

# VISUALIZING NARRATIVES OF ART AS GENTRIFICATION IN THE “ARTWASHING” OF BOYLE HEIGHTS

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In Boyle Heights, a predominantly Chicana, working class, and renter neighborhood in Los Angeles, anti-gentrification activists have been rallying against “artwashing”—the appearance of art galleries and associated creative class consumption as a threat of gentrification. These concerns originate from the opening of several commercial art galleries in the neighborhood’s industrial outskirts adjacent to the “Arts District” in Downtown LA. The case of “artwashing” protest in Boyle Heights raises a contestation over the political and spatial possibilities of an art world in an existing urban neighborhood. With particular attention to these implications, this paper investigates the following critical questions: How is the relationship between art and gentrification visualized in Boyle Heights? What narrative of gentrification is represented in strategies of its resistance? This research paper will consider “artwashing” in Boyle Heights under particular social theories and geographic relations contributing to the rise of multiple forms of resistance, from neighborhood art projects capturing displacement to anti-“artwashing” organizations targeting the art galleries in the neighborhood. The investigation concludes by suggesting additional research on accounts of “artwashing” protests and urban development in the “Arts District” and encouraging the practice of incorporating new forms of urban development into new forms of spatial depictions and visual activism against gentrification.

## Introduction: Street Fights

On an early morning in November 2016, Los Angeles Police Department arrived at three adjacent art galleries in the predominantly working class, Chicana neighborhood of Boyle Heights for the reported vandalism of “Fuck White Art” sprayed over the Nicodim Gallery storefront (see figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The explicit racial element of this message elevated the charges from vandalism to a hate crime investigation and resulted in the charges

<sup>1</sup> Rory Carroll, “‘Anti-White’ graffiti in gentrifying LA neighborhood sparks hate crime debate.” *The Guardian*, November, 6th, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/04/boyle-heights-art-gallery-vandalism-hate-crime-gentrification>.

being dropped by the gallery owner as if to avoid the discomfort of addressing race-related controversies.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the racial targeting of the message gains a situational meaning when considering its location on an imagined battleground of the gentrification taking place on the industrial outskirts of Boyle Heights via a series of blue-chip art gallery opening in “abandoned warehouses”.<sup>3</sup> Particularly, it exposes the emerging art galleries as racially and economically threatening for a dissenting group of neighborhood residents due to the threat of gentrification from creative industries through recent efforts of revitalizing Boyle Heights.<sup>4</sup>

This climactic moment served as a critical instance of political resistance over a “gallery row” formed on the industrial outskirts of Boyle Heights over the span of 2015 to 2018.<sup>5</sup> Within this timeframe, approximately 15 galleries and art spaces all opened or relocated in vacant warehouses in this industrial zone on the border of Boyle Heights and the Downtown LA “Arts District.”<sup>6</sup> As gentrification loomed over this neighborhood throughout the urban revitalization of Los Angeles, the “gallery row” signifies the cultural shifts that pose a threat of gentrification for the region. Specifically, activists labeled this “gallery row” as “artwashing”—gentrification through the means of artistic production—of the neighborhood to formulate a novel narrative in which the art galleries represented the outside interests of gentrification rather than current Boyle Heights residents.<sup>7</sup> Through locating the origins of “art-as-gentrification” in the collectives of galleries, rogue acts of hostile defiance eventually made way for organized coalitions of anti-“artwashing” activism. These activists, through their act of protest, also contributed towards reformulating the historic construction of art and gentrification. Traditionally, the history of art and gentrification proceeds as follows: it begins with struggling artists forming art communities, after which commercial galleries open in association to the arts scene and commodify the artistic lifestyle for affluent visitors, bringing in businesses representing the interests of gallery visitors, commodifying real estate, and ultimately displacing both artists and the low income communities through rising rent.<sup>8</sup> With its basis fixated on the industry of galleries rather than the identity of artists, the perceived formulation of art and gentrification in Boyle Heights promotes a temporal urgency to resist the proliferation of new establishments and remove the social licence of the “creative” industry by framing the art galleries as material and cultural threats towards an existing community.

Historically, the predominant Chicana working class in Boyle Heights were based in this neighborhood through redlining and racially restrictive housing covenants that systematically concentrated Chicana working class into the space by structurally barring groups of people from moving towards the suburbs in the age of white flight.<sup>9</sup> Holding the highest rate of affordable housing in the country by the mid 20th century, Boyle Heights holds a historic legacy of being predominantly working class.<sup>10</sup> Against this legal discrimination and economic hardship, the Boyle Heights community built a local identity enriched in a shared Chicana heritage and the particular culture of resistance as a counter-public against adversity from the overall city policies that disproportionately target their neighborhood—police aggression, freeway development, and (most recently) gentrification.<sup>11</sup>

2 Matt Stromberger, “Boyle Heights Activists Question LAPDs hate crime charge”, Hyperallergic, December 2nd, 2017. <https://hyperallergic.com/342364/boyle-heights-activists-question-lapds-hate-crime-charge/>

3 Dennis Romero, “Boyle Heights Anti-Gentrification Graffiti investigated as a possible hate crime”, LA Weekly, November 4th, 2016. <https://www.laweekly.com/news/boyle-heights-anti-gentrification-graffiti-investigated-as-possible-hate-crime-7575417>

4 Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object in Contemporary Art*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003) p. 22

5 Jemina Augie, “Gentrification and the Arrival of Art Galleries in Boyle Heights: Is there a correlation?”, Urbanize LA, November 29th, 2017.

6 Ibid.

7 Jillian Billard, “Art & Gentrification: What is Artwashing and What Are Galleries Doing to Confront it?”, Art Space, November 30rd, 2017. [https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art\\_101/in\\_depth/art-gentrification-what-is-artwashing-and-what-are-galleries-doing-to-resist-it-55124](https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/in_depth/art-gentrification-what-is-artwashing-and-what-are-galleries-doing-to-resist-it-55124)

8 Peter Moskowitz, “What Role Do Artists Play in Gentrification?” Artsy, September 11th, 2017. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-role-artists-play-gentrification>

9 Ryan Reft, “The Shifting Cultures of Multiracial Boyle Heights”, KCET, August 9th, 2013. <https://www.kcet.org/history-society/the-shifting-cultures-of-multiracial-boyle-heights>

10 Ibid.

11 Gilbert Estrada, “The Historical Roots of Gentrification in Boyle Heights”, KCET, September 13th 2017. <https://www.kcet.org/shows/city-rising/the-historical-roots-of-gentrification-in-boyle-heights>

In this regard, the anti-“artwashing” activists call upon the historic character and the legacy of the neighborhood to imagine and animate the community that is defended against the dominant culture and industries in Los Angeles. By the 1970s, Boyle Heights had served as a predominantly generational neighborhood and claimed with it a notion of legacy and tradition. This was maintained through the heightened sense of community in shared history and space through cultural expressions ranging from community murals, markets, restaurants, and gatherings ranging from mariachi performances to skateboarding to organized protests at the central mariachi plaza.<sup>12</sup> In terms of demographics, Boyle Heights currently is predominantly Latino (94%), Chicana (87%), low household income for the city and country (average annual salary of \$33,000), and upwards of 75% renters.<sup>13</sup> In comparison, the art world’s demographic is considerably whiter and more affluent than the general demographic.<sup>14</sup>

In essence, the neighborhood’s common socioeconomic and cultural identities in addition to its history of resistance towards these oppressive policies of urban development make the issue of gentrification both economic in housing and cultural in consumption and industry. As the neighborhood was in the forefront of Chicana civil rights movements, the significance of protestors resisting “artwashing” in Boyle Heights builds on an existing history of resistance towards oppressive urban development by reasserting the ownership of space and identity within this contemporary economic struggle. Locally, the economic and cultural livelihoods—taking issues not only with shifts in housing but also shifts in consumption and lifestyle—take on gentrification as a shift of cultural industries away from representing the material conditions of an existing community.

For activists, the proliferation of art galleries worked under an imagination of this neighborhood as an opportunity for artists and creative industries who consider it a “discovery” of empty warehouses—neglecting its external proximity and relations to neighboring affordable housing complexes in Pico Gardens and its replacement of working class industries—so that the art world of the neighboring “Arts District” expanded over.<sup>15</sup> Multiple anti-gentrification activists—Union De Vecinos, Defend Boyle Heights (DBH), community artists, and members of the LA Tenants Union—joined forces to form Boyle Heights Against Artwashing and Displacement (BHAAAD) in mid-2016. As a coalition, the group aimed at connecting the threat of gentrification to the outsider qualities of the galleries that culturally sanitized Boyle Heights’ neighborhood to appeal to outsiders of the neighborhood from different socio-economic classes. For activists, the advent of galleries signifies the preliminary state of increasing rent and exploiting its current residents.

The coalition of anti-“artwashing” activists aims to demystify the power operations of art being “depoliticized”, as they suggest commercial art is a tool to import the artistic culture of revitalization and colonize an existing neighborhood’s culture and space. Asserting the real estate speculation under an imperialistic trajectory raised intense and aggressive activism to counter the increase in art galleries as “cancer” cells of gentrification to the Boyle Heights community—a foreign invasion within the livelihood of the community and its material survival which must be both diagnosed as malignant and immediately treated with removal to stop its spread.<sup>16</sup> In this analogy, activists frame these galleries as increasingly residing in the space through invasion while unwelcomely destroying its very livelihood. To extend the analogy to its treatment, the response would be to remove the galleries before a process of gentrification spreads further. On a broader level, this poignant analogy provokes a temporality and narrative in which gentrification is a broader, threatening process—one which requires agency to counter it—of critical moments that signify local shifts in culture and industry rather than an inevitable trajectory of real estate. Anti-gentrification activism targeting galleries indicates an existing community that is both symbolically and materially disrupted by proliferation of art galleries, which must be removed to eliminate the threat of gentrification. In this regard, the rhetoric of

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12 Erwin Recinos, “A New Mural for Boyle Heights Commemorates the Past and Comments on the Gentrification of today” LA Taco, November 8th, 2018. <https://www.lataco.com/galo-robleto-streetscapers-mural/>

13 “Mapping LA: Boyle Heights Profile.” The Los Angeles Times. N.d. <http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/neighborhood/boyle-heights/>.

14 Hakim Bishara, “A Study Says High Family Income Significantly Increases Likelihood of Becoming Artist” <https://hyperallergic.com/497270/economic-study-artists/>

15 Melena Ryzik “New Galleries Enjoy a Los Angeles Advantage: Space” The New York Times, September 16th, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/17/arts/design/new-art-galleries-enjoy-a-los-angeles-advantage-space.html>

16 Saul Gonzalez, “In this Neighborhood, Protest Art is a Verb”, National Public Radio, June 27th, 2017.

“Artwashing” concerns itself primarily with the elitism of art institutions’ commercial activities serving outside interests: bringing in more and more affluent investors into the space until the increase in property value erases the existing community through displacement.

