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Leimert Park, An African Village

The Possibility of an Ethnically Branded Cultural District

A thesis in partial satisfaction of the requirements for
the degree Master of Arts in African American Studies

by

Yolanda Yvette Hester

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Leimert Park, An African Village

The Possibility of an Ethnically Branded Cultural District

by

Yolanda Yvette Hester

Master of Arts in African American Studies
University of California, Los Angeles, 2017
Professor Marcus Hunter, Chair

Few studies have focused attention specifically on ethnically branded cultural districts and even less have investigated the pursuit of these districts in Black neighborhoods. By using Leimert Park, a Black cultural hub in Los Angeles, as my case study, this study examines the historical, cultural and economic considerations that can emerge when Black communities pursue cultural tourism and seek the formal establishment of an ethnically branded cultural district. In highlighting the voices of community members, this study identifies four important concerns: consensus building in naming of new districts, the challenges of reframing community cultural assets for cultural tourism, the dilemmas of markets and capital access and issues of gentrification.

The thesis of Yolanda Yvette Hester is approved.

Christopher C. Tilly

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University of California, Los Angeles 2017

This work is dedicated to Wayne B. Lamb and Chloe V. H. Lamb.

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Leimert Park, An African Village
The Possibility of an Ethnically Branded Cultural District
Yolanda Hester

Introduction

Since the late 70s, the establishment of ethnically branded cultural districts and the promotion of cultural tourism within those districts have become a developing trend. A number of factors had propelled this development: the economic growth of cultural tourism, cities reinvestment in urban areas spurred by suburban migration back into cities, and the cultivation of community driven, public and private sector partnering as a development approach. Comprehensive research studies have not yet caught up with the growth of this trend. There are a number of studies on cultural districts (NASAA, 2015, Noonan, 2013, Loukaitou-Sideris, 2011, McKercher 2002, Borrup 2014, Johanssen & Cornebise, 2010, Santagata, 2002, Sheth, 2014) but few focus specifically on ethnically branded cultural districts and even less on the establishment of these districts in Black communities. This could be attributed to the fact that there are very few Black ethnically branded districts. Some Black neighborhoods have formed arts and historical districts, but few have succeeded in forming an ethnically branded district. The lack of these districts do not reflect a lack of community interest, as a number of neighborhoods have pursued designation, without success. Neighborhoods in Oakland, California, New York, Florida, Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles and Washington DC are amongst the most robust efforts. It is understanding these efforts and the challenges they bring that concerns this study.

Engaging in an in-depth study of Leimert Park, a Black cultural center in Los Angeles and its pursuits of formal designation over the last 15 years, this study examines the way in which ethnically and culturally specific histories and socio-economic legacies impact the decision making process with regards to community economic development. As these pursuits are community initiated and community driven, the voices of community members are specifically highlighted throughout this study. This work suggests that although much can be generalized across ethnicity and class makeup of neighborhoods, that research that considers race, ethnicity, and culture can provide a dynamic and nuanced understanding of factors that impact the outcomes of community led development efforts. An understanding of the historical relevance of race and ethnicity can clarify why certain decisions are made and what priorities are at stake. An in-depth analysis of cultural and social relations can also illuminate how value systems are constructed.

A brief history of Leimert Park and the development of cultural districts will help contextualize the findings. Through interviews with community member and local officials, four issues emerged as important challenges that shaped the progression of formal designation efforts: consensus building in naming of new districts, the challenges of reframing community cultural assets for cultural tourism, the dilemmas of markets and capital access and issues of gentrification. Many studies examine the formation of cultural districts from the perspective of local officials and how cultural districts are used as development and revitalization tools, this study seeks to center community voices, the challenges they face and the strategies they employ.

Literature

Cultural districts are defined as formally designated or labeled areas or cultural clusters with high concentrations of cultural activities and institutions (Frost-Kumpf 2001). They are areas with defined boundaries that are formally labeled as districts. (NASAA, 2015) These districts can get their labels and boundaries from local government, business groups, or community members.

A number of terms are used in bodies of work to describe cultural districts, informed by the disciplinary lens of the literature. In tourism and leisure literature (McNulty & Russel, 2014, McKercher & du Cros, 2002), which primarily focuses on the consumption of cultural assets, terms such as cultural tourism, heritage tourism, and in some cases ethnic branding (Wherry, 2011), might be used. In historic preservation literature (Bryant, 2006, Polanca, 2014), which focuses on the preservation of historical assets, the terms, “historic district” might be used and in community economic development literature (Borup, 2014, Loukaitou & Soureli, 2011, Noonan, 2013, Sheth 2014, Thirnton, 2012), terms such as cultural districts, arts districts, and cultural corridors or quarters might be used. All of these terms roughly describe a similar phenomenon and are sometimes used interchangeably, but there are some important distinctions between an arts district, a historic district, and an ethnically branded or designated cultural district. Historic districts are administered through local preservation offices, which are under the guidance of federal preservation offices. Historic preservation efforts are primarily concerned with the conservation of structures, landscapes or artifacts of historical significance, therefore resources are often directed toward place, buildings and structures and, indirectly, to communities or individuals. Arts districts, on the other hand, are administered through local and

state offices and are concerned with formalizing areas that provide a concentration of cultural production and consumption, ie., theaters, music venues, art galleries, etc. Ethnically branded cultural districts, however, are districts that are designated based on the ethnic and cultural identity of a community, such as Little Tokyo, Byzantine-Latino Quarter, Little Ethiopia and Chinatown. They are formalized through local council districts, therefore the process of officiating these districts can vary. The focus of this study will be ethnically branded cultural districts.

As the establishment of ethnically branded cultural districts is a fairly new phenomenon, scholarship is limited. Some important works are by Laguerre (2000), Sandoval (2010), Wherry (2011), Boyd (2000, 2008) and Loukaitou-Sideris (2011). Some include Black neighborhoods as part of a broader analysis on cultural districts. A few studies were particularly useful for this research. John J. Betancur and Janet L. Smith's (2016) research in *Claiming Neighborhoods, New Ways of Understanding Neighborhood Change*, was useful in its critique of how the racialization of space effects neighborhood change and that, perceptions of race can impact property values and investments, regardless of the class status of a neighborhood. Along with the work of Frederick F. Wherry (2011) in *The Philadelphia Barrio, The Arts Branding and Neighborhood Transformation*, which offered helpful insight into the commercialization of culture, ethnic branding, and marketing, both of these works highlighted how representations of race and culture, both within and outside of a community, had important economic implications. Two works were particularly useful in understanding the politics of community mobilization around development efforts: Michelle R. Boyd's (2008), *Jim Crow Nostalgia, Reconstructing Race in Bronzeville*, which detailed the political workings behind attempts to revitalize and

rebrand Bronzeville, a Black neighborhood in Chicago and Gerardo Sandoval's (2010) *Immigrants and the Revitalization of Los Angeles: Development and Change in MacArthur Park*, a case study of community change and initiative in McArthur Park, a Mesoamerican immigrant community in Los Angeles. Two works that provided theoretical insight into the transactional nature and economic mechanisms that sustain ethnic enclaves were: Michel S. Laguerre's (2000) *The Global Ethnopolis: Chinatown, Japantown, and Manilatown in American Society*, which offers a framework in which to understand the transnational and global nature of ethnic enclaves and how relationships within the broader "container city" are negotiated. And Paul Stoller's *Money Has No Smell, The Africanization of New York City*, an ethnography of activity between the African community in New York and local residents in Harlem. Two scholar's whose works focused specifically on ethnic enclaves and cultural districts in Los Angeles, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris' work on ethnically branded neighborhoods and Gary A. Dymksi's work on "ethnobanks," proved very useful. Each of these works offered a dynamic critical lens in which to understand and critique efforts in Leimert Park.

