript{142} “The Great Wall - History and Description,” \texttt{SPARCinLA}, accessed September 8, 2019, https://SPARCinLA.org/the-great-wall-part-2/.
  \item\textsuperscript{143} Carrie Rickey, “The Writing on the Wall,” in \textit{Chicano Art History: A Book of Selected Readings}, ed. Jacinto Quirarte (San Antonio, Texas: Research Center for the Arts and Humanities, University of Texas at San Antonio, 1984), 87-91.
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Challenging to monitor. Their content may be flat out inaccurate. But, as demonstrated above, more formalized, professional engagements with heritage are not exempt from these same problems.

Conclusion

Because heritage is steeped with power, those who leave comments on websites, run video blogs and small bus tours, or make plays, appear fringe. Calling attention to these small actors can ensure heritage is used as a form of conversation rather than indoctrination. Unless all those interested in heritage make efforts to level the playing field, the government’s use of the past will always appear most legitimate, even if it glosses over stories that are important not only for marginalized people, but society generally.

The Zoot Suit Riots are a great example to call attention to this problem. Some writers cite this event as the beginning of the famous Chicano/a movement of Los Angeles in the 1960s and ‘70s. Despite this, there is little in this city which grapples with this past in a meaningful way. Meanwhile, discrimination against Mexicans and Mexican Americans persists, from the federal level to the municipal. While no person of color needs the government to tell them how discrimination works and how long it has been around, it is essential that those interested in the past find ways to expose injustice—how it unfolds and how it is avoided, as well as its staying power. Heritage is where this happens.
Chapter Three: The Black Panther Party in Los Angeles

On May 2, 1967, thirty Black people armed with loaded rifles and shotguns interrupted the California State Legislature. Their aim was to protest new legislation which made it a misdemeanor to carry an unconcealed gun in public—a law they argued explicitly targeted their organization, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (referred to as the Party in this chapter). They contended the aim was to undermine their newest practice: Panthers would follow police and observe any law enforcement activity from a legal distance, all while legally armed with loaded weapons. The group intended to monitor and intimidate the police, who they believed were continually “intensifying the terror, brutality, murder and repression of black people.”

The nation was shocked, and the demonstration gave the Party center stage. From 1966 to 1982, the Black Panther Party grew from a small, Oakland-based group advocating against police brutality to a national movement involved in healthcare, housing rights, and childcare. The end goal was a socialist revolution. The work the Party did, in combination with its militant stance on Black rights and open advocacy of violence, made the organization, according to Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director J. Edgar Hoover, “the greatest threat to the internal security of the country.”

It did not take long for a negative narrative surrounding the Panthers’ radicality to take hold. Even when reporting on the Party’s occupation of the California Legislature, when the movement was less than a year old, the New York Times unequivocally described the group as “antiwhite.” This chapter discusses how this narrative developed, which demonized the Black Panther Party from the outset and chose to downplay the truly violent and arguably illegal campaign the FBI conducted to dissolve them. Recontextualizing the Black Panther Party demonstrates that this group did not act alone, but was part of a larger moment of widespread upheaval along lines of both race and class. Surveying the movement in general and the Southern California chapter in particular shows that the narrative of the Black Panthers as a strictly anti-white and inherently violent organization is misguided and reductive.

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This story avoids the community service carried out by the group across the country, and its collaboration with other organizations with white, Black, and Latinx membership. Today, the Panthers and the systemic national campaign carried out against them is hardly visible in the City of Los Angeles. As a result, their legacy remains plagued by selective memory and misappropriation.

**Contextualizing the Black Panthers**

*The Ten-Point Platform and its Social Context*

Huey Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in October 1966 in Oakland, California. Critical of the Civil Rights Movement as a middle-class undertaking ignorant to the needs of poor, urban Black people, Newton and Seale sought out a new, “post-civil rights agenda” to change fundamentally their community’s economic, political, and social situation. The fall, they drafted their “Party Platform and Program” as ten points:

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.
2. We want full employment for our people.
3. We want an end to the robbery by the white men of our Black Community. [later changed to "We want an end to the robbery by the capitalists of our Black and oppressed communities."]
4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.
5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society.
6. We want all Black men to be exempt from military service.
7. We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people.
8. We want freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.
9. We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their Black Communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.

The Ten-Point Platform became the guiding manifesto for Party members. It is important to note that while race and the protection of the Black community is clearly a central tenant of the program, what separated the Black Panthers from other contemporary Black nationalist groups was their insistence on the overthrow of the current political economy. Indeed, rifts would later develop between the

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154 I use Black Nationalism in a general way to capture a variety of movements interested in the unity and empowerment of Black people. For a useful overview see Robert Carr, *Black Nationalism in the New World: Reading the African-American and West Indian Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).
Panthers and other groups over this core belief, which they viewed as essential for moving from cultural advocacy to true social change.

The Platform and actions of the Panthers, particularly their bearing arms, were quite radical. However, when placed in its broader national and international context, it becomes clear that the Party fit into a tumultuous political moment. Relatively little change had come to fruition for urban Black populations, who remained destitute, particularly after the early stages of post-World War II deindustrialization scaled back the manufacturing jobs they had traveled westward for. A period of continuous racial strife took place nationwide from 1964 to 1968. In their article on debunking “Panther mythology,” Charles Jones and Judson Jeffries point out that “forty-three racial riots occurred in the United States during 1966, a significant increase from fifteen reported racial revolts in 1964.”

To Newton and Seale, the Civil Rights Movement was a stalemate and the chronic, disorganized demonstrations that followed indicated the failure of non-violent protests for social change. Their platform pushed for a paradigm shift to guerilla tactics which organized people locally and advocated for wholesale separatism from a white government which they deemed an occupational force in their community. Newton and Seale were very open about this process involving bloodshed, mainly of “white, racist, Gestapo cops.”

While police brutality was a common spark for unrest, the nationwide socioeconomic situation for Black people in urban areas was also a major cause. In Newark, for example, as reported by Malcolm McLaughlin in his book, The Long Hot Summer of 1967, the proportion of dilapidated or deteriorated housing for Black people in a 1960 survey ranged form forty-three to ninety-one percent. In Los Angeles, where the Black population increased fifteenfold between 1910 and 1944, white streetcar workers responded to the influx by striking until they received a guarantee that Black people would be limited to janitorial jobs on their trains. In the South Central Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts, where a five-day-long racial uprising took place in 1965, residents reported dismal infrastructure in the

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years leading up to the unrest: water flow was so poor that there was often not enough pressure to flush toilets or fight fires.\textsuperscript{160}

Slum clearance projects in the name of urban renewal throughout the 1950s and 1960s—sardonically referred to as “Negro removal” projects by some—reduced the supply of available housing in cities.\textsuperscript{161} While the federal government incentivized white populations to move into suburban tract housing, incoming migrants as well as residents displaced by urban renewal “were squeezed into ever more densely populated neighborhoods,” according to McLaughlin.\textsuperscript{162} Racist deed covenants and discriminatory lending practices precluded Black people from moving into suburban housing, locking them into these poor conditions.\textsuperscript{163} Even the federal government’s Kerner Commission, a board created by Lyndon B. Johnson to investigate the causes of the country’s racial uprisings in 1967, was very clear in its findings, admitting that discrimination caused massive “exclusion of great numbers of Negroes from . . . economic progress” and “Crime, drug addiction, dependency on welfare, and bitterness and resentment against society . . . are the result.”\textsuperscript{164} Such was the socioeconomic climate in cities throughout the country during the advent of the Black Panther Party, making the connections between this context and the Party’s Ten-Point Platform quite clear.

\textit{Interracial and International Collaboration}

In contrast to the depiction of the Panthers as stridently anti-white, there is evidence that the Party frequently collaborated with radical activists from other racial groups. As the movement for Black power grew, white activists in famous organizations like Students for a Democratic Society reassessed their role. Eventually the group splintered over the question of Black Nationalism and separatism, with some factions continuing to advocate against police brutality and sometimes resorting to violence.\textsuperscript{165} Despite this shift in which marginalized groups took control of their own advocacy work, interracial collaboration continued.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 28-36.
\textsuperscript{162} McLaughlin, 25.
\textsuperscript{163} A new, exhaustive study of this phenomenon can be found here: Richard Rothstein, \textit{The Color of Law} (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017).
\textsuperscript{165} Laura Pulido, \textit{Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left Radical Activism in Southern California} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 37.
This “coalition mentality,” as described by historian W.J. Rorabaugh, was somewhat unique to the Black Panthers, and possibly related to the general climate of activism that existed in the Bay Area where Newton and Seale founded the Party. Class warfare was the bonding agent for this cooperation, and the Party’s leadership recognized that their movement should rely on becoming both “autonomous and nonracist.” According to Charles E. Jones of Georgia State University, “Under the Party’s ideological doctrine, all white people were not defined as enemies of African Americans. Rather the ruling class of the country, high ranking government officials, and the police were deemed the oppressors by Panther theoreticians.” The Party’s Minister of Information, Eldrige Cleaver confirmed this in a 1968 memo published in *Open City*: “we must also be able to realize that there are white people, brown people, red people, yellow people in this world who are totally dedicated to the destruction of this system of oppression, and we welcome that. We will always be open to working with that . . . white racism, ethnocentrism, the arrogance of people in power—these are the major enemies, and we will never confuse the two.”

Additionally, the Black Panthers worked closely with and inspired empowerment movements of other people of color, including the Chicano/a Brown Berets, the Puerto Rican Young Lords Party, the Chinese American Red Guard, and the American Indian Movement. These groups varied in their level of militance and advocacy of violence, but all grew from the same revolutionary social milieu as the Panthers. In addition to borrowing principles and approaches from one another, the groups sometimes worked together explicitly: In the anthology, *The Black Panthers: Portraits from an Unfinished Revolution*, Jeffrey Ogbar reported that “The Patriots [short for the Young Patriots, a radical white leftist organization], Lords, and Panthers famously provided security for each other at events, held press conferences together, and developed community programs to mitigate gang violence and police terror and provide breakfast for children, along with medical care.” The Panthers’ free breakfast program, designed to nourish Black children before their days at school, was replicated by Chicano/a allies at the organization Los Siete de la Raza in Los Angeles. While split along identities and what each group viewed as a proper course of action, these organizations generally stood against oppression at home and imperialism abroad. Although the Panthers quickly became the most famous racially motivated

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167 Jones and Jeffries, 38.
170 Bloom and Martin, 221.
separatist group, it is important to take note of other organizations carrying out similar work simultaneously.

Non-militant Organizing

Though the image of shotgun-toting Black men in paramilitary gear quickly spread throughout the country, the Black Panther Party also engaged deeply in non-militant organizing work. These included petitioning, lobbying, educational programs, tenant organizing, and free healthcare clinics, meals, and household services.\textsuperscript{171} The free breakfast program quickly became the party’s most famous form of non-violent advocacy and was replicated at chapters across the country. Panthers believed that there was a direct link between nutrition and school performance and fed thousands of school children daily—1,200 a week in Los Angeles alone.\textsuperscript{172} The Party’s healthcare clinics also provided free sickle-cell-anemia testing, a disease which disproportionately affects Black people at a rate of one in every five hundred.\textsuperscript{173} Panthers in Milwaukee established free transportation to and from prison for families visiting their incarcerated relatives.\textsuperscript{174} Additionally, the organization provided traditional forms of political advocacy through legal advice during incidents of police brutality.\textsuperscript{175} In West Oakland, the original Party chapter even managed to petition the city to install a traffic light at a dangerous crossing where drivers had previously killed several schoolchildren.\textsuperscript{176}

This work was hyper-local, responsive, and an essential tool for the Party’s ability to gain legitimacy in communities across the country. Aside from their usefulness as a tool of recruitment and a demonstration of Black self-determination, these actions drew attention to a socioeconomic situation some believed did not exist in the United States. As businesses began donating food to the free breakfast program throughout the country, the Party drew attention to a demographic that policymakers and everyday citizens alike frequently ignored: poor communities of color in urban areas.\textsuperscript{177}

Aside from meeting the immediate needs of impoverished and marginalized people, the Panthers’ “Survival Programs” also spurred long-term change. Their work on police brutality led to the

\textsuperscript{171} Jones and Jeffries, 41.
\textsuperscript{172} Bloom and Martin, 185.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 188.
\textsuperscript{175} Smith, \textit{An International History of the Black Panther Party}, 38.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{177} Bloom and Martin, 185.
formation of a “Citizens’ Complaint Board” by Oakland’s City Council in 1981. Some scholars also argue that the Party’s free breakfast program acted as a precursor of the National School Lunch Program in practice today. These effects are only one important part of the legacy of the Black Panthers. Data cannot fully capture the value communities of color must have derived from the group’s community organizing.

Assessing the Panther Legacy

Because many Party chapters sought to remain “underground” and out of sight of hostile federal authorities, understanding the breadth of the Party’s impact is challenging. Membership quickly ballooned into the thousands, and the group founded chapters in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Newark, Chicago, New Haven, Houston, Dallas, and Los Angeles, as well as in other smaller cities. Unfortunately, the Party’s rapid rise prevented any vetting process for its members. While this made the organization fluid and responsive to local needs, it also led to ideological fragmentation, the infiltration of police informants, and difficulty maintaining a centralized platform in practice. The press and state authorities quickly latched on to any deviance from the Party’s goals in the form of unprovoked violence or other illegal acts, undermining the important political and social organizing work of the Panthers. This issue continues to plague the legacy of the organization today.

The context provided here requires some qualification. While in some ways non-militant, tolerant, and collaborative, the Black Panther Party was indeed violent when necessary, radical, and arguably authoritarian in its structure. This project does not ignore these facets of the organization. However, this context is needed to counter the misperceptions that many scholars say continue to “minimize the historical significance of the Party.” Activist JoNina Abron-Evrin was shocked that even when interviewing students in the progressive space of a college-level Black American literature class, most were surprised to learn that the Party engaged in non-militant activism at all, having never heard of the organization’s work in childcare, healthcare, and education. She blamed this on the fact that “the establishment news media, historians, and political scientists have not provided a full treatment of the BPP [Black Panther Party].” In his anthology, The Black Panther Party (Reconsidered), Charles E. Jones

179 Pulido, 42.
181 Jones and Jeffries, 26.
182 Abron, 178.
also contended that scholarly research on the BPP is needed to counteract “the demonization of the Panthers in particular and the Black power movement in general.”

This reductive understanding of the Panthers is a disservice to both the Party and the people they advocated for, as summarized by New York Times writer Sol Stern in his 1967 article, “The Call of the Black Panthers”:

to write off the Panthers as a fringe group of little influence is to miss the point. The group's roots are in the desperation and anger that no civil-rights legislation or poverty program has touched in the ghetto. The fate of the Panthers as an organization is not the issue. What matters is that there are a thousand black people in the ghetto thinking privately what any Panther says out loud.

Recognizing the potential of this movement, the FBI soon clamped down on the Party. Inspecting the growth and subsequent repression of the Southern California Chapter demonstrates how current engagements with the Party’s legacy do not capture this history’s complexity.

The Southern California Chapter and the “Undeclared War” on the Black Panther Party

Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter founded the Southern California Chapter of the Black Panther Party in Los Angeles in late 1967. By November of 1969, he, his brother Glen Carter, and his co-leader John Huggins would all be dead. The following month, the FBI, working in conjunction with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), would storm the Chapter’s headquarters in South Central, starting a gunfight that lasted over four hours. The raid of the Party’s office at 4115 Central Avenue was part of systematic, arguably illegal campaign by the FBI to destroy the Black Panther Party nationwide on largely political grounds. Today, this Chapter’s history, and the story of the FBI’s “undeclared war” on the Black Panthers remains almost invisible in Los Angeles’ built environment.