Of course, this activism omits a critical historical step in gentrification requiring the migration and eventual displacement of struggling artists at the very early stages of an inevitable cycle in which most artists are priced out from their living spaces as well.<sup>17</sup> Pointing at its neighboring Downtown Los Angeles “Arts District” regarding the influence of attracting visitors and speculators to the spot for its edgy and “off the grid” scene, the artists struggling against displacement is glossed from its historical trajectory from the models which the anti-gentrification activists particularly draw from.<sup>18</sup> While identity and culture fuel the motives of resistance, the spatial relations surrounding Boyle Heights engender the representation of displacement by understanding art galleries in the similar vein of colonialism through a perceived movement from Downtown Los Angeles “Arts District” transgressing into Boyle Heights and considering it a frontier for improvement.<sup>19</sup> More specifically, anti-gentrification activist groups describe the “gallery row” as a Trojan horse that finds its origins in association to the Downtown LA “Arts District” pushing past its borders.<sup>20</sup> In other words, activists suggested the nascent art scene as geographically imported from a neighboring Downtown Los Angeles “Arts District” as a colonial imposition into the region. Though such rhetoric identifies galleries as a visible manifestation of this “culture war” in themselves, the galleries also fall under a broader overarching social imaginary of “revitalization”, which includes independent cafes, craft breweries, or bike lanes that mirror the culture of hipsters from the creative industry of the neighboring “Arts District.”<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, the account for the spatial movement of the creative industries by anti-gentrification activists in Boyle Heights considers the “Arts District” as a manifestation of the creative class, yet this district also faces its own history of gentrification. The Downtown Los Angeles “Arts District” predates its self-designated namesake and function in the broader Downtown Los Angeles. Historically, the space served as an underground affordable arts community and a haven for struggling artists priced out of living in the art scene of Venice Beach who found abandoned warehouses to be ideal studio spaces.<sup>22</sup> Neglected by the city, underground residencies, leadership, and meeting spaces were owned by and for independent and self-described bohemian artists. At the time, the district provided loft space in abandoned industrial buildings—a more affordable and desirable alternative for living and working — on the outskirts of Downtown Los Angeles.<sup>23</sup> As a testament to both its neglect by the city and local advocacy, Joel Bloom, an artist often considered the unofficial mayor of the district by running the local cafe, actively petitioned for the city to mark the region as an acknowledgement of the artists who live there.<sup>24</sup> While the artist once desired this legal recognition, its designation would come to influence the eventual forces of their displacement.

The name eludes not only to the artists’ migration into the deindustrialized zone in the 1970s and 1980s but also to its transformation into industry and consumption following this history. As artist collectives proliferated, prospects of investment in downtown LA brought a second wave of development to the “Arts District” with rent that many artists considered unaffordable.<sup>25</sup> Following the 2008 recession, the “Arts District” experienced a second substantial wave of revitalization with an intense proliferation of public art as well as

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17 Aaron Shkuda, *The Lofts of Soho*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016). P. 1.

18 Catherine Wagley, “Good-Bye to All That: Boyle Heights, Hotbed of Gentrification Protests, Sees Galleries Depart.” *Art News*, June 8th 2018. <http://www.artnews.com/2018/06/08/good-bye-boyle-heights-hotbed-gentrification-protests-sees-galleries-depart/>

19 Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier*, (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 1996), 17.

20 Brittny Majia & Steve Saldivar, “Boyle Heights activists blame the art galleries for gentrification.” *The Los Angeles Times*, August 4th, 2016. <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-self-help-graphics-20160718-snap-story.html>.

21 Smith, 115.

22 Saul Gonzalez, ‘Change the Name of the “Arts District” to the Luxury District’, *KCET*, October 17th, 2017. <https://www.kcrw.com/culture/shows/there-goes-the-neighborhood/change-the-name-of-the-arts-district-to-the-luxury-district>.

23 Ibid.

24 Valerie Nelson, “Joel Bloom, 59; activist helped shape the “Arts District” in L.A.,” *Los Angeles Times*, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-jul-14-me-bloom14-story.html>.

25 Ibid.

new cafes, art galleries, live-work loft development, film sets, and private parking lots.<sup>26</sup> In present day, the Arts District's array of experiences and live work lofts appeal to the "edgy" and "hip" culture of the creative class while displacing the very artist community that established this desired district.

What remains from its title, despite the displacement of multiple artists and the erasure of art collectives and residencies in its urban development, is the recognition of an administrative unit representing and attracting particular interests and industries serving the entire Downtown area. That is to say, the value of the "Arts District" was confined to the designative purpose within downtown as a "specialized" industry that functions as a broader "urban" core, achieving a collective character through offering "multiple activities" associated with its cumulative "identity."<sup>27</sup> In addition, "districts" offer a distinctive space to "mentally" go "inside of"—as if understood as isolated from its external relations to its urban development—because of its "character cluster" of a distinct "thematic unit"—the arts— throughout the area.<sup>28</sup> An important distinction to raise is the title of this region. Though self-designated by artists for empowerment of their creative labor, the title emphasizes the industry of "Arts" over a community for "Artists." By expanding its cultural production and inserting itself into other neighborhoods in the city, the influence of the "Arts District" as a hot-spot of gentrification focuses on its current composition—the creative experience behind such activities— without considering the initial historical steps of exploiting artistic labor in the process of transforming the neighborhood.

Mike Davis' *City of Quartz*, an influential urban history of 20th Century Los Angeles, identifies Los Angeles as a predictive case study into urban development; this tradition has its foundations in Adorno and Horkheimer's view of Los Angeles as a "crystal ball" of late capitalism.<sup>29</sup> The notion of the city as a crystal ball suggests compelling insights are drawn from viewing the city of Los Angeles in both its economic development and mythical lifestyles. Moreover, this academic approach already illustrates the tensions of Los Angeles to exist as an urban city in reality— its socioeconomic conditions—and in futuristic myth—its cultural and historical legacy—that provide predictive elements over political contestations of its influence later manifested in other urban areas. In this spirit of exposing contestations regarding capitalism and ownership through the case studies offered by these neighborhoods in Los Angeles, the following investigation will explore qualitative depictions that construct a narrative and image of the tensions in spatial ownership, consumer identity, artistic practice, and historical narratives of gentrification behind "artwashing." These visualizations serve as a basis of the resistance towards this form of "trendy" urban development and, on a large scale, speculate consequences for the approaches of art in contemporary urban space in late capitalism. This unique case study in anti-gentrification activism that implicates art towards representing the colonizing practices of curating a city against the representation of existing residents raises critical questions which the following analysis will seek to investigate: How is art and gentrification given a political and spatial narrative in Boyle Heights? How does this inform visual strategies of resistance to counter art and gentrification in this neighborhood? This investigation will now move forward to consider the rhetorical narrative of "artwashing" by considering and critiquing Richard Florida's theory of creative class placemaking as a means to urban revitalization. From there, it will interpret the spatial depictions in which Boyle Heights framed in relation to the expanding urban development from the "Arts District." Finally, it will take into account how different approaches in visual activism by Boyle Heights residents have worked to visualize the injustices in the process of gentrification and resist the cultural industries associated with gentrification as "artwashing."

## **The Conceptual Background of "Artwashing": Gentrification and the Creative Class**

In the Boyle Heights Against Artwashing and Displacement manifesto, *The Short History of a Long Struggle*, the coalition states their aim to resist the "culture of gentrification" in order to "stop" the "narrative of

26 Jason Lopata, "L.A. Urbanized: Post-Recession Growth Acceleration in DTLA", *Urbanize LA*, <https://urbanize.la/post/la-urbanized-post-recession-growth-acceleration-dtla>

27 Andres Duany, *The Neighborhood, District, and Corridor*, (2008).

28 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1960), 66-67.

29 Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 2006), 49.

inevitability” around urban revitalization and “displacement.”<sup>30</sup> To elaborate further, the following coalition statement directly distinguished the perceived outsiders and opposed their establishment in Boyle Heights: the creative class. Amidst its first organized gallery protest, the coalition’s October 2017 statement “The Racist Myth of Outside Agitators” affirmed its focus on the creative class in order to solidify Boyle Heights Against Artwashing and Displacement’s (BHAAAD) authenticity in the Boyle Heights community and discredit online forums and facebook comment threads speculating that the group was led by a small minority of paid protestors from wealthy donors interested in disinvesting Boyle Heights to invest in other neighborhoods.<sup>31</sup> To resolve such speculation of illegitimacy towards the organization’s ability to speak for the interests of the entire Boyle Heights community, the activist coalition countered by identifying the opposition group leading the gentrification of Boyle Heights: the creative class. In identifying the creative class, Boyle Heights activists suggested a critique of [the] creative class’ industry and life-style, in both consumption and housing, as means of displacement. Through establishing a force of opposition, activist groups stabilized their identity by identifying the fear of supposed revitalization—in itself a value judgement over the existing neighborhood—with the gentry of the creative class, a socioeconomic group considered outside of the community in terms of its industry, ethnicity, and economic class.<sup>32</sup> In order to legitimize and validate their authenticity, the activist coalition’s rhetoric charged the creative class as contemporary colonizers of space by having neglected the value given to space apart from its use. In essence, the arguments around the creative class serves as a basis for questioning notions of progress and revitalization by challenging a desired population and outcome to urban revitalization. The following section will elaborate on the significations of the rallying calls—gentrification, “artwashing”, and the creative class—utilized in the discourse of activists. It will find that the conceptual umbrella of “artwashing” associates the present struggle as a cultural signifier of gentrification, which threatens the existing Chicanx with erasure at the hands of the (white) creative class.

Gentrification is a prominent urban theory which explains demographic shifts in a neighborhood during its development, having also expanded into contemporary discourse in urban areas. First explicated by Ruth Glass in 1964 to describe particularities in urban neighborhoods of London, the term refers to a neighborhood shifting historically from working class residents over an undefined period of time to middle and higher class—the residents who “gentry” an area—until its working class core is entirely displaced from the region.<sup>33</sup> To illustrate and expand on this theory, Neil Smith studies both the economic conditions and cultural implications of gentrification, offering a “rent gap theory”; in this prominent theory, gentrification is initially measured under a significant difference between current rent and potential rent of a location and a “frontier myth” in which gentrifying classes justify their displacement by considering blighted areas as empty.<sup>34</sup> Considering that Boyle Heights offers homes with easy and fast access to Downtown Los Angeles via driving, a form of transportation associated with the middle class, the neighborhood’s location poses a threat for the material opportunity of proximity to downtown it presents for the creative class—an economic interest of real estate speculation. However, the cultural implications in the activist’s rhetoric of “Artwashing” targets the cultural markers of artistic practice, invoking the notion of colonialism associated with the frontier myth in advancing their charge of the “Arts District’s” cultural revitalization of Boyle Heights

According to activists, the underlying processes of cultural renovation to appeal to the influx of new residents with “hip” life-styles serves as an entry point into a process of cultural imperialism through deliberate rising property values to evict and displace the existing community. Moreover, the narrative of revitalization self justifies its violence through the myth of an empty and open area under such rhetoric. In this regard, it imposes and asserts the addition of an aesthetic value which offers a strategy that makes gentrification more

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30 “The Short History of a Large Struggle”, Boyle Heights Against Artwashing and Displacement (Blog). N.d. Accessed March 28, 2019. <http://alianzacontraartwashing.org/en/coalition-statements/bhaaad-the-short-history-of-a-long-struggle/>.

31 “The Racist Myth of Outside Agitators”, Boyle Heights Against Artwashing and Displacement (Blog). N.d. Accessed March 28, 2019. <http://alianzacontraartwashing.org/en/coalition-statements/bhaaad-the-short-history-of-a-long-struggle/>.