Leimert Park and The Formation of a Black Cultural Hub

In 1927, Leimert Park became one of the first planned communities in the US. Developed by Walter H. Leimert and designed by the Olmsted Brothers, whose father designed Central Park in New York, it was originally designed to attract to middle and upper-income Whites and held a racially restrictive covenant to keep out non-Whites. It wasn't until the Shelley vs. Kramer ruling in 1948, which declared racially restrictive covenants unenforceable, that non-Whites were able to move into the neighborhood. This coincided with a wave of war-

time Black migration as defense industry jobs became available to Blacks in the West. These new economic opportunities cultivated a growing Black middle class who were able to buy homes in middle class neighborhoods (Sides, 2003, p.57). Although the ruling made it possible to own and occupy homes in Leimert Park they were still met with opposition. “In the decade following the Shelley decision, whites across the County bombed six black homes, burned four more to the ground, and intimidated countless African Americans through an array of wicked techniques including death threats, cross-burnings and "KKK" scrawlings” (KCET, Josh Sides) But as more non-Whites moved in, White flight ensued.

Leimert Park eventually became the home to many Black artists, both Ella Fitzgerald and Ray Charles called it home. It became an important destination for Black artists and a key site for the cultivation of the Black Arts Movement in Los Angeles. But it wasn’t until Alonzo and Dale Davis opened the Brockman Gallery in 1967 that Leimert Park began to grow into its current shoes as a Black cultural hub. A number of artists and entrepreneurs followed in these footsteps, developing a number of culturally relevant Black owned businesses and organizations.

A walking tour today of Leimert Park and its arts district would focus on Degnan and 43rd, the heart of Leimert Park Village. Starting from Leimert Park Village Plaza, a small park at the northwest corner of Leimert Park one could see a number of vendors selling art, jewelry, African inspired goods. One could also see KAOS Network, a neighborhood institution owned by Ben Caldwell, artist, filmmaker and resident, The Vision Theater, World Stage, a performance art space founded in 1989 by the late jazz drummer Billy Higgins and poet Kamau Daaood, Eso Won Books, one of the country’s oldest Black bookstores, Art and Practice, a gallery and educational space, founded by artist Mark Bradford. Further down Degnan is Ackee Bamboo, a

Caribbean eatery, Zambezi Bazaar, Sita, Gallery Plus and Barbara Morrison Performing Arts Center. Each offering an array of culturally specific products and services. Although Leimert Park's beginnings reflect a history of sanctioned segregation and exclusion, it has become a neighborhood steeped in Black culture and, as revealed in interviews, a community with a strong sense of identity. An important marker of its identity can be seen along Degnan Blvd, The Sankofa Passage, an art installation embedded in the cement along Degnan, symbolizing the presence of African culture in America. Sankofa is an African principle derived from Ghana that evokes the idea of reaching back in history to move forward. The "Passage" reflects both, a "rites of passage," or hand-off of inspiration given to a next generation of artists and cultural influencers, and the strength and spirit of those who survived the Middle Passage or Maafa (African Holocaust). The bronze plaques honor community members whose cultural and political impact is embedded in the memory and history of Leimert Park. The Sankofa Passage serves as the most powerful and enduring declaration of Black culture's hold on Leimert Park.

Methods

As very few Black communities have successfully petitioned for designation status, yet a number of communities have pursued designation, this study is concerned with understanding this discrepancy. Comprehensive scholarship on cultural districts is limited and even less focus on Black neighborhoods or analyze failed cases. The significance of this study is in highlighting the culturally specific push-pull factors that Black communities grapple with when employing cultural districts and cultural tourism as development tools. This study does not advocate for or against the development of cultural districts in Black neighborhoods, but is inspired to better

understand how community driven efforts unfold and how community members work through challenges.

This study draws from semi-structured interviews with local community members, community organizers and officials and city records to assess designation pursuits over a fifteen year period and to reveal which factors had the most significant impact of designation efforts. As these efforts are community driven this study highlights the voices of community members. Interviewees were local business owner, residents, community organizers and cultural gatekeepers. An appendix of interviewees is included. This study also incorporates analysis retrieved from academic journals, newspaper articles, and census data.

Cultural Districts and the Development of Ethnic Enclaves in Los Angeles

Cultural Districts

Culture is a useful strategy for revitalizing urban communities. The establishment of cultural districts are one way that both communities and local governments employ to energize existing cultural assets. A number of states have recently begun setting formal processes in place to officially designate and promote cultural areas (NASAA, 2015). Many districts are community initiated, where mobilization and grassroots efforts have nudged local governments to formally acknowledge a particular neighborhood and its understood cultural identity. For some communities, a successful district can be a boost of much needed economic stimulus, with increased property values, job growth and increased revenue for local businesses (NASAA, 2015, Noonan, 2013, Loukaitou-Sideris, 2011). Public officials, too, have recognized these

benefits. For local governments, cultural districts can provide investment, development and revitalization opportunities. As local officials began to redirect their attention back to neglected communities and mine for creative revitalization approaches, cultural districts enable the transformation of cultural assets that are already in place and allow for more holistic community development where partnerships with community actors shape efforts. Promoting cultural districts also allow both local government and communities to take advantage of the growth of cultural tourism, which is becoming an important economic driver in urban areas (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2011, McKercher 2002). For many community members, the benefits are not just economic but also symbolic. Establishing a district can preserve cultural traditions, it can acknowledge the historical importance of communities whose formations were subjected to segregative and discriminatory practices, and it can allow communities, whose existence is at the mercy of external political and economic forces, to feel rooted and legitimate. Establishing cultural districts and promoting cultural tourism can also have downsides, as in gentrification and loss of authenticity.

Some cultural districts begin “organically” as a cluster of cultural activities that lead to formal recognition, such as arts districts. Others formed as cities became important destinations for immigration and migration. Influxes of newcomers, some of who gravitated to areas where cultural and linguistic shorthand facilitated their settlement, and others, who were limited by housing choice due to segregation, created communities rich in cultural assets. Each of these factors propelled the development of “ethnic enclaves.” Although ethnic enclaves are concentrations of both ethnic residential and commercial activity, where one ethnic hegemony dominates, what distinguishes an ethnic enclave from a primarily residential cluster is the

commercial activity. Ethnic enclaves are places where transactions and exchange of resources happen, whether internally within the enclave, between co-ethnics, or externally between enclaves and the broader city culture or globally and transnationally. Although the term mostly refers to immigrant communities (Wilson and Portes 1980), Black communities also align with this definition as they are sites of dynamic economic activity, where business districts serve their community and interface with a broader economic and political dynamic. Black communities are also global, transnational places where African Americans share space with Black immigrants throughout Africa and the African diaspora, yet share a collective pan-African identity and history of struggle. The cultural and linguistic diversity of Black communities are well documented, the long-term Caribbean influences and more recent West African influences in Harlem or the shared communities between African Americans and East Africans in Washington DC, or the impact of Afro-Latino culture on Black neighborhoods in Los Angeles. As Black neighborhoods are both transactional and global sites, I include them in my use of the phrase “ethnic enclaves.”

Ethnic Enclaves in Los Angeles

The City of Los Angeles is considered one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the US. Its massive sprawl has always been a draw for communities of newcomers wanting to claim space and start anew. Its coastal location has made it an important entry point for immigration and exchange of resources, and its promise of economic potential has lured waves of domestic migration. Los Angeles is in many ways a patchwork of ethnic enclaves, steeped in traditions and values, that have fueled the local economy and are an important part of Los Angeles’ history.