Before the Party’s formation, Carter met Eldridge Cleaver in Soledad State Prison, where they both became interested in the teachings of Malcolm X. Carter was well known throughout Los Angeles for his activity in the Slauson Renegades, a prominent gang purported to have five thousand members,

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183 Jones and Jeffries, 47.
185 A Party flyer from December 1969 summarized the nationwide raids, arrests, and assassinations as an “Undeclared War.” Located in: The Black Panther Files, Southern California Library, Box 1, Folder 3.
188 Austin, 108.
according to historians Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr.\textsuperscript{189} It was this position and his deep connection with the city’s Black community that uniquely positioned Carter to open the Party’s second chapter in the country. To borrow the concise description from Panther activist Elaine Brown’s memoir, \textit{A Taste of Power}: “Everybody had heard of Bunchy.”\textsuperscript{190}

Carter’s chapter took off, eventually occupying ten buildings throughout the region, and later helping establish new chapters in Houston and Dallas.\textsuperscript{191} The communities of South Central Los Angeles had remained politically activated after the Watts Uprising of 1965. The event was fresh in the city’s collective memory and demonstrated that communities of color in Southern California in general and South Central in particular “were willing to engage in mass violence.”\textsuperscript{192} One testament to this was the existence of the Community Alert Patrol, an unarmed precursor of the “copwatching” squads later introduced by the Black Panthers in Oakland, who would monitor police behavior throughout South Central.\textsuperscript{193} When Carter declared the following only two years after residents of Watts inflicted $40 million worth of property damage, there is little doubt about the impact it must have had: “it is the position of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense that we are the vanguard of revolution in the United States . . . And the party is declaring all-out-war on the pig [derogatory slang for police officer] . . . nobody will speak about Black Power or revolution unless he’s willing to follow the example of the vanguard, willing to pick up the gun, ready to die for the people.”\textsuperscript{194} Many young activists in Los Angeles aimed to put Carter’s words into practice. His own brother, Glen, would be killed by federal agents in March 1968.\textsuperscript{195} At least ten Panthers from the Southern California Chapter would meet the same fate, including two young men who engaged in a firefight with police during the Watts Festival on the third anniversary of the Uprising.\textsuperscript{196}

As with all Party chapters, the Southern California group engaged in more than violence. Flores Forbes, ten-year member turned urban planner, discussed how the free breakfast program became an important organizing tool in Los Angeles:

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\textsuperscript{189} Bloom and Martin, 144. \\
\textsuperscript{190} Elaine Brown, \textit{A Taste of Power: A Black Woman’s Story} (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 118. \\
\textsuperscript{191} Pulido, 44. \\
\textsuperscript{192} Austin, 109. \\
\textsuperscript{193} Pulido, 44. \\
\textsuperscript{194} Brown, 122-124. This quote is recounted by Brown in a memoir and could possibly be paraphrased. \\
\textsuperscript{195} Murch, 162. \\
\textsuperscript{196} Bloom and Martin, 146; Austin, 110.
\end{flushright}
The organizing effort began with us going door-to-door in the projects, passing out free papers with leaflets advertising the program. We talked to parents, kids, and storeowners near the projects... The response was overwhelming. All types of parents agreed to host and serve our efforts. We held the program in the homes of junkies, drug dealers, regular public assistance recipients, gamblers, and gang bangers. Store owners donated bread, eggs, bacon, sausage, milk, and paper products.\(^{197}\)

The chapter also created free clinics which provided both treatments and education on healthcare to make medical services less “impersonal” and abate the “alienation people sometimes feel when they bring their medical needs to the attention of personnel at county hospitals.”\(^{198}\) In 1970, Southern California Chapter member Yvonne Carter pointed out that on top of the six-hour wait times many experienced upon arrival to county hospitals, their locations throughout the region often made them inaccessible to residents of South Central. Through their free clinic, which continued its services after the LAPD raid made their central office inhabitable, this Chapter hoped that “once people become educated to this service, they can begin to demand the kind of care they are entitled to.”\(^{199}\)

*The Killing of Bunchy Carter and John Huggins*

The success of these programs and their attachment to a politically violent organization did not go unnoticed by law enforcement agencies. Aside from minor harassment—repeated pullovers, arrests on false pretenses, and even alleged raids of houses serving breakfasts—the targeting of the Southern California Chapter became part of a national campaign against the Black Panthers.\(^{200}\) In late 1967, the FBI established the Counterintelligence Program, COINTELPRO, “to expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of black nationalist, hate-type organization and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership, and supporters, and to counter their propensity for violence and civil disorder.”\(^{201}\) Following the McCarthy Era, which led to large public outcry concerning blatant political surveillance, groups like the FBI devised new methods to disrupt illicit activity discreetly.\(^{202}\) These included preventing recruitment, taking advantage of internal rifts within organizations, and


\(^{199}\) Ibid.


\(^{202}\) McLaughlin, 133.
fomenting tension between groups, on top of direct assault, when possible.\textsuperscript{203} Conservative estimates place the Panther death toll at the hands of law enforcement nationwide at two dozen, but at least one account tallied three hundred victims.\textsuperscript{204} In the words of historian Robert Carr, “the state was determined to exterminate the BPP by any means necessary.”\textsuperscript{205} This remains an underrepresented aspect of the Black Panthers’ legacy, particularly in Los Angeles, where the Party came under both violent and surreptitious attacks from the FBI in 1969.

Due to the confidentiality surrounding the program, compiling evidence about COINTELPRO can be challenging. However, many scholars agree that the FBI was directly involved in creating tension between the Southern California Chapter and the Black nationalist group, US. US was founded by Maulana Karenga in 1965.\textsuperscript{206} While the Black Panthers advocated for armed revolution, they viewed US as a tepid organization that accommodated current systems of power.\textsuperscript{207} The Los Angeles branch of the FBI noted this friction and began anonymously sending cartoons to both parties depicting each of the organizations conspiring with law enforcement.\textsuperscript{208} More serious, however, was a letter campaign which led both groups to believe the other planned to assassinate members of their leadership.\textsuperscript{209} “It is hoped this counterintelligence measure,” wrote one FBI operative, “will result in an ‘US’ and BPP vendetta.”\textsuperscript{210}

On January 17, 1969, the tensions came to a tipping point on the University of California, Los Angeles’ (UCLA) campus. College campuses were an essential recruiting location for radical organizations throughout the 1960s, and thus became an ideological battleground between differing groups like US and the Black Panther Party.\textsuperscript{211} This, combined with the misinformation campaign
conducted by law enforcement, caused the selection of a new head for the African American Studies Department to become the cause of a shootout in Campbell Hall.

Bunchy Carter and John Huggins claimed their organization was not represented during the selection process. A fight commenced after the meeting which led to the killing of Carter and Huggins by representatives of US.\(^{212}\) Rather than pursue the shooters, law enforcement used the assassination as an excuse to raid the homes of several Panthers. Huggins’ wife, Ericka, and sixteen others were arrested and eventually released.\(^{213}\) Numerous attacks of revenge between US and the Panthers took place in both directions in the following weeks.\(^{214}\)

Cleaver and other top Party leaders lambasted US and dubbed the murders “a political assassination.”\(^{215}\) At Carter’s funeral—attended by hundreds, including famous Black author and political activist James Baldwin—Party Chairman Seale denounced Karenga as “reactionary” and a “tool of the power structure.”\(^{216}\) Researchers remain unsure about how involved US was with the FBI.\(^{217}\) However, COINTELPRO documents paint a clear picture of law enforcement’s systematic approach to drive a wedge between US and the Black Panther Party. At any rate, the violence delegitimized the two groups, portraying them as disorganized and volatile, ultimately fulfilling the FBI’s initial goal.

**The Central Headquarters Raid**

At 3:30 A.M. on December 8, 1969, police officers armed with automatic weapons began cordoning off sixteen blocks surrounding 4115 Central Avenue in South Central Los Angeles.\(^{218}\) Acting Chief of Police Daryl Gates, with the backing of the FBI, planned his raid with a new division of the LAPD called Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT). This specialized group was seen as “a breakthrough in urban police assault tactics,” with many of its members having undergone training from marines at the Naval Armory in Chavez Ravine.\(^{219}\)

\(^{214}\) Pharr, 132-133.
\(^{217}\) Bloom and Martin, 220.
\(^{219}\) George Percy Bargainer III, “Fanon’s Children: The Black Panther Party and the Rise of the Crips and Bloods in Los Angeles” (Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2011), 58. This is the same building that the Navy used as its launching point for its assault on the Mexican American community during the Zoot Suit Riots of the previous chapter. Also worth noting: Acting Chief Daryl Gates would assume his role in full, holding it during the 1992 Uprising analyzed in the following chapter.
The Black Panthers awaited the assault. FBI attacks on the Party were taking place across the
country. Just four days earlier, law enforcement had raided the home of Chicago Panther leader Fred
Hampton, killing him while he slept with two gunshots to the head at close range.220 The building at
4115 Central avenue was heavily fortified with sandbags.221 After announcing their warrant to enter the
premises and search for illegally owned guns, three officers were immediately wounded from Panther
gunfire.222

The battle lasted for over four hours.223 The police used tear gas which the Panthers lobbed back
while using cigarette filters to plug their noses.224 Dynamite was detonated on the roof, but the building
held.225 Over time, three hundred officers arrived on the scene and became desperate. Gates recalled
his decision to obtain a grenade launcher in his book Chief: My Life in the LAPD:

Only the military had them [grenade launchers]. They were tantamount to a rocket device
today, capable of firing a mortar shell that would blast a hole in the building . . . I called the
marines at Camp Pendleton to ask if we could borrow their grenade launcher. The commanding
officer said, “You’re going to have to get permission from the Department of Defense and
probably the President of the United States.” . . . Anytime you even talk about using military
equipment in a civil action, it’s very serious business. You’re bridging an enormous gap.
The Pentagon got back to us within the hour. We had permission to use the grenade
launcher.226

Fortunately, press arrived, and the Panthers, reassured by their presence, finally surrendered. Eleven of
them exited the building, including three women (Figure 3.1).227 Three Party members were wounded,
as were three police officers.228 In a National-Guard-grade vehicle with tank tracks parked nearby sat the
grenade launcher delivered from Camp Pendleton in San Diego, “Primed and ready to blast the house to
kingdom come,” recollected Gates.229 Weeks later, the City of Los Angeles condemned the damaged
building (Figure 3.2).230 The site has remained a vacant lot since.

220 Churchill and Wall, 70-73.
221 Pharr, 6-10.
222 Bloom and Martin, 223-224.
224 Pharr, 8.
225 Bargainer III, 58-59.
227 Bloom and Martin, 223.
228 Roberts, “Panthers Battle Police on Coast.”
229 Gates and Shah, 123.
Figure 3.1: Black Panthers surrendering outside 4115 Central Avenue, 1969. Herald Examiner, Los Angeles Public Library.
As with the killing of Carter nearly a year before, there was widespread support for the Panthers in the days that followed the raid. On December 11, around four thousand protestors rallied at City Hall (Figure 3.3 and 3.4).\textsuperscript{231} The demonstrators held signs criticizing the police as fascistic and politically repressive. Legendary activist Angela Davis spoke, calling the nationwide campaign against the Black power movement a genocide.\textsuperscript{232} The crowd moved on to the Hall of Justice, where the arrestees were imprisoned (Figure 3.5). One protestor yelled from atop the building’s stairs that “this building or any other building belongs to the people,” and that “eventually we will take power and we will destroy this

\textsuperscript{231} Art Berman, “Thousands Protest Panther Raid in Rally at City Hall,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, December 12, 1969; Bloom and Martin, 225.
This demonstration, with some newspapers estimating the crowd to have exceeded 6,000, seriously undercuts the notion that the Panthers were a wantonly militant or fringe group.\textsuperscript{234}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Protestors gather at City Hall on December 11, 1969 following the FBI's raid on Panther headquarters. Herald Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{233} Art Berman, “Thousands Protest Panther Raid in Rally at City Hall,” \emph{Los Angeles Times}, December 12, 1969.

\textsuperscript{234} Baireuther, “Community Makes Show of Unity at City Hall.”
Figure 3.4: Protesters gather on Spring Street outside City Hall, December 11, 1969. Photo by Rolland J. Curtis. Rolland J. Curtis Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.
Figure 3.5: Protestors move from City Hall to Hall of Justice, December 11, 1969. Photo by Ober Jim. Herald Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.
Police seized two other buildings in Los Angeles at the same time as the raid on 4115 Central Avenue, arresting twenty-four in total. Two years later, all those taken into custody after the four-hour shootout were acquitted of the most severe charge brought against them: conspiracy to murder policemen. The jury found that the police were overly aggressive in their assault. Nine were still convicted of the more minor crime of possessing illegal weapons. Additionally, researchers later discovered that a police officer had lied to obtain a search warrant for the raid.

Illegal, or at least questionable tactics were commonplace in the war against the Black Panthers, and despite claims from the police that there was no concerted effort being made against the Party, the consistent harassment that took place in cities across the country showed otherwise. Tactics varied from repeated arrests and releases, which “distracted Panther activists from organizing and . . . depleted Party funds,” to outright violence in the form of raids, shootouts, and killings. Surveillance through informants and planted electronic devices was also common. In San Francisco, for example, operatives bribed a building engineer to plant a microphone inside the wall of Huey Newton’s apartment after his release from prison in 1970. On the spectrum of intrusion, this was minor: in the case of the raid on Fred Hampton’s Chicago apartment, one shot was fired by the Panthers, while ninety came from law enforcement, killing two and wounding several others. The willingness of the Pentagon to deploy a grenade launcher domestically also speaks volumes about the federal government’s opinion of the Panthers. Additionally, prison statistics support the idea that the FBI’s response to the revolutionary period of the 1960s disproportionately targeted the Black Panthers. In 1998, Akinyele Omowale Umoja’s pointed out the following in his article on political prisoners: “More than one hundred inmates in U.S. prisons have been identified by human rights groups as political prisoners . . . Approximately one-third of these were members of or were affiliated with the Black Panther Party. Consequently, there are more

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237 Churchill and Wall, 83-84.
238 Roberts, “Panthers Battle Police on Coast.”
240 Ibid., 367.
241 Ibid., 373.
political prisoners from the Black Panther Party than any other political formation in United States prisons.”

In their exhaustive work on the FBI as a form of political police, *Agents of Repression*, Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall plainly argue that the agency “was founded, maintained and steadily expanded as a mechanism to forestall, curtail and repress the expression of political diversity within the United States.” The examples above illustrate this on their own, but, in 1976, even a United States Senate investigative committee recognized that the FBI and other intelligence agencies were abusing their powers to the extreme. The majority-white board conceded that “The Government, operating primarily through secret and biased informants, but also using other intrusive techniques such as wiretaps, microphone ‘bugs,’ surreptitious mail opening, and break-ins, has swept in vast amounts of information about the personal lives, views, and associations of American citizens.” COINTELPRO and other programs like it were criticized for their questionable evidence collection and open pursuit of federal charges, even when their targets were not suspected of “having committed . . . any specific Federal crime.” Rather, the committee found that victims were “assaulted, repressed, harassed and disrupted” because of “their political views, social beliefs, and their lifestyles.” Following the report’s release, the *New York Times* published an article highlighting how COINTELPRO’s dubious tactics targeted the Panthers in particular. The publication pulled one especially troubling quote from the Commission, which argued that the agency’s tactics “would be intolerable in a democratic society even if all the targets had been involved in violent activity; but Cointelpro went far beyond that.” Unfortunately, little reform came from the investigation’s findings.