32 Richard Florida, “The Racial Divides in the Creative Economy”, CityLab, May 6th, 2016. <https://www.citylab.com/life/2016/05/creative-class-race-black-white-divide/481749/>

33 Ruth Glass, *London: Aspects of Change*, (London: McKibben & Kee, 1964).

34 Neil Smith, “Gentrification and the Rent Gap”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* Vol. 77, No. 3 (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 1987), 464.

permissible to those outside the neighborhood by mystifying the process under a narrative of cultural progress, all the while discrediting the autonomy and existence of lasting cultural legacies in the region. Even its preliminary stage of urban development—through its art galleries—imposes socio-economic values of culture by curating the neighborhood to appeal to outside groups—inviting speculation and instability into the property values of the region. In essence, it works as a holistic commercial project which attempts to reform or transform an existing community and space to address the desires of outside groups. As the property rises in monetary value, the working class renters are unable to afford the cost of living in the space and are displaced. In this framing, gentrification serves as a process of both sociocultural and economic forces that co-opts the space of a neighborhood and transforms its property values and human capital over time.

Recent developments in the “Arts District” attempt to appeal to the “promise” and anticipation of the creative class, the group BHAAAD fears will be drawn to the neighborhood of working class residents.<sup>35</sup> The notion of the creative class, coined by the urban theorist Richard Florida, configures a novel socioeconomic group based on one generic criteria: their “distinguishing characteristics” of “work” that produces “meaningful new forms.”<sup>36</sup> Within this vague and open-ended definition, Florida already asserts a value judgement over the supremacy of the creative class by considering their contributions to the society and economy as progressive and meaningful. In essence, it operates under the assumption that communities existing before the creative class are void of purpose, lacking forms of production involving innovation of thought. Under such an obscure definition, the creative class expands to signify professions ranging from technology, academia, or engineering; no longer bound to the stereotype of “artists and writers”, what it “used to mean”, it now holds professions that carry a “crucial economic role.”<sup>37</sup> Here, Florida’s expansive definition of the creative class to all creative industries suggests an acceptance of artists—albeit grudgingly—in this coalition of creativity as a means to the ends of creativity that sparks economic stimulation. Within the context of deindustrialized cities, Florida offers creative industry as an alternative means of production based on intellectual ideas, without taking into account the material conditions that determine which classes have the means to produce intellectual ideas.

Florida bases the creative class on its imagined economic influence and monetary value for its surrounding regions. In essence, the importation of the creative class finds its justification in the possibility of economic value added to the region—ranging from increasing industry to property value of housing. In this regard, Florida concentrates on a predominantly economic justification for the creative class, intentionally undermining the inclusion of artists in this class. In Florida’s visualization, members of the creative class serve as the source of intellectual thought and creative production that creates “meaningful” realities to incite an economic vitality for the city. This economic incentive was particularly exacerbated under the transition period of the 2008 recession, wherein Florida suggests that the “old order” of life and work had “collapsed”, inciting cities to construct space around these personas and their new ways of life. In establishing the creative class as a dominant economic order, Florida’s social imaginary places an economic value and necessity in urban revitalization to cater to these signifiers of the creative class. The subtext is that attracting creatives also carries a promise for the city’s economy to compete in new markets and emerging industries. Florida’s fixation with the importance and predominance of the creative class appears to consider urban areas and their existing residents as the means—in providing space and culture—to the goal of establishing a presence of the creative class. Therefore, the creative class is considered to carry an influential role in determining and directing the ultimate aims of urban revitalization towards “filling” a city by appealing and attracting the presence of a specific population without fully considering or situating the contestations in community ownership within an existing community. Florida’s theory of the creative class can be seen as disregarding pre-existing community ties to the space and instead considering such battles for authenticity as inessential when he revisits the Creative Class’ “so-called gentrification.”<sup>38</sup> Instead, the existing community’s legacy is minimalized and tasked with becoming part of an expanding creative class or be outcasts from the notions of progress towards this socioeconomic ideal.

Beyond the economic justification and value of constructing creative class industries, Florida’s theory

35 Mary Holland, “How Downtown Transformed into a Cultural Destination”, Skift. January 6th, 2018. <https://skift.com/2018/01/06/how-downtown-l-a-became-a-burgeoning-capital-for-creative-and-entrepreneurial-classes/>

36 Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, revisited, (New York: Basic Books, 2012), p. 18.

37 Ibid, p. 9.

38 Ibid, p. xiv.

also works to capture the culture of the creative class. This is because a “hip” culture is how the “business” of the creative class operates and “understands” the work that it is doing.<sup>39</sup> On this basis, Florida defines the ideal cultural climate for creative production within the function of the social scene to offer “hybrids” and “clusters” of “experience” throughout a street or district. These include curated streets as reflecting creative production through new and unique “coffee shops, restaurants, bars”—a totality of communal experiences and commercial stimulation—all within proximity to one another.<sup>40</sup> For Florida, the interconnected experience serves to construct a scene which fosters creativity through “social and psychological dimensions, not just economic ones.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, this theory directs urban centers towards experiences that stimulate creativity and collaboration which appeal to creative class by both offering a hip culture and creative inspiration. Florida suggests that the creative class is one driven by the “observance” and “consumption” of “vibrant” street “scenes”—the composite experience of creative spaces in relation to one another—as an overarching value for the city to provide a means to produce creative ideas by blending work into life.<sup>42</sup> Here, Florida is suggesting forming cities that invest with and belong to a particular way of life centered around location as a holistic experience to best foster and maximize its utility and innovation. For anti-“artwashing” activists, this protagonization of the creative class in such an analysis ignores the sense of imperialistic appropriation of space it invokes in denying the diversity of cultural traditions and economic industries already present. Even so, Florida’s value judgements that cities ought to be constructed around the interests of the creative class—being in zoning, subsidizing, or designating—has informed national strategies for “creative placemaking” in urban areas and emerging arts districts throughout contemporary American cities, with the intent of increasing the property values of the region and stimulating the city’s creative industry.<sup>43</sup> In essence, the offering of a hip culture—signified in engaging storefronts, public artworks, authentic experiences—relies on the existence of the arts as a dominant factor to attract and target the creative class into a community. BHAAAD’s blog posts identify such cultural implications as bringing the creative class, as outsiders, into a pre-curtailed neighborhood that appeals to their cultures’ need for “cool” experiences to promote creative production.

In affirming that the creative class benefits from a particular lifestyle, Florida suggests reframing what job positions, workspaces, and work culture make up a city that caters to the demands of the creative class: openness, expression, and intellect. Interestingly, Florida indicates that the “cool”, hip culture which emerges from their residential environment imposes itself onto both their personal and professional lives with the goal to blend the barriers between labor and identity. This cool, hip culture based on experience, blending work and life, and living outside of traditional norms either works to emulate or appropriate historic “Bohemian lifestyles,” while still serving useful to further capitalist production by promoting rising property value and economic development. Bohemian culture, at its core, elusively emphasizes a “social fixation” on the “spirit” for those “chosen” with the “spontaneous gift” of creativity.<sup>44</sup> The myth of Bohemian life clearly works into Florida’s creative class through the designation and concentration of a spontaneous, non-conformist, experiential, self-infatuated, and gifted group. However, the appropriation of Bohemian culture by Florida’s creative class seeks to mimic the mythos of Bohemia—a culture which emphasizes uncontained individualism, non-conformity, integration of new experience into life, and a blending between work and identity—and redirect it from social marginalization towards economic prosperity.

Florida’s theory is appropriated by the activists, not only in the sense of what promoting this new way of life offers as signifiers, but in what it overlooks by overriding existing communities. That is, the meaningfulness of community conditioned on the creative class exacerbates the permissibility of considering a neighborhood a “blighted area,” imagined as devoid of its use value without the presence of the creative class.<sup>45</sup> Bluntly, Florida neglected the impact of utilizing the colonizing “frontier myth” to construct cities as a means for the creative

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39 Ibid, p. 166.

40 Ibid, p. 149.

41 Ibid, p. 297.

42 Ibid, p. 135.

43 Alexandre Frenette, *The Rise of Creative Placemaking: Cross-Sector Collaboration as Cultural Policy in the United States* (Oxfordshire: Taylor and Francis, 2017).

44 Cesar and Marigay Grana, *On Bohemia: The Code of the Self Exiled*. (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1990). P. 6.

45 Smith, 13.

class without anticipating a crisis emerging over ownership of both private and public space between current residents and members of the creative class.<sup>46</sup> In this regard, the creative class imagines its presence as instilling culture and prosperity on “other spaces” believing them to be undiscovered without accounting for, or perhaps simply finding inevitable, the destructive erasure of an existing culture in its wake.<sup>47</sup> This theory dismisses any claims of prior ownership—belittling claims by calling the phenomena “so-called gentrification”—of a neighborhood by a community of different ethnicities, cultures, or industries that have historically belonged towards, composed, and constructed an identity for this space.<sup>48</sup> Particularly, Florida incentivizes artistic, racial, and sexual diversity as a means for the creative class by labeling them factors in deciding location, rather than valuing these identities in themselves. The seductiveness of diversity has led to the critique that Florida’s work contributed to the creation of cities that foster and proliferate the trend of gentrification in marginalized areas.<sup>49</sup> While Florida’s revision of the creative class identifies the existence of present residents facing inequality and an urban crisis at the hands of creative class migration, Florida still suggests that the solution would be found in expanding and incorporating existing residents into creative class industries.<sup>50</sup> Florida’s simplistic solution neglects the material conditions of the working class and instead imposes upon it a need to conform to a creative work force.

“Artwashing” essentially bridges the signifier of art galleries to signify a strategy of urban development designed for the culture of the creative class and mystifying the erasure in gentrifying this existing community.<sup>51</sup> To signify the social impact of commercial art galleries in the space, activists worked to semantically link the galleries to gentrification through constructing the notion that art participates in facilitating gentrification— attracting new commercial spaces, visitors, developers, and (consequently) rising rents and evictions for residents of an existing neighborhood via “artwashing.”<sup>52</sup> In earlier uses, “artwashing” was an attempt by major corporations to collaborate with the arts as a means to restore their image in public opinion.<sup>53</sup> Though redirected and reappropriated to a particular context in activism against gentrification, its core elements remain: to obscure the material conditions of capitalist exploitation and commercial interests through the visual experience derived from art. Within the form of the phrase, the conjoined nature of the two words suggests an integration and dependency on art as a means to “revitalize” a community for those outside of it, new hipsters, yuppies, bohemian-bourgeois, and the creative class.

Furthermore, “artwashing” implicates an active culprit of gentrification by making art represent all creativity. Being a verb in the present tense, instead of “artwashable” or “artwashed”, animates the term with a particular agent behind this action and suggests this process is occurring in the immediate present—demanding resistance. However, this manifestation of the phrase marks it as a continuous process, still incomplete in Boyle Heights. This use of the phrase perhaps opens possibility of redemption for the arts by requiring a social responsibility for artists to follow their demands and operate in other areas. Here, a strategy emerges to resolve the threat of gentrification: exposing the actor(s) behind galleries, identifying how to call upon action by artists, and reversing the order by closing down galleries. In addition, at its very core is an association with the term “whitewashing.” This term itself has an array of significations, from physically painting over a surface with white paint, to censoring unappealing material aspects from visibility, to misrepresenting of communities of color by representing white people in their place.<sup>54</sup> “artwashing” draws connections from all senses of

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46 Smith, xvi.

47 Smith, 43.

48 Florida, 300.

49 Sam Wetherell, “Richard Florida is Sorry”, *Jacobin*, August 19th, 2017. <https://jacobinmag.com/2017/08/new-urban-crisis-review-richard-florida>.