It is also a city on the brink of unprecedented change as housing prices skyrocket, making long-standing enclaves, such as Boyle Heights and Leimert Park grapple with gentrification. The economy is shifting toward a service economy moving away from manufacturing. As massive development projects increase population density claiming space, which LA is known for, is more difficult. In *Third L.A. with Architecture Critic Christopher Hawthorne*, a documentary that seeks to shed light on these changes, Hawthorne suggests that Los Angeles is going through a third transformation of its civic identity, “it no longer dreams of expansion, the way it did, of growing its way out of every problem . . . Los Angeles is, instead, a city that is folding back or doubling back on itself, instead of looking for new fresh territory and new edges to expand toward, it's looking instead to redevelop areas of the city that it ignored in many ways” (KCET, 2015). What Hawthorne fails to mention is the repopulation of urban areas also fuel this trend, as the flow of suburban migration is returning to city centers.

In the past decade efforts to designate ethnic neighborhoods in Los Angeles has accelerated as communities strategize to hold on to traditions, stave off gentrification and harness impending changes on their own terms. Chinatown and Little Tokyo were the first neighborhoods to be officially designated in the 70s. Both were developed with the involvement of Los Angeles' Community Redevelopment Agency, which aided commercial development and addressed issues of urban blight. In 1981 Koreatown was designated. But it wasn't until the late 90s with the establishment of Thaitown (1999) and Byzantine-Latino Quarter (1997) that community mobilization around formal ethnic branding increased. A number of neighborhoods sought out designation in the 2000s (Sheth, 2014). Communities employed a variety of approaches, as no formal process was in place, but for most neighborhoods, designation was the

domain of the local council districts and communities leveraged political and economic power to gain their support. By 2006 the city of Los Angeles formalized the process for designation, where community organizers can file a petition. The authority to designate is still the domain of local council districts, but city offices help expedite the decision making process.

Although, the most successful efforts put forth a detailed plan that outlined a strategy for a viable commercial area, what is ultimately the key to approval of a petition can vary from council district to council district. Some efforts, such as Thaitown, emphasized a strategy for affordable housing, where as others stress the historical relevance of the community, as in the case of Byzantine-Latino Quarter. In all, there are roughly 14 ethnically branded neighborhoods in Los Angeles. Not all petitions have succeeded. Some efforts have trouble getting off the ground, as too few community members share the burden of making it happen or have difficulty in mobilizing a significant portion of the community, such is the case with “Little Brazil” and “Little Belize.” In other cases, such as the effort to designate “Little India” in Artesia, the effort failed as opposition from neighboring communities contested the legitimacy of the claim. In some cases efforts fail when competing agendas clash as in the case of “Historic Central American Town” and to some extent in Leimert Park. As these efforts are community driven and administered locally, many variables determine the success or failure of a petition, and therefore it is hard to generalize markers of a successful process.

Leimert Park, Tradition and Change

As you travel south on Crenshaw Blvd, past the 10 Freeway, billboards make a noticeable shift from White faces to Black faces, as advertisers, selling identical products, make clear their

target market. Other markers of Black community and institution building are also obvious, such as West Angeles Church of God and Christ, a well attended local Black church, and its properties sprinkled along the strip, and the signage of One United Bank, the largest Black-owned bank in the country, towering over the Crenshaw Corridor just south of Rodeo Rd. The Crenshaw corridor which houses a cluster of Black neighborhoods, including Leimert Park, runs north to south between Washington Blvd and Slauson Ave and east to west from Arlington Ave. to La Brea Ave. Continuing down on Crenshaw, clusters of mom and pop shops and Black institutions, such as Lula Washington Dance Theatre, Angelus Funeral Home (founded 1923) and the offices of the La Sentinel (founded 1933), a Black newspaper, are interspersed with popular franchises, such as Denny's and Big 5 as well as bigger chains such as Walgreens and Starbucks. Crenshaw Blvd hugs the western edge of Leimert Park. Demographically, Leimert Park holds one the highest concentrations of Black residents in Los Angeles, with its Black population at 80%. It is a predominately middle income neighborhood, nestled between some of the richest and poorest Black communities. On the west is Baldwin Hills and View Park-Windsor Hills and to the east are neighborhoods that were once predominately Black and are now mostly Latino.

The signs of change are also evident throughout Leimert Park. The massive transit project, the development of the Crenshaw Metro line, bifurcates the neighborhood, as Harriet, the special tunnel boring machine named after Harriet Tubman, rips through the heart of Black Los Angeles (Hyman, 2016). Although some residents support the project, believing it will bring more access to the community, others brace for the onslaught of gentrification and displacement. Hopefully, the peppering of vacant businesses along Crenshaw is not a sign of what's to come.

According to community members, there have been several attempts to ethnically brand Leimert Park since the 1980s. The first documented effort I found was in 1991 when Melva Parhams led a group call The African International Village Association. Their goal was to re-brand the Crenshaw corridor as “African International Village” and incorporate symbolic designs throughout. One such idea was to construct a hotel in the shape of a pyramid, emphasizing an Afrocentric vision that draws inspiration from Egyptian culture. Ms. Parhams stated in an interview for the LA Times, “There are 10 architects, artists, and engineers who have stepped forward and made all these wonderful designs and I have these maps that would show where everything would go. They’re planning out the buildings and the transportation. The business owners in the area support it. There would be African themed shops, and arts, and crafts for sale. I dream about seeing the hotel shaped like one of the Pyramids there at Adams, too. . . People think of Africa and think of spears and little huts, but there is far more to it than that. They need to know about Egypt and how it was a black land” (LA Times 1994).

The early 2000s reveal two efforts, one in which a few community members desired to rename Leimert Park “Sankofa Village.” A petition and vote was presented to community members, who rejected the idea. Another effort was spearheaded by community organizer, B. Hall. Her group petitioned to have Leimert Park designated as, initially “Africatown” but changed it to “African Village” after polling community members. Ms. Hall’s efforts are ongoing. A number of factors have effected the progress of these efforts from lack of support to divergent agendas. Although Leimert Park has yet to be designated as an ethnically branded cultural district, it has recently become an arts district.

The Challenges of Naming and Renaming of Ethnic Enclaves

Community input plays a critical role in establishing ethnically branded cultural districts and building consensus in naming a new district is an important first step. In Los Angeles' formal process, communities must file a "renaming" petition with the city clerk's office. For many ethnic enclaves, this first step is simple and straightforward as most enclaves seeking designation have clearly established cultural and ethnic identities. Some have nicknames that have become embedded in the civic identity of the broader city, such as Chinatown in Los Angeles or Little Havana in Miami. For others, choosing a name is an opportunity to strengthen ties and global relationships between a homeland and a "satellite" enclave such as Little Italy in New York or Koreatown in Los Angeles. But, for other neighborhoods, consensus building around renaming can be a source of tension as interpretations of history and divergent economic agendas collide.

Some ethnic enclaves carry sobriquets, nicknames chosen by others, and often these names are reflective of the history of exclusion and "otherness" that they endured. One such example is Japantown in San Francisco. "Japanese residents referred to the Japanese quarter as *Nihonjin-Machi*. . . Residents fought against the imposition of a name by the dominant sector of society. For many years the quarter was referred to as *Japantown* (Nihon-Machi) by outsiders and as *Nihonjin-Machi* (Japanese People Town) by insiders." (Laguerre, 2000. p. 5). The sprinkling of Bronzeveilles in cities like Chicago, Los Angeles and Milwaukee, derogatory

names imposed on Black neighborhoods by outsiders when they shifted from non-black to black is another example of a sobriquet. In many cases, ethnic communities adopted and transformed these names, in much the same way that communities members in Leimert Park transformed a name that carries the history of exclusion and the racist past of restrictive covenants. For some community members renaming offers an opportunity to cast away these reminders and exercise an essential right, which is of particular importance to a group of people who were at one time prohibited from choosing their own names and whose current surnames carry the stigma of enslavement. One community member, a resident, who chose to remain anonymous, when asked what renaming could mean for the community stated, “To be able to study and recognize your identity as Black and that we’re not Europeans, we came from Africa. We came from a continent where we were a beautiful people. And they had lives they lived, they had moral philosophies that benefited them.”