243 Churchill and Wall, 12.


246 Ibid., 512.

The Decline of the Panther Party and Its Legacy

The misinformation campaign conducted alongside the FBI’s violent, semi-legal war against the Party has had lasting impacts. The already fragmented Party continued to splinter under state pressure. Informants intentionally broke the law to undermine the Party’s public image.248 With each misstep, the Party recoiled and became more autocratic. By the late 1970s, with the Black Panthers beginning to fray and Newton struggling with drug addiction, the group became challenging to support, even for leftists.249 By the early 1980s membership dwindled and the party fell apart.250 Newton was killed by a drug dealer in 1989.251

The Party’s erratic final years, combined with its demonization by the state throughout its lifespan, led to an ultimately tarnished image. Its acts of radical community service—several of which were adopted at different levels of government—became overshadowed. As articulated by Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin, in their book, *Black Against Empire*, “nothing did more to vilify the Panthers than the widely publicized evidence of intraorganizational violence and corruption as the Party unraveled. Any attempt to replicate the earlier Panther revolutionary nationalism was now vulnerable to provocation and vilification. The political ‘system’ had been inoculated against the Panthers’ politics.”252 This effect has lasted decades. When Hillary Clinton ran for U.S. Senate, the mere rumor of an association with the Panthers during her years as a Yale law student posed an imminent threat to her campaign.253 In 1994, city officials in Los Angeles withheld a $250,000 contract with a local public art non-profit until it agreed to drop a Black Panther mural from its list of proposed projects.254 There is no doubt that this organization remains politically contentious today.

252 Bloom and Martin, 401.
Historian Jennifer B. Smith argued that in the media, politics, and even academia, “Organizations such as the Black Panther Party have often been absent or misrepresented . . . rather than being presented as an integral key to this epoch.” This chapter has demonstrated what this organization accomplished in its short existence, as well as the ferocious resistance its doctrine inspired. In general, this legacy is only somewhat displayed in the City of Los Angeles. Due to the ephemeral and secretive nature of both the Panthers and the FBI, locating sites to analyze for this case study was challenging. Three are inspected here to illustrate that engagement with this past is limited but growing.

Southern California Chapter Headquarters (4115 Central Avenue)

Figure 3.7: 4115 Central Avenue. The parking lot between these two buildings is the site of former Southern California Chapter Headquarters. Photo by author.

The former headquarters of the Southern California Chapter of the Black Panther Party is now a parking lot, flanked on either side by non-descript, two-story buildings. Historic photos show an aging brick building with painted signs advertising the Panthers and their free breakfast. No remnants of the building remain, and no commemoration of the Party’s acts of service or the raid against it exist here.

This site presents a unique challenge. Here, an era of resistance and repression unfolded in micro. As the second chapter founded in the country, the Los Angeles office represented the rapid expansion of the Black Panthers in the late 1960s. But its decimation is also an important narrative in its own right, reflective of the FBI’s nationwide campaign against Black Nationalism. Ideally, memory work here would highlight both of these stories.
The issue now, however, is not only which story to tell, but what to tell it with. Building permits show that the structure was demolished a year later.\textsuperscript{256} The City’s role in the demolition is unclear, but one article from the Party’s local newspaper claims that the government condemned their headquarters as unfit for habitation within two weeks of the raid.\textsuperscript{257} Whether this was a malicious act, intended to erase the Panthers’ legacy is an intriguing but ultimately fruitless debate. But it is reasonable to believe that if a building still stood onsite, an interested party would push for its designation. The site is marked as a potential historic resource in the \textit{Historic Places L.A.} database, the online inventory compiled from a city-wide historic resources survey.\textsuperscript{258} This honor, however, holds no legal weight.

Designation aside, this site shows that mainstream heritage approaches struggle to accommodate places of difficult history, especially if they have been razed. Unlike Sleepy Lagoon (Chapter Two), this site’s location is clear, and it remains accessible today. The problem is that the legal tools available to call attention to this place were not designed to accommodate stories like this.

\textsuperscript{256} City of Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, http://ladbsdoc.lacity.org/idispublic/.
Campbell Hall and the Carter-Huggins Memorial (UCLA Campus)

Figure 3.8: Campbell Hall, UCLA, the building in which Bunchy Carter and John Huggins were killed. Photo by author.
The classroom hall where assailants from the US organization shot and killed Bunchy Carter and John Huggins remains standing. A memorial stone sits in the landscaping adjacent to the building, reading simply “Carter-Huggins 1969.” Relatively little information is given about who these men were, while even less is offered about the role the FBI played in their killing. Installed relatively recently in 2010, the memorial demonstrates how the Panthers’ legacy has evolved since their deaths. Still, the lack of context provided on the site—particularly regarding the relationship between the Panthers, US, and the FBI—is troubling.259

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Despite this, the classroom hall and its memorial attract the attention of political organizers and others interested in commemorating this movement. When an expansion project came to Campbell Hall in 2015, students pushed for the university to rename the building after the slain activists, which did not take place.260 One editorial from the student newspaper expressed frustration regarding how “the story behind their 1969 killings is not mentioned in traditional tours of UCLA.”261 Another article discussing the fiftieth anniversary of the deaths in 2019 lamented the fact that “for years after the shooting, there was no marking or sign to denote that such an incident had taken place . . . After all, they were just activists, not rich megadonors filling UCLA's coffers.”262 While the stone itself represents a new form of engagement with this painful story, following sections discuss how annual gatherings at this site, along with these fights over its presentation, are an equally notable form of heritage engagement.

Wilshire Federal Building (11000 Wilshire Boulevard)

Figure 3.10: Wilshire Federal Building, main Los Angeles office of the FBI. Photo by author.

261 Ibid.
A major shortcoming of dominant narratives surrounding the Black Panther Party is that they avoid the role the state played in crushing the organization. However, finding ways to draw attention to the FBI’s involvement is challenging. By nature, the organization is secretive and distant. As the main field office of the FBI in the City of Los Angeles, the Wilshire Federal Building is worth inspecting.\(^{263}\) Opened in December 1969, it is unlikely that the organization worked on the 4115 Central Avenue raid from this space.\(^{264}\) However, the war against the Panthers did continue nationwide into the 1980s, making this site important as a symbol of the expansion of the agency and its increased involvement in urban policing during this era.

The Wilshire Federal building stands on Los Angeles’ Westside near UCLA’s campus. The seventeen-story structure cost $14 million to build, and is lauded by the Los Angeles Conservancy as an example of “corporate Late Modernism at its finest.”\(^{265}\) Initially, the structure housed offices of the FBI, the Post Office, and the National Aeronautic and Space Administration.\(^{266}\) Architecturally, the building is notable for its efficient, minimal design, but the activity that takes place inside its walls makes the building’s story much more complex.

The Los Angeles branch of the FBI remains stationed in this building today. As with the Hall of Justice downtown, the bureaucratic nature of the work that takes place here confounds current mainstream preservation approaches. For some, this office’s long history represents a necessary security agency, responsible for stopping terrorist attacks, and even bringing corrupt politicians to justice.\(^{267}\) For others, the site represents the unchecked surveillance, harassment, and aggression of the state against its political enemies. No legal approach exists in the City of Los Angeles today that can cast a net wide enough to capture both this place’s architectural merit and the complex relationship its tenant holds with people across the nation.

Still, this is one of few sites in Los Angeles that could draw attention to how the federal government targeted the Black Panther Party in the 1960s and 70s. Investigative committees and


\(^{267}\) I refer here to the arrest of people like Ahmad Ressam, which thwarted a plot to bomb Los Angeles International Airport on December 31, 1999, as well as the raid conducted by the agency on Los Angeles City Councilman Jose Huizar’s house and office. “FBI Los Angeles History,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed October 4, 2019, https://www.fbi.gov/history/field-office-histories/losangeles; David Zahniser, “FBI Raids Home and Offices of L.A. City Councilman Jose Huizar,” Los Angeles Times, November 7, 2018.
academics alike agree that the FBI severely overstepped in this era, and yet, there is no place for this story to be processed, memorialized, or even refuted. One could argue that this absence has a direct relationship to the Black Panthers’ legacy continuing to be defined by violence rather than service. Moreover, with the War on Terror being, in the agency’s own words, “the overriding focus of the FBI,” this building remains a center of surveillance and intense enforcement of the law. In this context, how might the FBI view preservationists calling attention to the agency’s troubling approach to the Black Panthers? This question is posed here to demonstrate how this site’s past, like all those discussed in this project, has important connections to the present.

Recognizing Alternative Approaches

Recontextualizing the legacy of the Black Panthers creates new heritage questions. In debating how the Party and its doctrine should be enshrined in the built environment or appropriated for use in current politics, different groups in Los Angeles sift through a complex, polarizing past with varying motivations. The memory work discussed below illustrates how, through both tangible and intangible heritage, the Panthers’ reductive legacy of violence is being reframed in real time.

Commemorating Bunchy Carter and John Huggins

Since 1999, thirty years after the killings of Carter and Huggins, students have organized an annual gathering at UCLA’s Campbell Hall. In 2010, the Afrikan Student Union, working in conjunction with the Academic Advancement Program, advocated for the creation of the Carter-Huggins memorial stone discussed in the previous section. In her seminal work Uses of Heritage, Laurajane Smith argues that what people do with heritage sites—from designation to candlelight vigils—is arguably more significant than the sites themselves. The memory work done at Campbell Hall is a perfect example of this.

In 2014, the Afrikan Student Union held a panel along with its annual vigil. Current students exchanged ideas with colleagues and family members of Huggins and Carter about the status of Black people in general and Black students in particular. A central issue was the fact that UCLA still did not have a standalone African American Studies Department, which the Faculty Senate voted unanimously

269 Temblador, “Memorial Honors Anniversary of Black Panther Students’ Deaths.”
270 Ibid.
272 Temblador, “Memorial Honors Anniversary of Black Panther Students’ Deaths.”
to establish three months later.\textsuperscript{273} Using this site as a place to not only work through the past trauma of the shooting itself, but also fight for the current needs of Black students, is exactly the type of heritage this thesis aims to call attention to. While designations and memorials are a useful tool for protecting places of significance, how these spaces function is equally noteworthy. Through commemorative gatherings people use places like Campbell Hall to create meaning, or, in the words of UCLA student Semaj Earl, to “recognize the history of students of color” and “ignite the fire in other people for this cause.”\textsuperscript{274}

Universities and cities around the country are beginning to reckon with difficult pasts and the often-problematic role these institutions have played in them. At the University of North Carolina, a monument to dead Confederate soldiers known as Silent Sam was illegally torn down by students in 2018.\textsuperscript{275} A memorial to Confederate General Robert E. Lee became a central gathering point for white nationalists and counter protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia during the “Unite the Right” protests in which a vehicle-ramming attack left one dead.\textsuperscript{276} Names of classrooms and colleges that glorify slaveowners are also a point of contention.\textsuperscript{277} As with the social movements in the late 1960s, it is students that are agitating for changes, and they are often meeting just as much resistance as they did decades ago.

Whether pushing for commemoration or advocating for its removal, these fights ultimately boil down to differential understandings of the past and how it should be used. Overcoming powerful forms of collective memory regarding topics like slavery or revolutionary movements is a sometimes violent, but always contentious process. Finding ways to recognize all forms of engagement with the past—from designation, to even vandalism—as pieces of the heritage process is an important step for including voices that have historically been ignored. History is reinspected and recycled with each passing moment, always affected by the perspective of the present. While uncomfortable, bringing this process onto campuses and into cities is the best way to guarantee that new perspectives on the past are not only available in books and articles.

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{273}] “Faculty Senate Unanimously Votes to Create African American Studies Department,” UCLA, accessed October 5, 2019, http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/faculty-senate-unanimously-votes-to-create-african-american-studies-department.
\item[\textsuperscript{274}] Temblador, “Memorial Honors Anniversary of Black Panther Students’ Deaths.”
\item[\textsuperscript{277}] Noah Remnick, “Yale Grapples With Ties to Slavery in Debate Over a College’s Name,” New York Times, September 11, 2015.
\end{itemize}
The New Black Panther Party

Aside from the annual gathering at UCLA, fights over how to handle the Panthers’ legacy continue throughout the country. The New Black Panther Party, regarded by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a “hate group,” claims to be the rightful descendent of the ’60s Panther platform, and openly advocates for attacking white people, Jewish people, and their children. Whether the organization deploys this rhetoric simply to attract attention is debatable. At any rate, the original Black Panther Party’s living founders vehemently disavow the group and its teachings.

The New Black Panther Party represents what can happen to an historic legacy when neglected. It can be argued that if the prevailing narrative surrounding the original Panthers did not demonize the Party for its advocacy of violence, it might be clear that this group is using their name inappropriately. While the new party seems to remain a truly fringe organization, their very existence is still a heritage issue. By advocating for underrepresented narratives—in this case, the Black Panthers as a community-serving Party, repressed by the state—those interested in heritage can build an understanding of the past that counters those who coopt it to do harm. Drawing the line on what is an acceptable amount of political violence is far outside the scope of this project. But, both the New Black Panther Party and the attack in Charlottesville demonstrate what role history plays in building all social movements, and how important heritage work is.

SoCal BPP Memory Project

Groups that hope to change how the Southern California Chapter of the Black Panthers is remembered are engaging with this past actively. Operating under the slogan “educate to liberate,” an organization of educators, students, artists, politicians, and former members of the Party are working together on a holistic “SoCal BPP Memory Project.” A conference is tentatively scheduled for December of 2019, fifty years after the LAPD attacked the Chapter’s main office. Speakers on the program’s provisional schedule include important figures like Kathleen Cleaver, Ericka Huggins, and Elaine Brown; all important party members who took on leadership roles at various points during the Party’s early years. The conference will include art exhibits with ephemera and memorabilia, panels

281 Ibid.
discussing the political climate of the late 1960s, a grocery giveaway, and free healthcare trailers. Two panels also plan to discuss conflicts between the LAPD and the Panthers, as well as a discussion of the relationship between police and Black people today.282

Conferences like this can be an important heritage tool that brings people together to work through the past. Researchers can boil down cumbersome work into short talks, delivering a bigger picture than one might receive from the prevailing narrative on the Panthers in the media. Moreover, as the original Panther members age, this form of memory work shapes what image of the Party is passed on to younger activists interested in capitalizing on their work.

Surviving members of the Chapter have also held monthly Black Panther breakfasts in the spirit of the Party’s activism around food justice.283 Wayne Pharr, one of the Panthers wounded during the raid at 4115 Central Avenue, stated that the breakfast helped former party members “maintain our camaraderie” as well as “raise funds for political prisoners and those still suffering from the effects of the state’s war against us.” Additionally, the group honors those who died for the cause and engages with “newer activists.”284 Through conferences, vigils, or breakfasts, former Panthers and their sympathizers reflect on their own version of the past and appropriate it for present gain. These forms of commemoration are an important part of memory work that counters the Panther legacy scarred by disinformation and political manipulation.

282 Ibid.
284 Ibid., 291.
Activists have also brought the memory of the Black Panthers into Los Angeles’ built environment through public art. Not surprisingly, this effort has received resistance, both from city officials and in the form of anti-Black vandalism. The murals and their reception in the city demonstrate how politically charged the memory of the Black Panthers remains today.

Near Leimert Park in South Los Angeles, a 787-foot-long wall stretches along Crenshaw Boulevard between Fiftieth Street and Fifty-Second Street. In 2002, twelve artists created “Our Mighty Contribution,” a collection of murals on Black culture spanning the entire wall. The panels depict historic events and portraits of famous Black historical figures, artists, and athletes. According to the collective, the project was completed “without any financial support or permission from the city [sic].”

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One section by muralist Enkone Goodlow depicts four Black Panthers. Three stand in their now-iconic all-black outfits with one fist raised. Centered is a take on the widely circulated photo of the Party’s Communications Secretary Kathleen Cleaver, in which she stood proudly aiming a shotgun from her hip in an apartment doorway. As a demonstration of the Party’s willingness to defend itself against police searches, this portrait has particular significance for the history of the Southern California Chapter.

Sadly, in 2018, each of the Panthers’ faces were spray painted over with a white swastika. Goodlow was particularly shocked because he claims that his portion of the mural had never been defaced during the wall’s sixteen-year history. His work, which he restored immediately, was the only section of the wall targeted. Police investigated the act of vandalism as a hate crime. The event made national news and concerned residents held a community meeting with the LAPD.

As with the heated discussions regarding Confederate memorials, this mural’s defacement represents how politically charged heritage work is and how contentious public-facing engagements with polarizing history can be. There are perturbing parallels between the destruction of Silent Sam by the students of the University of North Carolina and the defacement of Goodlow’s mural. Both are immediate acts that aim to project an alternative version of the past than that of the current memorial. While most would agree that the students have a stronger moral case for their actions, both examples demonstrate that heritage is a living discourse, reinforced daily.

