Networked Enclaves of Los Angeles: Infrastructural Strategies for the Immigrant Enclaves of Koreatown

by Wenfei Xu

B.A., Economics University of Chicago, 2008

Submitted to the Department of Architecture and Department Urban Studies and Planning
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degrees
of
Master of Architecture and Master in City Planning at the
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Abstract

Racial and ethnic segregation has always been physically embedded into Los Angeles. The history of planning within the LA metropolitan area, the development of its highway infrastructure, and the demographic mix are all deeply intertwined. While the construction of the highway system, at its height in the 1940s and 50s, allowed those who had the means to do so freedom to self-segregate, it also reinforced the racial divisions that were created with redlining practices and, thus, created a space of forced enclavization for the inhabitants near the center of the city.

The causes of the tensions between the growing Korean community and the black and Latino in this area were myriad and long-simmering, however, much of it was due to growing income inequality, racial biases, cultural and language barriers. Thus, while these ethnic and racial groups lived in physical proximity, enclave behaviors nevertheless prevailed. In the Los Angeles of the present, racial animosity is less directed towards a disenfranchised black population, as many have now moved to the suburbs, but more and more toward immigrant populations with varying degrees of legality.

Officially, Los Angeles' Koreatown has a population of 115,000 people, according the 2010 U.S. Census, in its 2.7 square miles, but its size, population, and influence, much like Los Angeles itself, is amorphous and fluid. Despite official boundaries, however, enclaves often struggle to form a definite identity and make strong roots. Central to these struggles is most often the low income of the people within the community and the inability to develop an economic engine that can form the basis for a strong cultural identity. Through the lens of Koreatown, this project proposes a flexible infrastructural network of links, which aim to connect and strengthen the region as a whole through the legitimization of informal commerce prevalent throughout the area, and nodes, which act as programmatic crossings between one enclave and another.

The Networked Enclaves of Los Angeles

Wenfei Xu

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Azra Aksamija and Sarah Williams

Joint Thesis Advisors

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For yoga breaks, tea breaks, and group selfies breaks

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For accepting my crazy life changes and being wonderful parents

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The Networked Enclaves of Los Angeles

Racial and ethnic segregation has always been physically embedded into Los Angeles. The history of planning within the LA metropolitan area, the development of its highway infrastructure, and the demographic mix are all deeply intertwined. While the construction of the highway system, at its height in the 1940s and 50s, allowed those who had the means to do so freedom to self-segregate, it also reinforced the racial divisions that were created with redlining practices and, thus, created a space of forced enclavization for the inhabitants near the center of the city.

The passage of the 1965 Immigration Act created an influx of immigrants into the US, which raised tensions between different racial and ethnic communities. Exemplary of this are the Rodney King riots of 1992, which not only represents a key moment in LA's black history, but is also the first instance of a riot against immigrants, as many Korean business owners in South Central saw their shops destroyed in the riots. The causes of the tensions between the growing Korean community and the black and Latino in this area were myriad and long-simmering, however, much of it was due to growing income inequality, racial biases, cultural and language barriers. Thus, while these ethnic and racial groups lived in physical proximity, enclave behaviors nevertheless prevailed.

In the Los Angeles of the present, racial animosity is less directed towards a disenfranchised black

population, as many have now moved to the suburbs, but more and more toward immigrant populations with varying degrees of legality.

Officially, Los Angeles' Koreatown has a population of 115,000 people, according the 2010 U.S. Census, in its 2.7 square miles, but its size, population, and influence, much like Los Angeles itself, is amorphous and fluid. It is exemplary of both the racially and ethnically diverse nature of the city and of the sentiment of having a defined enclave for one's own community. With the establishment of Neighborhood Councils in 1999, many ethnic communities in the Koreatown area proposed to officially carve out their own, albeit small, part of the neighborhood. Despite official boundaries, however, these enclaves often struggle to form a definite identity and make strong roots. Central to these struggles most often the low income of the people within the community and the inability to develop an economic engine that can form the basis for a strong cultural identity. Through the lens of Koreatown, this project proposes a flexible infrastructural network of links, which aim to connect and strengthen the region as a whole through the legitimization of informal commerce prevalent throughout the area, and nodes, which act as programmatic crossings between one enclave and another.

The ultimate sentiment of the project grows from the idea that LA, with almost half of its population

born in a foreign country, contains neighborhoods that are, what Douglas Saunders calls, “platforms for personal, family, and village transformation”, and are spaces that are potentially beneficial for not only to immigrants but also for the city itself.
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Introduction

Racial Riots

Territorial Disputes

The history of Los Angeles is a reflection of the movement of people generated through infrastructural and transportation development in the United States. Los Angeles is a city whose foundation, shape, and culture is deeply intertwined with its infrastructure - before it was known for its web of freeways, the metropolitan region in the 1920s had the most extensive railway network in the world under Pacific Electric, with over 1,000 miles of track and 2,160 daily trains.[1] Los Angeles' initial transition to United States territory from a Mexican town in 1848 gave way to an influx of various migrants and immigrants arriving to the city on the Santa Fe railroad, which reached Los Angeles in 1887. The decade and a half between the 1950s and 1970s, when highway construction occurred in full force after the "red trolley" cars were essentially driven out by large auto manufacturers, also saw an increase in the city's population at rates not seen previously[2]. This was the period of time that the population was truly given the freedom of sprawl.

From its conception, Los Angeles has been an ethnically non-white settlement. While it's non-white population has fluctuated over the city's history, what is consistent has been the

1 Demoro, Harre W. California's Electric Railways: An Illustrated Review. Glendale, CA: Interurban, 1986. Print.

2 "Population and Natural Resources Case Study: How Does Urban Development Affect the Quality and Quantity of Natural Resources?" Population Growth in California. US Census Bureau, 1 Aug. 2012. Web. 16 May 2016.

displacement of these various groups at the hands of infrastructural developments and the lack of political power for this group of people in the decision-making process. Downtown Los Angeles is the site of the layering of different nascent ethnic enclaves over the city's history. Sonoratown was the small Mexican stopping ground for Gold Rush workers pre-1850, before the town became part of the US territories in 1848. In the late nineteenth century to early twentieth century, immigrants arrived to downtown Los Angeles, through the country's relatively new railroad system. Communities such as the city's first Chinatown, at Alameda and Macy Street, and Little Tokyo, bounded by San Pedro, First and Requena streets, and Central Avenue were often the gateways for new immigrants to the country. Because the residents living in the area were tenants and lessees rather than owners, they were vulnerable to building owners' failure to maintain buildings and potential redevelopment of the area, which arrived in full force with the construction of rail-yards and depots for Union Station in the 1930s[3], after the California Supreme Court upheld a decision approving of land condemnations for the station May 19, 1931.

Despite forced dispersal Asian and Hispanic minorities in the downtown Los Angeles area, resettlement options were limited due to the racially restrictive covenants that were established in the

3 Masters, Nathan. "Sonoratown: Downtown L.A.'s Forgotten Neighborhood." KCET. USC Libraries, 18 Jan. 2012. Web. 16 May 2016.

1920s. These "redline" policies and maps established race-based mortgage rates for ethnic groups across the city. Many of the city's Hispanic population moved to East Los Angeles, which is still predominantly Hispanic today. Seven years after the Supreme Court decision, a new Chinatown was finally established in its current location north of the old Chinatown. For the city's Japanese population, however, the displacement came not from land condemnations, but from the incarceration of Japanese Americans in concentration camps starting in 1942 due to World War I, thus emptying out Little Tokyo. During this time, because there were ample war-time defense jobs in the area, African Americans moved into Little Tokyo, as the racial covenants prevented them from living in most other areas, and almost tripled the population in that area to 80,000 people. After the end of the war, defense jobs diminished and the return of the Japanese-Americans to Little Tokyo is exemplary of the parallel and often complex negotiations of space and territory between minority populations in Los Angeles.

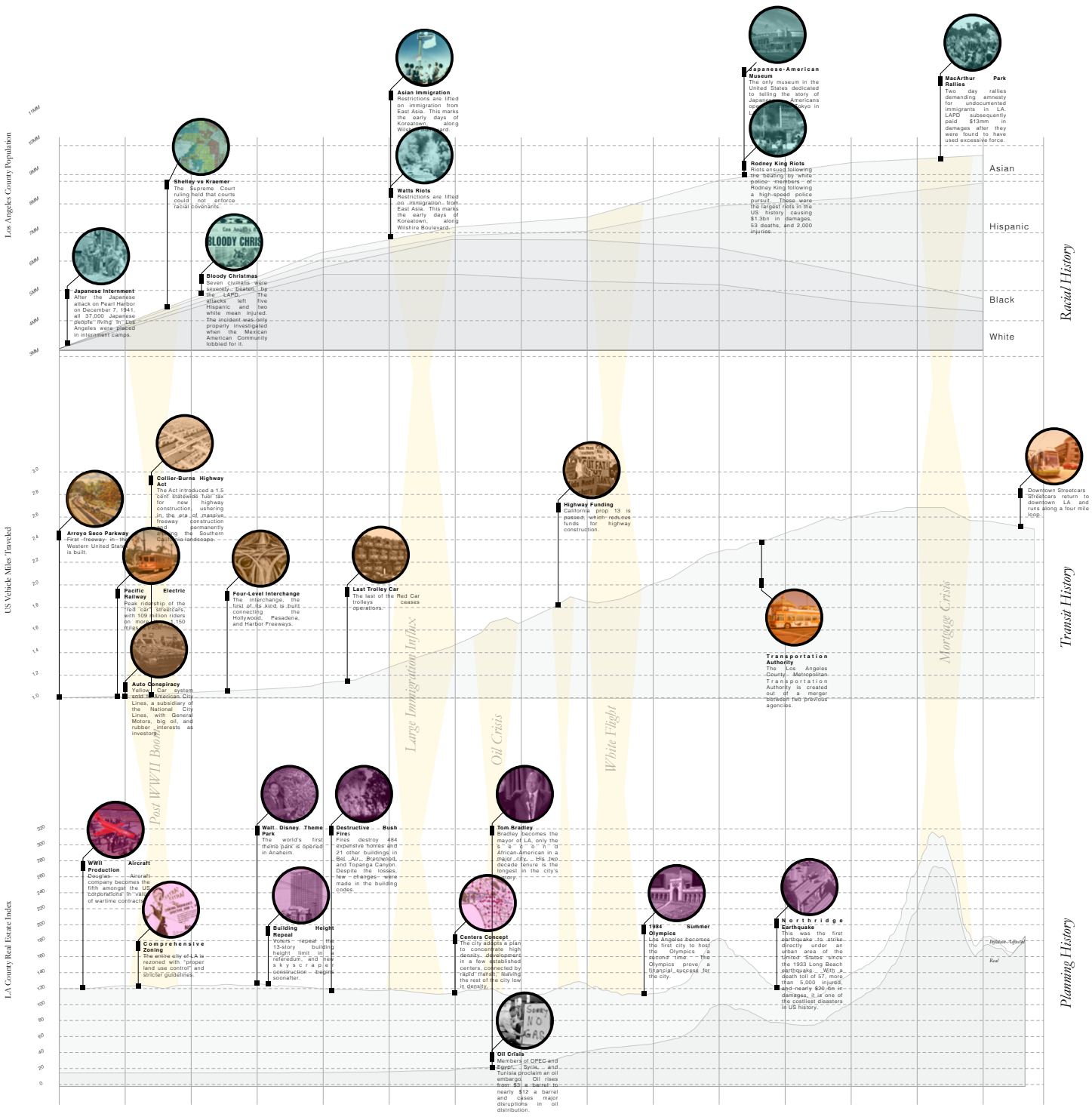
Scott Kurashige argues in *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* that Japanese-Americans focused on business development rather than politics in their efforts to gain civic legitimacy due to the fact that they were often unable to participate in politics because they were not American citizens, unlike their African-American counterparts. This

idea of earning social legitimacy through economic legitimacy rings true for other minority populations in Los Angeles. It especially applies to the Korean population in the city, who also had their beginnings in downtown Los Angeles. The Korean-Americans established successful local grocery stores, which allowed them to spread to the current location of Koreatown, between Normandie and Vermont streets.

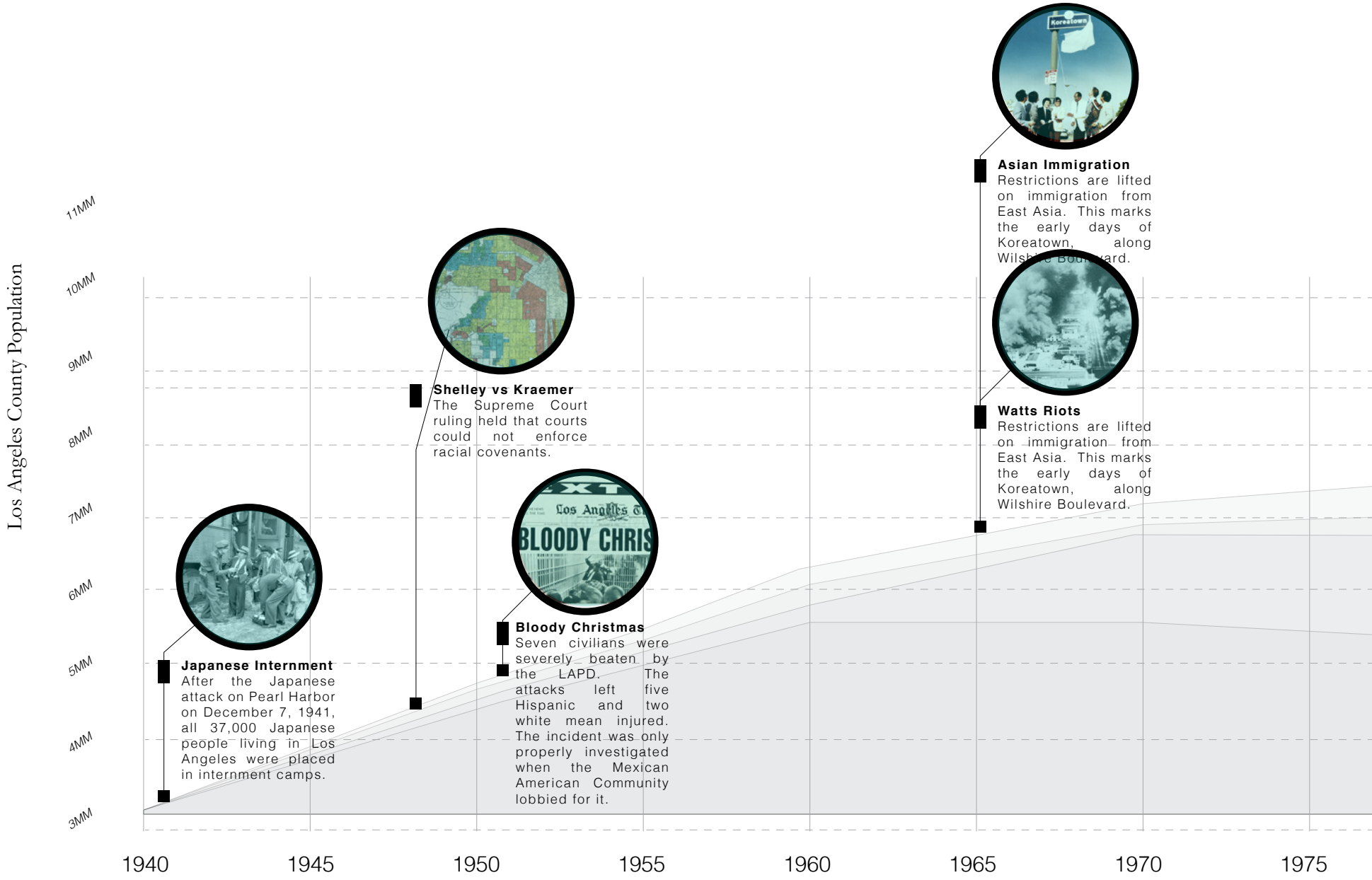
The racial strains between Korean-Americans and the relatively poorer African-American population in the city finally came to a head in the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, which was first major immigrant riot in the city. These events were exacerbated by an incident in the previous year on March 16, 1991, in which a Korean storekeeper killed a 15-year-old girl; the storekeeper, Soon Ja Du, was charged a fine of $500, but was not sentenced to prison time.

As a consequence of infrastructural developments, Los Angeles' minority populations have been both constrained and displaced, while maintaining close proximity to each other due to the racial covenants limiting their possibilities for residence in the city. This proximity has resulted in a complex relationship between these groups, exacerbated by their different relative economic standings, amongst other issues.

The focus of the following sections will attempt to detail the spatial consequences of this history.



Important events in history have impacts on multiple levels across the city's racial, planning/political, and infrastructural development.



A History of Race Relations

Japanese-American Museum
The only museum in the United States dedicated to telling the story of Japanese Americans opens in Little Tokyo in LA.

Rodney King Riots
Riots ensued following the beating by white police members of Rodney King following a high-speed police pursuit. These were the largest riots in the US history causing $1.3bn in damages, 53 deaths, and 2,000 injuries.

MacArthur Park Rallies
Two day rallies demanding amnesty for undocumented immigrants in LA. LAPD subsequently paid $13mm in damages after they were found to have used excessive force.