But for others facing past histories can be difficult. Jackie Ryan, owner of Zambezi Bazaar, a local retailer who sells African inspired products, and supported the Sankofa Village efforts says, “No, we couldn’t get a consensus from residents, even the business owners. We tried to. We wanted to change it to Sankofa Village, we wanted to call it that and we lost in the vote. It was business owners and different people, but there wasn’t enough people to side with the vote, because they thought that Leimert Park was greater than Sankofa Village . . . There was a [racially restrictive] covenant from the Leimert family, but even though there was covenant, the people voted to have it stay Leimert . . . They wanted it Leimert, so really to fight for your own identity, to name yourself and define yourself has been around [for] years, but people are afraid, people fear it because of the past. It’s hard to touch it.” But for some, the transformational

quality of Leimert Park shifting from an all White restrictive neighborhood to a Black cultural center is worth preserving. Ben Caldwell, resident and owner of KAOS Network, a community media lab and arts organization that opened in 1990 explains, “I always use Harlem as an example, the name was a Jewish name, it was a Polish name, there were a number of different other cultures that were there before it became a Black name. I think there’s something really strongly powerful by changing a name that didn’t want Black people to then have the designation of a black neighborhood on top of that, it’s kind of like karma.” But, as cultural districts and cultural tourism are economic enterprises, others have more practical concerns. “I think it’s really hard to dig out of a name that is already there and re-designate it. You say you’re going to the African Village and people say where’s that and you say Leimert Park, why not just say, Leimert Park. It’s something that grows out of the way people remember it and make it work,” says one longtime community member and business owner. How best to utilize history in development efforts are challenging, especially for communities whose histories are steeped in exclusion and oppression.

Leland Saito’s *The Politics of Exclusion* and Clarence Stone *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*, writes of this in their work. Saito details the political debates concerning the failed effort to preserve the Douglas Hotel in San Diego. The Douglas Hotel, which opened in 1924, was at one time the gem of Black institution building in a Black San Diego. As segregation prevented visiting Black artists, musicians and political leaders from staying at White hotels, the Douglas Hotel become a major destination for Black elites. In the late 80s efforts to preserve the hotel could not build support within the Black community. “Its existence was a stark reminder of racial discrimination, exclusion and segregation in society” (Saito,

2009). Stone's work also addresses the dilemma of preservation in Black communities by offering a detail account of the political interplay between preservations, developers, and politicians in designating Auburn Ave in Atlanta a historic district. Although the establishment of Sweet Auburn Historic District succeeded, organizers had to contend with Auburn's Ave's celebrated history as the home of Martin Luther King Jr. and the history of exclusion and segregation which confined Blacks to the area to begin with. Both Saito's and Stone's work unpack the friction between interpretations of history and how, in shaping Black identity and progress, Black people are challenged with determining what aspects of the past should be included in a forward vision.

Another challenge that plagued renaming efforts was consensus building around an Afrocentric and pan-African collective identity. Both ideologies became an important part of Leimert Park's cultural identity, as it evolved into a hub of Black art and culture and grew into a site of activism in the late 60s through Los Angeles' Civil Unrest in 1992. The term Afrocentric was first introduced by W.E.B. DuBois in the 60s in his transcript draft of "Proposed plans for an Encyclopedia Africana," but it wasn't until the 80s that the Afrocentrism movement took flight through the work of Dr. Molefi Asante. Afrocentrism is a philosophical framework that centers an African epistemology. Historically, Afrocentrism has been an important dynamic of Leimert Park's identity, as reflected in its annual Kwanzaa Parade, African Market Place festival and the numerous African artifacts and African inspired cultural products sold at local businesses. Some scholars argue that Afrocentrism is primarily an American ideological framework, but others suggest that there is a broader appeal. For some, Afrocentrism embodies a narrow aesthetic, that may not be representative of an ideologically and ethnically diverse Black community and may

not capture a broader appeal for the purposes of cultural tourism. Bernard Parks, former councilman of the area told a journalist, “So Leimert Park doesn’t die on the vine, it needs to attract the type of business that drives them there every night, . . . Normally (people) will not go every night to Leimert Park to buy this unique Afro-centric trinket” (Associated Press, 2007). But, for some proof of its appeal is in the staying power, as many of the business in the area, that sell and produce Afrocentric inspired products, have been active for at least a decade or two.

A Pan-African identity, although it has a wider appeal, with interpretations throughout Africa and the African diaspora, also has limitations generationally, as younger generations are more removed from this political movement. Pan-Africanism unifies people of the African diaspora around a common homeland, “the making of memory around that homeland, the recognition of marginalization in the new location, a commitment to the restoration of the homeland and a return and continued relationship with the homeland,” (Smith, 2014). For some, these ideologies represent a particular “moment in time” and may not capture a forward going concept of Black identity and may not be relatable across generations and ethnicities. The significance of a Pan-African or Afrocentrism name such as “African Village” or “Sankofa Village,” although historically relevant for the neighborhood, may not always translate across the diaspora, which, as Black communities are home to both domestic and a growing number of foreign-born Blacks, is viewed as a missed economic opportunity for robust cultural tourism.

Leimert Park is 80% Black, one of the highest concentrations of Blacks residents in Los Angeles County. South Los Angeles, which houses Leimert Park and the surrounding Black neighborhoods, is home to a growing population of Belizeans, Ethiopians, Caribbeans, Afro-Latinos and West Africans. Community members in Leimert Park overall embrace the concept

of unity. "I'm all for a plan where blacks can come together. We need to realize that economically, all of us--Jamaican, American, Somali or whatever--can have a collective strength." said one community member of the 1991 effort (LA Times, 1993). But, unifying these African diasporic communities under one name is a challenge that other, more homogeneous enclaves do not have to confront. Some of these communities have fractured and pursued their own cultural districts with Little Ethiopia established in 2004 and an unsuccessful pursuit of Little Belize in the late 2000s. Yet both of these communities are small and might not command the sustained cultural tourism that a joint effort could support.

One approach may be to consider a pan-ethnic identity for the purposes of economic development. Pan-ethnicity is “defined by an inherent tension derived from maintaining subgroup distinctions while developing a sense of metagroup unity. The maintenance of subgroup identities is necessary for the success and longevity of broader-based panethnic groupings. Diversity is thus inherently a part of panethnicity” (Okamoto, 2014). This could be a useful strategy for Black communities, which would enable unity, for the purposes of economic and political leverage, without sacrificing diversity. In other words Black communities need not come together under one aesthetic, cultural concept or even a singular racial understanding. Chanchanit Martorell, the founder and executive director of the Thai Community Development Center, who spearheaded the designation efforts for Thaitown in 1999 and has helped numerous other communities navigate the designation process, utilized a pan-ethnic strategy in coalition with other Asian cultural districts in Los Angeles, The Asian Pacific Islander Coalition, to receive federal designation in 2008. “We had developed an Asian Pacific Islander Neighborhood Coalition, made up of these distinct communities, Chinatown, Little Tokyo, Koreatown and

Historic Filipinotown, in the Asian community to press for the Preserve America (Neighborhood) designation and we just felt that more power for us if we came in as a coalition, but still preserving our distinct identities as neighborhoods because we're going with separate applications . . . but we needed the federal government to know that we support one another, that we are a coalition that's pushing for this.” The Central American community also, developed a pan-ethnic strategy to designation a portion of Los Angeles under the label, Central American Historical District, but plans fell through.