Vandalism can provide insight into how different people understand the past. In the case of the hate crime on Crenshaw Boulevard, this act is disturbing evidence that ideologies like Nazism persist in America. However, the restoration of the mural and the sympathetic reactions of the press and the police are also a form of heritage maintenance that nurtured this representation of the past back to health, in the process reinforcing its meaning and significance. This site’s defacement demonstrates that holding space for the heritage of underrepresented groups is extremely important. Even as these narratives become more accepted, progress is never truly guaranteed.

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288 “Vandalism of Hyde Park Black Panthers Mural With Swastika Graffiti Investigated as Hate Crime,” KTLA.
A second mural located at 3406 11th Avenue in South Los Angeles just north of Leimert Park also handles the heritage of the Black Panthers. Working in conjunction with Judith Baca and the Social and Public Arts Resource Center (SPARC), muralist Noni Olabisi proposed her work, “To Protect and Serve,” in 1994. The Panther-themed mural features several incendiary scenes, including Huey Newton with a gun; Bobby Seale bound and gagged under court orders following his several outbursts during his trial for conspiracy and inciting a riot in Chicago; a Black Panther with a rifle saving a victim from a Ku Klux Klan lynching; and two police officers forcefully arresting a Black man. The mural also depicts the Panthers’ social services, namely their free breakfast program. On the far-right corner, excerpts from the Party’s Ten-Point Platform are listed.

Unlike most other public representations of the history of the Black Panthers in Los Angeles, this mural explicitly includes representations of white violence. Towering over Seale is the white judge who...

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ordered him to be bound and gagged during his trial. Members of the Ku Klux Klan stand in close proximity to the two white police officers, both committing acts of violence on Black men. Throughout the mural, Olabisi depicts the Panthers as righteous victims of racial violence, rather than simply aggressors. These scenes portray the Panthers’ legacy holistically, capturing the Party’s advocacy of violence and its social programs, as well as the state’s war on the organization. The mural thus avoids the reductive pitfalls that most other engagements with the Panthers suffer from.

The work was initially one of several projects that SPARC planned to complete using an endowment from the City.291 The City’s Cultural Affairs Commission—a body which reviews publicly funded art projects and is expressly forbidden from making decisions based on content—approved the mural after much contention in October of 1994.292 Soon after, however, City Council withdrew its support. Councilman Nate Holden tried to have the monument canceled and then moved, arguing that its depictions of violence in an area he deemed drug- and gang-infested were a public health risk comparable to “shouting fire in a crowded theater.”293 There is little doubt that the recent memory of the 1992 Uprising affected this concern. Eventually, the City threatened to pull all $250,000 of SPARC’s funding if the group did not drop Olabisi’s work from its package of proposed works.294 The group withdrew the project and it was later funded through private donations.295

The project was also polarizing for everyday residents. One adjacent business owner believed the Black Panthers were a fundamental aspect of Black history, while another contended that the Panthers discredited the Black community with their advocacy of violence.296 A patron named Kimberly Armstrong argued positively for the mural as protected by the First Amendment in the Los Angeles Times: “We see guns on TV . . . If Hollywood can do it, why not Crenshaw? I don’t see the big deal of putting a mural on a wall if the KKK can walk down the street and say it’s their freedom of expression.”297 Another nearby resident, Altair Bey, fifty, argued that Newton and his teachings were “so old” and that his advocacy of violence was a “concept [that] doesn’t fit with the time.”298 Particularly

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291 Riccardi, “Black Panther Mural Backers Reject Funding.”
292 Hall, “Controversial Black Panther Mural OK’d.”
294 Nicholas Riccardi, “Black Panther Mural Backers Reject Funding.”
297 Ibid.
298 Ibid.
revealing is that nearly thirty years after the Party’s creation most people maintained strident opinions on who the Panthers were and what role their memory should play in society.

Later that year, the LAPD raided the barbershop on which Olabisi was to paint the mural, confiscating small amounts of marijuana and two illegally owned weapons from customers and store owners. Baca claimed that the raid was designed by the police as a way to make the area appear dangerous and decrease support for the controversial artwork. Inspecting the political process surrounding the mural’s creation reveals how troubling the legacy of the Panthers remains. These conversations, while secondary to the work of art itself, are a substantive part of memory work. Olabisi’s mural inspired different people to voice their ideas about this past, revealing how prevailing understandings of history are reinforced and resisted through heritage.

**Conclusion: An Unclear Future**

In 2017 the City Council of Los Angeles finalized an action to erect a “permanent ceremonial sign” at the site of the LAPD’s raid on the Black Panther Party headquarters. The language of the report argues that “prior to becoming infamous for a daytime shootout,” the location “was known for providing hot meals to low-income students whose families could not afford to provide breakfast.” At the time of this project’s writing, there remains no commemorative material onsite. Nonetheless, the action taken by Council demonstrates that sympathetic activists are changing the legacy of the Black Panther Party in real time.

The alternative approaches listed above demonstrate that even when the built environment provides few visible memorials to the Panthers, much of this work continues to happen intangibly. These forms of commemoration allow those in favor of the movement to build their own understanding of the Party’s history, countering the dominant narrative produced in part by the federal government’s national vendetta against the organization. However, the fleeting nature of this heritage leaves the Panthers’ legacy vulnerable. Even in academia, the earnest reconsideration of the Black Panthers is a relatively recent development. The New Black Panther Party; the Los Angeles City Council’s blocking Olabisi’s mural funding; and the white supremacist vandalism of “Our Mighty Contribution”—each of these examples illustrates that heritage engagements with the Panthers are susceptible to pressure from a variety of interests, not just state repression. It is thus more important than ever that those

299 Hall, “Controversial Black Panther Mural OK’d.”
300 Ibid.
interested in this history inspect sites of erasure and recognize unconventional forms of memorialization while this past is reconfigured.
Chapter Four: The 1992 Uprising

For three days in the spring of 1992 Los Angeles burned. Footage from helicopters and home video cameras of beatings and torched cars put the city in the international spotlight, exposing the image of Los Angeles as a multiracial center of prosperity and sunshine as a blatant fiction. $1 billion dollars in property damage, sixty-three dead, and over 16,000 arrested attested to this.302

Despite the shock that the unrest caused worldwide, many contemporary researchers and commentators agreed that the rebellion was far from unexpected.303 Changing demographics combined with decades of federal, state, and municipal policies which gutted urban industrial economies had left people of color struggling in particular. In the early 1990s, the Black male unemployment rate in some areas of South Central Los Angeles hovered around fifty percent.304 To make matters worse, between 1965 and 1992, the state at all levels of government replaced the social safety net with “a criminal dragnet.”305 The War on Drugs was in full swing, which involved police disproportionately targeting young Black men.306 In the pointed words of journalist and native Angeleno Marc Cooper, these policy changes sent “a clear message that the only public service that would be freely offered to minority communities was a shit-kicking police department to keep the lid on.”307

The takeaway point of this case study is that while the beating of Rodney King is frequently cited as the main cause of the uprising, this narrative dismisses a broader social context of discrimination and oppression. Rather than activate sites associated with the Uprising to call attention to how systemic discrimination caused this unrest, heritage engagement with the events tepidly focuses on police brutality or completely avoids this difficult past altogether. By simplifying and avoiding this polarizing past, the municipal government can shirk responsibility for its underlying causes, many of which are

303 Rebellion, uprising, unrest, insurrection—scholars and journalists have used many words to describe what happened in Los Angeles that spring. I use these words interchangeably and opt for titling the event “The 1992 Uprising” because the word riot is often used to undermine the legitimacy of a rebellion’s grievances. Riot implies wanton violence, while uprising connotes at least some sort of social purpose.
304 James H. Johnson et al., “The Los Angeles Rebellion: A Retrospective View,” Economic Development Quarterly 6, no. 4 (November 1, 1992): 361. South Central Los Angeles has since been rebranded as South Los Angeles in an attempt to move away from media depictions of the area as inherently criminal and dangerous. I use South Central here because it was the contemporary title. When I discuss this area today, I switch to South Los Angeles.
305 Ibid., 364.
ongoing. Alternative engagements detailed at this chapter’s end show how marginalized communities counter this reductive approach by turning to exhibitions, vigils, and performances.

The Uprising: April 29-May 4, 1992

The footage of police officers striking a Black motorist fifty-six times with solid aluminum batons and tasing him twice with 50,000 volts of electricity circulated widely.308 Twenty-one officers surrounded the man, with four assailants doing the brunt of the beating.309 The motorist’s name, Rodney King, became a household one. When a majority-white jury acquitted three of the four officers on April 29, 1992, the region held its breath.310

While a crowd of protesters gathered at Parker Center, the Los Angeles Police Department’s (LAPD) headquarters downtown, Chief of Police Daryl Gates left to attend a fundraising event against a potential City amendment designed to reign in police misconduct.311 The multi-racial crowd grew and eventually became violent (Figure 4.1). By nightfall, the crowd moved through downtown, burning objects, overturning vehicles, and blocking traffic on U.S. Route 101.312 In South Central Los Angeles, at the intersection of Florence and Normandie, looting began around 6 p.m. A crowd pelted passing cars with objects, pulled motorists from their vehicles, and beat them. Most infamously, the white truck driver Reginald Denny fell victim to the protestors while a helicopter crew captured his beating on film.313

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309 Cooper, 13.
A Guatemalan immigrant and construction worker, Fidel Lopez, was also beaten and maimed. A Black reverend named Bennie Newton pulled him from the crowd to safety. One other such story also became famous, in which a Black man named Alan Williams saved Japanese American Takao Hirata from several attackers. Two police officers backed up their patrol car when Williams hailed them down for aid. They looked at Hirata bleeding on the street for approximately twenty-five seconds and left. Another Black bystander offered to take Hirata to the hospital. The LAPD continued its retreat and remained largely absent from South Central.

Over the next several days, looting and arson spread throughout the region. Years of racial tension between Korean immigrants and Black residents led the demonstrators to target over 2,000 Korean-owned businesses, about half of the total number of establishments damaged. Some business

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316 While recognizing that this was no conventional protest, I use terms like demonstrators as opposed to something like mob to call attention to the social purpose of the Uprising. Chanhaeng Lee, “Conflicts, Riots, and Korean Americans in Los Angeles, 1965–1992” (Ph.D., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2012), 183.
owners placed signs in front of their properties reading “Black owned,” in the hope that looters would spare their stores. Fires and looting spread north into Hollywood with some isolated incidents occurring in the San Fernando Valley. 317 Violent demonstrations also broke out in Pomona, Long Beach, the South Bay, and Las Vegas. The Bay Area, Atlanta, Omaha, Minneapolis, and Toronto witnessed sympathetic activity as well. 318

Figure 4.2: Building burned during the 1992 Uprising. Photo by Gary Leonard. Gary Leonard Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

Mayor Tom Bradley instituted a city-wide curfew on April 30. 319 While local police forces tended to protect areas with financial and political capital like Bunker Hill downtown and enclaves like Beverly Hills and Pasadena, city officials called on the state and federal governments for help with South Central and Koreatown, which they had essentially abandoned (Figure 4.3). 320 By May 2, the fourth day of the insurrection, the total federal troop strength in Los Angeles reached 13,500, armed with bulletproof

317 Watts, 212.
vests, automatic weapons, and Humvees. These reinforcements remained in the area until May 14.\textsuperscript{321}

What meant safety to some was further trouble for others. In one incident in Compton, a miscommunication between the LAPD and the Marines while responding to a domestic dispute led to troops firing more than two hundred rounds into a home. Luckily the man, woman, and children inside were left uninjured.\textsuperscript{322} The combined power of the federal troops and several local police agencies eventually quelled the unrest by its fifth day. Bradley lifted the curfew on May 4.\textsuperscript{323}


Many recognize the Rodney King Trial as the main cause of the Uprising, but question the legitimacy of the reaction to this grievance.\textsuperscript{324} The vignettes of violence presented here do not intend to propagate this same narrative by focusing on stories of violence, which is a reductive approach that


\textsuperscript{323} Dean E. Murphy, “Bradley Lifts Curfew Tonight.”

oftentimes demonizes people of color. However, glossing over the violent nature of this human tragedy in the name of social discourse is problematic. Theorizing about these events as a response to structural racism before addressing the pain and loss suffered by so many could be seen as disrespectful. The following sections, however, demonstrate that this violence was far from mindless. Preservationists cannot change the past pain inflicted by the rebellion, but they can guide how it is processed and understood.

**Causes and Context**

As with previous case studies, this chapter calls attention to how powerful people can dilute complex history through heritage. This section outlines some of the major causes of the 1992 Uprising to contextualize the beating of Rodney King in a larger backdrop of widespread oppression and discrimination. Mainstream heritage engagements with these events tend to gloss over this complex context by focusing heavily on the issues of police brutality and interracial conflict between Black residents and Korean immigrants in South Central.

**Police Brutality**

Standing outside of the Simi Valley courthouse where the jury delivered its acquittals to three of the four cops who beat King, filmmaker John Singleton told press that “By having this verdict, what these people done, they lit the fuse to a bomb.” Decades of rage were pent up within South Central over the brutal treatment of Black people by the police, which one could argue is a fundamental aspect of Southern California’s history. Famous sundowner municipalities like Glendale, in which the police guaranteed a beating and removal to any Black person found on the street after dark, embodied this.

In August of 1965, when police clashed with a Black motorist named Marquette Frye, the South Central neighborhood of Watts devolved into chaos. Over five days crowds caused $40 million worth of property damage. Thirty-four people died. In this context, the brutality of the police and the unrest that followed in 1992 is one bullet point on a lengthy timeline of oppression and resistance.

Contemporary researchers sympathetic to communities of color argued that “the strongly held perception in Los Angeles’ racial minority communities, at the time of the insurrection, was that the

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328 Ibid., 1.
police had no limits on what they could do to minority citizens.”

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses demonstrate that people of color had little reason to believe otherwise. Between 1986 and 1990, residents of Los Angeles filed 2,152 complaints of excessive force by the police. Only forty-two were sustained. In 1991, the City of Los Angeles paid $11.3 million in settlements to victims of police brutality. Two decades earlier, that number was $11,000. Throughout the 1980s, LAPD officers killed eighteen people though the use of chokeholds. Sixteen were Black. In 1982, Chief of Police Gates claimed that the department “may be finding that in some blacks when it [the chokehold] is applied, the veins or arteries do not open up as fast as they do in normal people.” He refused to retract the statement. There is little doubt that despite the shock the King tape caused in 1992, its contents were sadly symptomatic of systemic problems within the police.

While the problems were broad, the direct link between the Rodney King incident and the 1992 Uprising is undeniable. The tape and the acquittals that followed are cited by both the state and its opponents as the mainstay cause of the rebellion. Graffiti tags of King’s name in South Central showed that those partaking in the looting, arson, and violence were in touch with this. But, to return to the words of Singleton, chronic police brutality without legal recourse was the fuse that lit the bomb. Housed within that explosive was also frustration with decades of socioeconomic oppression that abandoned people of color in urban areas to fight amongst themselves to survive. In their article, “Some People Don’t Count” Marc Cooper and Greg Goldin argue that “What looks to the television cameras like so many mounds of rubble is, in reality, a mosaic of anger over decades of LAPD brutality, of agony over a court system that sends a black man to jail for shooting a dog while freeing a Korean shopkeeper who shot a black teenager, of frustration over an economy that no longer provides a real living, of discontent with a welfare system that punishes.” Thus, despite how frequently the relationship between Rodney King’s beating and the insurrection is discussed, this relationship is not linear.