Asian

Hispanic

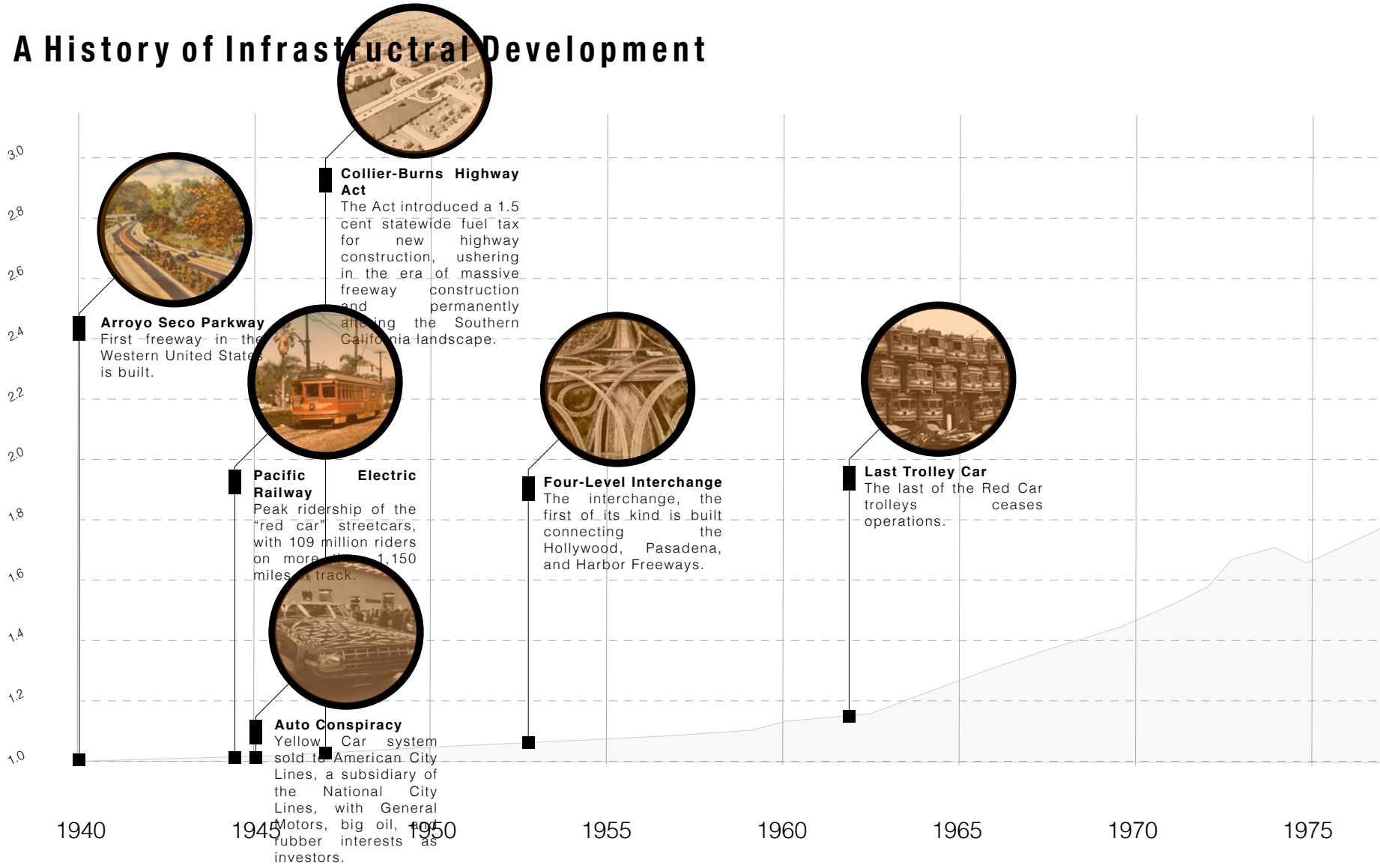
Black

White

1980 1985 1990 1995 2000 2005 2010 2015

Racial History

A History of Infrastructral Development



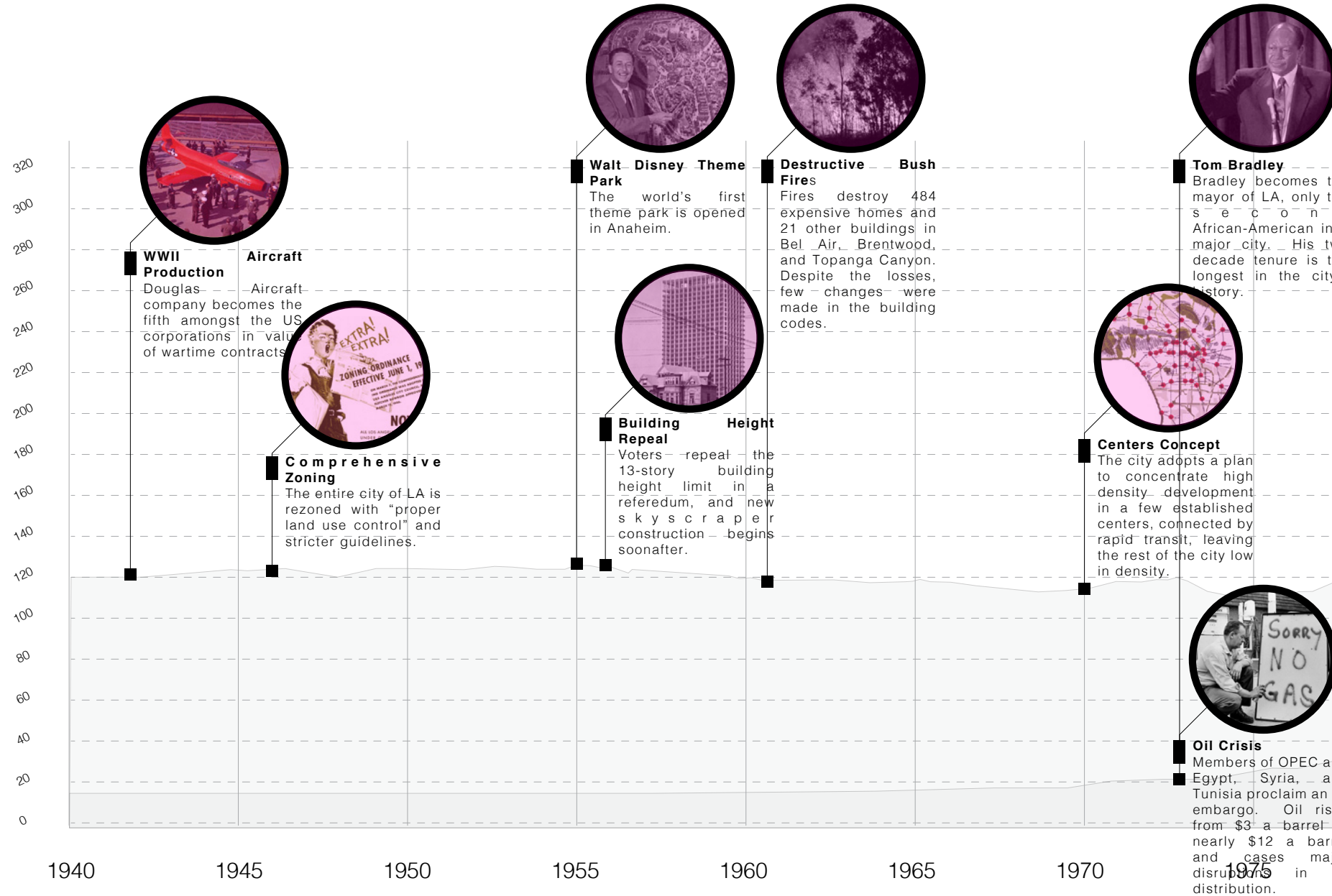
Highway Funding
California prop 13 is passed, which reduces funds for highway construction.

Transportation Authority
The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority is created out of a merger between two previous agencies.

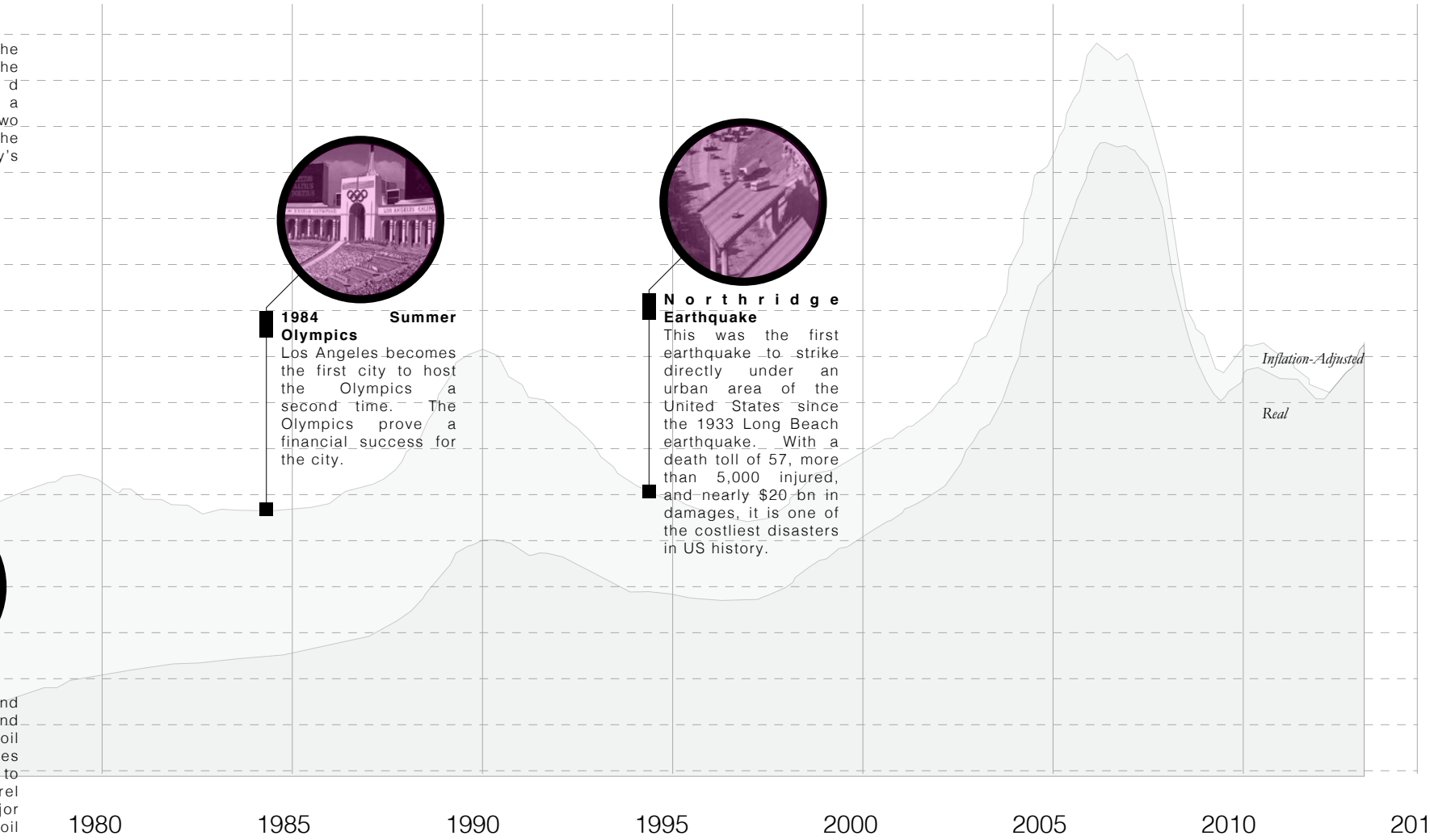
Downtown Streetcars
Streetcars return to downtown LA and runs along a four mile loop.

1980 1985 1990 1995 2000 2005 2010 2015

Transit History

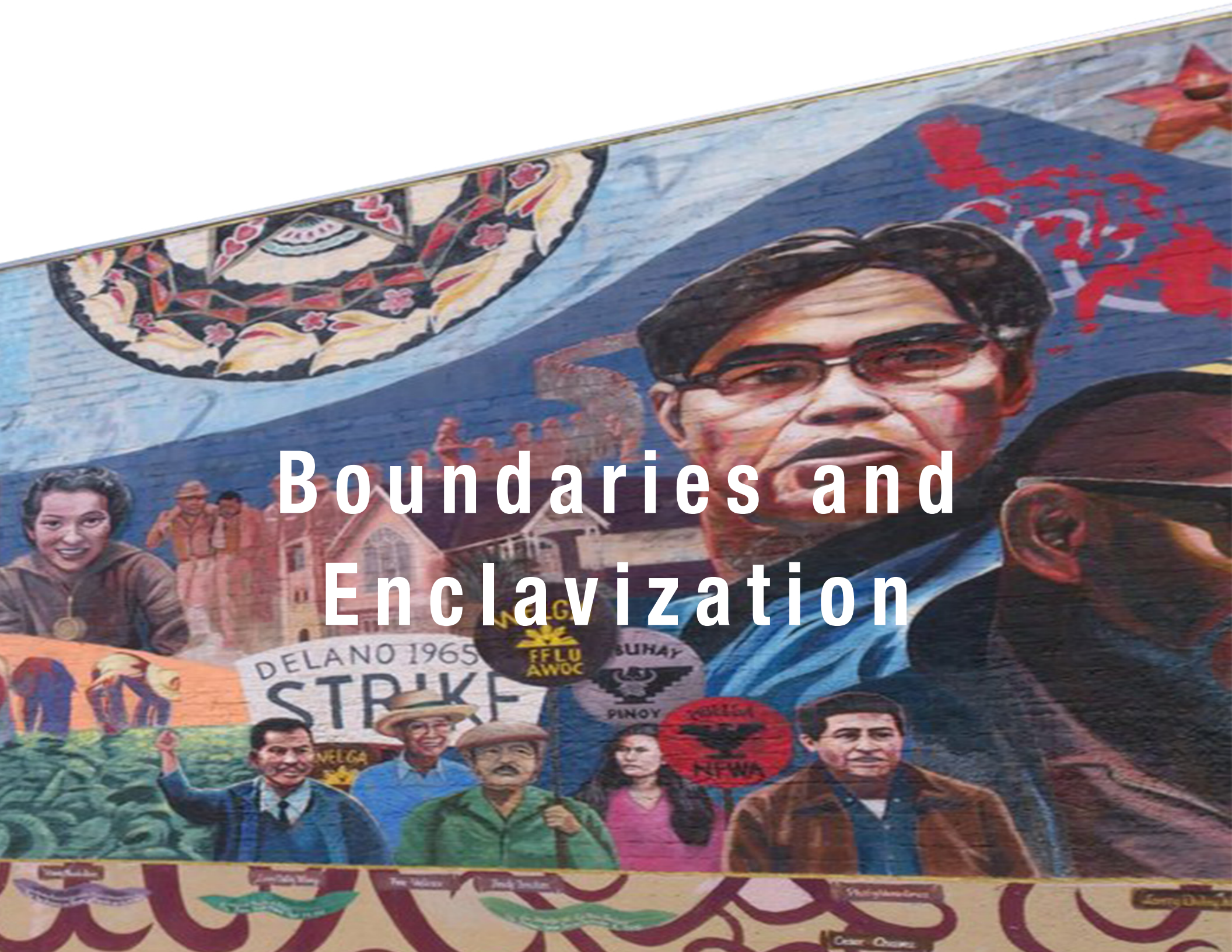


A History of Urban Policy



Planning History

MANILA VILLAGE 1763



Boundaries and Enclavization

From early in its history, Los Angeles has been blessed or cursed, depending on how one sees it, with an abundance of land. The construction of the transcontinental Santa Fe railroad in 1887, in which one-way fares from the Midwest dropped below $5.00[1], many suburban communities appear. Many of these suburban cities, established late in the nineteenth century became religiously or morally homogeneous enclaves such as Pasadena, Monrovia, Long Beach, Whittier and Claremont.[2] Thus, the notion of enclavization in Los Angeles is almost as old as the city is itself.

The National Housing Act of 1934, which was part of a Depression-era set of policies to bolster the American economy through easing bank foreclosures and creating the mortgage industry in the county. In an effort to specify mortgage lending practices, th Federal Home Loan Bank created the Home Owners' Loan corporation 'residential security maps' to show varying degrees of real estate credit worthiness and, thus, lending desirability. These maps, which were drawn for 239 cities across the United States, largely followed racial and income divisions across the city. In creating zones of more and less preferably borrowers, the maps aggravated the distinction between these different regions of the city.

As will be discussed in more detail in later sections,

1 Waldie, D.J. "How We Got This Way (Los Angeles Has Always Been Suburban)." KCET. KCET, 12 Dec. 2011. Web. 16 May 2016.
2 Ibid

the topography and orientation of the city also provided a geographical separating force. The concept of Los Angeles as being governed by larger, physical forces was conceptualized by Reyner Banham in his *Architecture of Four Ecologies.* Perhaps the strongest physical separation is created by the ecology of the 'Foothills' - the hillside region of the city encircling the Los Angeles Basin. Banham distinguishes these regions from their Basin counterparts by their lack of a planning: "That is what the foothill ecology is really all about: narrow, tortuous residential roads serving precipitous house-plots that often back up directly on unimproved wilderness...".[3] In the flatter plains of the city, the grid system of roads dominates the organization of the city in an almost overwhelming and endless manner. Beyond this level of organization, the Los Angeles River and the East-West division and orientation that is resultant can also be seen as a larger separating force in the city. Historically, the side east of the river have been spaces of industrial production. These two sides of the city have been markers for race and class, as working-class (and primarily Hispanic) communities such as Bell Gardens, Vernon, El Segundo, Hawthorn, and Redondo Beach were located here for its proximity to factories, despite the noise and pollution.

3 Banham, Reyner. Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies. Middlesex: Penguin, 1976. Print.

Racially Embedding Redlining Practices

Outright racial zoning was prohibited, as a result of the 1917 Supreme Court ruling of Buchanan vs. Warley; racial covenants, private contracts stipulated in home-ownership agreements that only allowed the white population to own homes in certain areas, with the aid of redlining maps, were seen as a peaceful legal alternative to guard communities from minority residents. It is estimated that around 80% of the homes were governed by racial covenants by the 1940s.[1] From these redlining maps, from 1939, it can be seen that regions designated as less reliable for loans are, even today, those regions in South Central Los Angeles and East Los Angeles, where the lowest income residents live.

Not only were home loans denied to minority borrowers, but real estate brokers' licenses were threatened if they integrated the neighborhood, as was the policy in Compton, a primarily white city near Los Angeles, before racial covenants were revoked in 1948 in Shelley vs. Kraemer.

1 "1920s–1948: Racially Restrictive Covenants." Fair Housing Boston. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 May 2016

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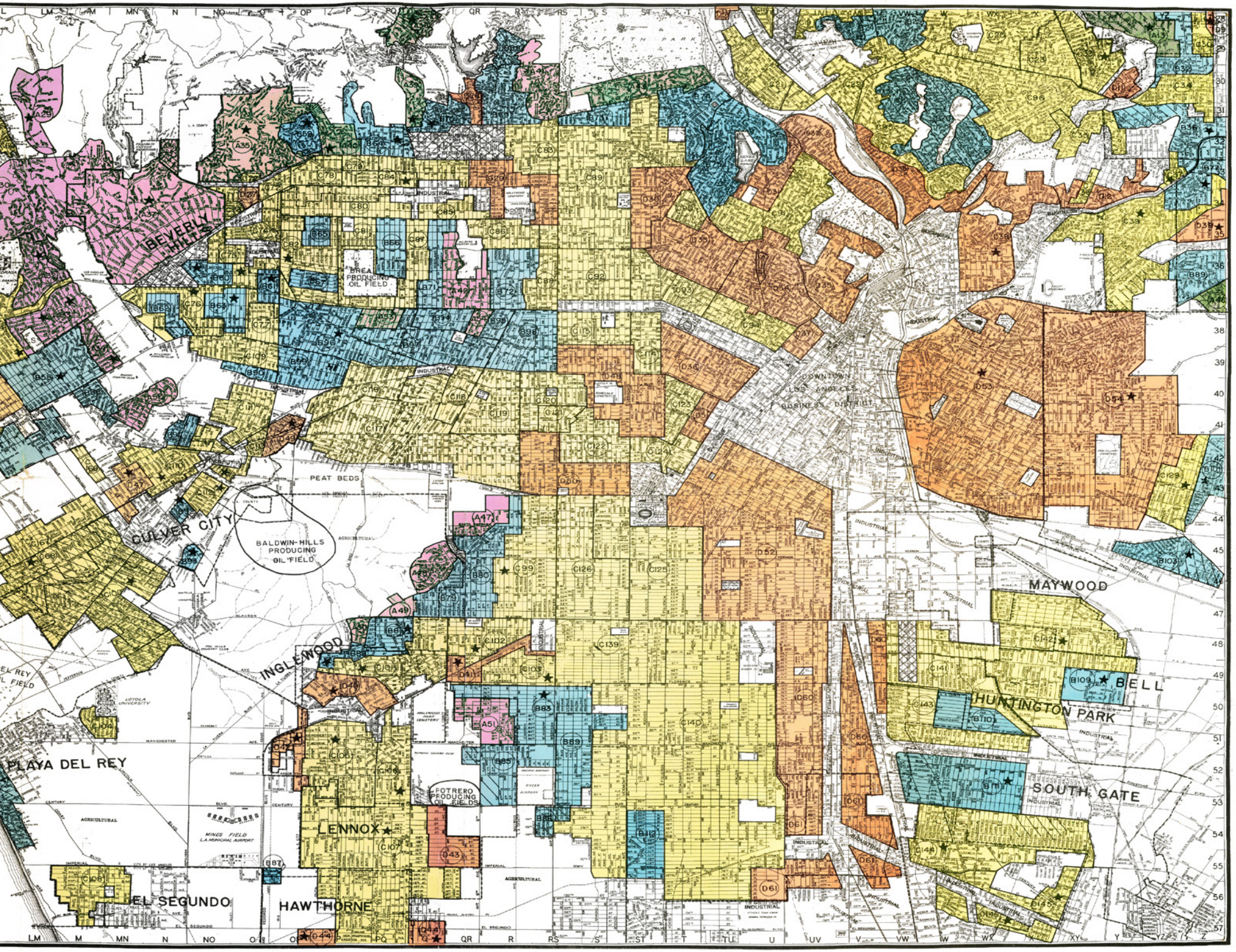

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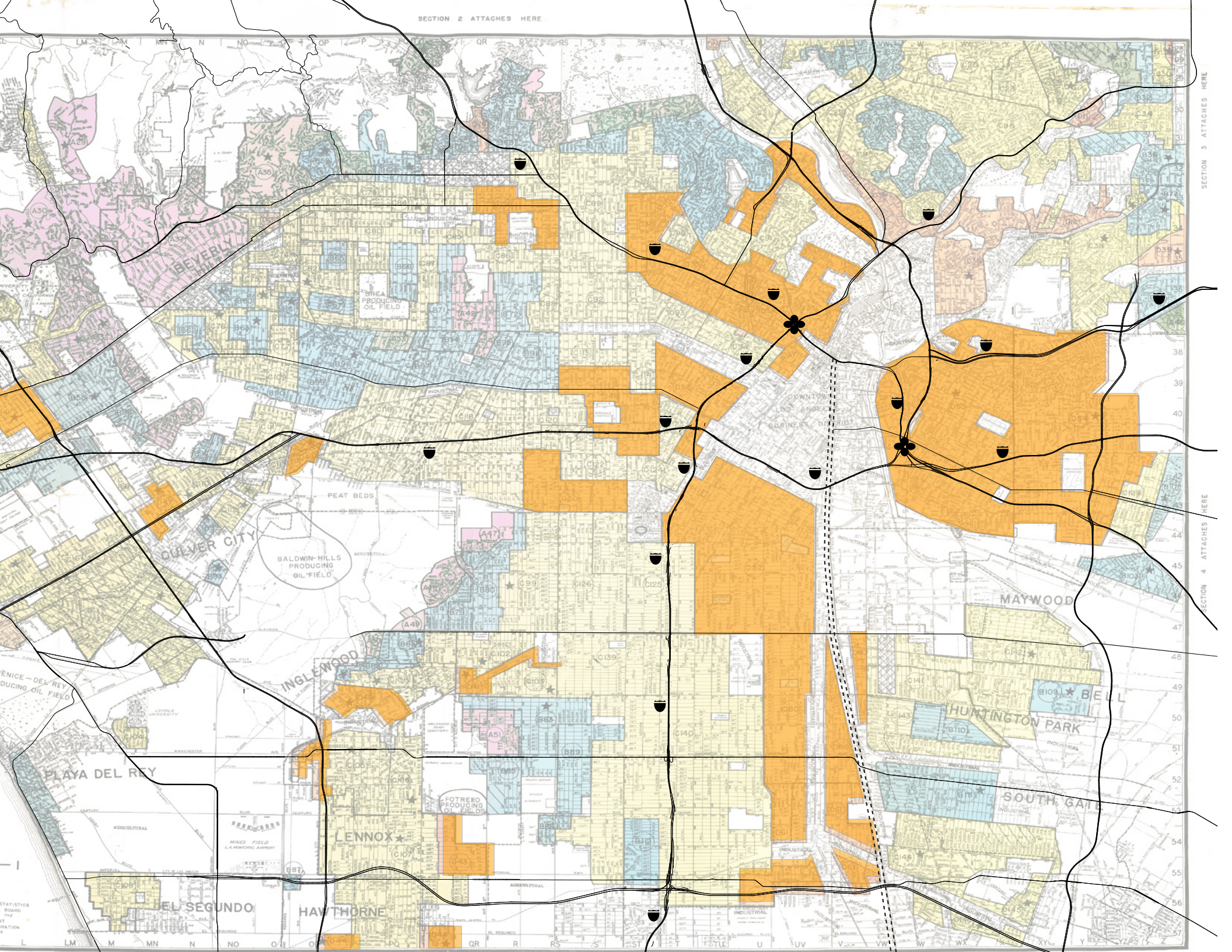
Highway System Construction