Adapting a pan-ethnic identity in the Black community can come with challenges. “Among some black immigrant groups, the rejection of pan-ethnicity often stems from a resistance to racialization (Okamoto, 2014).” For some Black immigrant groups, especially those from more racially homogeneous countries, American racial categorizations do not always translate to their concept of identity, and they might therefore resist a pan-ethnic identity that hinges solely on race. Another challenge for some groups is having to choose between their racial, ethnic, cultural identity or nationality. For example, someone from Belize, may phenotypically appear Black, but may feel more aligned with a Hispanic cultural identity. Yet, a pan-ethnic identity and community label, need not be built around race, and in many ways, although past names submitted to rename Leimert Park are steeped in Afrocentric and Pan African ideas, none of the suggestions identify purely through race. The challenge is to find a unifying label that has buy in from such a diverse community, as there are economic benefits in doing so.

Cultural Tourism and the Dilemmas of Attraction and Authenticity

Much of the success of ethnically branded cultural districts is dependent on the strategic development of a commercial area that can attract tourism but also serve the need of the local community. Straddling the interests of both parties is an important consideration for community stakeholders when determining how best to transform cultural assets into commercial assets. Local government also has a stake in these developments as the growth of the cultural tourism industry presents opportunities that can increase municipal budgets and revitalize neglected neighborhoods (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2011, McKercher & du Cros, 2002). For many public officials, the degree to which a community can produce a district where tourism can be promoted and cultivated informs their decision to officially designate the area. Often, ethnic communities have already established central commercial areas, but the transformation of these areas for the purpose of tourist consumption can present challenges that require creative and effective business development strategies. Community organizers are posed with two contrasting dilemmas: issues of attraction, creating a district that appeals to outsiders and issues of authenticity, creating a district that remains true to itself and its residents.

In order to understand the challenges that Black and other ethnic communities face in meeting these development outcomes, it's important to revisit some of the history of Black business districts to contextualize the current state of these once thriving commercial areas. Black business districts were at one time important community anchors where the health of Black communities was directly correlated with the vigor of these economic centers. They were the main service providers for communities that had limited access to services elsewhere and the

vitality of these businesses was dependent on the patronage of local Blacks. In his study of Black business districts, Franklin D. Wilson made three conclusions regarding the restrictions imposed on Black businesses as a result of segregation and discrimination: that Blacks were the primary patrons of Black businesses, and access to these areas determined the location of Black business districts, that limited access to capital and business “know-how” limited the types and sizes of businesses, and that Black entrepreneurs were limited in their ability to compete with White businesses, even for Black customers. Therefore most Black businesses were clustered in Black neighborhoods, where Black consumers had easy, unrestricted access and Black businesses were tasked with offering a broad range of services as Blacks were faced with both de facto and de jure segregation which limited their participation in the broader marketplace. The impact on the community was two-fold as both Black consumption was mostly restricted to specific locations and access to capital and the ability to compete in the marketplace, for business owners, was stifled. Yet, Black business districts thrived as enterprising Black entrepreneurs put to good use the confinement of Black dollars.

Although desegregation and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ushered in important legislation that protects the rights of citizens against discrimination, it also had an impact on Black business districts. As Blacks found themselves in spaces that were previously off limits, i.e., integrating White educational institutions, workspaces and neighborhoods, they began to participate in the broader marketplace and less in Black business districts. White businesses were able to compete in ways that Black businesses couldn't with low pricing strategies, with access to locations that were still off-limits to black business owners and they were able to compete for both Black and White dollars, whereas Black businesses, located in mostly Black neighborhoods, could not

always lure white dollars. The double impact of a disseminating customer base and the lack of reciprocity given to Black business from White patrons that Black patrons gave to White businesses had a devastating and lasting effect.

Appealing to outsiders

As Black culture and artistic production has become deeply intertwined in American culture and is foundational to American culture, the question of whether Black culture is distinguishable enough to be an attraction and warrant cultural tourism arises. For some Black entrepreneurs, businesses that serve only the Black community are limited in growth, expansion, and potential and as a result a drive through Leimert Park and the Crenshaw area will reveal a number of identifiable franchises associated with mainstream American culture, that are Black owned. Yet, there are a number a cultural specific businesses as well. Much like any Black commercial area, cultural specific businesses are mingled amongst mainstream businesses, but for some community members there is great potential in culturally specific entrepreneurship. “We make up 9% of this city yet we own 75% of what’s here [Leimert Park], those are some good numbers but we’re not reusing this wealth to build anything immediately around us and what it’s being used for is McDonald’s, or a franchise Denny’s or Big 5s all over the place, so they’re owning franchises, but not starting bonafide businesses that have a Black or African focus to them, see there’s no African focused business here like in Koreatown, with modern Korean businesses” says Ben Caldwell, owner of KAOS Network.

Some argue whether Black American culture is distinguishable enough to support a cultural district, even a young President Barack Obama noted that American culture is Black

culture. “The truth of the matter is that American culture at this point, what is truly American is Black culture to a larger degree, flip on the television, look at pulp fiction, you know, you can choose whatever examples you want, and it’s had a profound influence on this entire nation and it has to be affirmed.” Some debates suggest that Black American culture is embedded in the American cultural tapestry and although this may be true, the elements that distinguishes Black culture and make it identifiable and the economically viable can be shown through its global popularity. “I think the fact that we have a museum [Smithsonian of African American History and Culture], that represents a lot of the achievements and history of Black people, certainly shows that we have that kind of culture that demand museums all over the country. But I would say just look at other communities and they definitely have a number of places all over the country that have different ethnic backgrounds or oriented places and I think that that is just bizarre that people think that black people don’t have enough culture. I think we have a rich and distinctive culture that is the most important component of American culture and history]. . . I think it is ridiculous to think it is so embedded in American culture that there is no need for it. There’s definitely a need for it.” says, community member James Fugate, co-owner of Eso Won Books, one of the oldest Black bookstores in the country. Most of the interviewees agreed that there is a clear and ready market for Black cultural production, but were more concerned about ensuring that the financial gains of this production benefitted Black communities.

James Fugate thinks business development is a bigger issue, “I don’t have a problem with the idea of a ‘Little Africa,’ or a ‘Black Village,’ there’s nothing wrong with that when you have Chinatown, but Leimert Park has existed as a cultural destination, I think, in name only. The people who push this idea of a ‘Little Africa,’ they don’t own businesses over here. . . They

have no idea what really affects a community in terms of business and in terms of cultural needs, you can't have a cultural community with only three stores." Over the years, petitions to designate Leimert Park and the Crenshaw area have shifted between various boundaries, with earlier petitions aimed at designating the entire Crenshaw Corridor, which housed a concentrated cluster of Black Angelenos including residents and business owners, in an effort to bring as many businesses as possible into a district. As South Los Angeles has become more demographically diverse, with an increasing Latino population, later petitions have focused on Leimert Park Village, a smaller area with one main strip of businesses.

Although this area is ground zero for the spirit of Leimert Park, many believe that there aren't enough businesses and diversity of business type to nourish the needs of cultural tourism. "We're not quite there yet, meaning we're not quite there yet in the sense of cultural designation. [Leimert Park] is not quite there, . . .with Chinatown, you say you're going to Chinatown because that's an experience, whereas here we don't have many eating places except for Ackee Bamboo, but [we need] several eating places where people can just spend a day." says Ben Caldwell. Although there is a consensus that the new metro line will bring in newcomers to the neighborhood, it is also believed Leimert Park's business cluster is underdeveloped and will not be ready to support the needs these newcomers. As mentioned earlier, a drive through Leimert Park and the Crenshaw area reveals a number of vacant shops and the main strip on Degnan Blvd, which houses an art gallery, performance spaces, and shops where one can buy clothes, jewelry, and art, but has only one restaurant and no coffee shops or bars, businesses that generate traffic. In the past Leimert Park had a number of eateries and cultural attractions, but many have closed.