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331 Cooper, 14.
332 Johnson et al., 359.
**Socioeconomics**

Between 1965 and 1992, both major political parties at the federal level emphatically gutted social programs and liberalized trade in an effort to make American businesses more competitive on a global scale. These policies incentivized industries to leave cities across the United States in search of cheap labor. In Southern California, unionized industrial jobs left Los Angeles’ core for places like Tijuana, while high-skill job centers developed on the suburban periphery closer to the moneyed, educated, and generally white populations. The departure of accessible decent jobs from urban centers, combined with the removal of any semblance of a social safety net, put communities of color in America’s cities in crisis.

Researchers have grounded these claims in hard data. 70,000 high-wage jobs left South Central between 1978 and 1982. At the time of the rebellion, the unemployment rate in South Central was over twenty percent, with the majority of employed residents commuting outside the area for work. Some areas held an unemployment rate for men of color aged eighteen to thirty-five at fifty percent. Simultaneously, the criminal dragnet wreaked havoc. One 1992 study from *Economic Development Quarterly* argued that “nationally, 25% of prime working-age young black males are either in prison, in jail, on probation, or otherwise connected to the criminal justice system . . . the anecdotal evidence suggests that at least 25% of the young black males in South Central Los Angeles have had a brush with the law. What are the prospects of landing a job if you have a criminal record? Incarceration breeds despair and in the employment arena, it is the scarlet letter of unemployability.”

The dragnet had impacts at both the individual and neighborhood levels. The demonization of poverty disincentivized development, which ensured South Central remained on the margins. Countywide, the ratio of residents to general stores in 1990 was 203:1. In South Central that ratio was 415:1. At the time of the unrest, forty percent of the housing stock was constructed before 1940. Testifying before the Senate Banking Committee, Congresswoman Maxine Waters went on record

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336 Farrell Jr. and Johnson Jr., 343.
337 Johnson et al., 359.
339 Farrell Jr. and Johnson Jr., 339.
340 Johnson et al., 364.
342 Hamilton, 20.
claiming that “Only 2 percent of all of BofA’s [Bank of America’s] loans were made to California’s 2.5 million African Americans.” In one year, the institution loaned only $8 million—one tenth of one percent of its mortgages—to low-income Black households. Only a handful of banks located themselves in South Central, forcing most residents to cash their paychecks at predatory check-cashing stores, whose fee rates can rise to ten percent. This de facto push of people of color away from wealth was a centuries-old practice with powerful cumulative effects: in 1991 the median net worth of Anglo households in Los Angeles was $31,904. For non-whites the median was $1,353—a ratio of one to nearly twenty-four. Considering these facts, several researchers argue that the uprising was in fact a “postmodern bread riot.”

**Race, Changing Demography, and Latasha Harlins**

This troubling economic climate arrived in conjunction with massive demographic changes. In the 1960s South Central was predominately Black. By 1992, the area was half Latinx. Moreover, following the Watts Rebellion of 1965, shop owners that were mostly Jewish moved to other areas of the city. Korean immigrants arriving mostly in the 1970s and ‘80s experienced barriers to employment and sought out small business ownership to make ends meet, locating themselves in South Central, where depressed land values made overhead cheap. These changes frustrated some longstanding Black residents of South Central, who believed Latinx newcomers were taking scarce low-skill jobs, while Korean immigrants refused to offer Black people employment or develop a relationship with the community. In one study from 1989, Black participants contended that Korean shop owners frequently watched or followed them, accused them of stealing, refused to serve them, and were generally disrespectful.

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344 Ibid., 26-27.
345 Ibid., 32.
348 Horne, 109-110.
349 Lee, iii.
Most of the friction between these two groups of people took place at one problematic battleground: liquor stores. While Korean shop owners used these businesses and their relatively low commercial rents to gain footing in their new country, many residents saw these establishments as a nuisance which increased the presence of alcoholism and acted as “magnets for other negative activities like drug dealing, public drunkenness, sales to minors, and other criminal activity.”\footnote{Erich Nakano, “Building Common Ground—The Liquor Store Controversy,” in Los Angeles—Struggles toward Multiethnic Community, ed. Edward T. Chang and Russel C. Leong (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 167.} In one article, Erich Nakano of the Little Tokyo Service Center contended that in public testimonies at municipal hearings residents of South Central regularly complained of “drug deals openly taking place in store backrooms, of children purchasing liquor, [and] of violence outside stores involving inebriated customers.”\footnote{Ibid., 168.}

While the interracial friction between Black residents, and Korean and Latinx immigrants was palpable, it is also important to note that the presence of liquor stores as a site of conflict was an issue of urban policy that a negligent municipal government left unaddressed. Supermarkets and other grocers left South Central as part of the widespread, macro-level disinvestment from Los Angeles’ industrial core discussed above. Liquor stores began replacing these uses at alarming rates, with City Hall doing little to stem the tide. Nakano reported that in 1993, in the forty-square-miles that constitute South Central, there were 17 liquor stores per square mile, versus 1.6 per square mile countywide.\footnote{Ibid., 167.}

Turning to art can provide a far more intimate perspective on this issue and its interaction with race than the data and scholarly sources cited thus far. In a scene from John Singleton’s 1991 directorial debut, Boyz n the Hood, Laurence Fishburne’s character, Furious Styles, Jr., stands in front of a billboard for a house flipping company called “Seoul to Seoul Realty.” Speaking to a group of several interested residents, he Accuses the government of purposely devaluing property in South Central through land use policy at the expense of longtime residents: “Why is it that there’s a gun shop on almost every corner in this community? I’ll tell you why, for the same reason that there’s a liquor store on almost every corner in the Black community. Why? They want us to kill ourselves. You go out to Beverly Hills you don’t see that shit.”\footnote{John Singleton, Boyz n the Hood (Columbia Pictures, 1991). Art can sometimes go overlooked in scholarly work, despite its close ties with the subjects we study. I recognize that this is an unconventional choice of source, but I believe Singleton’s presentation of Black radicalism and the platform he achieved with this very popular film is noteworthy. Its timing, released less than a year before the uprising, makes its content very relevant for this project.} Through the pointed naming of the realty company and Styles’ monologue, Singleton argues that Korean immigrants played a role in a much larger system—one that pitted impoverished
people against one another and harmed communities of color obliquely through malignant land use, while the municipal government appeared innocent. The director’s stance—undoubtedly radical to some in its belief of a coordinated white conspiracy to destroy Black communities—demonstrates that the racial conflict in South Central was much more intricate than feuds between shopkeepers and drug addicts. Within this context, conflicts in liquor stores become motivated not only by race, but also economics and politics.

The murder of fifteen-year-old Latasha Harlins by a Korean liquor store owner, Soon Ja Du, embodied the racial conflict of South Central, as well as the failure of the American justice system to protect Black lives. Du owned Empire Liquor with her husband, located at the intersection of 91st Street and Figueroa Street (Figure 4.4). Harlins entered the store on March 16, 1991. She placed a bottle of orange juice in her purse and approached the counter. Du accused Harlins of attempted shoplifting. The two tussled at the counter and Harlins struck Du in the face three times. She then threw the orange juice on the counter and headed toward the store’s entrance. Du produced a handgun and shot Harlins in the back of the head once, killing her instantly. Closed circuit cameras captured grainy footage of the incident.

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355 Location and ownership was confirmed through an alteration permit from 1989, City of Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, http://ladbsdoc.lacity.org/idispublic/.
In November of 1991 a jury convicted Du of voluntary manslaughter and recommended the maximum sentence: sixteen years in prison. Trial Judge Joyce Karlin disagreed, sentencing Du with five years of probation, 400 hours of community service, and a $500 fine.\textsuperscript{357} In defending her decision, Karlin argued that “This is not a time for revenge . . . and no matter what sentence this court imposes, Mrs. Du will be punished every day for the rest of her life.”\textsuperscript{358} An appeals court upheld the sentence in April of the following year, one week before the uprising.\textsuperscript{359} Harlins’ murder and Du’s sentence are frequently cited as important factors leading up to the interracial violence that took place during the Uprising.

\textbf{Dissonant Past, Conditioned Future: Interpreting and Responding to an Uprising}

The causes listed above paint the 1992 Uprising as arguably the most contentious historical event in Los Angeles’ history. The process of rebuilding was hardly different. In the months that followed, different perspectives on the unrest itself and how best to respond further highlighted tensions between the municipality and its residents. The reform package crafted by policymakers,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{357} Dean E. Murphy, “Reiner to Seek New Sentence in Girl's Death,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, November 27, 1991.
\end{footnotesize}
known as “Rebuild L.A.,” is seen today as having had mixed success. Additionally, while the Uprising changed the LAPD permanently, its violent role in mass incarceration and the War on Drugs persisted. This section briefly analyzes these band-aid reforms and the tensions that surrounded them before inspecting several sites associated with the uprising. Ultimately, leveraging a watered-down version of this difficult history allowed the state to provide tokenistic reforms while dodging the uprising’s deepest underlying causes. This same practice of avoidance is evident in the lack of formal heritage engagement with this event, which is now nearly three decades into the past.

**Narrative Building: Riot, Uprising, and Race**

The rampant violence that took place during the Uprising made it easy for some to delegitimize the underlying social causes of the unrest, particularly regarding Black people. A narrative quickly developed in the press that depicted the main form of violence as Black rioters attacking Korean-owned stores. Other critics, however, sought to highlight how the riot was actually multicultural, and argued that the villainization of Black people during the unrest was a harmfully simplistic depiction.

A discussion of the role Latinx individuals played during the insurrection demonstrates this fact. Despite the angle that the media took in the following weeks, with both *Newsweek* and *Time* running covers of a young Black man in front of a burning building, the growing Latinx population in South Central engaged in the uprising as both “victims and vandals,” according to one *Los Angeles Times* writer. Statistics gathered since confirm this: the majority of those arrested were Latinx, and up to forty percent of the businesses damaged during the insurrection were Latinx-owned. The LAPD also abandoned its normal practice of limiting its role in questions of immigration by aiding Immigration and Naturalization Service officials during the uprising. 1,200 arrestees were undocumented. Prominent scholar on Southern California, Mike Davis, claimed in one interview that federal authorities deported

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364 Navarro, 73.

365 Ibid., 73.
between six and seven hundred people during the unrest, mostly arrested during sweeps of Macarthur Park without having been charged with any riot-related offense.\textsuperscript{366}

The role that race played during the uprising is undeniable, but the way that this component has been framed since is suspect. By concentrating on violence between Black residents and Korean immigrants the dominant narrative became simplified. In the words of Elaine Kim, “the U.S. news media played a major role in exacerbating the damage and ill will toward Korean Americans . . . by spotlighting tensions between African Americans and Koreans above all efforts to work together and as opposed to many other newsworthy events.”\textsuperscript{367} Over time, however, researchers and social critics have tried to reframe the unrest as the first multicultural riot, in response to not only police brutality but oppression and extreme poverty. This shifts the dynamic from a lateral one—Black mobs versus Korean shopkeepers—to something more vertical: people of color responding \textit{en masse} to a greater, less defined enemy of oppressive systems steeped in white supremacy. Repeatedly focusing on Rodney King and the specifically Black violence that followed the acquittal of his assailants eliminates these important components of this troubling story. By focusing on interracial conflict in South Central, attention is moved away from the role the municipality played in creating the social conditions which led to the chaos.

\textit{Police “Reform”}

The LAPD instituted several reforms after the Uprising, including sensitivity training and efforts to diversify staff. At the time of the insurrection, around 60\% of the force’s officers were white. In 2015, that number was 44\%.\textsuperscript{368} LAPD officials hoped that changing this would help the force develop a more intimate relationship with the communities they policed.

At the federal level, however, the War on Crime and the War on Drugs continued. Programs like Operation Weed and Seed—which intended to remove criminals from struggling neighborhoods while shoring up these communities with “human services encompassing prevention, treatment, and neighborhood revitalization”—did not fundamentally change the police’s role as a borderline occupational force in America’s cities.\textsuperscript{369} The burden again was placed on the community, rather than

\textsuperscript{368} “Infographic: LAPD Diversity over the Years,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, March 28, 2015.
the state, as argued by scholar of policing Max Felker-Kantor: “Although many observers had high hopes that the violence [of 1992] would lead to renewed attention to racial inequality and poverty, the dominant understanding of the uprising viewed urban problems and violent uprising as ones of individual misbehavior, poor work habits, the failure of antipoverty programs, and a lack of effort by the poor themselves.”

This meant that even when much needed investment entered South Central in an attempt to address broader systemic inequities, the movement of this money “depended on a partnership with law enforcement and the criminal justice system.” A robust police force had become such a large facet of American city management that even when responding to an uprising against police brutality, criminal justice reform remained tepid. The limited improvement of relations between the LAPD and communities of color was a direct byproduct of the narrative which focused on the relationship between Rodney King and the uprising, rather than broader systems of oppression. Carrying out reforms without fundamentally reassessing this context produced a generally myopic response from the LAPD and the larger municipal government.

**Economic Reform**

City officials also created “Rebuild L.A.,” a program to bring new investment into South Central that could “remedy the conditions of economic marginalization and decline” which caused the explosion in 1992. However, Rebuild L.A. deflected the role bad urban policy played in creating the economic conditions it hoped to fix. Rather than inspect holistically how the municipality produced these areas of disinvestment through discrimination, the program turned to partnerships with the private sector to help the market economy “correct” itself. This essentially led to the program’s failure. By relying on private interests to bring dollars to an area they had essentially abandoned decades ago, Rebuild L.A. became both difficult to monitor and ineffective, satisfying “neither those who demanded open processes nor those who demanded results in the form of economic development.”

Extreme imbalances of wealth persist throughout Los Angeles, and despite how many property owners in South Central wished to rebuild, the promise of this reform work never came to fruition. Lots made empty by arson still dot the region today. Owners continue to struggle to obtain financing to

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370 Felker-Kantor, “Managing Marginalization from Watts to Rodney King,” 418.
371 Ibid., 418.
373 Ibid., 213.
develop them, leaving them as painful reminders that even through the combined power of the public and private sector, Rebuild L.A. could not find a way to prioritize this part of the city, even after the crisis of 1992.

The central demands of the 1992 Uprising remain basically unmet. In this disagreement between the municipality and its most marginalized there is fundamental dissonance about race, equity, and justice. Rather than answer to the crisis with a thoughtful engagement with this past, these neighborhoods were offered limited reforms and asked to further rely on the same economic system which had abandoned them in recent memory. These fundamental frictions between the government and the people are unseen in this city’s engagement with this past.

Selected Sites

Figure 4.5: Map of 1992 Uprising selected sites. Note that the scale has been doubled from the other two case studies to highlight the regional impact of this event. The Simi Valley courthouse where the acquittal of Rodney King’s assailants was served lies twenty-two miles west of the site of his beating, still not visible at this scale. Map by author.
Empire Liquor (9127 S. Figueroa Street)

The site of the Latasha Harlins shooting is a non-descript stucco building in the heart of South Los Angeles. With the help of neighbors who doused several attempts of arson at the site, Empire Liquor survived the unrest. Despite the work of these bystanders, there is little doubt that the site remained contentious for some time. After Du’s business closed soon after Harlins’ murder, signs and graffiti covered the building’s façade with phrases like “Closed for Murder & Disrespect of Black People” and “Burn This Mother Down!”375 The location has since been replaced by a Numero Uno Market, a franchise of a large chain grocer. Constructed in 1962, photo evidence and permits show that the building has gone through substantial alterations, including the addition of an accessory structure in its parking lot in 2001.376 The site has no preservation protections.

376 City of Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety Records, http://ladbsdoc.lacity.org/idispublic/.
In 2005, the City of Los Angeles’ Planning Department denied a zoning permit to allow the sale of beer and wine at this location, as part of a larger effort to reduce the availability of alcohol in South Los Angeles. In their decision, they quoted a letter from the Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment, which argued that “Permitting the sale of alcohol at the site where a child was murdered [adds] insult to injury and would be indicative of very poor judgement.” While this location remains undesignated, this advocacy work from community-based organizations represents an interesting form of engagement with the past. By pushing for land use changes in the name of Harlins, this coalition is leveraging a difficult history to produce tangible benefits in the present.