50 Florida, xvi.

51 “Destroy the Boyle Heights “Arts District” one gallery at a time, one landlord at a time”, *Defend Boyle Heights (Blog)*. February 6th 2018. Accessed April 6th, 2019.

52 Magally Miranda and Kyle Lane-Mckinney, “Artwashing, or, Between Social Practice and Social Reproduction” *A Blade of Grass (Blog)*. February 1, 2017. Accessed March 28th, 2019. <http://www.abladeofgrass.org/fertile-ground/artwashing-social-practice-social-reproduction/>

53 Ibid.

54 Steve Rose, “The Idea That it’s Good Business is a Myth”, *The Guardian*, August 29th, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/aug/29/the-idea-that-its-good-business-is-a-myth-why-hollywood-whitewashing-has-become-toxic>

the term as it threatens to usher in new physical spaces, new cultural values, and new hipster (perceived as predominantly white) groups of people. In their similarities of process, art serves within this category as a particular manifestation of white culture imposing itself over an existing Chicanx culture and uses the capital of those gentrifying capitalism to raise rents beyond affordable means. Therefore, the rallying call against “artwashing” in Boyle Heights by BHAAAD and DBH Activist creates a semiotic link between the advent of art galleries and the underlying assertions of economic, cultural, and racial implications of gentrification, which seeks to impose, sanitize, and paint over the neighborhood to represent colonizing and gentrifying economic and cultural interests.

Within its rhetorical deployment in activism, the consequences of “artwashing” pose a threat to both the working class’ housing security and the overall community with its possible implications to ultimately eradicate the existence of a predominantly marginalized social group which is attempting to reclaim ownership over this space. This section offered the associative links of “Artwashing” in collectively signifying the notion of art and gentrification as a force that undermines the artistic tendencies of an existing community and assumes superiority in virtue of its capacity to attract creative institutions that very well could transform the neighborhood in its image. In essence, the label of gentrification as a primary indicator calls attention to the threat of art galleries as an emergence of a new set and lexicon of value systems that imagine the neighborhood as an expansion of the “Arts District” over Boyle Heights.<sup>55</sup> This rhetoric suggests that the organized resistance operates, in turn, under a temporality in which the art galleries implicated in “artwashing” signify the onset of gentrification in its appeal to the creative class. In this process, the codes of consumption that represents businesses and urban planning which appeal to the creative class—from increases in street art, breweries, cafes, bike lanes, or art galleries—are considered within a broader discourse on gentrification with the possibility of an end result in which displacement of the existing Boyle Heights community is embraced or treated with inaction.

### **Expanding the “Arts District”: Mapping The Artwashing of Boyle Heights**

How do the spatial relations between the “Arts District” and Boyle Heights connect and withdraw the spaces from each other, and how does this distinctly form the narrative of gentrification within the spaces? Understanding the spatial elements that frame the area of contestation for this tension between art and gentrification in Los Angeles requires an understanding of the “Arts District” becoming increasingly connected to Boyle Heights in the context of gentrification. The following section will consider maps of these two districts capturing elements of the “Arts District” (fueled by the creative class rather than artists themselves) looming into Boyle Heights and constructing a battleground over the forces of gentrification and colonialism onto an existing community. In the maps’ visualization of contested neighborhood territory, this analysis will attempt to uncover the spatial relations that represent gentrification in the case study of the industrial outskirts of Boyle Heights. In this regard, the comparative approach of the maps will provide the grounds for considering the emergence of an organized coalition of activists in 2016 to defend the existing Boyle Heights community from being culturally and economically displaced by the expanding creative class haven of the “Arts District.”

In the political administration of Los Angeles, the “Arts District” and Boyle Heights fall under the same city council district (see figure 2). This shows not only the geographic proximity of these two areas but also suggests that they share in the political representation of their public interests. Yet, the city council representative works from two separate offices within both districts. In this regard, the categorization of one representative in public office for two distinctive neighborhoods establishes a political conflict over the shared seat in city council and challenges the notion that this issue can be resolved through political representation. In essence, such divergence acknowledges that forms of symbolic representation exist beyond the “formal” institution of placing these two into the same unit of representation in city council.<sup>56</sup> Acknowledging a need to make change outside of the local representative body, this system of representation also incites the political need to protest in Boyle Heights as a means to make the neighborhood issues of gentrification more thoroughly

55 Scott Garner, “Boyle Heights Remains A Center of Gravity for LA Latinos”, The Los Angeles Times, May 20, 2016. <https://www.latimes.com/business/real-estate/hot-property/la-fi-hp-neighborhood-boyle-heights-20160521-snap-story.html>.

56 Hanna Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972). Pg. 6.

represented in the public sphere.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, the spatial relation established in this political map draws the two neighborhoods together in one representative district, but fails to consider the distinctions between the public interests of the two neighborhoods. This conflict within formal political representation ushers in competitive interests over controlling the substantive representation of policy towards urban development for the district's future. Through such competition over space, anti-gallery activists have questioned and challenged the legitimacy of political representation of the city council to work against the forces of gentrification. They have therefore instead directed their activism toward pressuring the commercial activity of art galleries rather than public officials themselves.<sup>58</sup>

Comparing different maps showcases both the boundaries between the two districts and a transgression of these boundaries that accounts for the contestation over the spread of gentrification. For example, the Map of Downtown Los Angeles provided by DTLA—an organization dedicated to improving business in Los Angeles—shows the boundary of Boyle Heights to be East of the Los Angeles River (see figure 3).<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the two regions are kept separate in part by the artificial boundary of a man-made river. Indeed, in emphasizing Downtown Los Angeles “districts and neighborhoods,” it affirms Boyle Heights as adjacent, yet distinct, from the actual downtown units that make up the urban core of the city. This map shows the “Arts District” as a mere component of Downtown—understood as its own distinct piece of the downtown urban core. As they border the LA River and are across from each other, the districts are both distinctly separated and adjacent to each other. These edges therefore serve to atomize the images of these two regions by “isolating” them, yet the edges also remain “impenetrable.”<sup>60</sup> However, when viewing the edges of Boyle Heights on Google Maps, its borders move inward (see figure 3). In such a framing, the space on the outskirts of Boyle Heights next to the “Arts District” are seemingly annexed to the “Arts District,” which raises the question of whether this industrial zone is what the neighborhood consists of under a capitalist frame. While it leaves the space of Boyle Heights fragmented and decentralized, this lost territory also serves as the space in which the contestation over the gallery spaces in Boyle Heights occurred. In this regard, the transgression of borders provided by these maps suggests the erasure of the industrial zone in which “gallery row” formed and visualizes the political imaginary of art galleries introducing art in an abandoned, deindustrialized area.

The zoning map between the two districts also suggests the residential zoning in Boyle Heights in combination to the lack of residential zoning in the Arts District provides a threat for Boyle Heights to real estate speculation and gentrification by its proximity to the downtown Arts District (see figure 4). Temporarily, the “Arts District” is predominantly ordered around one “live-work” zone—allowing for commercial uses that also offer spaces to live and work—to sustain its artistic production and encourage development. This zoning modification has changed blue-shaded areas from “heavy industry” to “live-work” for all future development until further notice. The zoning of Boyle Heights is predominantly residential (orange), with industrial-use (blue) connecting the neighborhood to the “Arts District.” Therefore, this zoning offers space for those seeking to own homes adjacent to the “Arts District.” The appearance of empty industrial warehouses offers opportunity for both private business and live-work space to expand the “Arts District” into Boyle Heights. As art galleries began the new “industry” moving into this zone with the augment of several galleries in these industrial streets, one might speculate this movement was encouraged by zoning structures reflecting deindustrialized zones across the LA river.

As a testament to the alluring qualities offered by Boyle Heights' location on real estate speculation, real estate agents posted flyers promoting Boyle Heights property around the “Arts District” reading, “Why Rent Downtown When You Can Own Boyle Heights?” and accompanied with an illustration of a young woman riding a bike from one point of the flyer in the direction of the opposite side (see figure 5).<sup>61</sup> Blatantly, the poster openly presents an opportunity to invest in the primarily residential properties zoned in Boyle Heights. This advertisement would come to be known at the “genti-flyer” for inciting Boyle Heights' potential value

57 Ibid.

58 “Points of Unity”, Defend Boyle Heights (Blog), Nd, Accessed April 15th, 2019. <http://defendboyleheights.blogspot.com/p/points-of-unity.html>

59 “Maps”, DTLA (Website), Accessed March 23rd, 2019. <https://www.downtownla.com/maps>.

60 Lynch, 64.

61 Jorge Rivas, “LA Realtor Introduces ‘Genti-flyer’”, Splinter, May 19th, 2014, Accessed April 6th, 2019.

by offering homes neighboring the “Arts District.”<sup>62</sup> On an underlying level, it also works to incite tensions over ownership and opportunity within these historic neighborhoods to transform based on the real estate interests of the creative class by illustrating the activity of biking (what Florida considers a creative pastime). Furthermore, the movement of the individual depicted on the flyer eastwards represents the movement of the “Arts District” across the river and into Boyle Heights. As the “Arts District” established itself as the creative core of Los Angeles in early 2015, the flyer tangibly affirmed a tension between the two neighborhoods: a sense of gentrification through movement from the creative class who wanted proximity to the “Arts District” but affordable homeownership. This real estate strategy highlights that the housing provided in Boyle Heights was viewed as an opportunity for mobility and ownership while retaining access to the “Arts District” but only for those with certain privileges. For example, the “only \$40,000 down payment with good credit” fails to recognize the inaccessibility of this capital to a majority of renters currently living in Boyle Heights.<sup>63</sup> In this regard, the real estate speculation on the basis of its relation to the “Arts District” incites caution over the strategies of economic and racial exclusion in urban development—such as the “gallery row” emerging in the years following—that would spark organized coalitions to refuse this threat of displacement.

A map of the “Arts District,” illustrated by artist Michael Hirshon for a book on a local business “Guerilla Tacos,” visualizes the experiential, commercial, and physical developments in the “Arts District” and the possibility of a cultural extension of itself into Boyle Heights at the time leading up to art galleries opening in Boyle Height in 2016 (See figure 6). With its use of color, it creates distinct geographical worlds and marks each region: the “Arts District” is shaded in purple, making it separated from other areas of downtown that are shaded in orange and sharing its purple color with the roads leading into Boyle Heights. This color scheme suggests a mobility of the “Arts District” into other territories. In this regard, the “Arts District” appears to be emanating into its surrounding spaces. Of course, its central focus is situated in the “Arts District,” but it highlights its reflection across the LA river with Boyle Heights. In fact, the similarities in industrial space in the “Arts District” and Boyle Heights show a particular sense of commonality. Emphasizing this architecture as opposed to nearby affordable housing units serves the political imaginary of Boyle Heights as providing an opportunity for creative industries in its available space. Ultimately, whether implicitly or explicitly, it reveals an opportunity to expand the “Arts District” into new territories; one might find a similar space for a less competitive rate in Boyle Heights while not losing touch with the arts community. The arrow pointing outwards toward Boyle Heights further suggests that the neighborhood continues beyond this, but the outskirts serve an interest for creative industries. In essence, the map portrays the outskirts of Boyle Heights in association to and a means of expanding the “Arts District” into new territory.