Another factor that Leimert Park faces in appealing to outsiders is countering negative representation. Leimert Park, like many other Black & ethnic neighborhoods, are often stigmatized as unsafe, crime-ridden, disinvested places, regardless of actual income levels or crime rates. Betancur writes in his study of Bronzeville in Chicago, “While it is possible to have a stable all black mixed-income or even higher income neighborhood, many still believe that being all-black prevents this from happening-particularly because of the association people make between blackness and crime” (Betancur, 2016, p.61). One way that community members have addressed issues of representation is by beautifying and branding the area and adding signs and banners. Community members have employed the support of organizations such as the Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative, whose mission is to help aid community driven revitalization efforts. Community members have also established a Business Improvement Districts, which utilizes funds collected from local merchants and property owners to make necessary upgrades. These efforts have enacted improvements on the facade, landscaping, signage and local environs.

Another strategy involved hosting events that appeal to a broader public, such as the Leimert Park Art Walk and Leimert Park Village Book Fair. The Leimert Park Art Walk, run by Ben Caldwell, happens once a month, allowing neighborhood artists to showcase their work. Although Leimert Park puts its own twist on the concept of an art walk, the event is aligned with other well-attended art walks the city, allowing Leimert Park to tap into a growing, broader interest in art and culture. The Leimert Park Village Book Fair and The Taste of Soul, also have mass appeal, bringing newcomers into the neighborhood. Leimert Park and these events are also promoted on popular city websites such as CultureLA and Discover Los Angeles.

Maintaining Authenticity

As cultural districts take form, the fear of “disneyfication” (Zurkin, 1995) or “theme-parkization” (Laguerre, 2000) arises as community actors become concerned with loss of authenticity. Ethnically branded districts emerged from a need to protect traditions and to cement a neighborhood’s historical and cultural importance into a city’s civic memory, but as these cultural assets transform into commercial assets, and the commodification of culture can reduce it to emblems of exoticized trinkets and novelty products, loss of authenticity can occur. Chanchanit Martorell, says of Thaitown, “That was very clear in our Thaitown proposal when we did the visioning and came out with the proposal for Thaitown as part of the designation, and Thai CDC would implement that vision and part of that was really about keeping it authentic, the culture and preserving the culture and heightening the awareness of the culture and doing the heritage marketing, but staying away from commodifying the culture and from creating this hyper reality, or disneyfication of the culture and really engage in real authentic place making.”

One way that Martorell buffered from disneyfication was to ensure that businesses in the district served the Thai community and that they continued to value Thai customers even as the district became popular and more available to outsiders. Martorell continues, “In our needs assessment survey, we were able to determine what are all the goods and services that are needed for the Thai community and the area, and we knew what the existing businesses were because they’ve been there 60 years and majority of them are restaurants. . . so fine we can have a restaurant row as long as the food is authentic, and they’re all regional and authentic, and of all the Thai food in the US, compared to Thaitown, Thaitown provides the most authentic Thai, because they cater to Thais, there are Thais at these restaurants, so you’ll know if it’s authentic or

not by seeing who actually patronizes and then we had other businesses, like hair salons, and entertainment, like video rentals, and those all service Thais.” Martorell also adds that although this strategy deemed effective, as Thai businesses serving Thai customers, warranted little change, in forming a cultural district certain structures had to be implemented. Thai Community Development Center developed a training program to help businesses better understand the cultural differences in service expectations and to better prepare for the onslaught of outsiders. Although the main attraction of Thaitown for many are the restaurants, Thai CDC had to limit the amount of restaurants and diversify the types of businesses in the area to avoid an overly competitive sector of businesses that would drive down prices and subject workers to low wages. Leimert Park, too, serves a primarily Black clientele, as it is 80% Black and centrally nestled between other Black communities, but unlike Thaitown, where locals have many choices, Black customers are limited and therefore fulfill social needs outside of the neighborhood. Community members have expressed a desire for more amenities. The challenge for Leimert Park is in developing a district that will lure locals back to its commercial offerings, which not only requires new business enterprises, but a carefully constructed strategy that considers the diverse needs of the community.

The interplay of Markets and Capital

The interplay of markets and capital has proven to be the biggest challenge in developing a sustainable cultural district. When asked as to why she thought Leimert Park has yet to be designated as a cultural district, Jackie Ryan stated, “And then there was the City, black people couldn’t afford to pay enough money to elected campaigns, you know, it’s a money process and

we didn't know that, we thought that it was a vote process, you know that you voted for people. . . this is a democracy and as a democratic person in a democracy, we thought if you voted for a person to express your ideas, which is what a democracy is, . . . but it isn't, it's about the money and people dance around that, they give lip service to African Americans, but the people who possess the power and the land have something different in mind. So we were not recognized as legitimate advocates of black culture and black power by the elected officials.” If the buying power of the local community plays a key role in maintaining the authenticity and sustaining the economic vitality of a district, then job growth and increased incomes are factors to be considered. “This [my business] could be full every day, if people had money, it's not because they don't want to come here and people who say that black people don't want to support black businesses are wrong. As far as I'm concerned, they have not looked at what the outer problem is,” says Ryan. If the growth and maintenance of commercial areas are crucial to the success of a cultural districts, then access to capital is an important consideration. Both markets and capital are key stabilizers of successful districts.

As the establishment of cultural districts is a new and trending phenomenon, there has been little statistical data collected to evaluate, measure or assess factors that contribute to success, nor are there enough studies to measure the impact of cultural districts on communities. Three studies have become important references in understanding the effect of cultural districts: a 2015 study conducted by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA), which conducted a survey of state policies and best practices concerning formalized cultural districts, Noonan's 2013 study, *How U.S. Cultural Districts Reshape Neighborhoods*, a comparative study between cities that “host” cultural districts and non-host cities to measure the impact of districts

on neighborhoods. And Loukaitou-Sideris and Soureli's article, *Cultural Tourism as an Economic Development Strategy for Ethnic Neighborhoods*, which sought to determine whether cultural districts were a good development strategy for ethnic communities. Although each of these studies focused on a broad range of cultural districts, and did not disaggregate type of district, much of the information can be generalized to include ethnically defined districts.

Although there is agreement on certain factors, such as gentrification, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, there has been mixed results amongst scholars as to whether cultural districts positively affect job growth. Both NASAA and Noonan's research suggest that job growth is a direct effect of thriving cultural districts. NASAA, which helps facilitate policy making amongst state arts leadership, focus primarily on state acknowledged districts (2015). Noonan's research, on the other hand, analyzes demographic data collected over a period of roughly 20 years of neighborhoods hosting districts, neighborhoods adjacent to these districts and non-host neighborhoods, In his comparative study he found that neighborhoods with districts got more jobs and less poverty(2013). Although job growth has been documented in some districts, each of these studies has limitations. NASAA focuses on state acknowledged districts, and although there can be overlap between state sanctioned and local government sanctioned districts, state districts can be better resourced and can utilize state resources in promoting cultural tourism and therefore can have more resources to draw from. Noonan's quantitative approach and bird's eye view of districts, provides useful information, but doesn't shed light on why districts produced job growth.