The change of use from liquor store to grocer is also worth noting. As of 2015, there were 0.57 grocery stores per 10,000 residents in South Los Angeles, making it a food desert. West Los Angeles maintains a ratio nearly double that size: 1.03 per 10,000. Despite its lack of architectural merit, the shift from liquor store to grocer in this building represents a benefit to this area of the city. It is unlikely that business owners would be interested in reminding customers of a murder that took place in their store. However, some form of interpretation or public art onsite could build on the benefits this change in use is already delivering to this community.

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379 Ibid.
A 1993 article from the *Los Angeles Times* discussed the lot where police officers beat Rodney King as an “odd landmark.” “It really helps the late-night pizza delivery. All the guys know the place right off,” reported one area resident.\(^3\)\(^8\)\(^1\) Discovery Cube Los Angeles, an educational museum constructed in 2006 with hands-on exhibits for children, now stands on the site. It is undesignated and there is no information about King’s beating available there.

Activating the site, which is geographically very distant from the heart of the uprising, would be challenging, and not just because this past is polarizing. Where some might see the beginnings of a dark chapter for Los Angeles’ history, others, like Rod Dotson, see something sadly unremarkable. The mechanic was quoted in the same *Los Angeles Times* article from 1993:

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\(^{380}\) There is some dispute about the exact location of the beating, but the empty lot at the corner of Foothill Boulevard and Osborne Street is the most agreed upon.

For most black people that particular spot has no significance whatsoever because a lot of blacks I know have been manhandled by police the same way Rodney King was. The only difference was that this one was captured on videotape . . . But I could take you to a thousand other spots where black people have had their face smashed into the concrete. If you are black in this city and you are not 100% cooperative with the police, you are in serious trouble, no matter what you have done. This King thing was no different, man. It’s like trying to find a significant spot on a battlefield. Take your pick.  

Understanding how widespread circulation affects memory is an important issue in the field of heritage conservation. How can those interested in this event’s preservation call attention to its role in a larger, episodic system of oppression, particularly when many of its iterations go unnoticed? Moreover, is it possible to memorialize the Rodney King beating without pulling attention away from other important issues, such as disinvestment, municipal neglect, and the continuing beatings and murders of Black people by police in the United States? Finding ways to hold attention on a site of painful history is the first step that could be attached to a larger effort of meaningful, connective storytelling. At any rate, while these questions might not have defined answers, the current lack of engagement is troubling.

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382 ibid.
383 Famous cases in recent years include: Stephon Clark, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, and many more.
Parker Center, the now-demolished former headquarters of the LAPD, is deserving of a standalone research project. The International Style building started as an urban renewal development which demolished two blocks of downtown’s Little Tokyo district in 1954, just twelve years after the community was left permanently altered by the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. The site received its namesake from polarizing Chief of Police William H. Parker, who was famous for militarizing the LAPD and maintaining poor relations with communities of color. The building served as the LAPD’s headquarters until 2009, holding famous criminals throughout its tenure and playing a prominent role in several television dramas.

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385 “Parker Center, Home to Police Dramas Real and Fictional, Comes Nearer to Demolition,” Los Angeles Times, October 29, 2017.
386 Ibid.
Repeated pressure to demolish the site and construct different civic buildings started serious dilemmas in Los Angeles’ preservation community. The site represented so much to so many: rampant redevelopment which scarred a minority community; a testament to an efficient, yet brutal police force; and a flashpoint for the largest insurrection in American history. Despite two major efforts to designate the building, one of which reached City Council, the building never achieved Historic-Cultural Landmark status. In July of 2019, during the writing of this project, the Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering completed the demolition of Parker Center with unanimous support of City Council, who hope to build an office tower for City employees onsite.

Places like Parker Center represent a serious conundrum in heritage conservation and management. Sites of difficult history are particularly apt for demonstrating that those affected by a place’s history are not a single bloc of opinion. Falling into a developer-versus-preservationist binary comes easily, but this model is simplistic and can sometimes place preservationists out of step with community members. In other words, to complicate the matter through a pointed question: what does it mean when a white, middle-class preservationist advocates for a building a person of color sees as a testament to police brutality or the embodiment of a municipality whose civic infrastructure grows violently into their neighborhood? In these politically charged contexts, it is important that preservationists craft their approach around the idea that not every person advocating for demolition is a power-hungry politician or greedy developer. For some, sites like Parker Center may represent one out of many forms of violence repeatedly inflicted on their community. It is this friction over the past that this project hopes to highlight. While it is indeed troubling that Parker Center’s story is now lost in Los Angeles’ built environment, the conversations surrounding its future were a valuable and instructive form of heritage engagement in and of themselves.

The intersection of Florence and Normandie in South Los Angeles is widely cited as the major flashpoint of the 1992 Uprising. It was from this intersection that police retreated as angry crowds became violent following the announcement of the acquittal.\textsuperscript{389} Tom’s Liquor, a store at the intersection’s northeast corner, was one of the first businesses looted.\textsuperscript{390} It was also here that four men pulled Reginald Denny from his eighteen-wheeler and beat him while a helicopter crew circled above, filming. Fires raged here, burning both buildings and cars. Today, the site is undesignated and as non-descript as the hundreds of other wide intersections that make the grid covering Los Angeles’ flatlands.

In an article discussing a graduate studio in the \textit{Journal of Architectural Education}, landscape architect Alison Hirsch discussed how her students experimented with spaces of resistance associated

with the 1992 Uprising. Students crafted interesting design solutions that preserved the site’s past of resistance by providing spaces for demonstrations, while bringing much needed change to the area’s built environment. Still, even this exercise made clear how challenging the preservation of a painful past can be. Hirsch concisely summarized the central dilemma: “The fact that many of the sites most impacted by the unrest were the result of looting or arson rather than obvious activism complicates questions.” Analysis of other case studies in this project has revealed that in some cases the state avoids preserving a site because its story is embarrassing or could tarnish the government’s image as benevolent. The case of Florence and Normandie, however, is not so simple. Urban theorists can philosophize about how the violence that took place there was part of a street-level discourse, or a form of instant redress and resistance against an oppressive municipality—but the relationship between this discourse and the looting of stores or beating of bystanders is a muddled one. This was not conventional activism and the sections above demonstrated that these five days of violence were and still are extremely contentious, which rightfully gives those interested in memorializing this past pause.

Moreover, as previously discussed, conventional approaches to preservation may not benefit places like this site or the communities surrounding them. Designation would not automatically “restore the ethos that made these once-everyday spaces significant,” as Hirsch argues. Additionally, even an effective designation program could run the risk of further tying this already disinvested area of the city to a narrative of danger, crime, and violence. In short, calling attention to such a site haphazardly would make this sensitive situation worse. But, as time carries on, residents and visitors alike continue to lack any central place of remembrance for the events that took place at this intersection in particular and throughout the city in general.

392 Ibid., 253.
Hirsch’s students also studied an area about a mile south of Florence and Normandie near the intersection of Vermont and Manchester, where incidents of arson left behind large vacant lots. Several of these empty swaths of land remain throughout South Los Angeles today, acting as “a stubborn reminder that the repeated vows to ‘rebuild L.A.’ were never fully realized,” in the words of one Los Angeles Times writer. 393

Landowners still struggle to obtain financing for projects in South Los Angeles, making the lots a painful and extremely public reminder not only of the violence that took place there, but also the persistent lack of investment from both the public and private sectors in this area of the city. Residents complain of the lots attracting litter and people experiencing homelessness. 394 Some repurpose the

394 Ibid.
fencing surrounding the lots to display merchandise during “swap meets.” In some sense, for better or worse, these scars remain an active piece of the neighborhood, but their connection to a troubling past is far removed.

This example is listed here because it is an unconventional preservation dilemma. Here there is the threat of erasure not through demolition, but through building. Developers have attempted to deliver a glitzy, high-end shopping mall to the large lot at Vermont and Manchester, but these plans have stalled.\(^{395}\) As rents in urban areas around the world rise, it is marginalized communities that face the biggest threat of displacement and erasure. Cases like this demand that preservationists interested in maintaining a sense of place develop a toolkit that is holistic. Where development is welcome, what role might preservation play in helping bring growth to a disinvested place that is mindful of the past? Hirsch’s students experimented with this question and proposed multi-use projects that facilitated new connections between residents while offering space for public gathering. The centerpiece of these plans was increased community control.\(^{396}\) Regardless of what does eventually fill these lots, this component is crucial. In this process, a new, more inclusive form of preservation advocacy could develop—one that welcomes needed growth and helps it coalesce with the past.

**Recognizing Alternative Approaches**

The examples presented above demonstrate that formal engagement with this past is largely absent and that there is no simple way to fix this problem. Some sites suffer from blatant erasure, while others are plagued by avoidance. In each case, the issue is not necessarily that powerful people are presenting a dominant narrative in the city’s built environment, but that the government is conducting very little memory work at all. While it is easy to understand why the region struggles with calling attention to this dark chapter of its history, it is still shocking that nearly thirty years later there is no central place of remembrance for this internationally significant event. There is little risk that the uprising will be entirely forgotten, but without some form of discussion memory can fester. The next section presents some alternative engagements with this past to demonstrate how memory work continues outside of the built environment.

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\(^{396}\) Hirsch, 264.
Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992

Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 is a one-woman play that premiered at the Mark Taper Forum on March 24, 1994. The debut was performed by the playwright, Anna Deavere Smith. Smith interviewed over three hundred people and produced a script that consists of monologues pulled verbatim from these transcripts. She also included quotes from prominent politicians and government officials such as Police Chief Daryl Gates and Congresswoman Maxine Waters. Together, the monologues create a riveting form of documentary theater. The use of one actor jars the viewer from any willing suspension of disbelief, instead placing them into a position of social criticism. The compilation of monologues creates a fascinating depiction of what comprises an historic event: jumbled perspectives, vying for attention and space.

From the interviews conducted by Smith to her performance, Twilight represents a unique form of heritage engagement, in which the past is worked through, reshaped, and then delivered performatively. This structure allows Smith to provide nuance to a story that is often simplified both in the built environment and the media. What was a simple equation—the beating of Rodney King leading to five days of unrest—becomes a complex tapestry presented all at once through a single individual. In his book Performance and Activism, Kamran Afary lauds Smith’s ability to note how both explicit and implicit forms of discrimination shaped Los Angeles in the months leading up to the acquittal which sparked the rebellion: “Smith’s particular skill was in the way she captured various manifestations of racism in different sectors of society, beginning with the top—the office of the president and the U.S. Congress—and continuing down though the streets of Los Angeles.” Through a careful selection of dialogue, Smith curates a collection of experiences which presents dissonant perspectives on this event in a way that is not legible in Los Angeles’ built environment.

The Graves of Latasha Harlins and Rodney King

As demonstrated through the example of José Díaz, victim of the murder at Sleepy Lagoon, inspecting gravesites can provide insight on alternative forms of heritage engagement. The grave of Latasha Harlins is located in Santa Fe Springs in Paradise Memorial Park. In 1995, Denise Harlins, Latasha’s aunt, learned through an unofficial document that cemetery management had disturbed

398 Ibid., 167.
several hundred graves, unearthing bodies and dumping them into a dirt pile to resell burial plots. It is unclear if Latasha’s remains are onsite.

On Findagrave.com, the same digital catalog of gravesites where Díaz received commemoration, visitors have left Latasha over one thousand flowers. Many are mindful of both the circumstances surrounding her death and the mistreatment of her remains: “My heart breaks for what happened to you in life, and in death. The desecration of your grave and callous discarding of your remains saddens and infuriates me. Continued rest and divine love eternally.” “You will never, ever be forgotten. Sad shame that what happened to you is still going on now. Rest in sweet peace Latasha.” "How I would love to have you for a big sister who I could look up to and love like my very own. Rest in peace, beautiful beloved child. You are forever safe in God's loving arms.” As with José Díaz, all comments are from the last fifteen years, demonstrating a continued engagement with this past despite the disturbance of Harlins’ grave and the lack of commemoration present at the site of her murder.

In 2012, Rodney King drowned to death in his swimming pool at the age of forty-seven. An autopsy concluded that King was under the influence and dismissed the possibility of foul play. He is interred in Los Angeles at Forest Lawn Memorial Park. The base of his headstone reads “Can we all get along?,” the famous phrase he uttered with a shaky voice during a press conference at the height of the uprising. Digital visitors to King’s grave have left over four hundred flowers with comments like the following: “No one deserved what was done to you that night Mr. King, I pray that you are finally at peace.” “It’s still happening Rodney . . . We even have a racist president! [this comment, left in 2019, refers to Donald Trump]” “Your name will forever be linked to the Cry for Justice [sic], in all places, in all situations. Thank you for trying.”

Again, it is necessary to qualify these examples. While the Internet is an informal and almost hyper-public space, its openness is exactly what makes these comments intriguing. There are no admission fees or barriers to entry. Anyone around the world can create a commemoration in an instant. Moreover, the digital realm is challenging to discuss because commentary quickly becomes dated as technology changes. Still, these comments are significant acts of memory, mindful of the

401 Ibid.
contexts surrounding both King and Harlins’ lives. While it remains unclear exactly what could be done with this work, validating its existence is an important early step.

**Exhibitions**

Museum exhibitions are a key component of heritage work which are particularly useful for polarized history. They are generally more flexible than commemoration in the built environment and allow for direct interaction with everyday people. In this way, they capture the discursive nature of heritage in a way that designated sites by themselves cannot. One drawback, however, is that they are usually temporary.

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1992 Uprising, curator Tyree Boyd-Pates presented “No Justice, No Peace: L.A. 1992” at the California African American Museum.\(^{404}\) The exhibit ran from May through August and displayed the long arc of the insurrection’s history dating back to the region’s past of housing discrimination in the early twentieth century.\(^{405}\) Photos and ephemera displayed alongside substantial text juxtaposed the Uprising with information on structural racism and resistance, touching on the Zoot Suit Riots, “Bloody Christmas,” the Watts Rebellion, the murder of Latasha Harlins, and more.\(^{406}\) One critic writing for KCET described the exhibition as “a reflective space for patrons to examine the underbelly of racial tension,” that “is not conceived to make you feel warm and cozy.”\(^{407}\) At the end of the exhibition, visitors were asked, “In the midst of today’s political climate, how can we bring change to unify ourselves?”\(^{408}\) They then pinned their answers to the wall for others to read.

While the ephemeral and temporary nature of museum exhibitions is a major drawback, those interested in heritage should recognize the role that this work can play in appropriating the past. This pointedly political exhibition, which took a provocative approach to recontextualize the beating of Rodney King into a broader system of white supremacy and oppression, is exactly the type of work this project calls for. It is this nuance and richness that is frequently removed from history by static engagements with heritage that are motivated primarily by political convenience.


\(^{406}\) Ibid.

\(^{407}\) Ibid.

Finding ways to connect the management of heritage sites with the interpretive work done at other institutions is essential for engaging with pasts that are painful. Without a dedicated space in which curators can present and support their understanding of the past, important details remain only in the hands of those with time to conduct their own research. Despite the California African American Museum’s location on the northern fringe of South Los Angeles, exhibits displayed here do not enhance or maintain an historic sense of place at sites like Florence and Normandie or Vermont and Manchester. Bringing these more political, in-depth interpretations of the past outside of museums and into the city’s fabric is a real challenge that involves policymakers, public artists, and politicians. But, making provocative interpretations of the past more public and permanent than museum exhibitions is a critical step in the effort to democratize heritage, even if the attempts fail for political reasons.

Public Gatherings and Intangible Commemoration

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Uprising also brought people to into public to remember and commemorate. One such gathering took place at Florence and Normandie, in which a small group came together to share space and commemorate Rodney King, Latasha Harlins, and those who died during the unrest. Denise Harlins, aunt of Latasha Harlins, was present. The group prayed and lit several candles, placing them on the ground near a street sign, a sort of ad hoc memorial. 409

In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, Denise Harlins argued that people had forgotten the complex context that preceded the insurrection. “It’s important to remember what started it . . . Rodney King and Latasha Harlins and many social ills that was going on at the time brought April 29, 1992, about,” she contended. 410 She then connected this past with the current moment in 2017, a year in which police killed 1,100 people nationwide, arguing that “When you look at the news and social media and police brutality, it hasn’t gotten better.” 411 These quotes demonstrate that while these gatherings and any memorials they produce are momentary, they still engage with this past in a meaningful and complex way.