Though racial covenants were ruled illegal in 1948, their impact on the structure of the city lasted much further beyond: A comprehensive freeway plan for southern California was devised in 1947, and freeway construction in the city took place into the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. From this overlay of the freeways against the lowest tier lending zones from the redlining maps, it can be shown that freeways mostly ran through poorer and minority neighborhoods in the city, which served to further entrench these ethnic and income divisions.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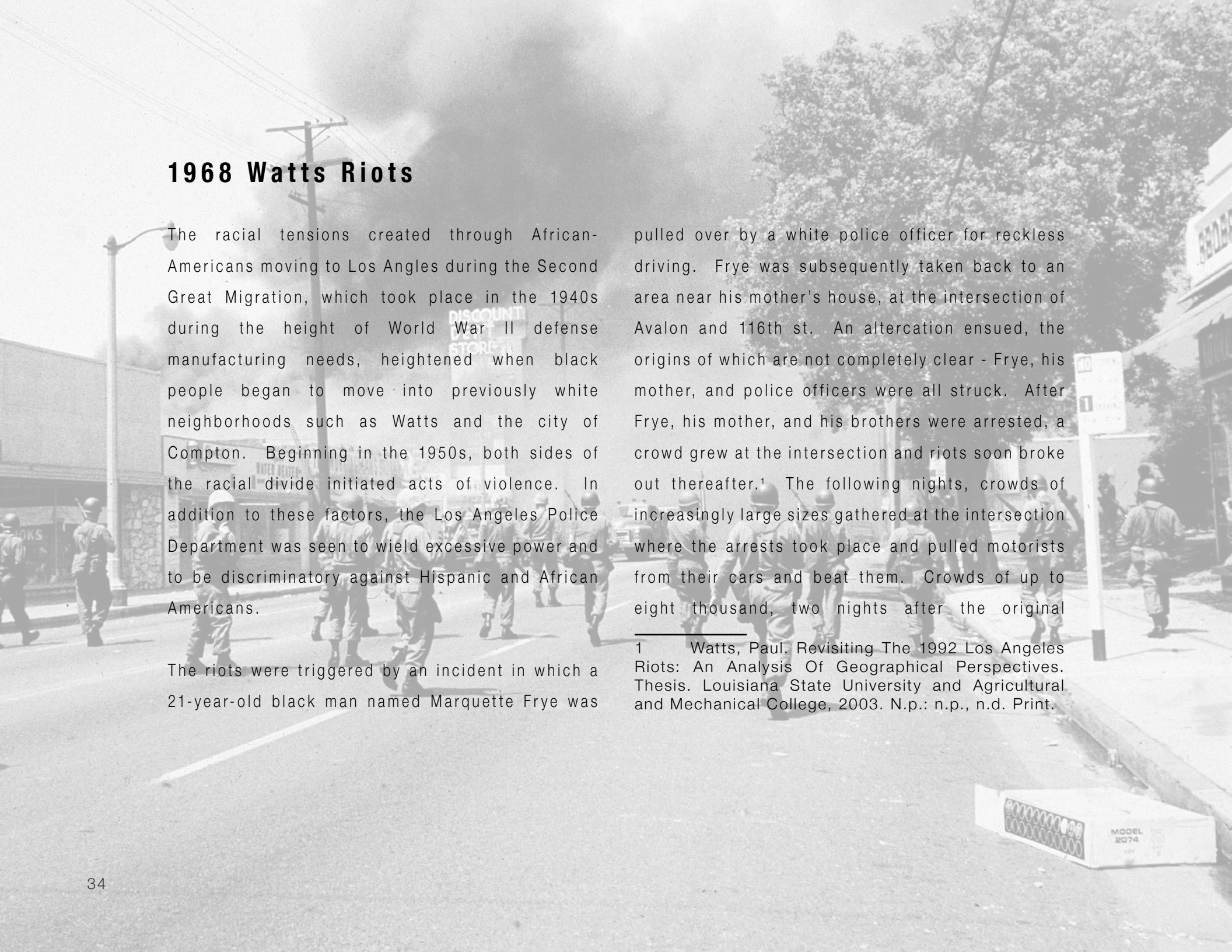
SECTION 3 ATTACHES HERE
SECTION 4 ATTACHES HERE
BEVERLY
CULVER CITY
PEAT BEDS
BALDWIN HILLS PRODUCING OIL FIELD
INGLEWOOD
PLAYA DEL REY
LENNOX
FOTRERO PRODUCING OIL FIELDS
EL SEGUNDO
HAWTHORNE
MAYWOOD
BELL
HUNTINGTON PARK
SOUTH GATE
DOWNTOWN BUSINESS
INDUSTRIAL
AGRICULTURAL

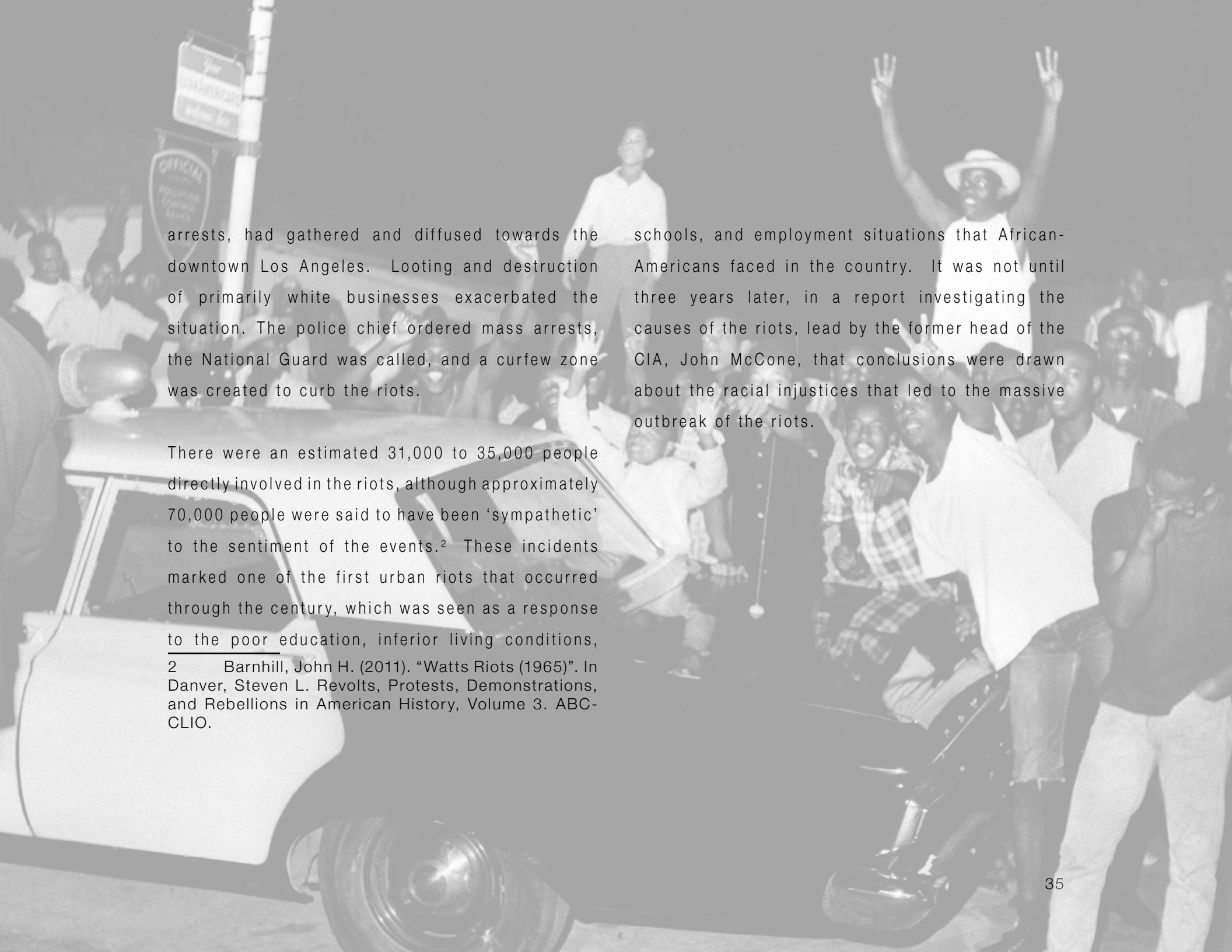


1968 Watts Riots

The racial tensions created through African-Americans moving to Los Angles during the Second Great Migration, which took place in the 1940s during the height of World War II defense manufacturing needs, heightened when black people began to move into previously white neighborhoods such as Watts and the city of Compton. Beginning in the 1950s, both sides of the racial divide initiated acts of violence. In addition to these factors, the Los Angeles Police Department was seen to wield excessive power and to be discriminatory against Hispanic and African Americans.

The riots were triggered by an incident in which a 21-year-old black man named Marquette Frye was pulled over by a white police officer for reckless driving. Frye was subsequently taken back to an area near his mother's house, at the intersection of Avalon and 116th st. An altercation ensued, the origins of which are not completely clear - Frye, his mother, and police officers were all struck. After Frye, his mother, and his brothers were arrested, a crowd grew at the intersection and riots soon broke out thereafter.[1] The following nights, crowds of increasingly large sizes gathered at the intersection where the arrests took place and pulled motorists from their cars and beat them. Crowds of up to eight thousand, two nights after the original

1 Watts, Paul. Revisiting The 1992 Los Angeles Riots: An Analysis Of Geographical Perspectives. Thesis. Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2003. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.



arrests, had gathered and diffused towards the downtown Los Angeles. Looting and destruction of primarily white businesses exacerbated the situation. The police chief ordered mass arrests, the National Guard was called, and a curfew zone was created to curb the riots.

There were an estimated 31,000 to 35,000 people directly involved in the riots, although approximately 70,000 people were said to have been 'sympathetic' to the sentiment of the events.[2] These incidents marked one of the first urban riots that occurred through the century, which was seen as a response to the poor education, inferior living conditions, schools, and employment situations that African-Americans faced in the country. It was not until three years later, in a report investigating the causes of the riots, lead by the former head of the CIA, John McCone, that conclusions were drawn about the racial injustices that led to the massive outbreak of the riots.

2 Barnhill, John H. (2011). "Watts Riots (1965)". In Danver, Steven L. Revolts, Protests, Demonstrations, and Rebellions in American History, Volume 3. ABC-CLIO.

1324 E. First St.

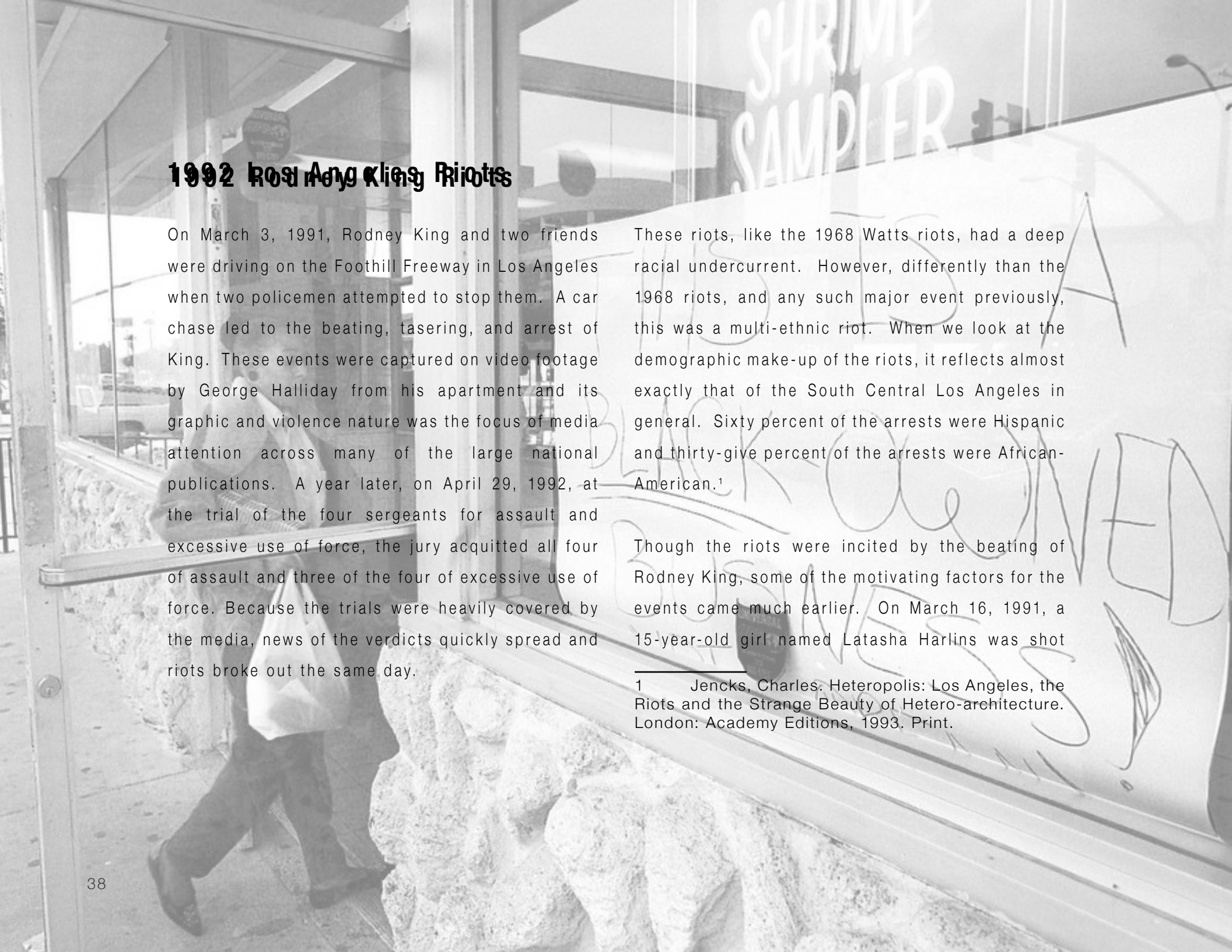
BUSINESSES & PRIVATE BUILDINGS

DAMAGED AND/OR BURNED	275
LOOTED	192
LOOTED, DAMAGED AND/OR BURNED	288
DESTROYED	207

PUBLIC BUILDINGS

DAMAGED AND/OR BURNED	14
DESTROYED	1
TOTAL	977
DEATHS	34

Map from the 1965 McCone Commission report, which documented the results of an inquiry into the riots, headed by the former CIA director, John McCone. This report suggested, three years after the riots, that root causes could have been inferior conditions due to racial injustice.



1992 Rodney King Riots

On March 3, 1991, Rodney King and two friends were driving on the Foothill Freeway in Los Angeles when two policemen attempted to stop them. A car chase led to the beating, tasering, and arrest of King. These events were captured on video footage by George Halliday from his apartment and its graphic and violence nature was the focus of media attention across many of the large national publications. A year later, on April 29, 1992, at the trial of the four sergeants for assault and excessive use of force, the jury acquitted all four of assault and three of the four of excessive use of force. Because the trials were heavily covered by the media, news of the verdicts quickly spread and riots broke out the same day.

These riots, like the 1968 Watts riots, had a deep racial undercurrent. However, differently than the 1968 riots, and any such major event previously, this was a multi-ethnic riot. When we look at the demographic make-up of the riots, it reflects almost exactly that of the South Central Los Angeles in general. Sixty percent of the arrests were Hispanic and thirty-give percent of the arrests were African-American.[1]

Though the riots were incited by the beating of Rodney King, some of the motivating factors for the events came much earlier. On March 16, 1991, a 15-year-old girl named Latasha Harlins was shot

1 Jencks, Charles. Heteropolis: Los Angeles, the Riots and the Strange Beauty of Hetero-architecture. London: Academy Editions, 1993. Print.

and killed in a Korean grocery store by the store's owner. Despite being convicted, the store owner was not sentenced to any time in prison, but was simply asked to pay a fine of $500. This touched a nerve amongst the African-American community, who harbored growing anger against the Korean community for being economically successful.

Another factor was the growing influx of migrants, often illegal, from Latin American countries, many of whom came to the United States in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s due to political unrest in their home countries and better economic opportunities in American cities. Though Latino Americans did not have a direct stake in the outcomes of the Rodney King trial, they were still very much involved in the race riots. It has been argued that their participation in the riots was primarily opportunistic. 20-40 per cent of the businesses that were looted had Latino owners.[2] The media coverage for riots, however, largely feature African-Americans, as Hispanics were not associated with South Central Los Angeles in the collective mindset.

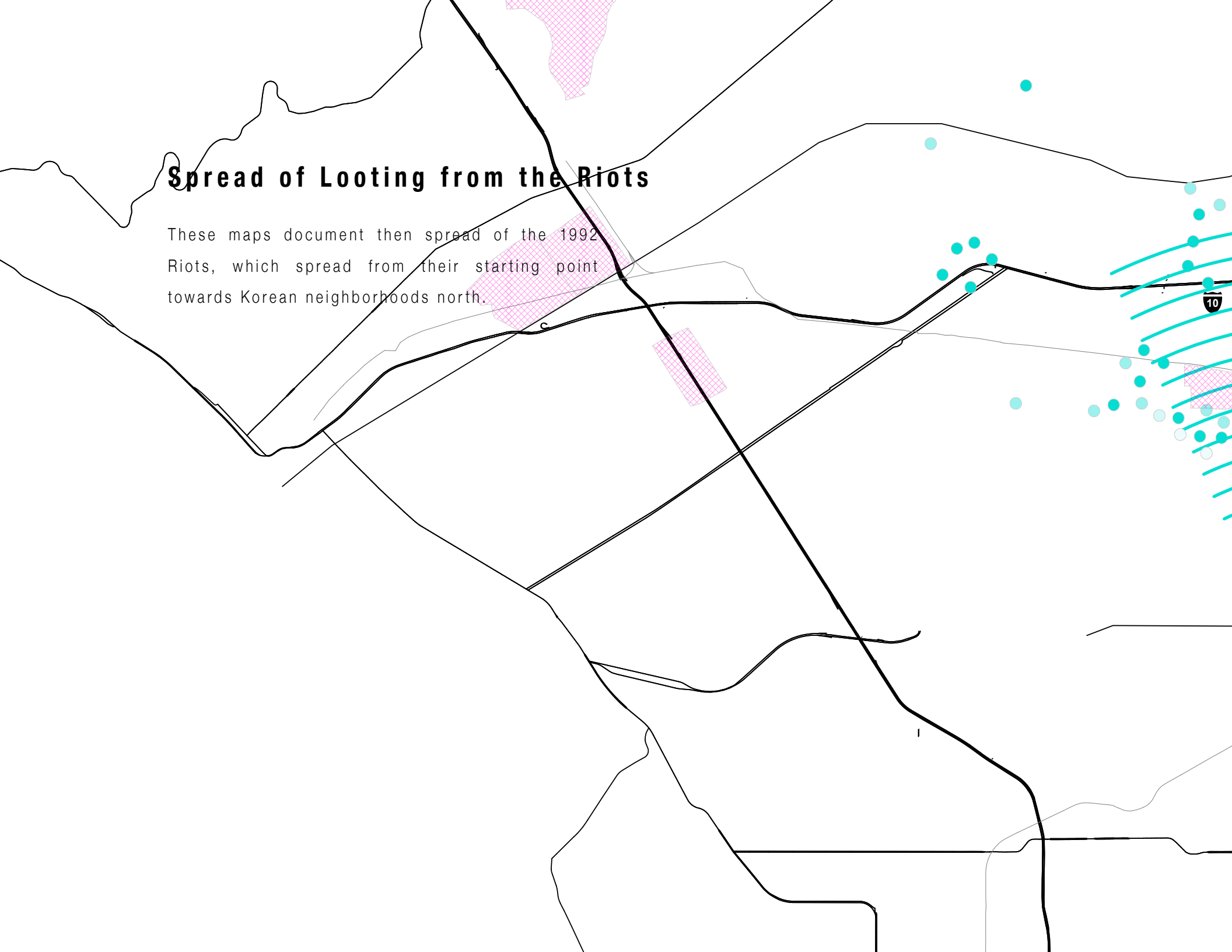
Both the Korean and Latino communities lacked adequate political support and protection from LAPD support during the riots, due to their not being broadly recognized as having significant communities at this time.