The geographic mapping of Boyle Heights disseminated on the Boyle Heights Against Artwashing and Displacement social media account on September 20th, 2017 with the caption “Dis-invitation” defines the problematic spatial tensions of “Artwashing” as a battle ground and buffer zone—connecting the geographic mapping to their protest tactic of refusal (see figure 7). To elaborate, the social media post utilizes a map of Boyle Heights to define the parameters of the conflict while also grounding the conflict in the material realities of the space. In contrast to the array of colors illustrating the “Arts District,” the black and white tones delineate a distinctively clear binary between spaces. That is to say, the “Arts District” is darkened in contrast to Boyle Heights. Devoid of color, the spaces also take on a conflicting and opposing relation to one another, with the border distinctively reclaiming the industrial outskirts by setting the border along the LA river. In addition, the map also works to elucidate the realities of the neighborhood’s properties through offering a satellite view. In such conceptualization of the neighborhood, the residential and commercial structures are endowed with their material appearance. In this regard, it represents the existence of an existing community to counter the notions of real estate speculation and commercial opportunity. To further disrupt the imaginary of empty space, the confinement of labels to the industrial outskirts works to establish how this space on the battleground of “artwashing” implicates the entire Boyle Heights neighborhood. Through this mapping, art galleries are not operating detached from the residencies or labor of Boyle Heights. Indeed, their operations are conditionalized on the threat towards the material existence of affordable housing complexes and lack of consumption and

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62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

industrial labor supporting those in affordable housing. In this regard, the space of the contestation being imagined as abandoned affirms the problematic notions undermining economically and socially marginalized residents making up the affordable housing due to its conditionalizing of space as a representation of creative class interest. For BHAAAD, the art galleries moving into a closed-down warehouse or factory must also consider their privilege in the relations to public housing. Therefore, BHAAAD's spatial construction of the conflict refines and reveals how the proliferation of galleries visibly threatens spaces of public housing by disregarding their existence and material needs by instead gentrifying the space industry and consumption against the interest of these long term residents.

Overall, these mappings animate spatial elements of the neighborhood to reveal how Boyle Heights faces a tension over the colonizing spread of development from the "Arts District" as it spreads into Boyle Heights. Drawing comparisons between these images of the city, this analysis provides an understanding of spatial tensions in this case of gentrification, as the creative class industries perceive opportunities for expansion rather than an existing community and the Boyle Heights' community subsequently senses a threat of ownership over the neighborhood. The depiction of the two spaces coming increasingly closer together heightens the conflict over "artwashing" as an association with the directional movement of the "Arts" of this particular Downtown district running adjacent to it. These mappings implicitly illustrate fears and tensions surrounding gentrification for the community based on the operations of arts industries within the neighborhood. This underlying spatial relation between the two neighborhoods provides a context for the argument in which the cultural and commercial threat of gentrification for Boyle Heights in art is linked to an oppressive, colonial tradition that steals space from an existing community by claiming it empty for a more privileged group. In this specific case, the creative class is drawn into this "revitalized" neighborhood in "artwashing" without considering the residents it displaces in the process. In essence, the spatial relations exhibited above capture the tensions arising on gallery row as a midpoint between the "Arts District" and Boyle Heights from the imaginary designating the space abandoned, vacant, and a possible expansion for the creative class.

### **Resisting Hipsters: Visual Culture Protesting Codes of Consumption**

As gentrification is typically associated with housing affordability, anti-gentrification activism offers a distinction from the expected path of targeting local governments to promote affordable housing or stabilize rent control. Rather than prevent a physical displacement, anti-gentrification activism in Boyle Heights expands its strategy into pressuring the culture shifts and private businesses moving into Boyle Heights as part of its protest efforts. More importantly, this is the first widespread and organized form of resistance against art and gentrification, particularly as a holistic process catering to the creative class. Though artists arriving in working class communities and leading to a process of gentrification for the neighborhood holds historical precedent, the novelty of this case is that activism has developed an entire discourse around art galleries and other signifiers of creative class industry and consumption as being agents of displacement. In this protest rhetoric, "artwashing" develops the role of art as a component of a larger cultural code of creative class consumption. To distinguish themselves from their imagined forces of gentrification, BHAAAD's activism engages in political refusal of hipster "culture" and lifestyle as a creative class consumer identity against businesses that are "artwashing." In addition, these strategies of neighborhood activism offer their own code of consumption in reinforcing the Chicana working class demographics of the space and their own visual culture in utilizing Marxist symbols of class solidarity.

Activists against "artwashing" not only organized physical protests that included marches and picket lines taking place on the gallery row, but the coalitions also took on active social media accounts and blog posts to disseminate information and reinforce their rhetorical claims that connect the advent of creative industries to gentrification of the existing community. Not only does this construct "Artwashing," it also brands the identity of this activism in binary opposition to art as a strategy to gentrify.<sup>64</sup> For example, the BHAAAD profile picture repeats its acronym several times while explaining what it stands for in the bottom margin of the image (see figure 8). In the bottom margin, the full name is written out in Spanish so that its

64 Jean Baudrillard, "Personalization or the Smallest Marginal Difference", *Consumer Society*, 90.

message resonates with the Chicana Boyle Heights community for which the organization shares a social code in common.<sup>65</sup> The distinction between the repeated acronym and the Spanish translation at the bottom reinforces the intentional strategy of the social media profile picture interlaying a value judgement associated with refusing “artwashing”—sounding out “bad”—within the organization’s title. In this regard, the coalition uses social media to establish a presence and assert a refusal over the art galleries and the entire code of hipster consumption it insights.

In addition, the profile picture of Defend Boyle Heights brands a call to action of active resistance towards “artwashing.” The raised fist—in its historical context and association with Marxist visual culture—signifies class solidarity, resistance, and unity for the perseverance of the Boyle Heights community. The profile picture itself thus openly uses a Marxist approach to activism in that it considers itself as a contemporary moment in an entire history of racial and economic conflicts which required active community resistance to “defend” against oppression. The struggle is rooted in the autonomy and agency of the people and requires action for change. In this regard, Defend Boyle Heights brands itself as protecting the community against the contemporary manifestation of class exploitation through direct and material action. The collective community itself is asserted in its marginal differences from any other community and form of cultural shifts by suggesting that Boyle Heights requires and deserves a defense against gentrifying forces.

In identifying “artwashing” and its neighborhood resistance, anti-gentrification activists in Boyle Heights prescribe to a narrative in which gentrification starts with shifts in cultural production and consumption work to disassociate existing residents from the neighborhood and attract the arrival of the creative class. The activist’s narrative of gentrification is exhibited in much of their boycotts, such as the protests against a Boyle Heights Beer festival with “gentrifying” breweries in the neighborhood (see figure 9). In charging the breweries with an agency of gentrification, the private business not only signified gentrification, but also actively worked to achieve it in its operations. To label the codes of consumption that represent “artwashing” as distinct from the existing local community, Defend Boyle Heights offered a list of leisure activities that would better represent the “working class community” than craft beer—such as “walking in Hazard Park” where families have been going for “generations.”<sup>66</sup>

In protest, Defend Boyle Heights produced boycott flyers including an image of an individual wearing indigeneous attire and pointing their finger in intense sense of disapproval. In these historical associations to Chicana identity as an indigenous culture in the neighborhood, the consumption of craft beer becomes coded as a marginal difference of creative class consumption against ancestral and cultural legacy. In addition, the distinction of “Your” Beer—implying an outside creative class entity owning craft beer—from “Our Hoodz”—imagining a community that activists speak for with claims to ownership of this neighborhood—separates the identification of anti-“artwashing” activism from creative industries by distinguishing between the difference of ownership and private consumption.<sup>67</sup> To reinforce this notion, the hashtag reinforces part of the movement by circulating this politics of refusal amongst an online community imagined to represent the entire physical community of Boyle Heights. In this regard, it circulates and reinforces the activism of its resistance as an identity apart from the consumption codes of the creative class.

In addition, anti-“artwashing” activists also worked to disrupt the business of a new cafe, Weird Wave Coffee, following the gallery row in late 2017 and early 2018. For example, throughout the course of the year, anti-gentrification picket lines formed outside the business. These protests implicated “artwashing” as the imposition of a distinctive, more affluent lifestyle over the material needs of the community. The protest focused on the racial and economic insensitivity of the cafe’s owners in referring to the Boyle Heights community as “yokels”—offensively pronouncing the word locals to mimic the supposed accent of the Chicana community.<sup>68</sup> Multiple members of the Boyle Heights community rejected the picket-line as they viewed this private business as unconnected to gentrification; yet, the work of activists still polemicized the comfort of this space from its

65 Ibid, 92.

66 “We Don’t Need Breweries, Bars, or Sell Outs”, Defend Boyle Heights (Blog). February 6th, 2018. <http://defendboyleheights.blogspot.com/2018/02/we-dont-need-breweries-bars-or-sellouts.html?q=beer>

67 Ibid.

68 Justin Caffier, “Activists Are Trying to Drive This Hipster Coffee Shop out of East LA” Vice News, June 20th, 2017. [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/9k5vx5/activists-are-trying-to-drive-a-hipster-coffee-shop-out-of-east-la](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/9k5vx5/activists-are-trying-to-drive-a-hipster-coffee-shop-out-of-east-la)

overarching implications of shifts in consumption as linked to gentrification.

In essence, the visual rhetoric of the protest worked to brand private commodifications of artisan coffee as a gentrifying force of “artwashing” by representing the interests of supposed outsiders and community traitors (see figure 10). Indeed, the fake logo propagated during the protests against “Weird Wave” substituted the word “Weird” for “White.” This works to affirm its “weird” qualities of distinguishing itself apart from the consumer interests of the local community and also equates such outsider status to “White” interests in race. Therefore, “artwashing” brands the invasive and racialized consumption imposed throughout “creative class” private businesses. Through this parody of the coffee shop’s logo, the consumption of “artwashing” represents the interests of “White” hipsters as the “weird” consumption—othered, confusing, and unwanted—in its refusal, calling on the private business to leave with the demand of “Fuera.” Through such rhetoric, DBH refuses the differentiation of this organic coffee shop to transcend the material interest of the existing community in its parody of the coffee shop’s logo. The image of “White Wave” brands the single private business as the signifier of an undercurrent representing the movement of urban development downtown being ushered in through these private businesses. In this regard, resisting “artwashing” also requires refusing the consent of all private businesses participating in this colonizing practice through identifying its intended code of consumption apart from the imagined local community interest.

During the ongoing protests of Weird Wave, an anonymous individual physically refused hipster codes of consumption by throwing a kombucha bottle through the window of “Weird Wave” in the middle of the night. While the activist coalition did not endorse or incite this rogue act, DBH affirmed this strategy of refusal to invert creative class consumer products against themselves (see figure 11). Such theorizing that the action subverts the production and the consumption of the creative class against itself attempts to reverse the process of gentrification and dismantle the business’ social license to operate in the space. That is to say, it both identifies and subsequently refuses a use value in a trendy beverage within a creative class code of consumption. Through this process, the protest act and visual response to the act posted on the DBH blog reinvents a new use for kombucha: “The Weapon of the People.” This visual culture ties the physical appropriation of kombucha to the working class symbol of the hammer and sickle, which is often associated with Marxism.<sup>69</sup> Through their visual rhetoric, this protest seized the means of creative class consumption by a member of the local neighborhood—possibly representing the entire community in anonymity—against the private industries representing this same code of consumption. This rhetorical strategy not only embraces rogue acts of protest, but also suggests an identity in dismantling the creative codes of consumption.