Loukaitou-Sideris and Soureli's research concluded that job growth was "modest" and varied greatly from district to districts. They concluded that although some districts showed job

growth, that the numbers were not particularly significant. Their research focused primarily on the development of cultural tourism in ethnic neighborhoods, four ethnic neighborhoods in Los Angeles and seven neighborhoods cross the country. Most of these neighborhoods have cultural districts, although some do not, but all engage in cultural tourism. Their study was particularly useful as it focused on Los Angeles and Leimert Park served as one of their case studies. Their work concludes that most ethnic commercial clusters are comprised of small businesses with few employees and limited resources, and that their ability to encourage job growth was small.

Capital

Access to capital posed the single most important challenge as agreed by all interview respondents. Black communities, like other ethnic communities, have been historically disadvantaged in accessing capital and the ability to accumulate wealth and the residue still lingers. In some cases, ethnic enclaves have found ways to circumvented these disadvantages by establishing ethnic banks. Gary A Dymski and Wei Li's research on "ethnobanks" highlights the functions of ethnic and foreign banks in helping ethnic communities access capital and gain economic strength. Ethnobanks (Dymski, 2010) differ from mainstream banks in three important ways: customization, where banks tailor their services to the needs of their community, location, where they are located within the communities they serve and long term contact, where they value long relationships with their customers. But these qualities do not always remedy inequities, unless, according to Dymski in *The Macrostructure of Financial Exclusion: Mainstream, Ethnic, and Fringe Banks in MoneySpace*, banks understand "macrostructural" issues, which may be harder to see on the individual level, but are obvious when looking more broadly at financial institutions. The macrostructural framework brings to light "hidden"

structural bias within the financial system. Dymski makes an interesting point about spatial proximity and financial exclusion, where it is suggested that bigger banks do not often open branches in lower-income communities or neighborhoods that are viewed as disinvested, as the cost of running a bank in those neighborhoods make it difficult for it to remain competitive. This lack of banks creates a ripe environment for more fringe financial services to grow. Ethnobanks often fill in the gap and some manage to succeed in lower income neighborhoods, by making well-considered structural changes, such is the case of Chinese American banks, that although serves many low-income customers manage to be profitable. Examples of such structural changes are in keeping their fees low and having multi-lingual staff.

In Los Angeles, there are two Black-owned banks, One United, the largest Black-owned bank in the country, located in the heart of the Crenshaw Corridor and Broadway Federal located outside of the Crenshaw Corridor. One desire from a community member was for these banks to provide more aid to businesses. “What about our own black banks? What investments are they doing in the black community, some sociologist say they don’t have the funding to do it, but. . . it doesn’t take a lot to invest in a business and the black banks do no investment in the black community in terms of retail. This idea that we don’t have the capital to invest in our own community is driving me nuts” says business owner, James Fugate. Some attribute the growing success of Korean banks to their focus on small business development, which is different than Black and Chinese banks that focus more on mortgage lending. (Dymski, 2010). As nearly half of Leimert Park residents are homeowners, perhaps a shift in focus to small business development is needed.

Another way that community stakeholders in Leimert Park have strategized in pulling

together capital, was to develop a Business Improvement District (BID), as mentioned earlier. Some council districts require the development of a BID before an official designation of the district can be made. BIDs are formalized partnerships between communities, private and public sector that are run at the local level and funded by local property owners or merchants, through the collection of an “extra tax” to improve the local environment. (Lee, 2015, The Los Angeles Bid Consortium 2009). The scope of what a BID can do is dictated by the amount of funds collected and although a comparison of BIDs across LA reveal inequities, where some BIDs in areas with higher property values or merchants with greater revenues can have more robust BIDs while other communities have less to work with or are unable to develop a BID. The Leimert Park BID, funded by property owners, is one of the lower funded BIDs in the city but stakeholders have found creative ways around these limitations. Their BID has supplied funding for clean up, security, some branding and neighborhood planning programs, such as Vision 2020, where community members can take a part in the planning process.

Another important way that ethnic enclaves create access to resources and capital is by utilizing transnational connections, which could materialize a number of ways, some examples are in utilizing foreign banks, seeking investors abroad, hosting enterprises from home countries. In many ways, these connections are a natural function of immigration as communities find ways to fulfill their needs. Although Black neighborhoods are not generally considered global and are often viewed as central to an American cultural and economic dynamic, with only nostalgic ties to places outside the US, I argue that Black neighborhoods are and have been for quite sometime global places. Michel S. Laguerre’s work in *The Global Ethnopolis*, introduces a framework in which to understand the transnational, transglobal nature of ethnic enclaves. His focuses is on

three Asian enclaves in San Francisco but could be expanded to include Black neighborhoods. He defines an ethnopolis “as an enclave city dominated by the hegemonic presence of one ethnic group and whose existence is tied to that of a container city with which it maintains multiple relations that have influenced its trajectory in many different ways.” and suggest that it becomes global when “its resident population must maintain ongoing relations with the homeland and with other diasporic enclaves.” Much of his framework hinges on the transactionary nature of ethnic enclaves, where acts of exchange are the life blood, shaping and informing the socioeconomic and political machinery of these enclaves. Black neighborhoods, too are global ethnopolises. In the literal sense, Black neighborhoods are both sites of transaction and commerce and sites of global exchange.

Although Black people are similarly categorized as one racial group, they are actually, ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse. African Americans make up the largest population of Black people in the US, with 8% of all Blacks being foreign born, but when taking a closer look at specific urban communities it reveals higher concentrations of foreign born and second generation Blacks. Many of these Black immigrants cluster in Black urban areas in New York, Atlanta, Miami, with Los Angeles, ranking in the top 5 as a destination for African immigration (Waters, Kasinitz & Asad, 2003, Shaw-Taylor 2009). This is evidenced in businesses in South Los Angeles where one can not only purchase soul food but eat at Belizean restaurants, Caribbean cafes or shop African markets for specialty food products, but can Black neighborhoods utilize their transnational, transglobal identity for economic purposes?

Some in Leimert Park have already embarked on a broader global focus, envisioning the neighborhood as an important site for exchange between African and other Afro-diasporic

countries and the US. One such way that stakeholders have pursued international resources is exploring the EB-5 Immigrant Investor program, where foreign investors and entrepreneurs can invest in commercial development in the US in exchange for residency, other approaches included encouraging West African banks to invest in the area and attracting African events and enterprises to be showcased in Leimert Park. A transnational approach to investment and resource is not unprecedented. In 1994, Leimert Park hosted 150 artists from Cameroon. The event was in conjunction with the World Cup Soccer Tournament and proved successful (LA Times, 1994). At other times community members have pursued hosting events and encouraging exchange between South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria and Belize. Utilizing transnational relationships as an alternative pathway to capital and investments is not new to ethnic enclaves, and many ethnically branded districts are turning to this approach to move beyond the limitations of local financial systems. “We have been pitching for more investment in Thaitown, we have taken the city to Thailand on two trade missions to attract investments from Thailand to Thaitown. . . so that’s a whole other aspect of trying to bring more capital to the community.” stated Chanchanit Martorell of the Thai Community Development Center. Although Leimert Park has limited resources, community stakeholders do not lack ideas and are finding creative and innovation solutions.

Gentrification

As communities mobilize and strategically pull together resources in support of establishing cultural districts, the success of these efforts can potentially invite gentrification. A successful district can experience an increase in property values, a loss of affordable housing and commercial space, propelling displacement. Successful revitalization of a neighborhood and the

promotion of its cultural district can make a once ignored neighborhood, attractive and hypervisible. According to key studies (Noonan, 2013, Loukaitou-Sideris & Soureli, 2011), low-income communities are the most vulnerable to these outcomes.