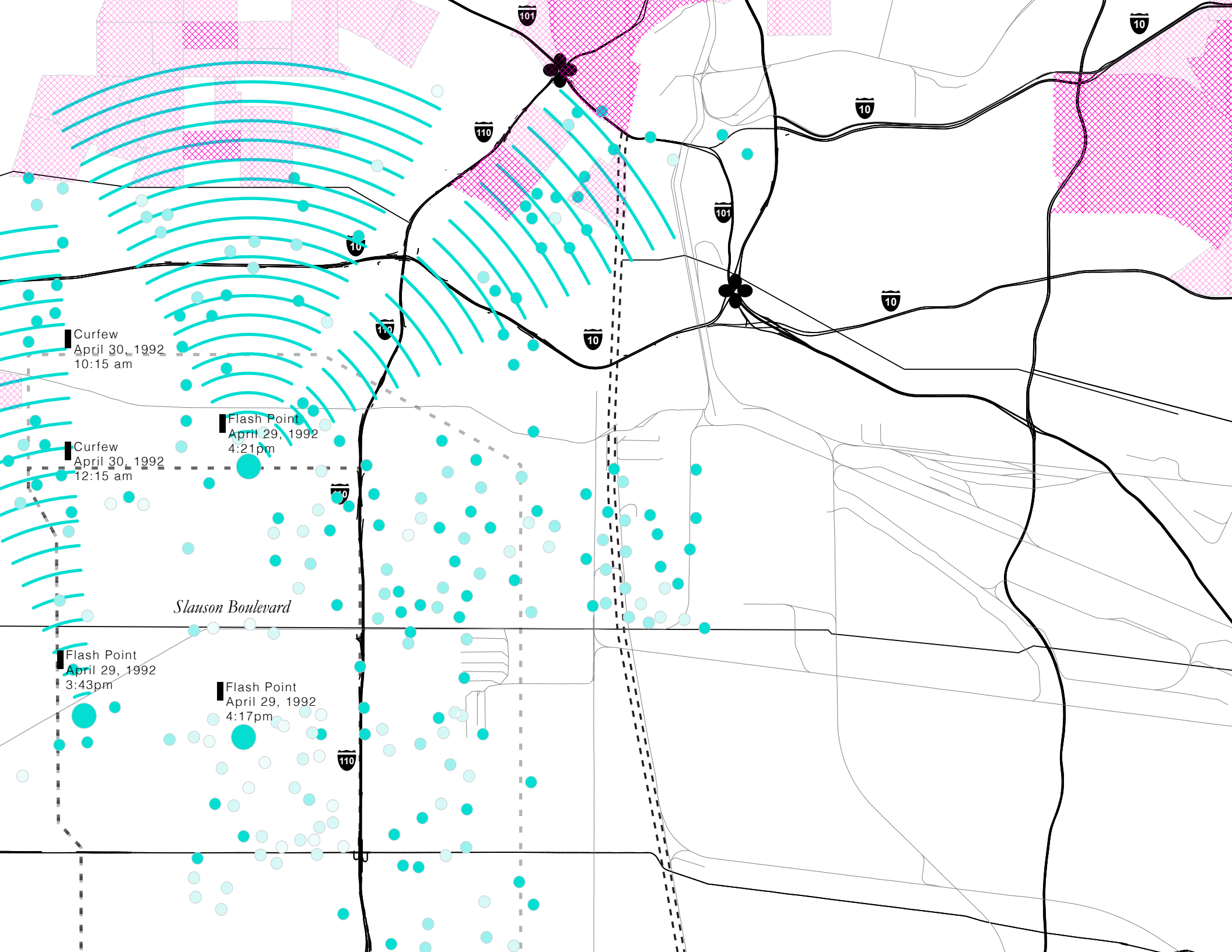
---

2 Hayes-Bautista, David E.; Schink, Werner O."Latinos and the 1992 Los Angeles riots: a behavioral sciences perspective". Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences 15 (4).

Spread of Looting from the Riots

These maps document then spread of the 1992 Riots, which spread from their starting point towards Korean neighborhoods north.




Curfew
April 30, 1992
10:15 am
Curfew
April 30, 1992
12:15 am
Flash Point
April 29, 1992
4:21pm
Slauson Boulevard
Flash Point
April 29, 1992
3:43pm
Flash Point
April 29, 1992
4:17pm
101
110
10

Topography

Los Angeles is a city of disaggregated spaces. Separation - private and public, infrastructural and programmatic, water and land, commercial and street, not to mention the inside from the outside - are all endogenous to the personality of the city.

Physical topography played an important in the organizational development of Los Angeles. Reyener Banham's seminal book *Los Angeles: The Architecture of the Four Ecologies* emphasizes the role that physical forces, as opposed to planning ones, that shaped the city. Importantly, the structure of Los Angeles differs greatly than other, more traditionally developed, East Coast American cities built largely around a medieval-city model. Because the city lacks this centralized hierarchy, the forces that govern it are 'ecologies' such as the beach, the hillsides, plains, and cars. In this sense, the city behaves like a non-hierarchical and dispersive field. Kazys Varnelis advances this argument in his book *The Infrastructural City: Networked Ecologies of Los Angeles*, which updates the notion of ecologies to include the various types of infrastructure that, more recently, have begun to act upon the city, such as traffic planning, telecommunications technology and infrastructure, and palm trees.

The fundamental belief in various theories of organization in Los Angeles is that, in a region where space exists in abundance and no central planning dominates, physical systems of organization then become the shaping forces in the city.

Sky
Mountain
House
Cliff
Highway
Beach

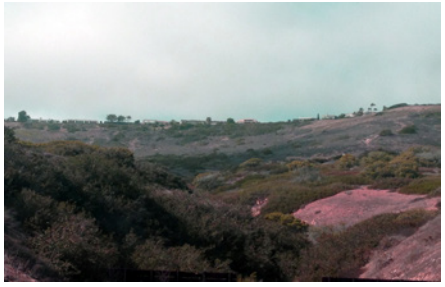
Physical Barriers

Disaggregation through carving out spaces is central to the fabric of the city: Physical barriers abound.

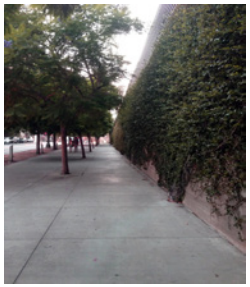
Shopping

Highways

Hilltops

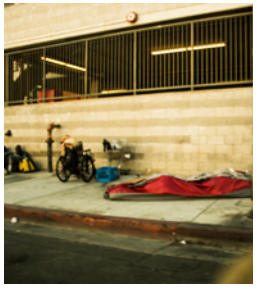


Hedges



Industrial

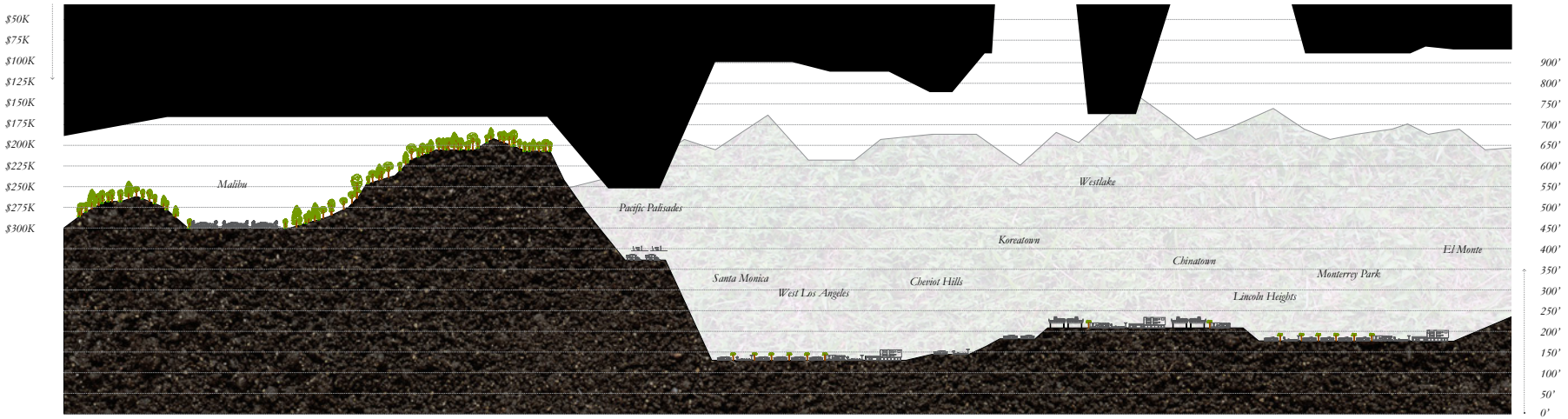
Homeless



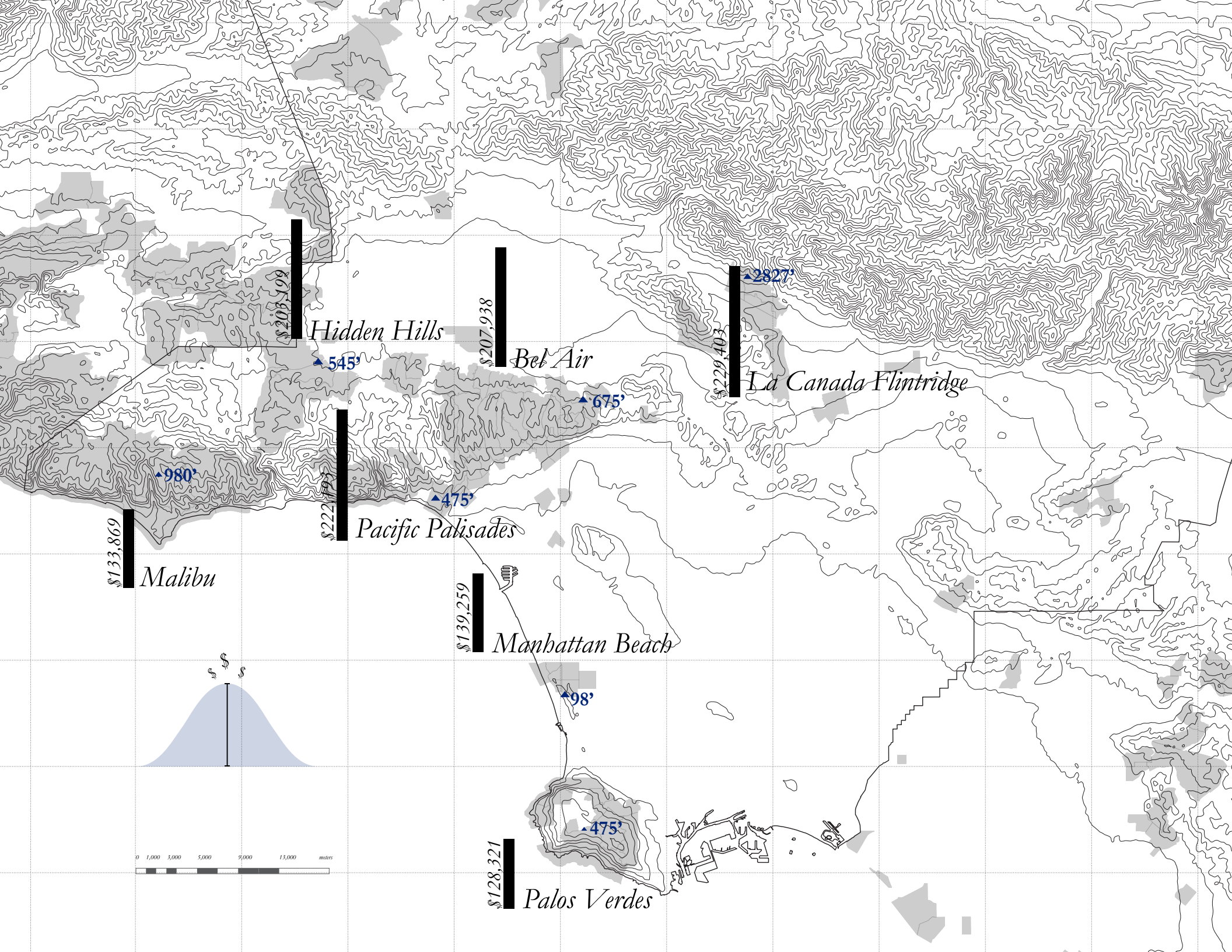
LA River

Wealth in the Hills

The city's wealthiest populations live in the hills of surrounding the Los Angeles Basin. In fact, even neighborhoods that have a smaller rise in elevation, such as Manhattan Beach, have a relatively wealthier population than their lower-to-the-ground neighbors.

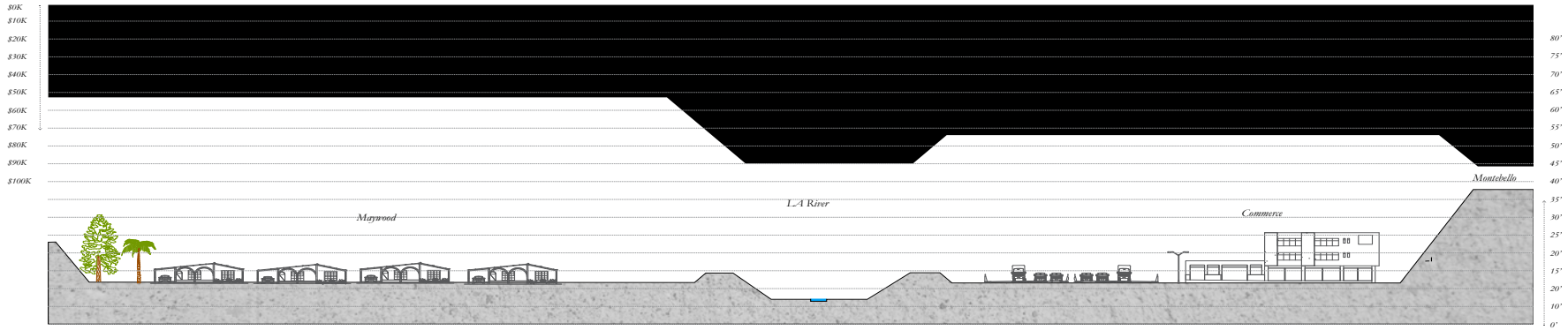


Relationship between topography and income - cross section.

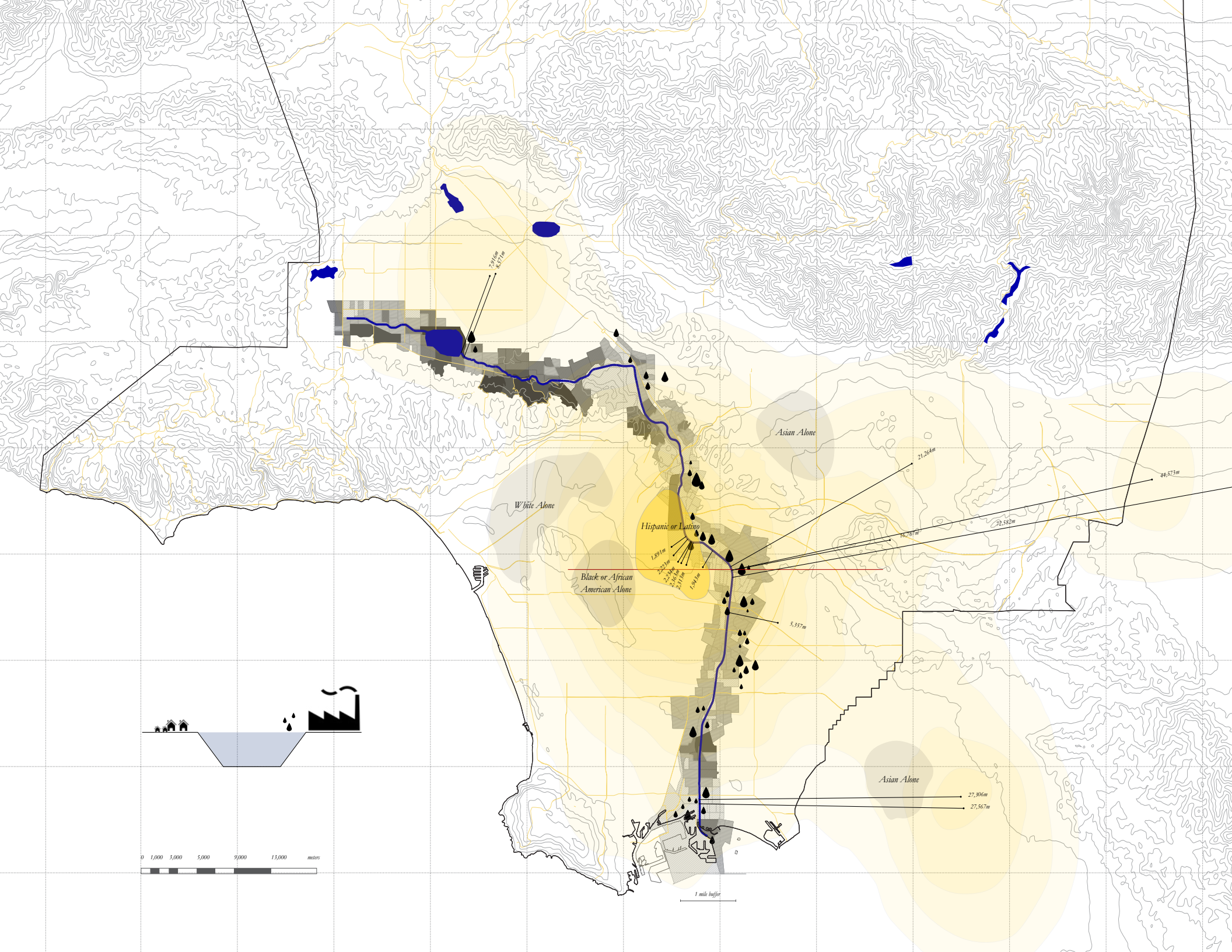

$203,129
Hidden Hills
545'
$207,938
Bel Air
675'
2827'
$229,403
La Canada Flintridge
980'
$133,869
Malibu
$222,793
475'
Pacific Palisades
$139,259
Manhattan Beach
98'
475'
$128,321
Palos Verdes
$ $ $
0 1,000 3,000 5,000 9,000 13,000 meters

Toxicity Around the River

The LA River is still a dominant force in the organization of the city. The area east of the city is still largely industrial. Looking at the population concentrations of white, Asian, black, and Latino populations across the city, we can see that the Latino population, the poorest group, is still the one that resides closest to the polluting river.