Therefore, anti-“artwashing” activists construct their resistance in distinction from the consumer codes associated with hipster and creative class consumption. Through its differentiation from these patterns and identities, it brands both “artwashing” and the means of resistance as its elements of racial and economic exploitation. In this regard, the distinctions of personalized consumption and experiences representing the lifestyle of a creative class over current residents works to visualize and demystify the exploitations of cultural displacement of Boyle Heights in “artwashing.” Such a configuration of the narrative of gentrification in turn focuses on the codes of consumption represented by private industries. In this regard, the activist coalitions identity, in distinction from industries appealing to the creative class, considers these private businesses under one categorical force and cultural manifestation of displacement in the narrative of gentrification. Establishing a delineation and misrepresentation between new industries and the material necessities of consumers in Boyle Heights, the activism works towards situating a dichotomy between the existing Boyle Heights community and the spread of the “Arts District.” In essence, the activism of Boyle Heights tasks itself to work against such a code of consumption by labeling and refusing private “hipster” businesses—including, but not completely limited to, art galleries—as the arrival of gentrification through cultural misrepresentation in emerging private business.

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69 Owen Hathley, “Has the Hammer and Sickle Had its Day?”, *The Guardian*, February 12, 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/feb/12/hammer-and-sickle-french-communist-party>

## sReclaiming Street Art: Local Boyle Heights Artists Visualizing Gentrification

As a result of this clash between art spaces and activists in Boyle Heights, a misguided perception of BHAAAD is that all artistic production must cease to prevent gentrification. Indeed, the reactionary claim that art is opposed to the Boyle Heights community dismisses local artists who reside and hold generational ties to Boyle Heights. What is lost in failing to incorporate Boyle Heights Artists more particularly in “artwashing” is a tool and means to visualize gentrification and deconstruct the frontier myth. The following section will consider the contemporary Boyle Heights artists resisting gentrification often lost in constructing a binary opposition between notions art and community. The following section will consider three distinct art works from Boyle Heights artists to showcase artistic practices within the neighborhood residents, yet outside of BHAAAD’s activism. At the intersection of this constructed binary opposition of activism and artist, local Boyle Heights artists—with generational ties to the neighborhood— operating prior to or outside of BHAAAD utilize their artwork as a means to depict their threats of displacement, mobilize around a shared Chicana identity, and ultimately reappropriate street art culture for Chicana artists in their resistance.

“DisplAcED”, an artwork by Boyle Heights artist Wayne Perry offers an image of the city and mapping of this narrative of gentrification across the bridge as a threat of displacement for the low-income renters that make up the Chicana heritage of this space (see figure 13).<sup>70</sup> Though its subject matter is dominated by the skyscrapers of Downtown Los Angeles, the perspective of the work is drawn from the perspective of one viewing Downtown from Boyle Heights urban center: mariachi plaza. This composition aims to construct the perspective in which Boyle Heights residents view Downtown—simultaneously distant and overpowering in defining the neighborhood’s horizon. Therefore, it reveals a spatial imagining of the overarching influence of Downtown Los Angeles as fueling the fears of gentrification in the lived experience of Boyle Heights. Furthermore, three cranes—signifying urban development—mount additional levels onto the towering structuring, suggesting the notion of gentrification is proliferation. In addition, the natural elements in the foreground stand in contrast to the skyscrapers in the painting’s background. In this representation, the intentionality to provide the warmth of these colors as distinct from the stark grey of Downtown. Such a blending of the grey nearly conceals the distinction of the industrial warehouses, the midpoint between Downtown and Boyle Heights, likely representing the industrial zone on the outskirts of Boyle Heights as part of a larger project of urban development. Meanwhile, the orange tree holds a home—as if the fruit of its labor—by a string. In essence, these associations connect housing to community roots, and reveal the vulnerability of the community if displaced from housing. In addition, the placement of the “home” at the center of the painting establishes the economic struggle of a community that senses their livelihood and security at stake amidst the development of Downtown.

The mobile work “Lupita Was Displaced” by Nico Avina elevates the threat of gentrification towards mobilizing the Chicana culture over the spiritual conflict of gentrification in Boyle Heights (See figure 13). As Virgin Mary murals—particularly in the apparition of “Guadalupe” that Lupita is modeled after— are a central and common religious and cultural found in Boyle Heights, this work of art draws upon a common, yet revered figure, as a means of community identification for the majority of residents in the area.<sup>71</sup> More so than invoking signifiers of Chicana culture, its parallels to religious iconography of this divine figure provides a spiritual dimension to the work. However, the work is also structured to place limits upon divine intervention amidst the calls of gentrification by grounding this figure back to reality for Boyle Heights residents. Though resembling Guadalupe, naming the figure Lupita—representing a common Chicana name rather than religious title— humanizes this figure and finds resemblances to divinity within each community member. As a Boyle Heights resident, Lupita faces the oppressive and threatening reality in eviction notices due to gentrification. As with the icon Lupita is modeled after, her eyes look down, not in reverence of prayer, but instead reading the eviction notice she had been handed. Here, the threat of displacement disrupts the very spiritual dynamic

70 Wayne Perry, “DisplAcED Notes”, Self Help Graphics (Website). Accessed May 10th, 2019. <https://www.selfhelpgraphics.com/2017-prints-1/2017/6/29/displaced-by-wayne-perry>.

71 Steve Saldivar, “Virgin Mary apparitions are said to be miracles. For this artist, they’re casualties of gentrification”, Los Angeles Times, August 17th, 2018. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-ca-cm-boyle-heights-gentrification-20180817-story.html>

and cultural consistency for the Boyle Heights community and instead preoccupies it with these threats of erasure. In addition, the mobility of this figure proves critical to its reception by engaging with a community being threatened with the sense of displacement. In terms of its form, its mobility also suggests displacement in that it holds no permanent place to call its own and instead wanders in search of housing. Moreover, it allows the art work to circulate amongst the community as a visual incitement of resistance. Indeed, Lupita presides over LA Tenants Union meetings in front of affordable housing to heighten the spiritual devotion behind resisting gentrification for tenants.<sup>72</sup> In contrast to the art works concealed in the gallery as an analytic introspective exercise enjoyed by those with leisure and segregated from everyday life, the mobility of this work brings the threat of displacement to entire community by circulating it in different parts of the Boyle Heights neighborhood and conditionalize the work on its external environment as a point of inspiration for resistance. In this regard, Lupita showcases—through the intermediary cultural and religious icon of the Virgin Mary—the spiritual complexity behind this threatened reality of physical and cultural displacement under gentrification.

Boyle Heights Artists also worked to reclaim and reappropriate the cultural ownership of street art by specifically resisting art galleries prior to anti-“artwashing” activist coalitions. Organized by a local Chicana Art space Self Help Graphics (SHG), a temporary art exhibit challenged problematic notions such as Maccarone gallery statements on Boyle Heights providing ample empty space for artists (See figure 14).<sup>73</sup> Ambulate set up a one night installation outside of Maccrone featuring local artists working on and hanging up their own screen prints and graffiti on canvas. By being hosted outside of the galleries, this temporary exhibit works in stark contrast from the gallery to engage with the surrounding external environment in the streets of Boyle Heights. Therefore, this reclamation and reinstitution of street art as belonging to Boyle Heights worked both to disrupt the colonizing mentality of empty space as opportunity by showcasing a collective of community members already engaging in artistic production. In this visual strategy, art is not offered within bourgeois institutions, but as a means of community empowerment and weaponization against those imposing upon space. As a result, it disrupts an imaginary artistic production being devoid in the imposition of the “Arts District.”

For example, the screen print reminiscent of Andy Warhol’s Campbell Soup Cans is instead labeled as “Columbusing Menso Soup.” The form of the soup can as a substrate for the message appears to be focused on—as if drawing in—the forms of prestigious art valued within the gallery context. In such duality, it suggests an appropriation of the weapon of art to both displace and resist displacement. The message itself “Columbusing” replacing “Campbells” and “Menso Soup” appropriates the ready made structure idealized by the art world as a means of delivering its message. In its word choice, “Columbusing” serves as a reference to the historical violence of colonialism following the eurocentric “discovering” of America through the influence of Christopher Columbus and associating Maccrone Gallery with this trend. In addition, Menso—spanish slang for idiot—exposes the problematic and short-sided comments made from the art gallery in treating Boyle Heights as an empty space and new frontier to exploit in the art world. In essence, this artwork directly utilized the refined and limited artistic tastes of the gallery to subvert its meaning within the context of a given community to recklessly proliferate displacement within its very format. In this regard, it works within the conventional appeal to gallery viewers only to appropriate this art and reclaim it as Chicana street art in the act of creating it openly on the street and instilling a message that exposes colonizing practices of the art gallery prior to the development of organized coalitions of anti-“artwashing” protests.

Furthermore, the projection over the walls of the gallery, drawn on by later protests of BHAAAD, originates in the 2015 “Ambulate” exhibit. Its visual message—“Community is Art is Resistance”—reaffirms and emphasizes the saliency of artistic practices already existing within the community. In this regard, this projection implicates acknowledgement of art as part of the community’s ownership of space more so than the narrative of art as a tool of gentrification. The projection connects each of these abstract concepts as if to tie in all these distinctive entities as signifiers of Boyle Heights. This offers an initial strategy towards countering “artwashing” in affirming, rather than distancing, the notion of community and art. Projecting itself onto the external wall of the gallery, this reinventive approach to street art in a temporary art exhibit allows Ambularte

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Abe Ahn, “An LA Community Fights the “Discovery” of Its Neighborhood by Commercial Art Galleries”, Hyperallergic, November 13th, 2015. <https://hyperallergic.com/252268/an-la-community-fights-the-discovery-of-its-neighborhood-by-commercial-art-galleries/>

to tag itself over the gallery as to assert its dominance. Rather than equating art to the ownership of white and affluent classes, it instead equates art to its Chicax community in its message. By doing so, it ultimately re-invisions the possibilities of art in this neighborhood as owned and authored through the existing legacy of Boyle Heights.

In conclusion, the art selected from Boyle Heights artists confronting gentrification work to visualize the displacement of urban development, the spiritual battle of displacement for the neighborhood, and the reappropriation of street art by an existing community of artists. More broadly, the above artworks showcased both the existence of local and generational Boyle Heights artists socially engaging in the fight against gentrification through the representations of their art works that are often marginalized from the discourse in the implications of “artwashing.” Though often discredited and dismissed from the dominant discourse in gentrification, this indicates that the Boyle Heights community relies on associating with its creative and artistic means to reverse the system of gentrification by exposing the threats of urban development and revitalization.

### **Conclusions and Implications: A Post-Artwashing Boyle Heights?**

In summary, the above analysis aimed at documenting an urban history accounted for by an interdisciplinary analysis of revitalization strategy, visual culture, strategies of activism, and historical implications in the identification of “Artwashing” and its resistance—in social media, visual culture, and protest art—for the LA neighborhood of Boyle Heights. Considering the particular political contexts of Boyle Heights, the movement constructed associative links between “artwashing” as a force of gentrification—the displacement of a working class neighborhood that comes to represent a more affluent class overtime—in this neighborhood of predominantly working class, Chicax, renters when artistic industry comes to signify threats to the instability of spatial and cultural ownership and belonging for local residents.