Today, this moment lives only in newspaper articles and the minds of those present. While both tangible and intangible forms of heritage can be linked to space—in this case the intersection of

410 Ibid.
Florence and Normandie—it is also important to recognize how other forms of heritage engage with the past. This widening of the lens of heritage management becomes particularly important when there is a prevailing lack of formal commemoration in the built environment.

Conclusion

Engagement with this past is happening outside of formal channels, but the question is whether or not this is sufficient. What is most concerning about the lackluster formal management of these sites is that the 1992 Uprising is decidedly something that the municipal government cannot sweep under the rug. Until people in power bring broad, meaningful reforms to neighborhoods like South Central throughout the country, unrest will continue to happen. In 2017, an interview from The Seattle Times quoted area resident Nathan Smith saying, “We’re just one more little slap in the face away from another one.” Eavesdroppers surrounding him in the South Central diner of M’Dears “nodded in agreement.” 412

In 2014, police killed eighteen-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and left his body exposed on the street for four hours. An uprising broke out in multiple waves after the killing itself and after a grand jury refused to indict the assailing policing officer. 413 Nearly fifty years after the Watts Riots, it seems that this explosive dynamic in America’s cities remains unchanged.

In the past, both preservationists and historians have avoided present-day issues, particularly those that were politically charged. What role might those interested in the past take on in a fight that’s happening in real time? Connecting Ferguson, 1992, Watts, and the various other fights for liberation that occur regularly in this country and beyond is an important step for helping people see a timeline rather than isolated incidents.

In his famous case for reparations published in The Atlantic, Ta-Nehisi Coates argued that “To proudly claim the veteran and disown the slaveholder is patriotism à la carte.” 414 Heritage professionals can undergird thinkers like this by holding attention on narratives of oppression and marginalization that some might wish to avoid. Effective storytelling and informative, political accounts of history are important fodder for resisting against issues that are systemic. Advocating for these sites is one piece of that process.

Chapter Five: Analysis and Recommendations

Many open-ended questions have been presented throughout this thesis. Some are purposely ambiguous, simply intended to provoke thought. I believe most of the others, however, can be answered with the following: mainstream heritage conservation tools like designation are poorly designed to address these case studies. Where memory work is taking place, it is often intangible, outside the purview of the government. The question remains, then, should this gap be bridged, and how? This chapter inspects all selected sites and alternative approaches together, highlighting how formal heritage approaches have struggled with these pasts. Other examples from around the world which face difficult history more effectively are then presented. The chapter finishes with recommendations to improve how we handle sites and stories like these case studies.
Figure 5.1: Map comparing the City of Los Angeles' Historic-Cultural Monument distribution with this project's selected sites. Map by Author.
## Selected Sites

(Shaded = Site of the Disempowered; Unshaded = Site of the Powerful)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Current Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herald Examiner Building</td>
<td>Building</td>
<td>146 W. 11\textsuperscript{th} St.</td>
<td>Under Rehabilitation</td>
<td>Arizona State Education Facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navy Armory</td>
<td>Building</td>
<td>1700 Stadium Way</td>
<td>Good Condition</td>
<td>Firefighter Training Facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleepy Lagoon</td>
<td>Site</td>
<td>5400 Lindbergh Lane</td>
<td>Unrecognizable</td>
<td>United States Navy Facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall of Justice</td>
<td>Building</td>
<td>211 W. Temple St.</td>
<td>Recently Rehabilitated</td>
<td>L.A. County Sheriff’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln Heights Jail</td>
<td>Building</td>
<td>421 N. Ave. 19</td>
<td>Fair Condition</td>
<td>Vacant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern California Chapter Headquarters</td>
<td>Site</td>
<td>4115 S. Central Ave.</td>
<td>Demolished</td>
<td>Parking Lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell Hall, UCLA</td>
<td>Building</td>
<td>UCLA Campus</td>
<td>Good Condition</td>
<td>Classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilshire Federal Building</td>
<td>Building</td>
<td>11000 Wilshire Boulevard</td>
<td>Good Condition</td>
<td>Federal Government Offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empire Liquor Site of Rodney King Beating</td>
<td>Building</td>
<td>9127 S. Figueroa St. Foothill Blvd. and Osborne St.</td>
<td>Fair Condition</td>
<td>Grocery Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker Center</td>
<td>Building</td>
<td>150 N. Los Angeles Street</td>
<td>Demolished</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersection of Florence and Normandie</td>
<td>Site</td>
<td>Florence Ave. and Normandie Ave. Throughout South Los Angeles</td>
<td>Unchanged</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lots Made Empty through Arson</td>
<td>Site</td>
<td>Throughout South Los Angeles</td>
<td>Unchanged</td>
<td>Vacant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Table compiling selected sites from all case studies. Table by author.

In the table above, sites are categorized as those associated with power (typically of the government), and those associated with the disempowered. Like most binaries, this arrangement is
simplistic and not intended to be steadfast. Florence and Normandie, for example, categorized here as a site of the disempowered, is mostly public property, but its association with state power is less palpable than at sites of civic grandeur like the Hall of Justice. And while Campbell Hall is associated with a powerful public university, the story Bunchy Carter and John Huggins’ murder is one that is attached to a political organization that was systematically disempowered by the government. Despite these limitations, these two categories proved useful for inspecting how current heritage approaches privilege certain narratives over others.

The distribution of designated landmarks throughout Los Angeles should be noted before discussing these sites specifically. The map above shows that the city’s historic core in and around downtown is dense with Historic-Cultural Monuments (Figure 5.1). This continues to the north, west, and east in neighborhoods like Hollywood, Highland Park, Koreatown, etc. But the number of designations declines steeply south of Interstate 10, where sites associated with the Black Panther Party and the 1992 Uprising are located. Further research is needed to better understand why municipal preservation policy is not finding value in South Los Angeles’ built environment, despite its longstanding role in the city’s history.

Sites of the Powerful

Inspecting designations is a good place to start, but this issue is also complicated. The Wilshire Federal Building belongs to the federal government and Sleepy Lagoon lies beyond Los Angeles’ city limits, putting these places outside the City’s preservation jurisdiction. Traditional historic preservation policy also privileges aged sites over newer ones, making buildings like the Hall of Justice and the Navy Armory more likely to receive this honor. Indeed, every site of power associated with the oldest case study, the Zoot Suit Riots, is locally designated, but not for reasons relating to this event.

Generally, the sites of powerful institutions were more likely to be designated as local landmarks for architectural rather than social reasons. As argued in previous chapters, this approach minimizes the painful narratives associated with each of these buildings, favoring instead stories about their relationship with Los Angeles’ civic expansion and their contribution to the city’s built environment. Additionally, those sites of power that remain undesignated—the Wilshire Federal Building and Parker Center—also avoid their painful pasts, through either an absence of heritage engagement or outright demolition.

Because of the fixed nature of designation, there is also little room to draw connections between historical events, let alone history and the present. This means that when places do tell stories
of the past, they are typically very limited or self-aggrandizing. The Hall of Justice, for instance, played a role in all three of the case studies presented here and will continue to be an important site in stories of resistance, repression, and disorder in the future. The long struggle to rehabilitate the building and its continued use are a testament to the power of heritage conservation policy and advocacy. But while preservationists restore its materials, the site’s underrepresented stories—like the conviction and release of those wrongly jailed for the death of José Díaz, the 4,000 protestors at the building’s steps decrying the LAPD’s actions against the Black Panther Party—remain undertold.

The Navy Armory turned firefighter training center struggles similarly. A passerby might remark at its beauty as an architectural artifact. A passionate researcher could even toil through its three-hundred-page designation to learn one version of the building’s past. Both, however, would remain ignorant to the fact that sailors departed from this base for a week with makeshift weapons to attack Mexican Americans in 1943, or that the new Special Weapons and Tactics division of the LAPD received training from marines there before conducting a violent, politically motivated raid in 1969.

These examples show that even when current approaches to heritage conservation are applied properly, the narratives they produce are lacking. The tools available to preservationists protect beautiful buildings, but typically avoid discussing the problematic institutions or oppressive actions these places can represent. Through mainstream conservation, dissonant pasts and marginalized perspectives become funneled into narratives that gloss over stories of struggle and oppression.

**Sites of the Disempowered**

In contrast, none of the sites of the disempowered listed above have been locally designated, and the reasons are somewhat clear: For the municipal government, these places are politically charged and, in some cases, downright shameful. Several of these sites have already been leveled, leaving little material to tell a story, even if the political will existed. These blank landscapes, like the burned-out lots of South Los Angeles, remain unchanged due to avoidance, rather than any concerted preservation efforts.

The lack of engagement with the sites of the disempowered exposes some major flaws in preservation. Typical approaches like designation and on-site commemoration would be a good starting point for interacting with these pasts, but the sites of the powerful discussed above demonstrate how much can be lost through that process. Imagining how these tools might handle the 1992 Uprising makes this clear: Can a designation form, stored miles away in a government office, truly capture the pain that unfolded at Florence and Normandie in a meaningful way? And would the preservation of this
particular intersection capture the regional, even national significance this event had? Similarly, it is challenging to imagine a plaque or designation at Empire Liquor doing justice to the complex social context that surrounded the murder of Latasha Harlins. But despite how many sites of significance are associated with the Uprising, this building is one of few places that fits into a standard, architecture-based preservation approach. Cases like this make clear that while designation is still a useful tool, more flexible approaches with greater community involvement are still needed.

There are also active social problems in Los Angeles that make these conservation dilemmas even more challenging. Should the lots made empty through arson in South Los Angeles be used as a tool of commemoration without addressing the discriminatory finance practices that have allowed their vacancy to persist for this long? Moreover, for residents in South Los Angeles interested in engaging with this traumatic past, commemoration at the far-removed site of Rodney King’s beating—thirty miles north of Florence and Normandie—offers little benefit, particularly for people without automobiles. Each of these case studies has demonstrated how complex histories are reduced and manipulated. But these heritage dilemmas show that even well-intended commemoration or protection could perpetuate this same problem.

Criticizing similarly tepid and avoidant models of preservation in post-war Berlin, historian Brian Ladd argued that “a recurring demand has been that the land ‘must be made to speak’ . . . But in the end someone must speak for it.” The questions posed above and throughout this thesis demonstrate that landmark designations will not provide the nuanced voice these places need. The current approaches protecting places like the Hall of Justice or the Herald Examiner Building freeze history, telling one story, oftentimes locking out marginalized perspectives in the process. Worse than a truncated story, many less grand sites have no voice whatsoever. Looking beyond buildings and materials to social practices reveals that memory work has continued, despite the overwhelming trend of avoidance and erasure surrounding these events.

At Campbell Hall, Empire Liquor, and Florence and Normandie, people have activated the past where the government refused to. Through discussion panels, vigils, and advocacy for changes in public policy, residents and activists leverage the past to create a symbiotic relationship between themselves and history. These heritage acts that are decoupled from material and space offer a voice to perspectives that have been historically repressed. But government approaches to preservation—which

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privilege buildings over social history, particularly when that history is uncomfortable—do not recognize this work and the power it offers both people and places.

These sites were selected because they illustrate how current approaches routinely miss the ephemeral, the marginalized, and the painful. Perhaps a deeply researched analysis of designation policies could eventually lead to the amendment of the documents that protect some of these sites. But how many adjustments using the current tools should be made before inspecting the tools themselves? Unless the preservation movement begins to recognize alternative engagements with the past, it is liable to continue undergirding oppressive forms of heritage.

**Alternative Approaches**

**Intangible Cultural Heritage**

In order to convey the significance of these alternative approaches, the concept of intangible heritage must be revisited. Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) generally sits in opposition to the sites, monuments, and architectural wonders that Western nations have historically valued and protected. It can take many forms, including knowledge, skills, oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, music, dance, and cuisine. Long unrecognized and even discredited in Western heritage management, it was only in 2003 that UNESCO produced a guiding piece of legislation for the management of ICH. Over time, it gained widespread support, with 178 nations accepting the treaty today.

The United States abstained from the initial vote. This became especially problematic in 2011, when UNESCO accepted Palestine as a member of its organization. It is against the law in the United States for the government to pay dues to United Nations organizations that hold Palestinian membership. After coming in and out of UNESCO and claiming to advocate for ICH in other ways, the federal government still has not ratified the document.

This is especially troubling because this thesis has shown that where government heritage engagement is lacking, marginalized groups have carried out memory work through less tangible practices. Most of the heritage acts in the table below do not require buildings and sites to conduct their

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416 For a more holistic definition, see: Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa, eds., Intangible Heritage (London: Routledge, 2009).
418 Ibid.
420 “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.”
work. They also generally come from the grassroots and are independent of the government. Three categories have been applied under the “Type” column: performative heritage, digital heritage, and public art. Each of these approaches helps people maintain a fluid relationship with history, making them better suited to accommodate marginalized perspectives than mainstream preservation approaches used by the government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zoot Suit Riots (1943)</th>
<th>Alternative Heritage Approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zoot Suit Culture and Luis Valdez’s Play</td>
<td>Performative Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findagrave.com: José Díaz</td>
<td>Digital Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mural: “The Great Wall of Los Angeles”</td>
<td>Public Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative History Tours</td>
<td>Performative Heritage</td>
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</tbody>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Gatherings (Campbell Hall)</td>
<td>Performative Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Black Panther Party</td>
<td>Performative Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference (SoCal BPP Memory Project)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mural: “Our Mighty Contribution”</td>
<td>Public Art</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mural: “To Protect and Serve”</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1992 Uprising</th>
<th>Alternative Heritage Approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992</td>
<td>Performative Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findagrave.com: Latasha Harlins and Rodney King</td>
<td>Digital Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum Exhibitions</td>
<td>Performative Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Gatherings (Florence and Normandie)</td>
<td>Performative Heritage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Table compiling alternative heritage approaches from all case studies. Table by author.
Performative Heritage

People engage in memory work through different kinds of performance. I use the term “performative” here not to imply falsehood or disingenuity, but to highlight how actions and behaviors shape our relationship with the past as much as places do. By visiting exhibitions, organizing politically, and attending tours, commemorative gatherings, or research conferences, people come together to shape and discuss their relationship with the past. These interactions allow for the development of memory in a fluid and discursive setting, oftentimes outside the purview of any government institutions.

Because performance-based heritage embraces subjectivity, it is free to include voices that designations often overlook. Projects like the SoCal BPP Memory Project and the commemoration of Bunchy Carter and John Huggins at UCLA offer a degree of nuance and discussion that slower, policy-based approaches struggle to capture. Tours and museum exhibitions can accommodate longer historical arcs and provide important contextual information to show how stories of urban uprising relate to topics like police brutality, deindustrialization, and housing discrimination. Performance art pieces interested in the past can also anchor history in engaging storytelling and first-hand perspectives, like in the interview-based script of Twilight. In short, these approaches embrace the dissonance and complexity that mainstream heritage typically avoids.

Digital Heritage

Digital heritage is an intriguing form of ICH because it relies less on professional expertise. Websites like Findagrave.com are becoming more accessible every day and require little training to use. These forums are open and disengaged from political bureaucracies, making them suitable for discussing politically charged history with less fear of backlash. The outpouring of digital commemoration for people like José Díaz, who died long before the Internet existed, demonstrates the power and persistence of collective memory. Digital heritage can provide an outlet to process painful events like this when no such space exists in a city physically.