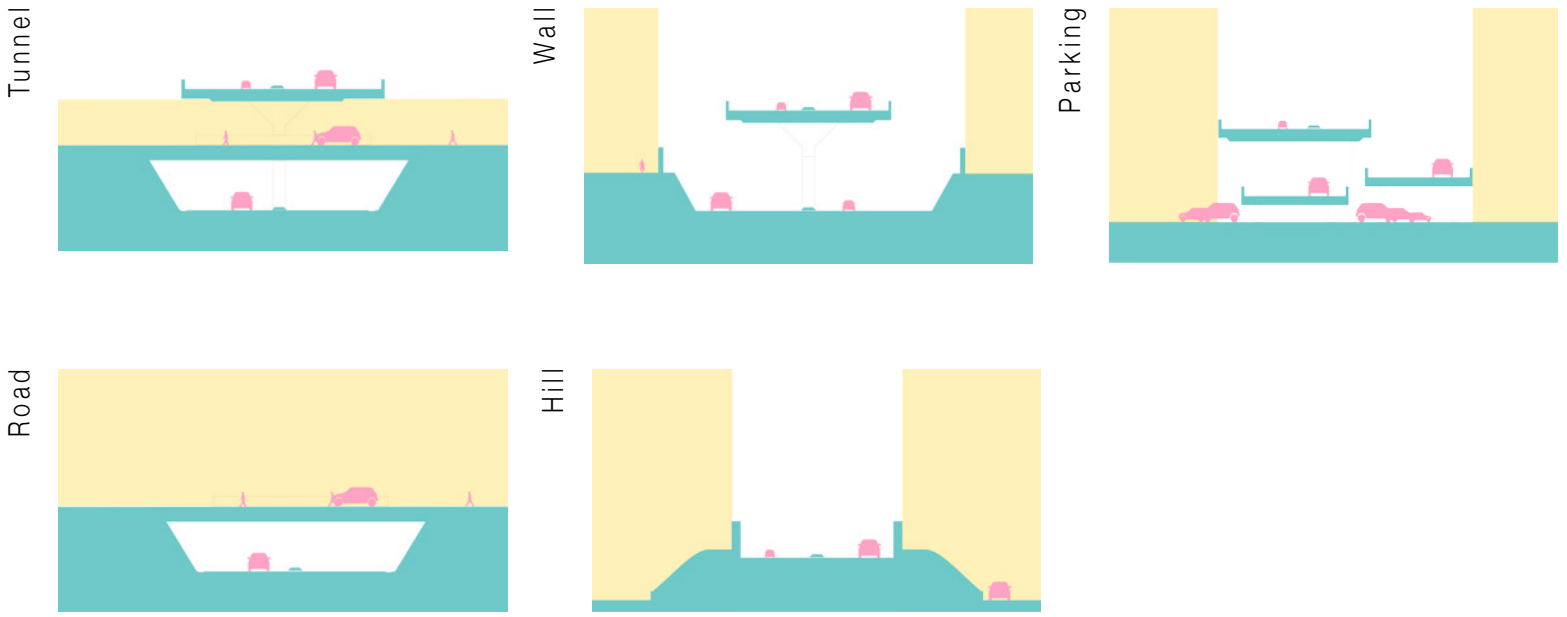


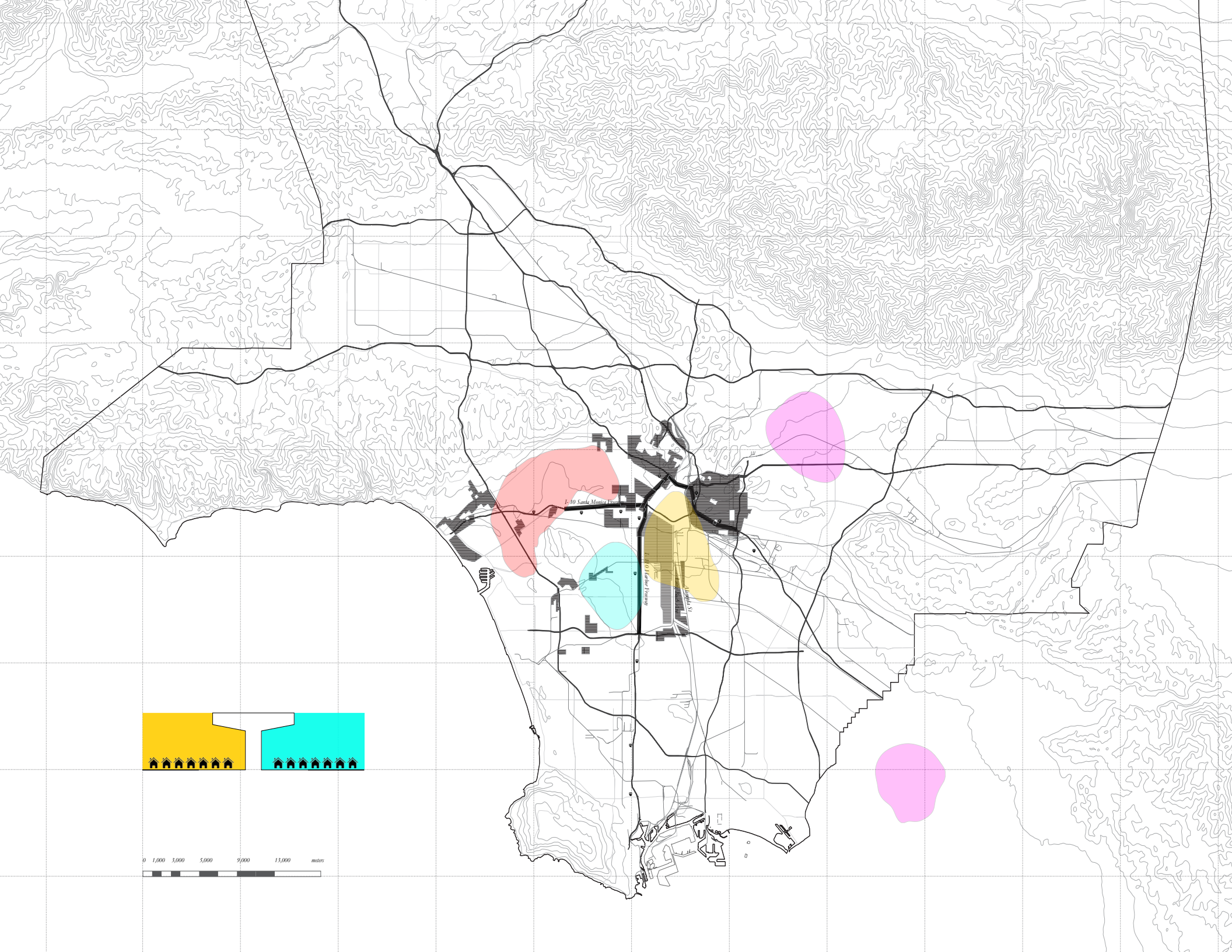
Relationship between proximity to the river and income - cross section.


7,916m
8,571m
Asian Alone
21,264m
44,573m
White Alone
Hispanic or Latino
72,582m
46,167m
1,891m
2,223m
2,324m
2,363m
2,511m
1,943m
Black or African American Alone
5,357m
Asian Alone
27,306m
27,567m
0 1,000 3,000 5,000 9,000 13,000 meters
1 mile buffer

Separated by the Highway

The freeway system criss-crosses and divides the city into disparate racial zones, the cores of which are shown on the map. Specific highway typologies and the ways in which they create connections or divisions are cataloged.




I-10 Santa Monica Freeway
I-110 Harbor Freeway
Downtown Los Angeles
0 1,000 3,000 5,000 9,000 13,000 meters

Urban Community

Ethnic Distribution Across the City

The current state of Los Angeles is a reflection of the many physical and racial forces that have shaped its history. The city has developed into a gateway city not only for Latin Americans, but immigrants from across the world.

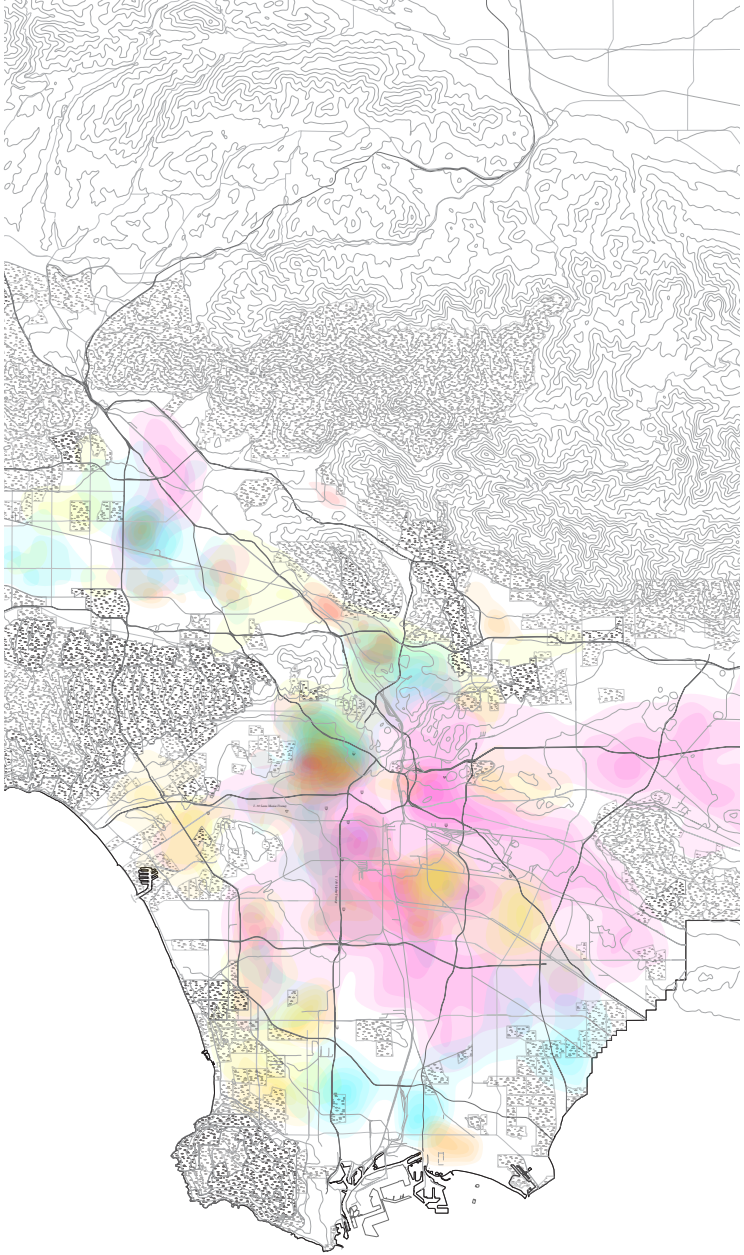
The enclaves of Little Armenia in Los Angeles contains the largest population of Armenians outside of Iran and Armenia. Recently minted neighborhoods such s Little Bangladesh, which became officially designated in 2010, and Historic Filipinotown, which received its official designation in 2002, are growing. Tehrangeles, the Iranian neighborhood in Los Angeles, came into being when Iranians fled the country during the 1979 Revolution. With a population of around 700,000 to 800,000, the Iranian population in Los Angeles is also the largest outside of Iran.

The influx of immigrants into Los Angeles, led by Latin American migrants starting in the 1970s has resulted in the city now being primarily non-white. According to the 2005-2009 American Community Survey, the city's largest ethnic group is 47.5% Hispanic or Latino, while Whites are 41.3%, Asians are 10.7%, and Black or African Americans are 9.8% of the population.[1] Also notable in these figures is the fact that the city's black population is now a relatively minor portion of the population.

1 "Los Angeles City, California - Fact Sheet - American FactFinder." Los Angeles City, California - Fact Sheet - American FactFinder. Amerian Community Survey, 2009. Web. 17 May 2016.

The residents of Compton or Watts are primarily Latino and Hispanic these days. With ethnic diversity flourishing in the city, a long-held Angeleno sentiment of carving out a community of one's own is nevertheless strong.

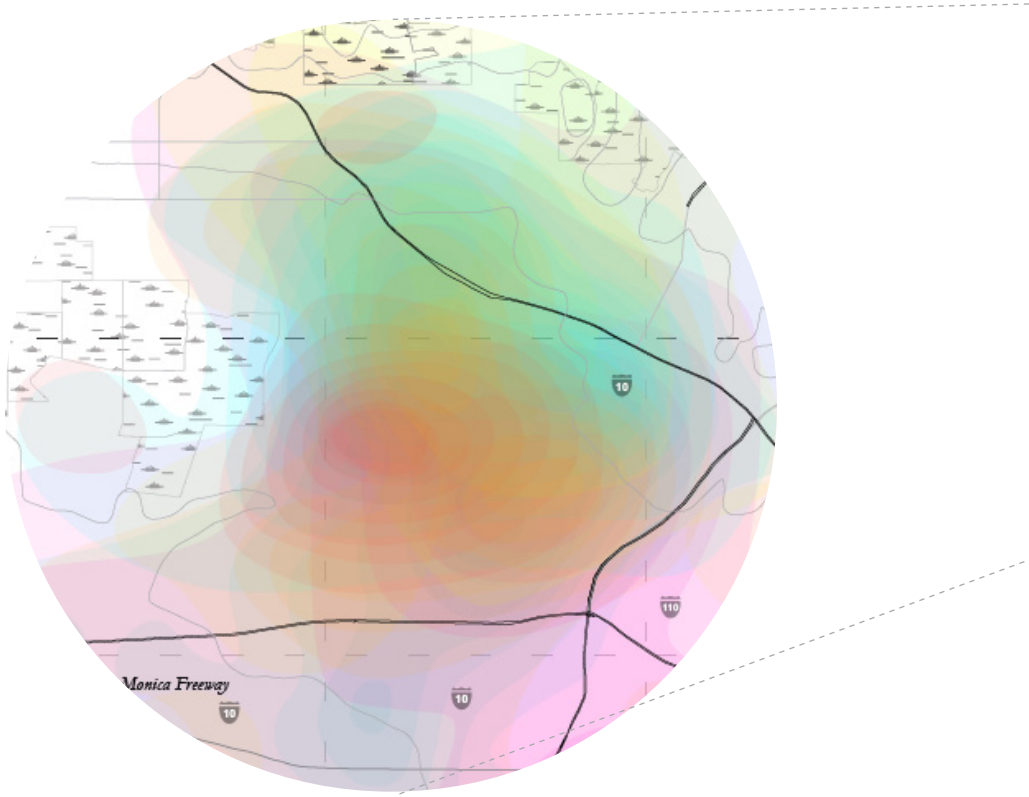
Recent disputes amongst the ethnic populations in the city have centered on border disagreements and delineations.

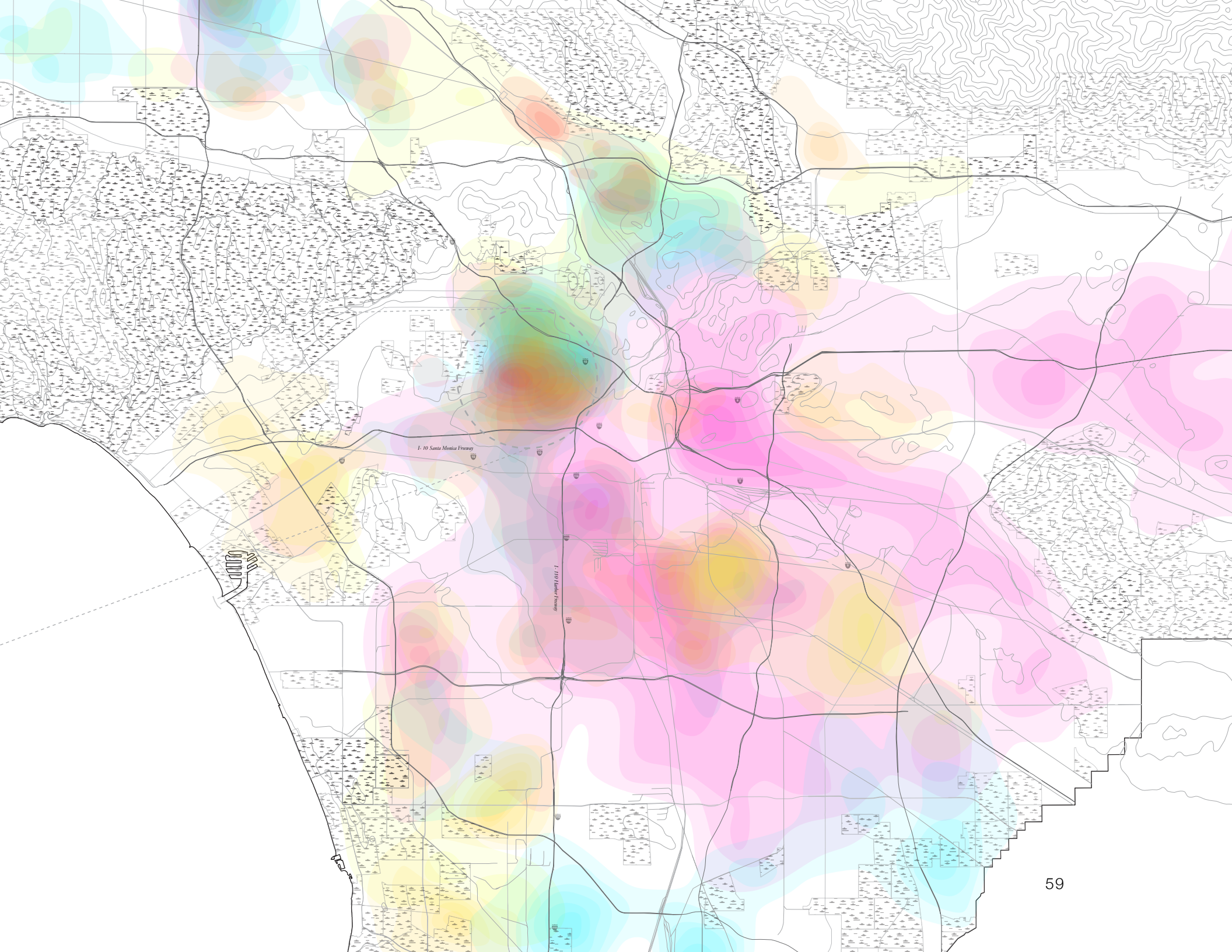


Foreign-born populations in LA County, 2010.

Koreatown - a Microcosm

Two details are noticeable when we look at concentrations of the foreign-born population in the larger LA metropolitan region: First, these groups do not reside in areas that are of a higher median income, and second, these immigrants have their highest concentration and diversity around Koreatown.




I- 10 Santa Monica Freeway
I- 110 Harbor Freeway

History of Koreatown

Koreatown is verily a microcosm for Los Angeles as a whole - it can almost be considered a city within a city, with its own commercial districts in what its downtown area centered on Wilshire Boulevard, complete with skyscrapers. Despite its name, Koreatown is a diverse mixture of ethnic neighborhoods, with the dominant population now being Latino, rather than Korean. Many of the Latin Consulate Generals, including that of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Bolivia, in addition to the South Korean and Chinese ones, are all located within the Koreatown.

The area currently known as Koreatown was once a thriving center of Hollywood. The Ambassador Hotel hosted the Academy Awards from 1930 to 1934. By the 1960s, however, the surrounding neighborhoods were in decline as Hollywood moved northwest-ward. In 1968, Robert F. Kennedy was shot at the Ambassador Hotel.

What was considered undesirable for Los Angeles natives, however, became attractive to immigrant Koreans who arrived in large numbers following the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act.

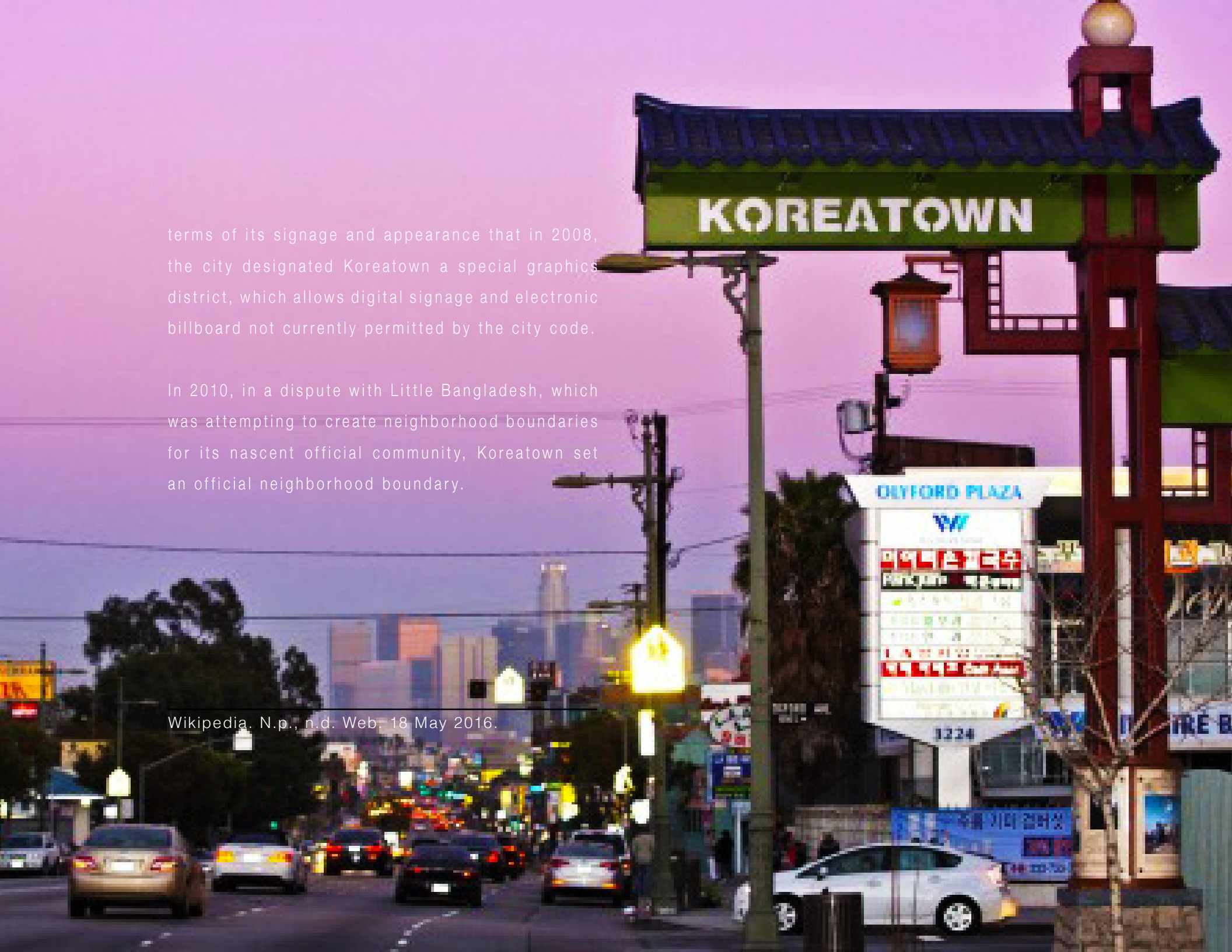
The initial Korean business district on Olympic Boulevard has now spread to a much larger region, running north-south along Western and Vermont for three miles, and east-west along Olympic Boulevard for two miles.[1] The area has become so distinct in

1 "Koreatown, Los Angeles | Wikipedia."

terms of its signage and appearance that in 2008, the city designated Koreatown a special graphics district, which allows digital signage and electronic billboard not currently permitted by the city code.