Moreover, it determined the affluent class representing displacement in this narrative as Florida’s “creative class”, a distinctive socioeconomic group providing economically “meaningful” labor that promotes innovation and a code of consumption through “hip” and “distinctive” experiences. In terms of space, it drew on comparative mappings of the region to illustrate the tensions between representations as to how industrial zoned outskirts of a working class neighborhood represented an opportunity to expand the space of the curated creative class neighborhood without considering the historical legacy of a material existence for the Boyle Heights community. From there, it considered how the categorizing of “artwashing”—led by galleries but also defined by hipster coffee shops and craft breweries— suggests that the activism intentionally targets private businesses that represent distinctive codes of consumption representing the material interests of the creative class instead of the existing residents. In addition, it also aimed at addressing the art works aimed at visualizing and resisting gentrification from local self-described artists in Boyle Heights apart from the organized resistance of BHAAAD to illustrate an identity at the intersections of this tension that utilizes art to support the notions of an existing sense of community and cultural legacy excluded from discourses of development.

Moving into considerations over the particular narratives of gentrification developed by activism, I plan to further my research into the historical investigation focused on three case studies in anti-“artwashing” activism against the Boyle Heights Gallery Row to reveal an extent as to how this Protest movement’s politics of refusal actualized in organized contestations that strategically selected and targeted pressure primarily on one gallery at a time. I intended to do this in my research moving forward by documenting the prevalent strategies of activism in coalition statements on blogs, physical protests, and visual culture within each contestation. Grounded in attention for the material realities of gentrification, this argument constructs a narrative of art and gentrification beginning with the arrival of art galleries, and develops demands over the course of activism in that artists acknowledge their social responsibility to consider the community space they are operating under. In addition, the narrative visualized through the spatial tensions that implicate “artwashing” would stand to benefit from an understanding of the role of art and gentrification fails to consider the historical struggles that artists have faced over spatial displacement. In such rhetoric, art held a particular power over society that needed to be administered—repressed and incited—based on the interests of government leadership of the time. However, those engaging in the construction of “creative placemaking” to make an area and location more desirable

are often also priced out due in part to the increasing value of the property in these creative neighborhoods—possibly suggesting an exploitation of their creative labor. My further research will also investigate an urban history of artists in gentrification more specifically, and their position that a narrative of gentrification entails housing affordability and accessibility rather than the erasure of community ownership to provide an alternative perspective and account that stems from the same spatial relations documented in my research above.

Indeed, the collection of narratives proceeded with caution over asserting a value judgement towards any perspective over another. Instead, it focused on the urban history, social theories, and political implications that socially constructed art within the community through distinctive forms—coalition statements, physical protests, and visual culture. Of course, this historical study faced limitations that offer opportunities to elaborate on “artwashing” in further research, be it in the future manifestations of activism in Boyle Heights or in other global urban centers as anti- “artwashing” groups emerge. To an extent, this analysis risks taking central rhetorical terms such as “resistance”, “community”, “identity”, “local”, “neighborhood”, or even “art” for granted rather than consistently deconstructing the use and challenging the implications of these terms as vague and empirical—perhaps themselves a source of ideological mystification—throughout the investigation. Considering historical and cultural narratives of gentrification rely on these terms, future research might proceed with considering, more particularly, how the political realities and imaginaries which make up a “community” impacts a district or neighborhood’s activity over gentrification moving forward. To an extent, this investigation has embraced salient voices of activism in forming such a binary opposition in “Artwashing” of local activists against gentrifying Artists. Yet, this neglects the existence of stakeholders that might consider themselves to fall out of the constructed binary of anti-artwashing. Yet, this offers a place for new research moving forward to turn towards public opinion gathered from the multitude of divergent voices in Boyle Heights residents who do not find themselves represented by either activists or artists.

At its present moment in 2019, the gallery row of Boyle Heights appears a failed project—several galleries fled the area by either relocating or ceasing all operations.<sup>74</sup> Multiple galleries cite the confrontations and animosity provoked by the activism as one of the leading factors in ceasing operation. Though few galleries remain in operation, the proliferation of new galleries within the space and coalition statements and rallies from BHAAAD have ceased. Even in settling the activism against galleries, Boyle Heights faces new threats of gentrification from new forms of urban and housing development surrounding the community. For example, the completion of the Sixth Street Viaduct Bridge will streamline the commute from Boyle Heights to the “Arts District,” and the Sears Building—once the neighborhood’s central retail store—is proposed to be converted into luxury loft apartments rather than affordable housing.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, new zoning proposes to label the industrial zone—no longer suitable as a gallery—as an “innovation” zone for tech startups and biotech research from the University of Southern California.<sup>76</sup> In this regard, apart from art galleries as a site for cultural and economic battle, forces of gentrification threatening Boyle Heights remain a pressing reality in novel manifestations. In this image of present day urban development, one finds that the narratives of gentrification within Boyle Heights and its neighboring “Arts District” are left unsettled in moving forward, fixed into a binary opposition between artist and neighborhood. That is to say, the activist account of “Artwashing,” as it stands, suggests that the arts erodes existing community by aestheticizing gentrification and pushing in development from neighboring territories. Moving forward, the activist might begin encompassing the large scale developments threatening that carry a threat of gentrification—and its suggested displacement of an existing community—outside of, or in relation to, placemaking a trendy and creative neighborhood. That is to say, the resistance will need to revise the narrative of art as gentrification, circulate new visual works challenging the new forms of development, and begin envisioning new political strategies demystifying the gentrification of the neighborhood.

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74 Carolina Miranda, “The art gallery exodus from Boyle Heights and Why More gentrification battles loom on the Horizon” Los Angeles Times, August 8th 2018. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-gentrification-protests-future-of-boyle-heights-20180808-story.html>.

75 Ibid.

76 Caroline Miranda, “Zoning Boyle Heights: What an innovation district could mean for the neighborhood”, Los Angeles Times, August 8th, 2018. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-zoning-boyle-heights-20180807-story.html>

**Contributors Notes**

The work presented is from the introduction and the first chapter of my year-long investigation and senior honors thesis. Having the privilege of working in a department as interdisciplinary as the rhetoric department, I worked to accomplish an urban history of art and gentrification in Boyle Heights through interpreting multiple different documents and statements that constructed a politicized narrative of artistic industry as gentrification and offered a course of resistance through a politics of refusal. Despite focusing intensively on one case study, I believe the insights it provides into the increasingly applicable topic of art and gentrification prove their relevance to understanding the implications of local resistance to the injustices in urban cities prompted by gentrification.

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defendboyleheights



Unknown Artist  
Boyle Heights, CA

"Fuck White Art"  
2016  
Graffiti on Metal Door



Figure 1: Defend Boyle Heights Instagram post on “Fuck White Art”, making an “Artwork” from a “Crime Scene”

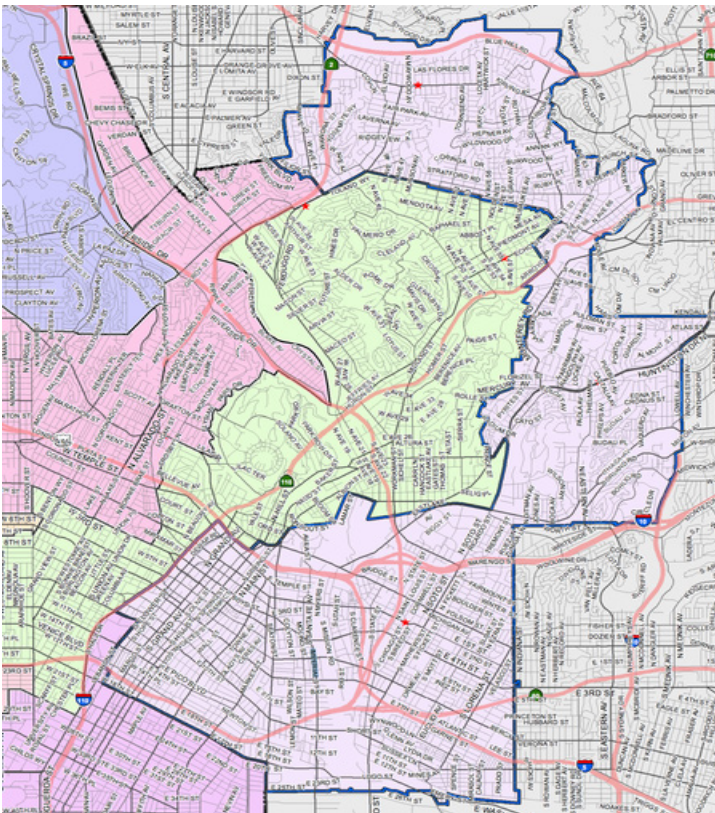


Figure 2: LA City Council Districts (District 14, Boyle Heights and the “Arts District” in light pink)