Additionally, digital engagements with the past are independent of space and move quickly. When a person can commemorate a gravesite from anywhere in the world, the eighteen miles between the site of Rodney King’s beating and the cemetery he rests in become less impactful. Websites can also deliver information rapidly to everyday people, while attaching the important background research and context that on-site commemorations usually lack. Such digital displays can be revisited, cost free, which lessens the risk of viewer fatigue that text-heavy exhibitions cause. Examples are discussed later which demonstrate how these new forms tell rich and accessible stories, without glossing over important
connections like those between Watts and Ferguson, or between the raids on the Southern California Chapter of the Black Panther Party, and its analogue in Chicago.

Public Art

Public art is the most place-based, tangible approach analyzed here. For that reason, it is particularly suited to bring underrepresented perspectives on the past to the built environment, particularly in cases where significant sites have been demolished. As opposed to digital or performative heritage, public art does not rely on the interest of heritage consumers—no tickets are necessary, and viewers are not required to seek out a particular website. Murals and monuments simply exist in public view, giving any person nearby an opportunity to consider the past, even if only for a moment.

The mural projects studied in this thesis demonstrate that there is a desire from the grassroots to enshrine difficult history in the built environment, but that navigating this process is challenging. Public officials may withhold funding from politically charged projects. Maintenance and vandalism are also an issue. These hurdles demonstrate, however, that art in the public sphere can spark different discussions than landmark designation. Even a holistically researched designation form which accounts for oppressed perspectives will be an unwieldy document, usually stored somewhere other than the site itself. But through both restoring “Our Mighty Contribution” and debating “To Protect and Serve,” everyday residents and city officials grappled with how best to represent history. If the goal of heritage is to shape how people understand their pasts, this shows that public art plays as much of a role in this process as preserving buildings does.

Case Studies in Facing Difficult History

These grassroots actions build alternative understandings of the past and directly address some of the preservation movement’s biggest shortcomings. Acknowledging their importance, as well as the significance of all ICH, could be a critical step in moving this field away from its role as an institution of the white and monied. While a haphazard attempt by governments to engage these forms of heritage could do more harm than good, the current paradigm of avoidance also has serious implications for disempowered people throughout the United States. The following section discusses some examples outside of Los Angeles where activists and preservation professionals are engaging with difficult history more purposefully.
Monuments, Guerilla Memorialization, and Vandalism

Monuments are sites of heritage contention. They project particular versions of history into public space and tell a story about what a society chooses to remember. Unfortunately, they are often coopted by powerful institutions, and used to present a very narrow perspective on history.

A monument on display during the writing of this thesis in Times Square in New York City pushes the boundaries of what a memorial can look like and commemorate. Kehinde Wiley’s bronze sculpture, “Rumors of War,” depicts a young Black man with dreadlocks, dressed casually in a hoodie and jeans, atop a warhorse. At twenty-seven feet tall, its form is identical to many depictions of famous war heroes in American history. Acquired by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the sculpture will be displayed in front of the institution in the City of Richmond after its stay in New York. Located a short walk away from Monument Avenue, a boulevard lined with several memorials to veterans and politicians of the Confederacy, this statue’s presentation will be a stark departure from the area’s historic use.

This confrontational heritage decision by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts accomplishes multiple goals. For one, it memorializes Black people in a space they were historically excluded from. Moreover, its depiction of a present-day figure in such a historical format subverts how monuments normally function. “Rumors of War” makes clear that the boundary between the past and present is flexible and permeable. Its juxtaposition gives viewers pause about the supposed fixedness of history and calls attention to what a small sliver of the past places like Monument Avenue memorialize.

The Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama also brings underrepresented stories to the forefront by facing some aspects of the United States’ dark racial history. The memorial includes artworks, sculptures, and interpretive panels on the enslavement and lynching of Black people. The space does not shy away from connections with the present: the museum’s broad arc connects this historic pain with the ongoing issue of mass incarceration. The National Memorial for Peace and Justice is also located on site. Opened on April 26, 2018, it is the first memorial dedicated to racial violence against Black people in the United States. Documented through research by the Economic Justice Initiative, the memorial dwarfs viewers with over eight hundred suspended steel rectangles, each representing a county where a lynching has taken place (Figure 5.2).

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Other less stately examples of confrontational heritage engagement also exist. In acts of what cultural studies professor Alan Rice calls “guerrilla memorialization,” activists in Bristol, England repeatedly defaced a statue of Richard Colston, a slave trader. From the 1990s onward people have splattered the statue with red paint, placed a ball and chain around its feet, and laid figures resembling dead bodies on the ground surrounding the monument. The acts of vandalism inspired the City to rewrite the plaque which glorified Colston, dedicated in 1895. This process has met intense pushback and remains active at the time of writing this thesis.

These examples show that people at various levels of power can disrupt heritage management by making difficult history more prominent. The idea of every person projecting their own version of the past into the public realm is intimidating, even anarchic. The repeated vandalization of a memorial to fourteen-year-old lynching victim Emmet Till shows this. The marker has been riddled with bullets

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several times, once by three white students from the University of Mississippi, who even took a photo proudly standing next to their work. It has since been bulletproofed.426

Confrontational heritage acts, whether they come from everyday people or powerful institutions, force us to have uncomfortable conversations we might otherwise avoid. They may debunk a dearly held narrative, complicate the legacy of an important figure, or, in the case of Till, even provide a disheartening truth about present-day society. Each circumstance makes a strong case for the importance of confronting painful history, rather than burying it.

Preserving Avoidance

When history is avoided, however, these periods of inaction can become shameful in and of themselves. Post-war Germany struggled similarly into the 1980s and 90s, with some sites associated with Nazi history being literally buried following demolition. Once heritage officials do confront challenging history, they must make careful decisions about both these pasts and their repression.

The Topography of Terror Museum stands on the site of the Main Security Office of the SS—Nazi Germany’s military organization responsible for managing much of the country’s political violence, including the Holocaust. Destroyed by Allied bombing and then buried, it was not until the mid-1980s that government officials rediscovered the security office’s foundations, along with underground prison cells.427 The museum today holds exhibitions on various topics of Nazi history. The excavated trenches remain open, with the original building’s footprint displayed below grade as a glaring reminder that this past remained untold for decades (Figure 5.3). The sites discussed in this thesis may not offer such a striking visual metaphor. But, without a well thought out approach like that of The Topography of Terror Museum, a decades-late memorial could simply replace one avoided chapter of history with another.

427 Ladd, 160-165.
Activating Extant Sites

The Slave Dwelling Project is a nationwide undertaking focused on preserving and activating the quarters of enslaved people in the United States. Through living history programs, talks, and technical assistance, this organization helps bring these underrepresented sites the prominence on plantations they deserve. The group has also created an overnight stay program, which brings visitors together at museums and plantation houses to sleep in the dwellings overnight. Intangible actions like these reactivate voiceless places that laid dormant in heritage narratives. Bringing life to neglected or even demolished sites through such approaches could prove useful for the case studies discussed here.

Publications, Digital Heritage, and Advocacy

Other heritage approaches can directly educate people on difficult history and its memorialization. *A People’s Guide to Los Angeles* from Laura Pulido, Laura Barraclough, and Wendy Cheng compiles over one hundred alternative tourist sites that involve stories of resistance and oppression. The authors group these both geographically and thematically, while recommending tours for topics like “Radical People of Color Movements” or “New Labor Organizing.” In a city frequently experienced via moving vehicle, these important sites are easy to bypass, even if they are well marked. Publications like this place alternative heritage engagements in the pocket of any interested party and provide an accessible historical background to visitors and residents of Los Angeles, a city that usually does not present its rich history on its surface.

*Place Matters* is a digital project with similar aims based in New York City. The organization surveys community members for information on places they deem significant. These sites are then catalogued into a “census” and mapped online. The organization also builds on this work in the policy arena by advocating for “place marking, asset mapping, broadening the historical record to include previously overlooked narratives, [and] historic preservation.”

Public-facing digital projects can also turn historical research into a full-blown heritage engagement. “Mapping Violence” tells the story of lynchings against Mexican Americans in Texas in the early twentieth century. Dots on a map link to further information on the murders, including a date and the name of the victims. By relying on these intimate pieces of information rather than overwhelming statistics, this approach is both provocative and personal. Overlaying the dots on a modern map also quickly demonstrates how current places and towns relate to these events, even if their built environments do not tell the story of this connection. Organizers of the project hope to leverage its digital forum to their advantage by allowing users to share information on other similar events. These steps would be less feasible without digital heritage’s independence from physical sites.

Other organizations shape heritage through advocacy work. The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience pushes for the protection of sites of difficult history and connects them with present-day

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432 “Mapping Violence.”

Another organization, The Humanities Action Lab, connects people with suppressed but urgent memory projects on contentious issues like incarceration, neo-imperialism, and environmental justice. Their Guantanamo Public Memory Project brought together hundreds of students to research the United States’ detention camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The group then worked with six hundred community stakeholders of “Haitian refugees, former service people, and attorneys representing current detainees” to create an exhibit.\footnote{“About,” Humanities Action Lab, accessed October 27, 2019, \url{https://www.humanitiesactionlab.org/about}.} The project traveled to eighteen cities, accessing more than 500,000 people.\footnote{Ibid.} The organizers also linked the project with a web platform, archive, and collection of interviews. With Donald Trump’s signing of an Executive Order in 2018 to keep this prison open indefinitely, this is a clear case of how important heritage-based engagements with active and painful issues are.\footnote{“Presidential Executive Order on Protecting America Through Lawful Detention of Terrorists,” The White House, accessed October 27, 2019, \url{https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-executive-order-protecting-america-lawful-detention-terrorists/}.}

These examples are all unique. The purpose of this thesis is not to recommend a generic approach for handling the legacy of the Zoot Suit Riots, the Black Panther Party, and the 1992 Uprising. Instead, this project has demonstrated how insufficient professional heritage management can be at engaging with such pasts. But the intangible memory work happening in Los Angeles and other successful examples of facing difficult history from around the world show that this can change.

**Recommendations**

This short list of policy recommendations provides some techniques for improving how we interact with sites of difficult history and support those grassroots movements that engage with these pasts independently from the government.

**Begin Recognizing and Supporting Intangible Heritage**

By its very nature, intangible cultural heritage is challenging to track and protect. Scholars have criticized organizations like UNESCO for relying on designation policies which tend to propagate the same problems that landmarking does—fixing sites, attracting damaging tourism, or not recognizing...
certain stories and perspectives. Avoiding this pitfall will require massive amounts of research and public participation.

San Francisco has developed policies that protect ICH through cultural districts which highlight the city’s queer and ethnic histories. The city government also provides rent relief to historic small businesses that may otherwise be priced out by its tumultuous real estate market. This “Legacy Business” program was funded through a tax voters imposed on themselves for this express purpose.

These programs are very new and their potential for handling challenging history is unknown. But this thesis has demonstrated that intangible memory work is an important realm where alternative narratives are maintained and passed on. As programs like San Francisco’s evolve, it may become clear that they are better suited for protecting businesses than intangible forms of commemoration. Nonetheless, opening the door to policies which protect not only buildings, but also the intangible relationships people have with their neighborhoods, could be an important early step for recognizing the memory work already being done from the grassroots for these case studies.

“Sites of Contention” Designation

One major cause for government avoidance of painful pasts is that they are politically charged. An open recognition of these unresolved histories could cost a politician votes or harm a policymaker’s reputation. In this context, the desire for stability causes repression.

Florence and Normandie, for example, is an intersection rife with tension between races, economic classes, as well as the government and the governed. Despite this, there are few who would argue that this place is not significant to this country’s history. A specific preservation policy for “sites of contention” could provide recognition of past pain without glorifying any particular perspective. Simply acknowledging that something uncomfortable occurred here could be a useful step for starting more contentious discussions about the preservation of these stories.

The specifics of this designation and its protections would need honing over time. In cases like Florence and Normandie, which is largely open space, safeguarding material could be a lower priority. But in other cases, like the Navy Armory, or the Hall of Justice, adding a recognition of conflict to an existing landmark could show that the narratives at heritage sites are not universal, and that it is possible to face painful history while still celebrating beautiful pieces of architecture.

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Ibid.
Incentivizing Alternative Heritage Engagement

If the political will exists, incentives for protecting sites of painful history are also useful. Texas began an “Undertold Marker” initiative in 2006, which levies a fee against all other state landmark designation applications and pools that money to fund projects for underrepresented stories.\textsuperscript{440} Each year the Historical Commission judges applicants on their ability to address “gaps in [the state’s] historical marker program” and the present endangerment of the property, site, or topic.\textsuperscript{441} The Commission has accepted dozens of designations that call attention to important historical figures of color, as well as events like sit-ins, desegregation in schools, migrations, and massacres. The marker locations are logged digitally on a map accessible through the Commission’s website.\textsuperscript{442} While this program may struggle with the same limitations as landmark designation, it still demonstrates that overt efforts to bring these stories to prominence can be successful.

Historic context statements also provide useful background on particular themes and demographics. These reports distill complex research for professionals in preservation, students, and everyday people. The City of Los Angeles has already begun this work, producing documents that cover the history of women, queer people, and various ethnic groups.\textsuperscript{443} By providing this information to policymakers, curators, and grassroots advocates simultaneously, these public reports push for changes in preservation from multiple angles. A statement on painful history would be contentious to produce but could later guide heritage efforts toward case studies like those analyzed here, or help existing institutions revise their interpretive materials.

\textsuperscript{441} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{442} Ibid.
Conclusion

Changing dominant narratives and supporting grassroots heritage practices requires both an expansion of what is considered heritage and how this construct is managed. The significance of ICH is slowly becoming apparent in Western heritage management. But what role these knowledges, skills, and practices play in our urban environments is poorly understood. Neighborhoods that lack the resources to build and maintain monumental historic sites are likely still rich with intangible practices unrecognized by current preservation approaches. In what other ways can we help people bring attention to pasts that matter to them, even in the absence of a grand building? More studies are needed to better understand what role governments can play in aiding this process without stifling it. This is a particularly important question when discussing how best to memorialize histories in which the government has done great harm.

Bringing attention to underrepresented narratives helps demonstrate who is entitled to space in the city. But if gentrification pushes these same groups out of their homes, then this effort is less meaningful. As capital continues flooding into historically disinvested communities, preservationists should work to not only protect historic fabric but prevent the displacement of long-time residents. Research on the intersection between heritage management and neighborhood change will be a critical discussion for this discipline in the coming decades, with important implications for engaging with sites of marginalized or painful history.

The intention of this thesis was to criticize how we typically approach difficult history in preservation and to acknowledge the existence of alternatives. Each of the grassroots approaches discussed here is deserving of its own research. Future projects that work with suppressed history should meet everyday people where they conduct their memory work through legitimate community engagement. Non-institutionalized sources like oral histories should be used whenever possible and taken seriously when presented in other forms of heritage management like designations. Connecting these small heritage actors with greater resources—if that is desired—requires more intimate engagement and research methods than conducted in this thesis.

Beyond academic projects, leveraging heritage policy to respond to urban challenges like housing crises, gentrification, climate change, and resilience will also require robust and meaningful community engagement. The past has shown that a lack of public participation leads to unnecessary demolitions and erasure. If this is not corrected, we will continue unsustainably destroying resources that are important for maintaining stories like those discussed in these case studies.
Lastly, aside from changing how this field functions, researchers and policymakers should hope to change how it looks. More research on how to continue improving hiring practices, diversity scholarships, and public participation will improve this field immeasurably. The best way to ensure these stories are told properly is to employ the people most affected by them and allow them to speak for themselves.

History can be ignored, manipulated, or embraced. Regardless of which approach is taken, the past affects every policy decision we make in ways that we will never completely understand. Just like the politicians and heritage professionals who avoided these case studies, preservationists and planners today hope to shape our cities for the benefit of tomorrow. And rightfully so: the story we tell through our cities—in buildings, books, and art—is one of the greatest gifts we can pass on. But how we handle pain speaks just as much to our moment’s legacy as any glittering urban environment we construct or preserve. Finding the tools to tell that story as fully as possible is what this thesis asks. We may never attain the ideal, but we can certainly do better than we are now.
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