In 2010, in a dispute with Little Bangladesh, which was attempting to create neighborhood boundaries for its nascent official community, Koreatown set an official neighborhood boundary.

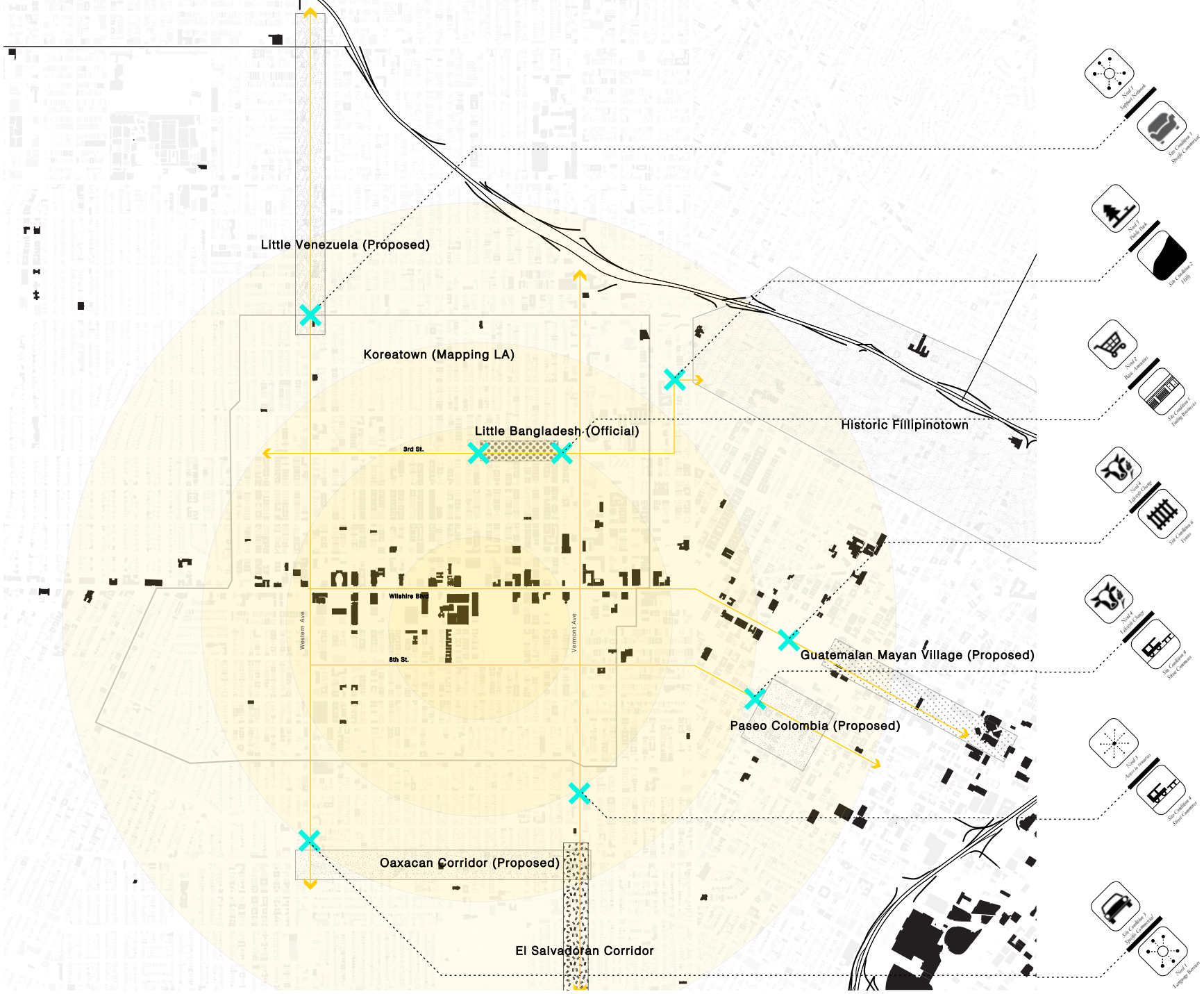
Wikipedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 May 2016.



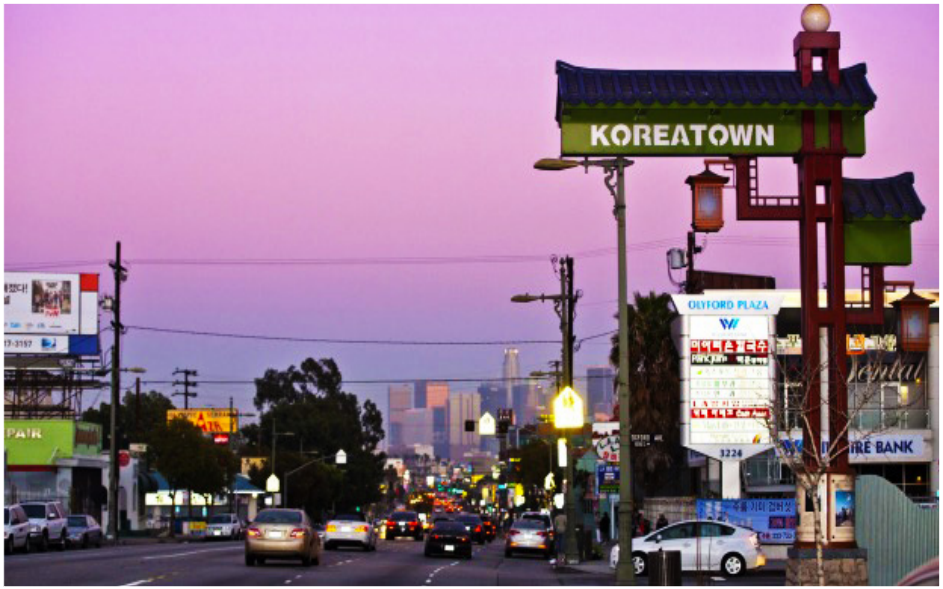
Community Identities | Community Existence

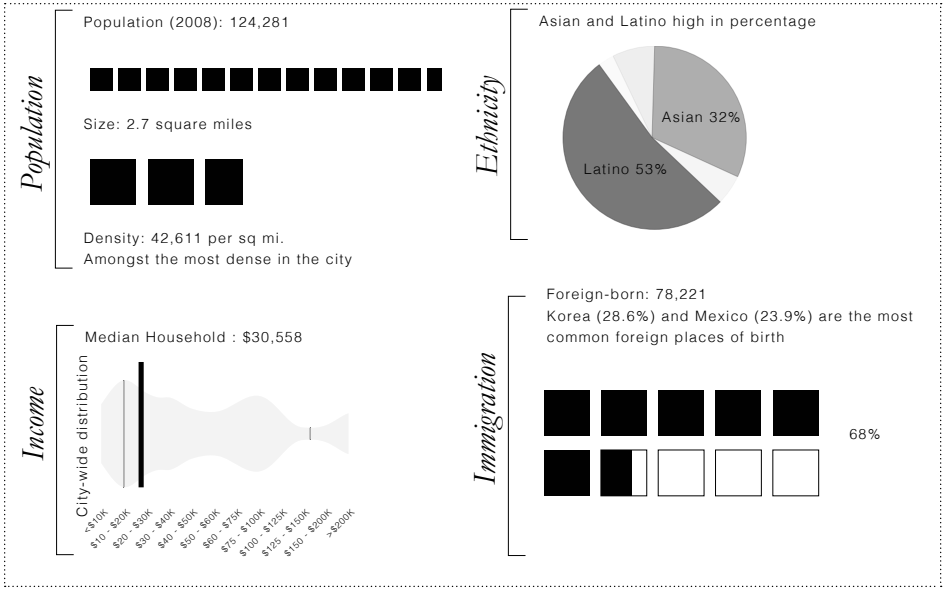
The current condition in Koreatown is a unique one and exemplifies a larger discussion around enclavization and development of strong enclave identities in Los Angeles. Despite its name, Koreatown is actually majority Latino. Behind Korean restaurants and grocery stores are Latino workers and customers. This dynamic arises from the fact that there continues to be an influx of, often illegal, migrant workers from Latin American countries who arrive in neighborhoods such as Koreatown or Pico-Union, an area directly east of Koreatown, to find better living and working situations. Most of these groups have existed for decades within Koreatown and have, formally or informally, created an identity and community within the larger Koreatown neighborhood. Vital for the continued existence of these communities and, in keeping with the enclavization mentality of Los Angeles, is the development of a strong and rooted identity.

Every community has concerns that they will be overtaken by the overwhelming commercial force of Koreatown. Most often, the tactic to fight for existence is an economic one: To open a successful Bangladeshi restaurant or a Salvadoran grocery store means that the community has created an anchor upon which other businesses can thrive, attracting more members to the community. In this way, the commercial success and strong neighborhood presences are inextricably linked.

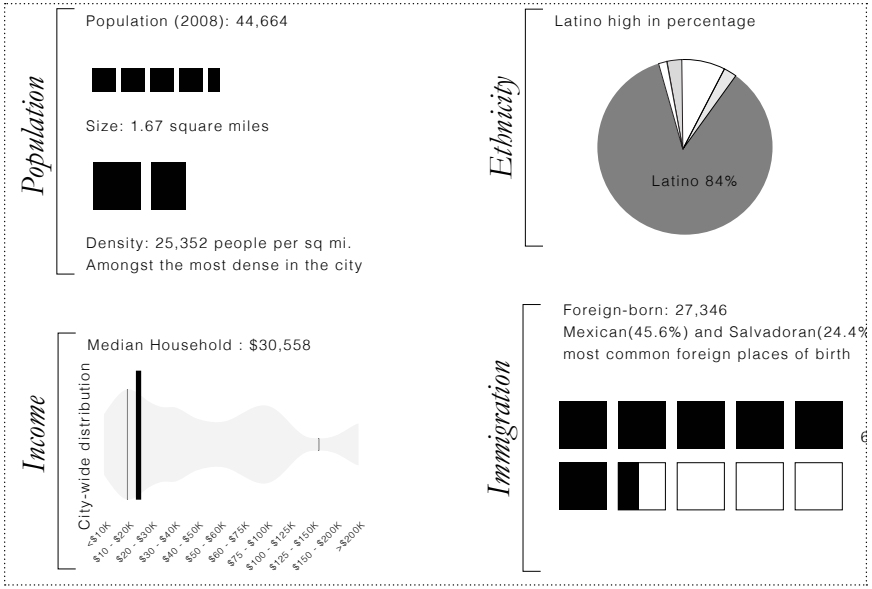

Little Venezuela (Proposed)
Koreatown (Mapping LA)
Little Bangladesh (Official)
Historic Fillipinotown
Guatemalan Mayan Village (Proposed)
Paseo Colombia (Proposed)
Oaxacan Corridor (Proposed)
El Salvadoran Corridor
3rd St.
Wilshire Blvd
8th St.
Western Ave
Vermont Ave

Koreatown Demographics

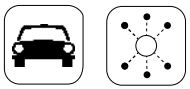




Pico Union Demographics

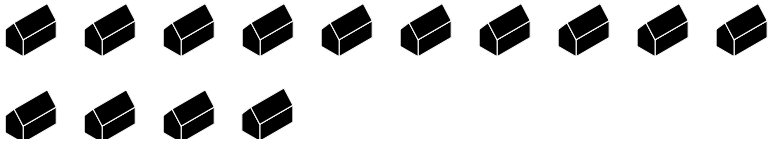


OAXACAN CORRIDOR | Babylon



Population: ~200,000

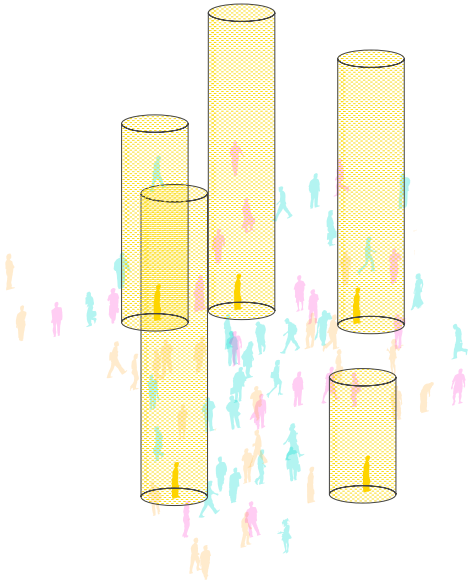
Businesses: 14



Since the 1980s, there has been a large influx of Mexican migrants from the state of Oaxaca. Increases in the unemployment rate and lowering of wages has led many Zapotecos and Mixtecos to migrate. Many of these migrants' native language is indigenous.

Indigenous Languages

When migrants go to Los Angeles, they are often met with many more language barriers than most Mexicans.



Language Barrier

The physical fabric of the region for the proposal Oaxacan corridor is also a fairly commercial street filled with auto shops, dollar stores, and cash-checking services. Due to the nature of these stores, facades have an industrial feel.

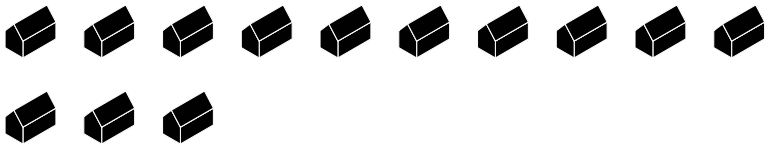
Fences

GUATEMALAN MAYAN VILLAGE |
City Mouse Country Mouse

Population: ~250,000

50-60% of all Guatemalans are Indigenous Mayans

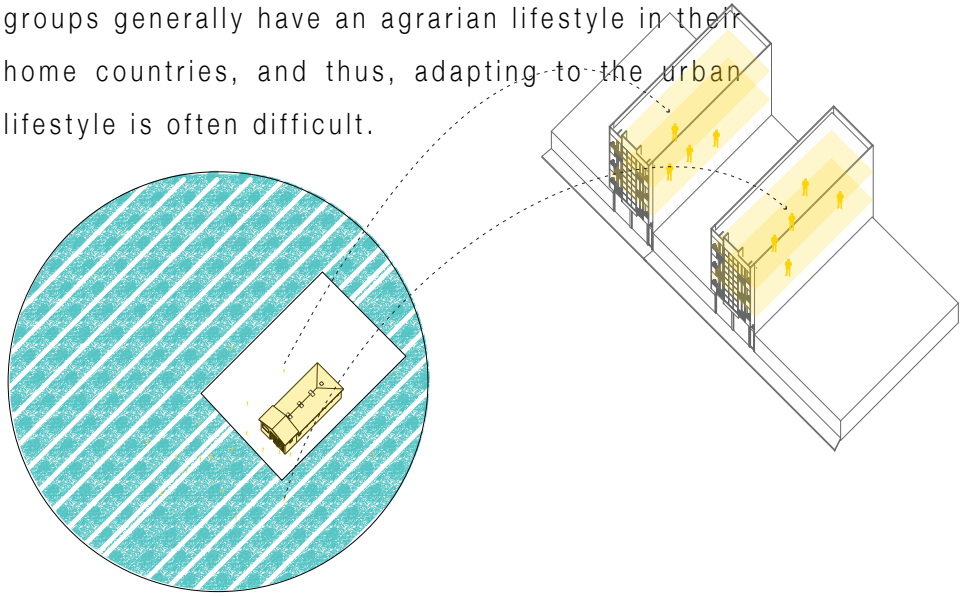
Businesses: 13



The majority of the Guatemalans who come to Los Angles are of an indigenous population and are more familiar living in a broader family structure in which neighbors and friends becomes an extension of the nuclear family.

Wide Family Structure

Not only is a the majority of the Guatemalan community from the indigenous groups such as Mayan Chujes, Quichés, and Kanjobals, but these groups generally have an agrarian lifestyle in their home countries, and thus, adapting to the urban lifestyle is often difficult.

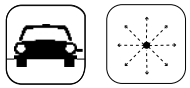


Agrarian to Urban Lifestyle

In general, the lack of density in Los Angeles make it difficult to re-produce the kind of wider family structure that indigenous Guatemalans are more familiar with. In particular, the omnipresence of fences in this part of Los Angeles make gatherings more difficult.

Fences

SALVADORAN CORRIDOR | Not Here Nor There



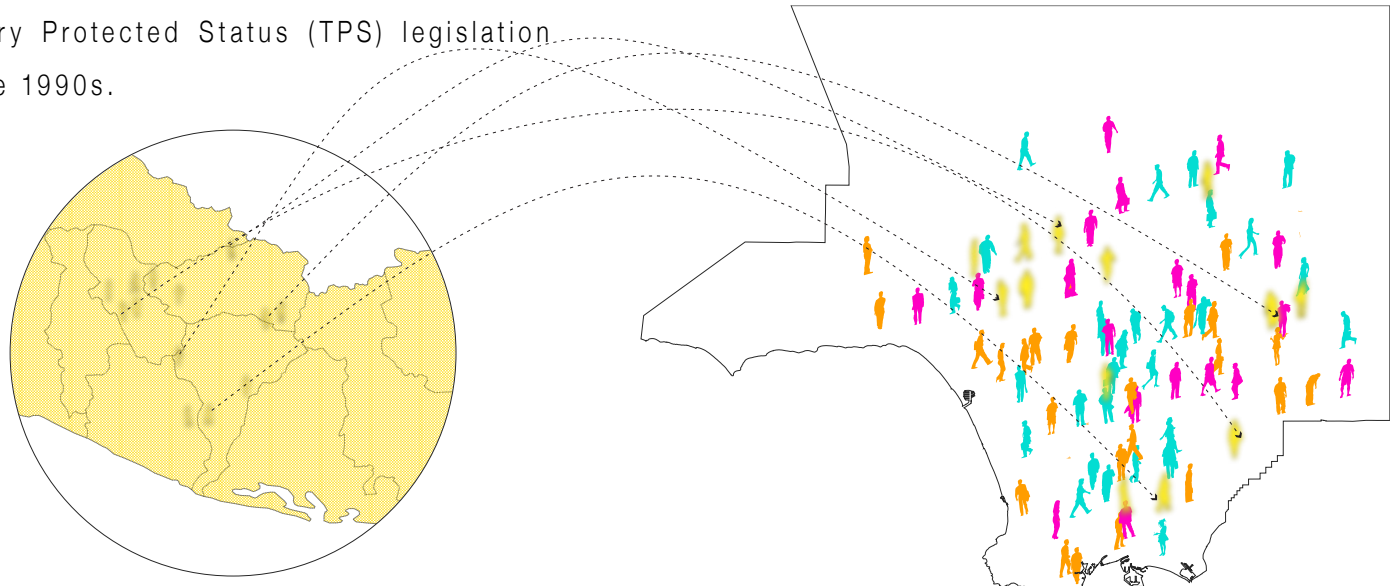
Documented Population: ~ 350,000

Undocumented Population: ~ ??

Businesses: 10

Due to the Salvadoran Civil War in the 1980s and subsequent violence and economic instability in El Salvador, Salvadorans are forced to seek refuge in countries like the United States through the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) legislation passed in the 1990s.