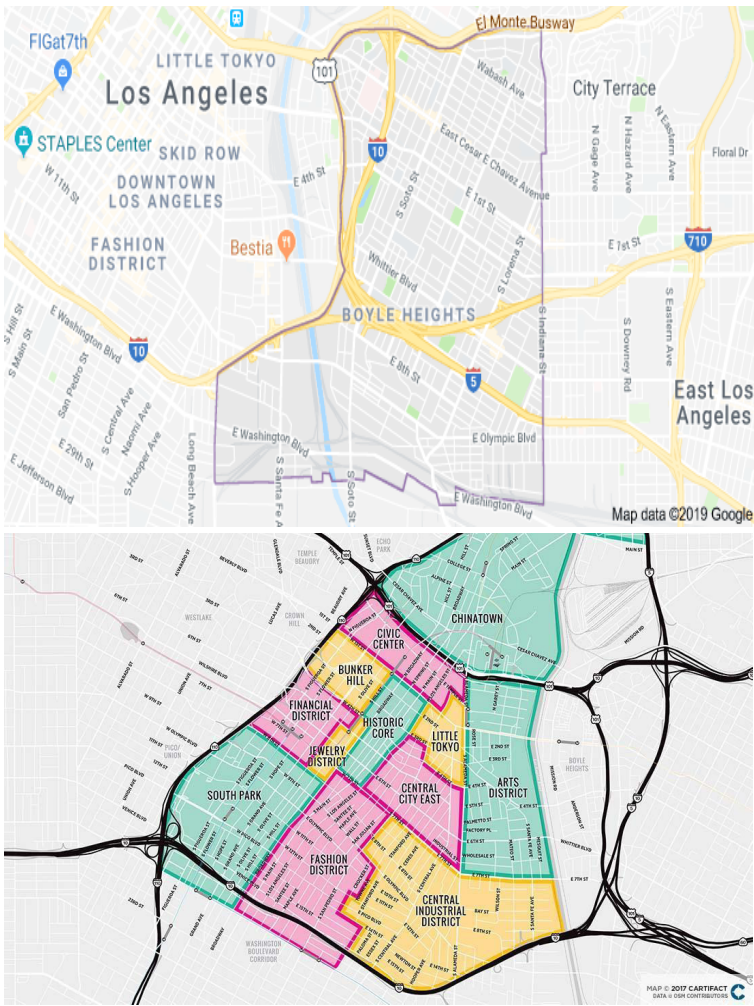


Figure 3: DTLA Map of Downtown Los Angeles and Google Map of Boyle Heights

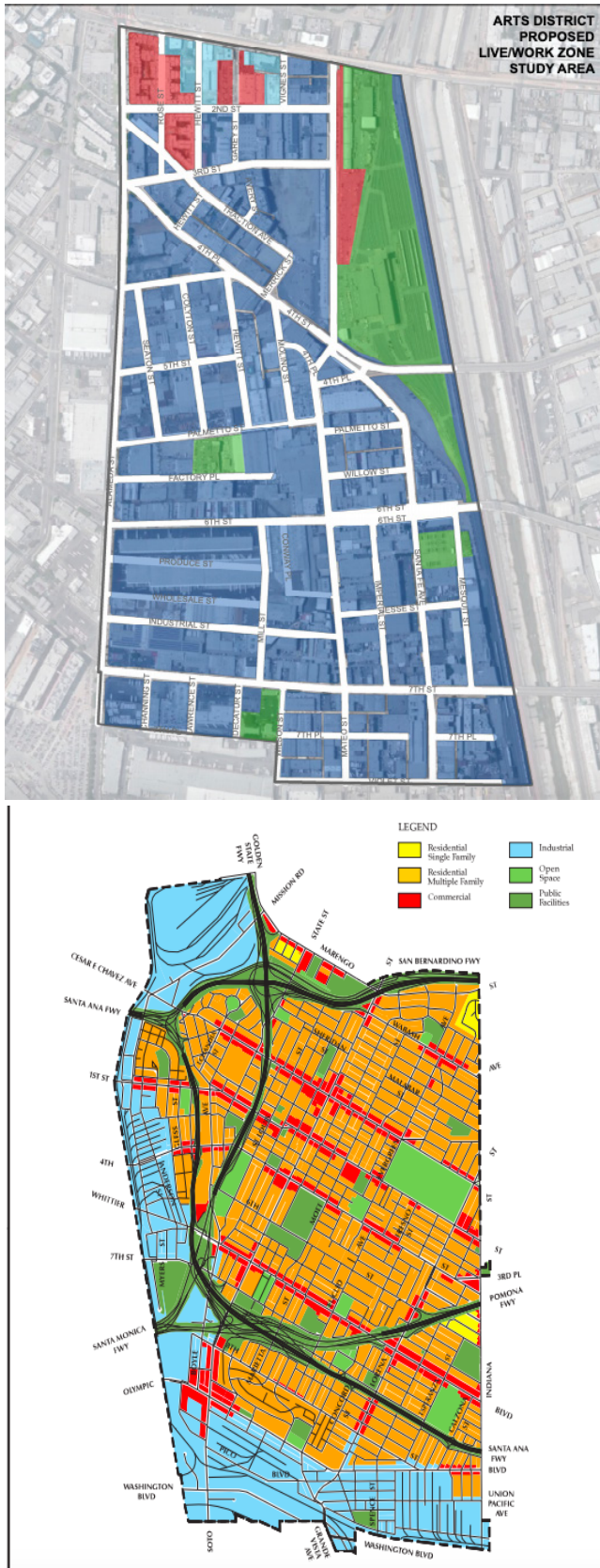


Figure 4: Zoning Maps of the “Arts District” and “Boyle Heights”

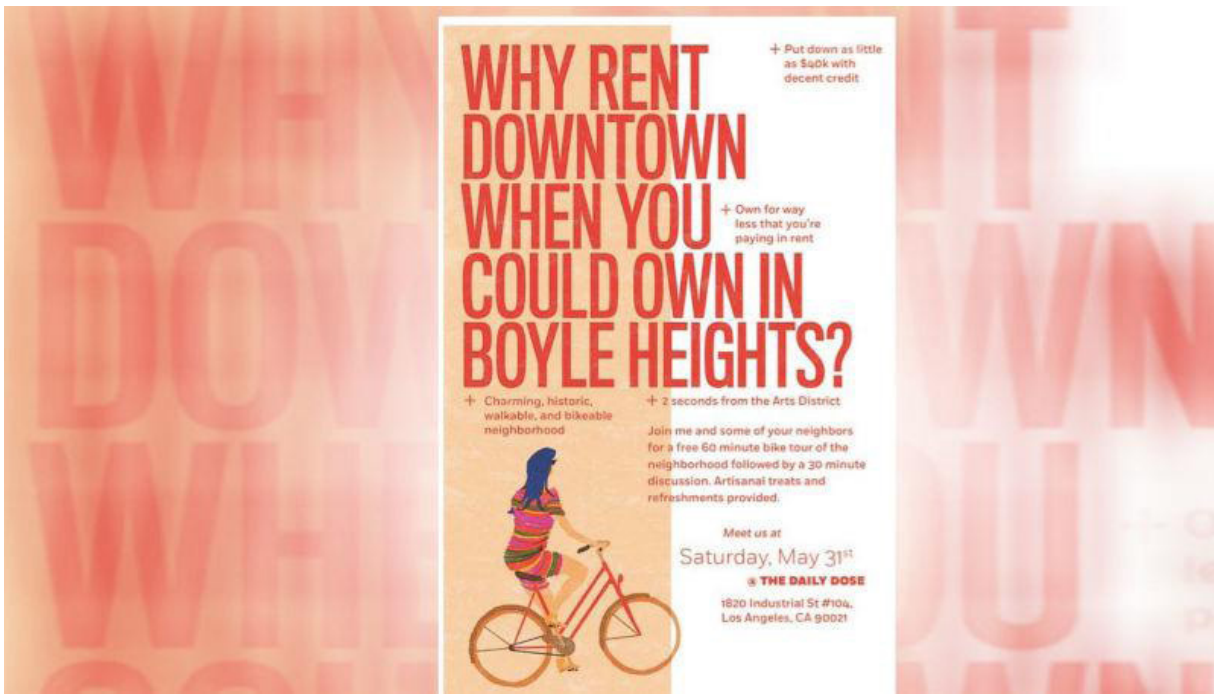


Figure 5: Real Estate Advertisement for Boyle Heights Circulating in the “Arts District”

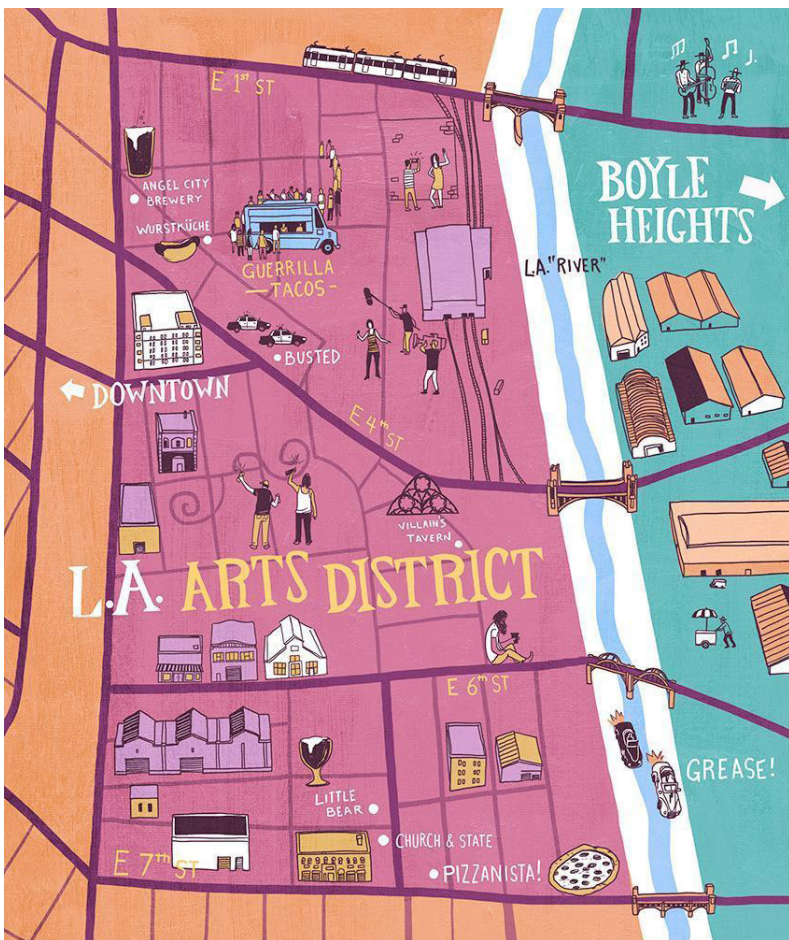
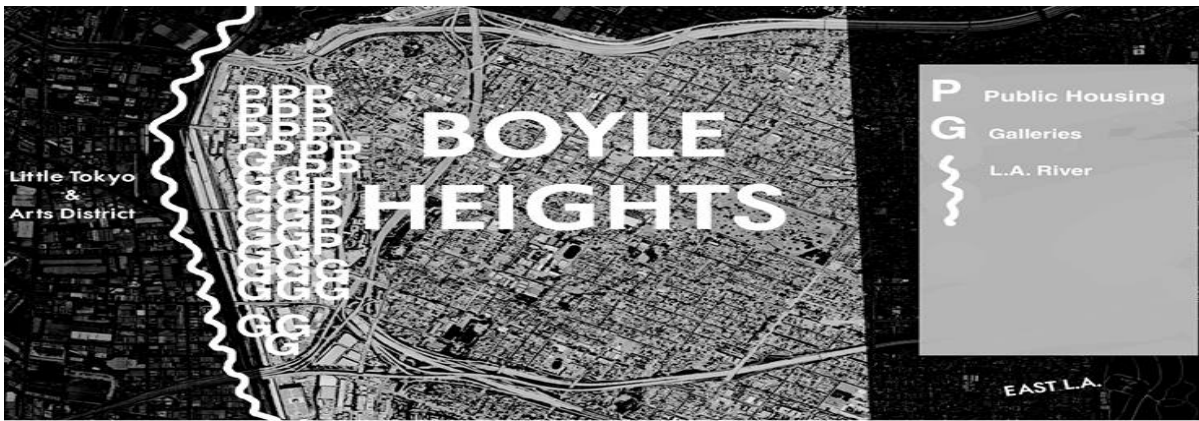


Figure 6: Illustrated Map of the “Arts District,” Michael Hirshon, 2016.



**Arts-oriented** pioneering is urban colonialism, that came from the legacy of redlining and white supremacy. Galleries have a long history of being the scouts of real estate developers -- who say the area is an industrial wasteland; who say there was 'nothing' here before artists and galleries came in.

**But** these buildings used to be workplaces that provided jobs for the neighborhood. The housing around them was affordable for low-income people. Some of the only public housing left in Los Angeles is adjacent to the galleries, 400 feet away! Look at the map above.

**Your** art and your career can be re-aligned by listening to the community and their voices. Take a stand and rethink: **Which side of history do you want be on?**

Figure 7: Map of “Artwashing” from BHAAAD facebook page



Figure 8: Boyle Heights Against Artwashing and Displacement and Defend Boyle Heights Facebook Profile Pictures



#BOYCOTTBOYLEHEIGHTSBEERFEST

Figure 9: DBH Flyer Against Beer Fest



Figure 10: Weird Wave Coffee Protests by BHAAAD and DBH

# KOMBUCHA



**THE WEAPON OF THE PEOPLE**

**DEFEND BOYLE  
HEIGHTS**

Figure 11: Title of Defend Boyle Heights Blog Post on the vandalism of Weird Wave Coffee



Figure 12: “DisPLaced”, Wayne Perry, Serigraph Print, 2017



Figure 13: “Lupita Was Displaced”, Nico Avina, 7 ½ ft tall plywood cut out, 2018.



Figure 14: Artworks from Ambularte Mobile Art Exhibit Protesting Maccarone Gallery  
<http://defendboyleheights.blogspot.com/2018/02/we-dont-need-breweries-bars-or-sellouts.html?q=beer>