In some cases, the fear of gentrification and displacement is what initially propels communities to seek establishing a district, yet the success of a district can accelerate displacement. As mentioned in earlier sections both residents and business owners play key roles in the stability, maintenance and authenticity of cultural districts, significant loss of either can have a devastating effect. As commercial areas become more complex and upgraded, offering more amenities, and as promotion of these neighborhoods make them more visible, they become increasingly attractive and considered by outsiders. Business owners too, are affected by these factors as many businesses in ethnic neighborhoods are small, limited in resources, have very few employees, and mostly rent the establishment that houses their businesses. Displacement of both residents and business owners is a big challenge in maintaining an ethnically branded district.

Community members in Leimert Park have mixed feelings about the impact and threat of gentrification. Although they believe that some degree of cultural tourism would be good for the neighborhood, the more visible waves of change, signaled in the construction of the new metro line along Crenshaw Blvd and the increase in business vacancies along the construction site, have stoked fears of gentrification. B. Hall, a community organizer who led the effort to designate Leimert Park as an African Village stated “what people fear is definitely happening, whites are moving in, gentrification is taking place.” But, some community members felt that these fears are unfounded and that the development taking place is not only necessary, but crucial

to the upkeep of the neighborhood. Some argue that Leimert Park's identity as a Black cultural hub is well ingrained and that regardless of slight demographic changes in the neighborhood, that its identity is well established. Others argue that, although change is evident, it has not significantly impacted the demographics of the neighborhood, that Leimert Park remains 80% Black, one of the highest concentration of Black residents and Black businesses in the city. And some community members mark the lack of investment as a signifier that the fear of gentrification is premature. According to James Fugate, "There's a [sense] in Leimert Park, that white people are coming in to take over, but I have not seen new businesses open here. . . I haven't seen really any businesses that are open. We had [a few] but they haven't opened up any new businesses, per se, and it remains to be seen what's going to happen." Some community members welcome the change, believing that longterm residents are due the payoff of increased property values and upgraded amenities.

Whether these fears are premature or evidenced, only time will tell, but what can be concluded is that there has been growing interest in Leimert Park and the surrounding areas for some time and as the new metro line opens this interest will only continue. Although home prices have increased, Leimert Park is still considered affordable and has drawn the interest of those who have been priced out of other neighborhoods, as Los Angeles' housing and rental markets skyrocket. One possible concern, could be the impact of change in adjacent neighborhoods. View Park, was recently designated as a historic district, in a contested battle that divided community members. Supporters of the efforts, mostly newcomers to the neighborhood, celebrated the acknowledgement of View Park's history as a Black enclave, while other, older residents resented the effort and viewed the development as a neighborhood coup

and a sign of impending gentrification. As Bryant (2006) investigates in *"Law Is Life!": Flag Wars, Local Government Law, and the Gentrification of Olde Towne East*, establishing a historic district can propel gentrification as long term residents can be financially challenged by the restrictions and upkeep of historically preserved structures. Other considerations are the demographic shifts that are taking place in Los Angeles as the Black population dwindles and South Los Angeles, becomes more Latino. The 2010 Census reveals that LA's Black population has decreased to 9% since the 1990s and neighborhoods that were once predominantly Black are now predominately Latino, such as West Adams and the Central Ave area. Whether any of these shifts pose any serious threat to Leimert Park will be revealed in time, but highlights surrounding changes that may impact Leimert Park's ongoing efforts.

One strategy that communities employ to starve off gentrification is property ownership. In enclaves such as Thaitown and Leimert Park, property ownership can be a way in which to limit the impact of cultural tourism. According to Martorell, executive director of the ThaiTown Community Development Center (Thaitown CDC), 80% of the businesses in Thaitown do not own their properties. Many of the businesses on Degnan, in Leimert Park also do not their properties. In fact one rental shop owner was evicted when ownership of her rental property changed hands and she could no longer afford the rent (Associated Press, 2007). Some community members in Leimert Park have focused their attention on increasing property ownership, especially with new and younger entrepreneurs. "Of all the fights to have, right now I'm trying to really focus on getting it to *be* an African village, where we own everything because we could do the battle of changing the name and not even be here." states Ben Caldwell. Thaitown CDC focus much of its resources on affordable housing, partnering with local

government to purchase building in the neighborhood. Both Thaitown and Leimert Park spearhead workshops and training to help educate and encourage community members and business owners to purchase property. Although property ownership doesn't inoculate a community from gentrification, it does allow the community more agency in shaping and harnessing change.

Conclusion

By examining the pursuits of ethnic branding, cultural tourism and cultural designation in Leimert Park, this study explored the ways in which culturally specific histories inform decision making processes in regards to community economic development efforts. Centering the voices of community members, allowed an understanding of cultural district formation, that departed from a "top-down" lens where efforts are scrutinized from the perspective of actors outside of the community i.e., local government, public agencies, non-profit organizations. This approach revealed how community members contemplated issues of identity, legacies of disenfranchisement and envisioned a future for Leimert Park. It revealed that although economic concerns often dominated the discourse around development pursuits, that, for community members, challenges concerning history, memory, and culture are equally important and are deeply interwoven in how they designed, planned and strategized development efforts. This approach also allowed three areas of concern to rise to the top that may not have been revealed in a broader survey or "top-down" analysis, but are key considerations.

The concerns of ethnically branded cultural districts extended well beyond the production and consumption of art objects, and the lure of a creative economy. Community members must also consider how to strategize the revalorization of their communities and the attention that that

may bring, while maintaining authenticity. They must consider histories of exclusion and “otherness,” while reconstructing their identities for mass appeal. They must create and promote districts, whose attractions can resuscitate a stalled economy but also invite gentrification. Community members employ a number of strategies to address these challenges and they found creative ways to work around limitations.

As cultural districts continue to be a growing tool for development and revitalization, more scholarship will accumulate, but there are some areas that deserve focus. A comprehensive survey of cultural districts and Black communities might shed light on how regional influences shape development efforts. More comparative research needs to be done that disaggregates district type, as ethnically branded districts differ from other cultural districts in important ways. More research is needed to understand the “success” of a district and to clarify what factors constitute “success.” And a more comprehensive analysis of the relationship between cultural districts and gentrification could offer effective solutions to displacement, while supporting growth and development.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEWEES

B. Hall is a community organizer, who spearheaded the efforts to initially designate Leimert Park as “Africatown,” then later “African Village.” Her efforts have been ongoing since early 2000s. We met at a local McDonalds. Our interview lasted for one hour and twelve minutes on 9.16.16.

Jackie Ryan-Has been a part of the community since childhood (the 60s). She owns Zambezi Bazaar, which has been open for 20th years. Her shop was on Degnan, before being evicted after property owner change over. She is the granddaughter of William Nickerson Jr., who founded the largest Black owned insurance company in the west, Golden State Mutual Life Insurance. She was interviewed for one hour on 10.3.16.

Ben Caldwell-Is a filmmaker, artist, and owner of KAOS Network, an institution in Leimert Park. He is active in the community. He organizes the Leimert Park Art Walk. He is a business owner and resident. He owns the property that houses his business. He is a part of the Leimert BID and an active member of 20/20 Vision. He was interviewed for one hour and ten minutes on 8.4.16.

James Fugate-Co-owner of Eso Won Books, one of the oldest Black book stores in the country. He was interviewed for 50 minutes on 10.3.16.

Community member-resident, wants to remain anonymous, was interviewed for 17 minutes on 10.18.16.

Community member- longtime resident, wants to remain anonymous, was interviewed for one hour and 13 minutes on 10.28.16.

Chanchancit Martorell-Founder and Executive Director of Thaitown Community Development Center. She spearheaded the efforts to designate Thaitown in 1999 and is an active organizer in the Asian Pacific Islander Coalition which received federal designation as part of the preserve American Neighborhood initiative. She was interviewed for one hour and 40 minutes on 10.19.16.

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