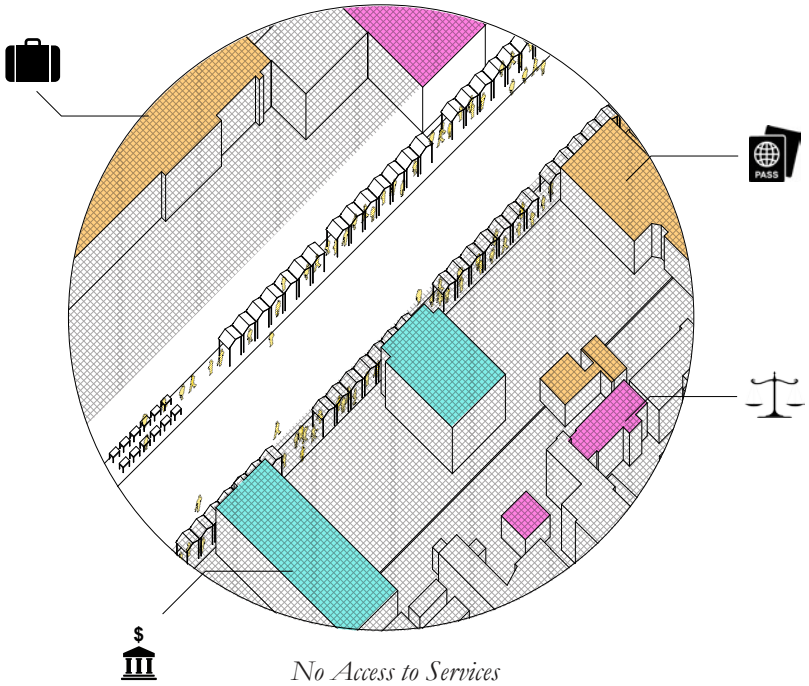
Many people go to cities like Los Angeles and remain there as undocumented refugees.



Refugee Status

Illegal Status

Due to their lack of status, many people of Salvadoran background do not have access to certain services that may help them root their lives in the US. The most crucial are generally legal, financial, and work-related services. Thus, their mode of business is more likely to be informal and temporary, taking place in public spaces.

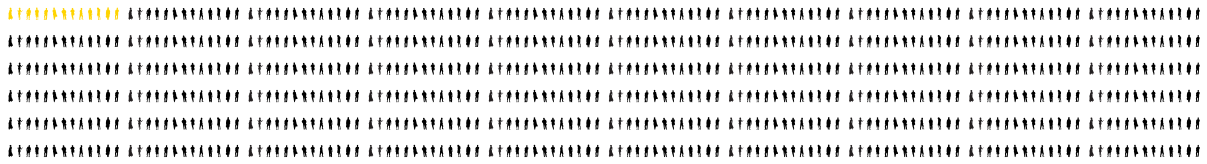


No Access to Services

HISTORIC FILIPINOTOWN |
City On A Hill

Population: ~600,000

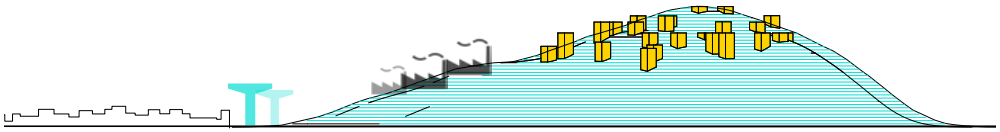
Only 10,000 living in the neighborhood



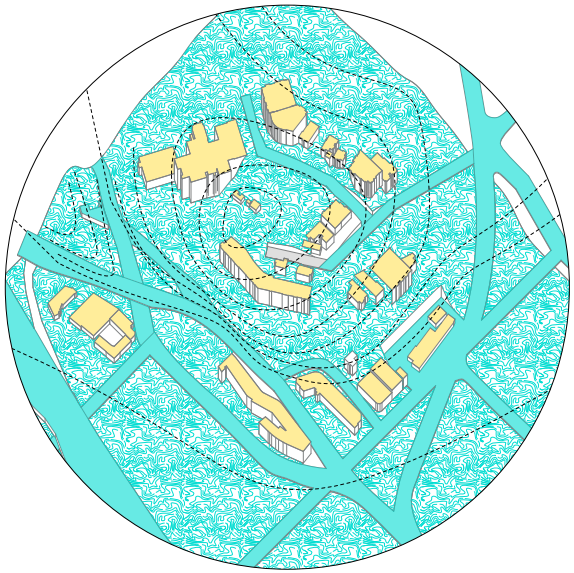
Businesses: 40

Community Centers: 2

Historic Filipinotown sits on top of a hill which has industrial regions at one end of its main access point. The area is also cut off from the west by ramps to the I-101, which sits at the foot of the hill.



Difficulty of Physical Access

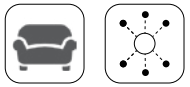


Geography

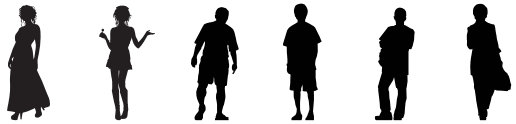
Historic Filipinotown, despite being only 20 years old, has a vibrant and growing community culture due to the fact that this is the largest concentration of Filipinos in the country. The neighborhood still lacks certain basic amenities such as a complete grocery store.

Established Neighborhood Fabric

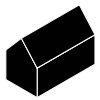
LITTLE VENEZUELA|
Nearer, Farther



Population: ~6,000

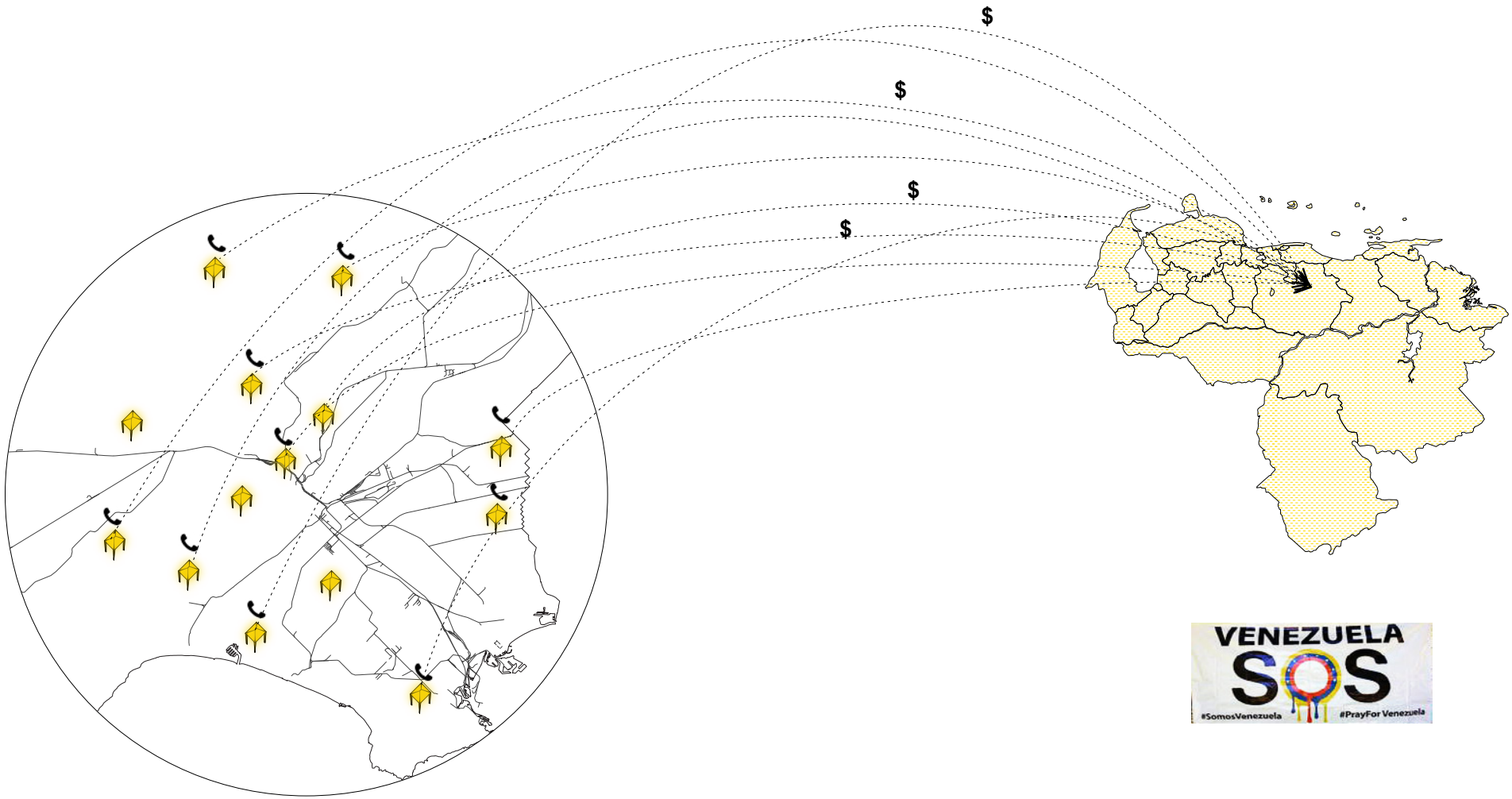


Businesses in Neighborhood: 1



The Venezuelan population is only around 6,000 people in the greater Los Angeles Metropolitan region, and the population is dispersed. Instability due to the political climate in Venezuela means that immigrants remain strongly attached to their home country. Thus, communicating and sending money back home is crucial. Conflicts in Venezuelan politic also spill over to the community in Los Angeles.

Distance



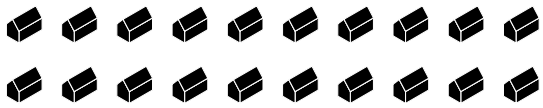
Dispersed Population within Los Angeles

Political Troubles in the Home Country

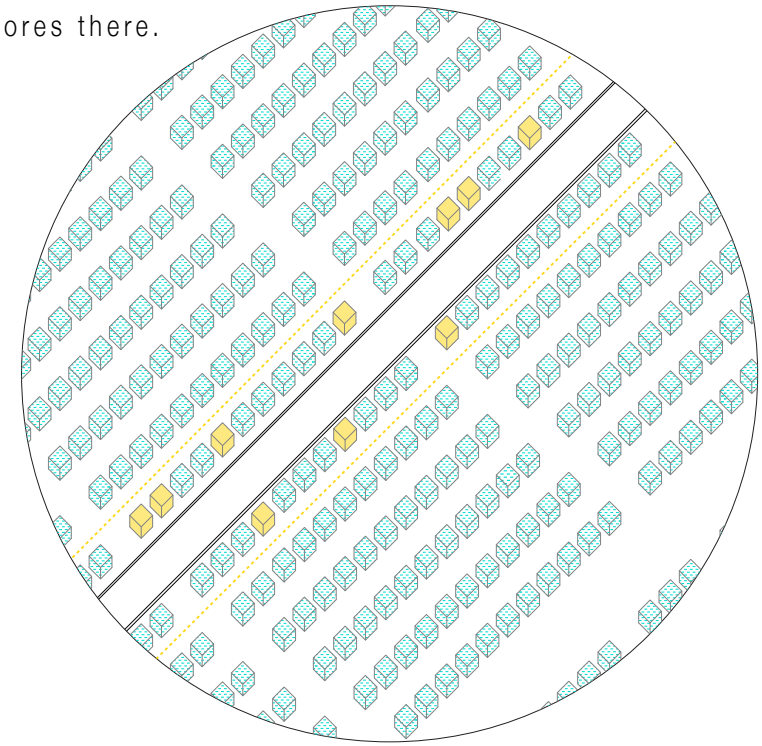
LITTLE BANGLADESH |
David Versus Koreatown

Population: ~20,000

Businesses in Neighborhood: 20

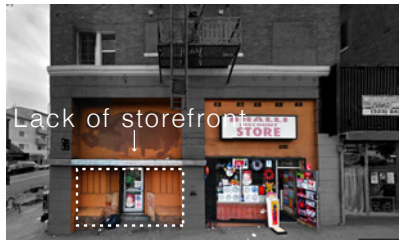


Little Bangladesh is a single strip that sits wholly within Koreatown and does not have a strong identity due to the varied mix of stores there.



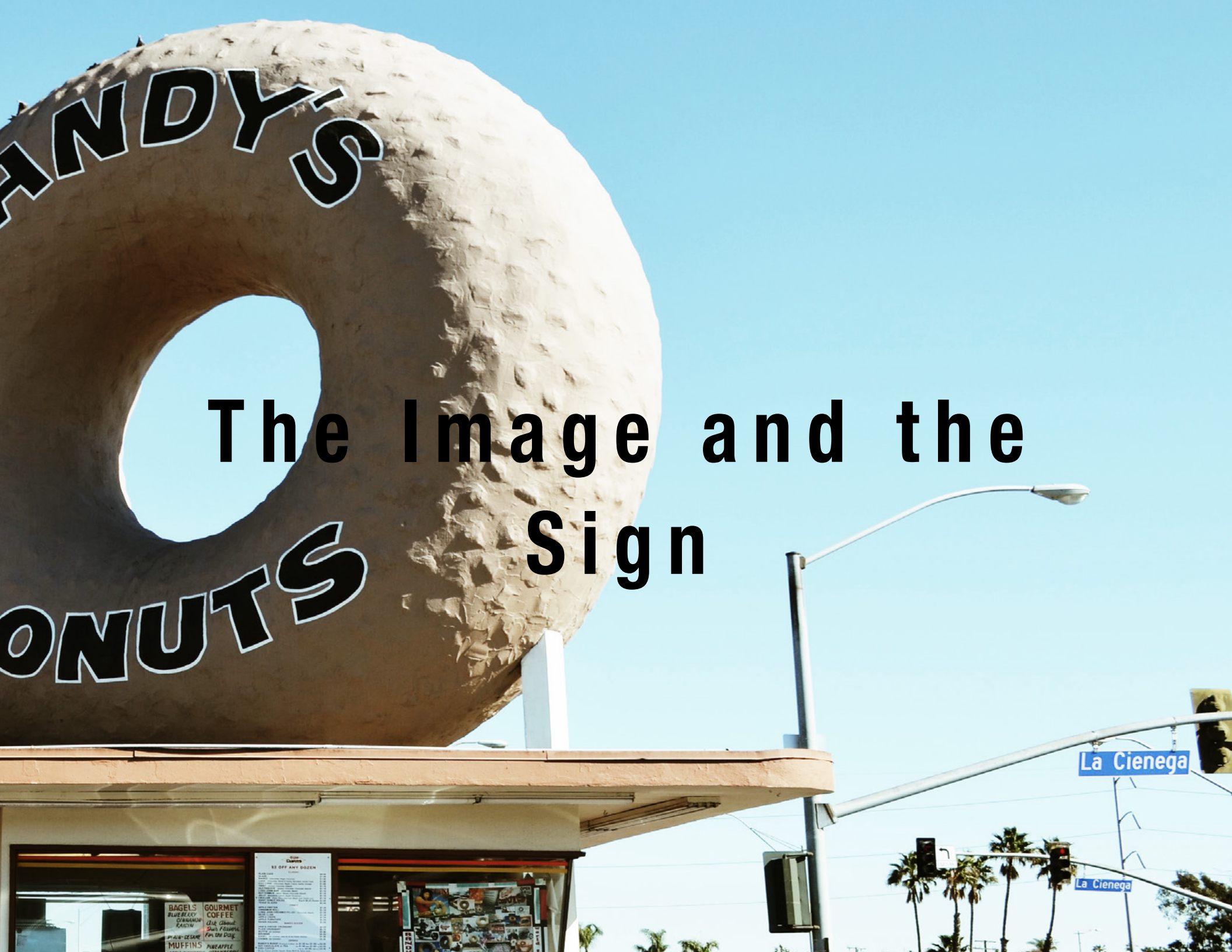
Island Within Koreatown

The commercial corridor on 3rd street, about almost a mile away from the core of Koreatown, is filled with lower-value brick and mortar shops like liquor stores, cell phone stores, and marijuana shops. Thus, the general street fabric is riddled with empty or shuttered storefronts.



No Man's Land of Shuttered Storefronts

Randy's



The Image and the Sign

Learning from Los Angeles

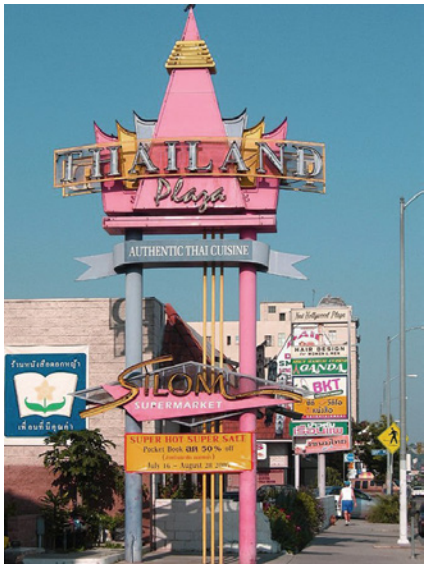
Central to the culture in Los Angeles is its ardent dependence on cars. In the city known for the freeways and interchanges criss-crossing its urban fabric, developments with a fast-moving vehicle and fast-moving driver in mind are myriad. Chapman Market, when it first opened in 1929 in what is now Koreatown, was the world's first drive-in grocery store and market. It had an entire courtyard set aside for parking. Beyond simply parking, however, the car-centric mentality drives urban design on multiple levels.

Around the same time that Banham published the *Los Angeles: Architecture of the Four Ecologies*, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown put out *Learning from Las Vegas* in 1972, which share many of the Pop sensibilities and embrace of popular culture as a legitimate force in shaping the urban condition.

Venturi Scott Brown have an embrace for the sign and the flatness of American urban artifacts that especially applies to Los Angeles. Buildings containing what their exterior advertises to be - 'ducks', in the parlance of *Learning from Las Vegas,* are especially relevant in Los Angeles. The way one moves about in Los Angeles is markedly different than a walkable environment. One images that, with everyone in the city driving in their cars, the need for a blatant sign or advertisement for a given space is crucial to usage of that space. Otherwise, it would simply be overlooked.

Little Tokyo

Koreatown



Thai Town

Signs for Commerce

Plaza
라 자
LAND
의료기구
Normandy
Pharmacy

RANDY'S
DONUTS

Diamant
구본선
치 과
ELORD
DENTIST
이화고전방
tanning
허리케인
복 가
자오평한의원
영동당구장
이 발
LIQUOR
헤어 디자인 클럽
벨컴컴퓨터
영동만화방
Berry Nutty

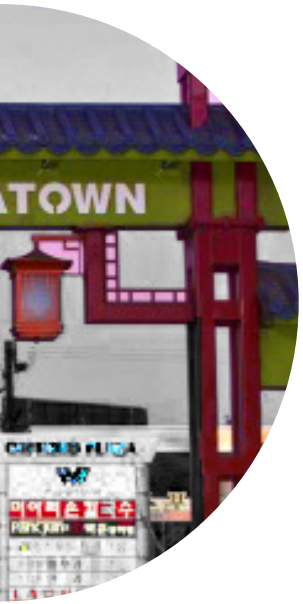
Signs as Border Designation

美華
MH
Health
美芳工業
衣車公司
MP
INDUS. SEWING
MACHINE INC.

Little Ethiopia

Little Armenia

Signs as Cultural Symbols


ATOWN

HOLLYWO

WATER
25¢
GL.

Informal Commerce

Latino Urbanism and the Case for Informal Commerce

We have seen the importance of commerce in the creation and maintenance of a community's identity, but characteristic of Los Angeles' commercial activities, especially in the Koreatown area, is informal commerce. These are the street vendors that sell drinks and snacks, clothes, shoes, books, and regional food. These items are generally sold illegally, without a vendor's license, and by the poorest tiers of the community, usually the Latino in this case. Due to the illegal nature of this commerce, vendors have learned to be flexible and creative with the usage of space and equipment in order to pack and unpack their wares easily.

James Rojas coins this type of informality, specifically in the case of East Los Angeles, which is primarily Latino, as 'Latino Urbanism'. He uses this term to describe the ad hoc and organic ways in which this community redesign their urban spaces to suit their needs.

The question of informal commerce is a nuanced and political one: On the one hand, the legitimization of informal commerce, an important means of income for those who cannot find legitimate employment due to their status, would not only improve the standard of living for merchants, and allow quality standards to be set, but would likely improve the economy of Koreatown overall; on the other hand, legitimization would be an indirect affirmation of illegal immigration.

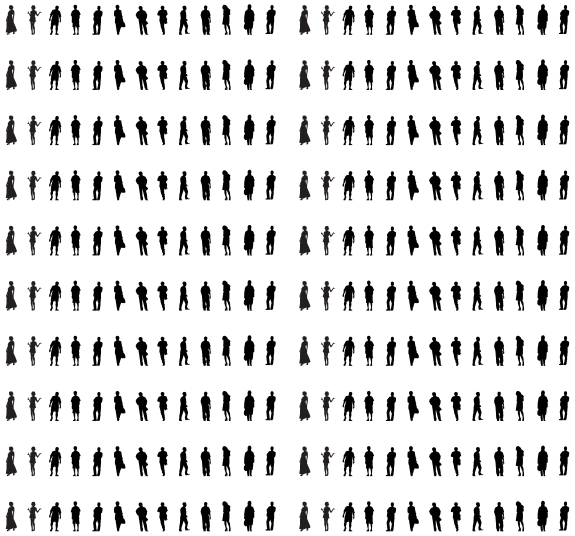
The requirements for one type of informal commerce, street food vending, has stringent requirements that are difficult to abide by for merchants who may not have the monetary means to comply. Violations include lack of potable water to wash hands, food obtained from 'unapproved sources', unsafe food temperatures, no restroom approved for food handlers, and unsanitary conditions for food equipment.[1]

This thesis takes the position that informal commerce should, in fact, be legitimized. From a pragmatic perspective, these vendors are not only providing goods and services that would otherwise be unavailable, which would benefit the economy as a whole, but they add to the richness of the street life in Los Angeles, a city that is naturally lacking in type of activity.

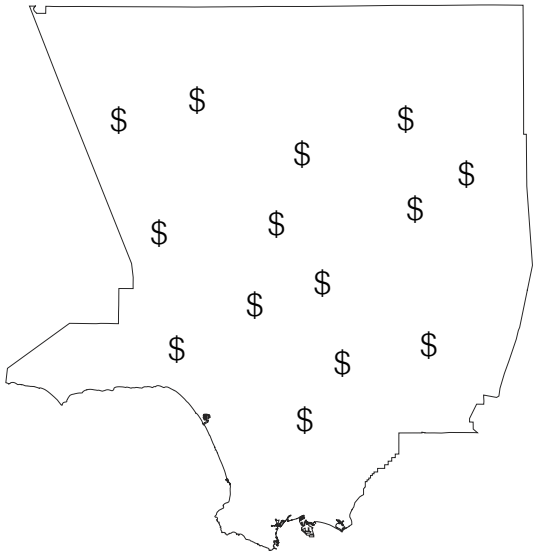
1 "LA County Public Health - Environmental Health." LA County Public Health - Environmental Health. County of Los Angeles Public Health Department, n.d. Web. 18 May 2016.

Economic incentive for Los Angeles County

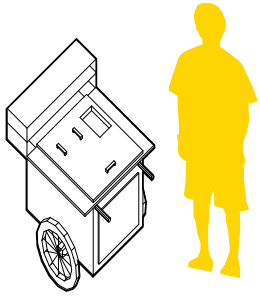
There is an argument to be made for the myriad potential benefits of legitimizing informal commerce on both the county level and on a local level.



Approx. 811,000 informal merchants



Approx $1.1 bn in unpaid payroll taxes and insurance benefits



Not only could legitimizing street commerce provide potential tax revenues for the county, but studies have shown that it can also increase the foot traffic of surrounding stores.

Commerce in Action

Flower vendors

Fruit carts

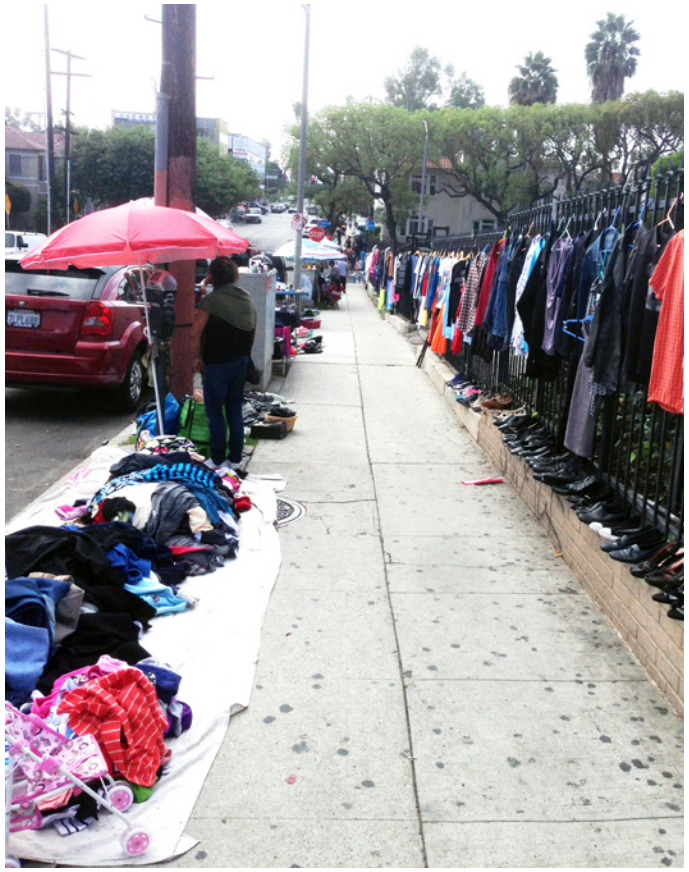
PETER L N ANTIQUE
FU NITURE
RESTO RATION
323-730-9999
彼得林世界古董家具修補專家
3523

Tented weekend markets in the Salvadoran Corridor

Weekend Markets at the Salvadoran Corridor

Streetside Food and Drink Vendors

Roadside Weekend Clothing Vendors



Street Vendors using Shopping Carts for Transport

Clothing Sold on Fences

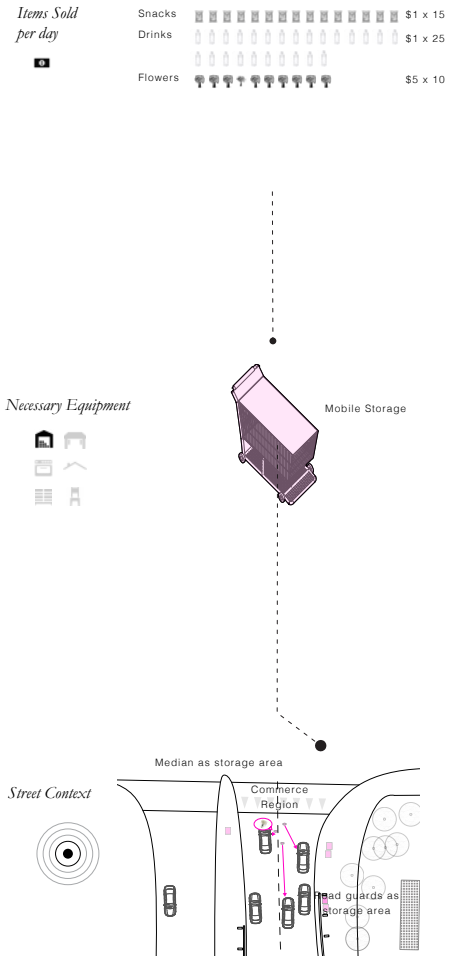
Clothing Sold on Fences

CEMITAS TEPEACA
CEMITAS TEPEACA
"BURRITOS"

Informal Commerce: Spaces And Equipment

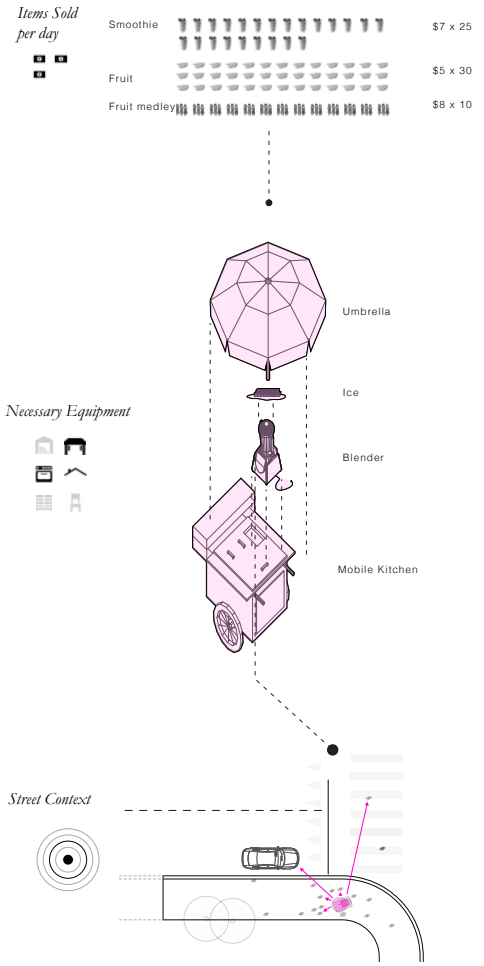
Highway vendor

On its smallest scale, informal commerce occurs with a vendor walking with goods in his hands. These types of vendors can be found at the off ramp of a highways selling water or flowers. To help them hold and transport goods, they often have a shopping cart parked nearby.



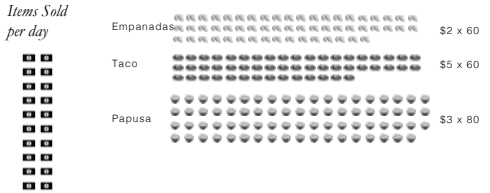
A slightly larger-scale operation comes from the drinks and fruits vendor, who can be found where there are larger concentrations of people, selling smoothies and fruit salads.

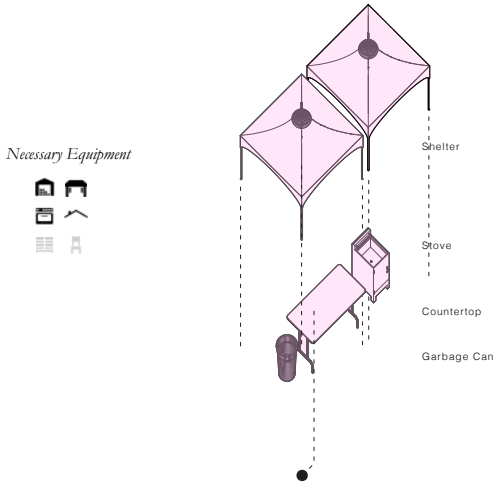
Fruit Vendor

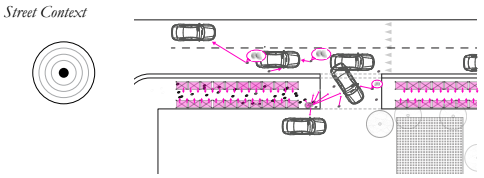


Tent vendors can usually be seen in groups during the weekends when food markets appear on the streets. These merchants use tents to shield themselves from the sun and usually come to the markets with mobile hot plates, fryers, coolers, and other kitchen equipment to cook fresh food.

Tent vendor

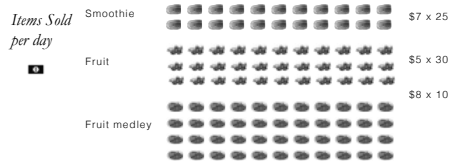


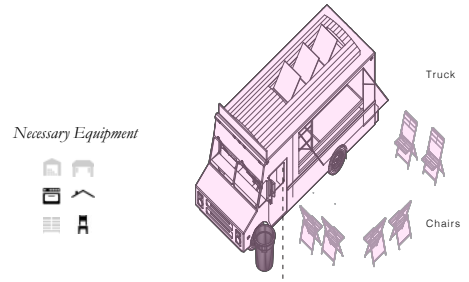


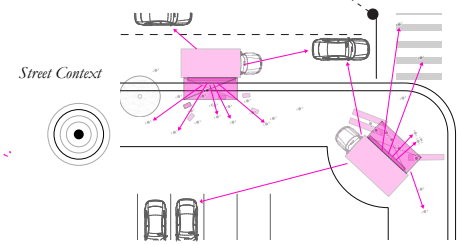


Food truck vendors are mobile merchants who can move about the city to populated areas, which depend on the time of day and day of the week. These vendors will sell a larger variety of food and often have collapsible tables and chairs to create a dining area for their customers. This group of vendors are most often the ones with street vending licenses.

Truck vendor

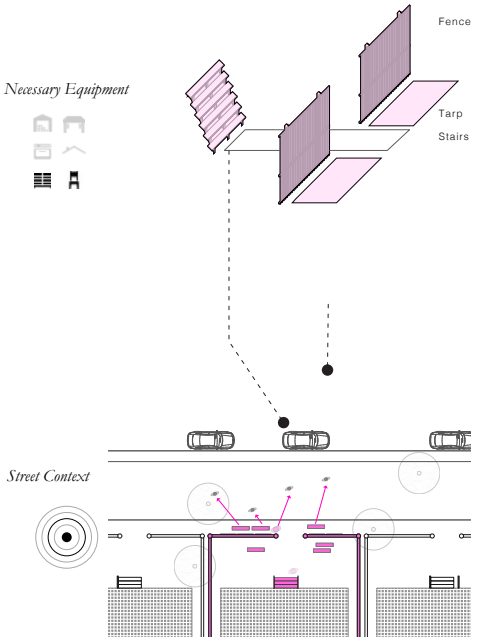






Fence vendors sell larger items such as clothing, shoes, and books on the lawns and fences in front of their homes. Often, these are women who are raising children and, therefore, must stay at home.

Fence vendor



Proposal

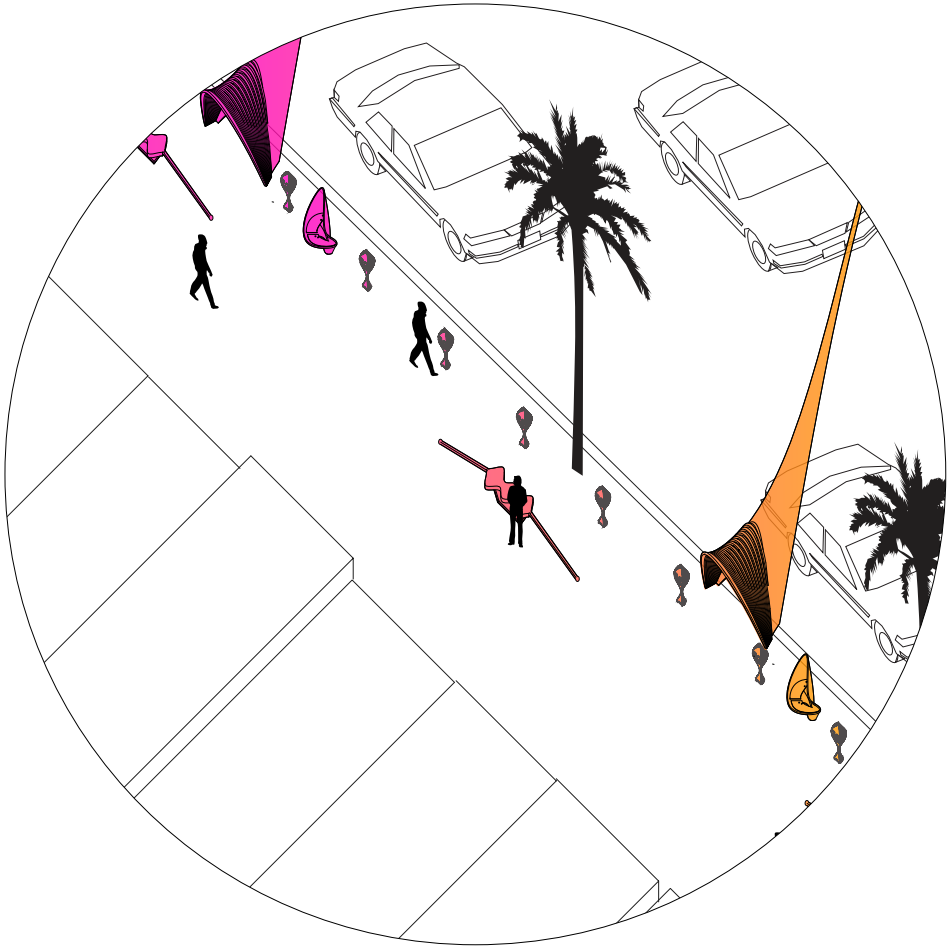
An Urban Infrastructural Network

The proposal for this thesis argues for an infrastructural network through Koreatown composed of 'links', which will be iconic street furniture that serve a dual use in providing services to the public and to commercial activities, and 'nodes' which will act as gates which also serve a dual use in announcing the entrance to a particular enclave as well as servicing that enclave with essential programmatic activities. Together these two strategies will stitch Koreatown together as a network of distinct, yet connected, neighborhoods, each with its unique identity.

The perspective that this thesis holds is that the city should embrace informal commerce as a legitimate source of income and business for its poorest residents. And, in fact, informal commerce should be seen as a unique strength that neighborhoods such as Koreatown and Pico-Union have in enacting a flexible urbanism.

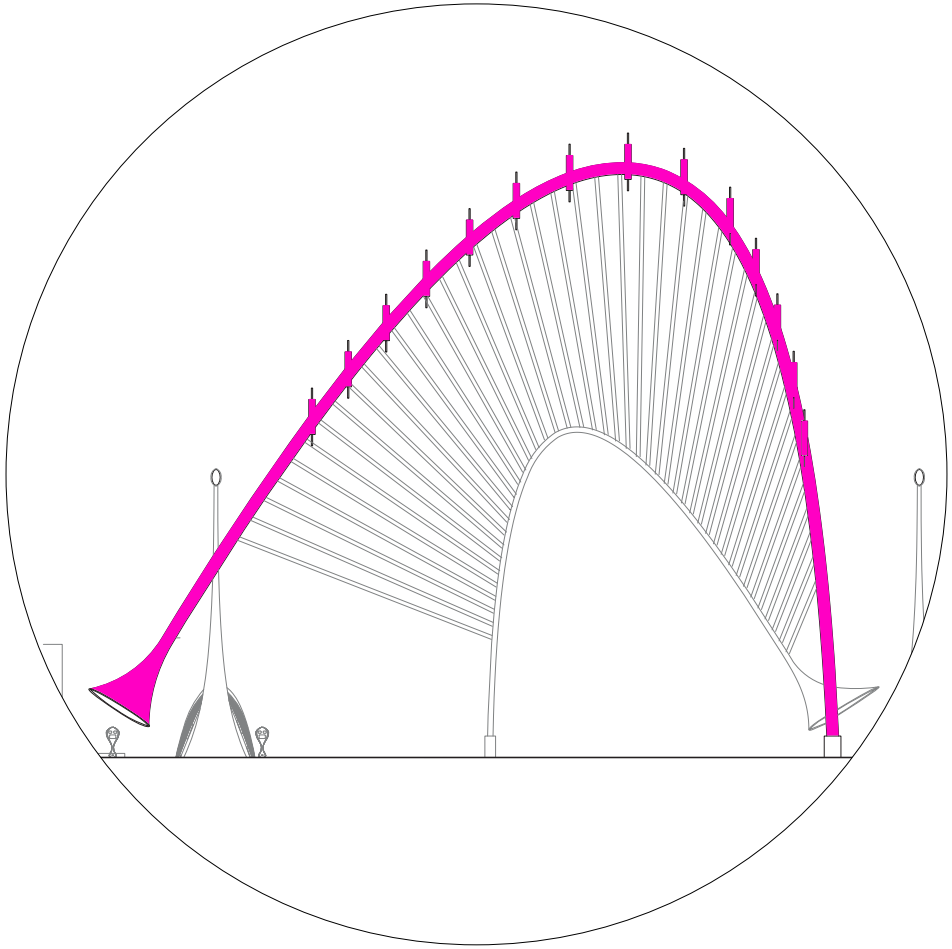
Links

Hybrid street furniture services both the population in general and contains elements which aid street merchants.



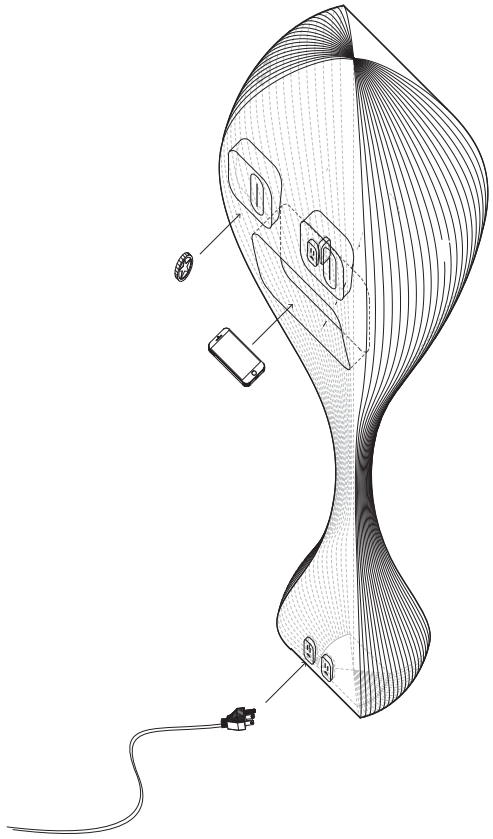
Nodes

Iconic gates indicate the crossing of a threshold from one ethnic enclave to the next. These crossings are programmatic and reflect broader issues faced not only by the enclave but for the broader immigrant population.



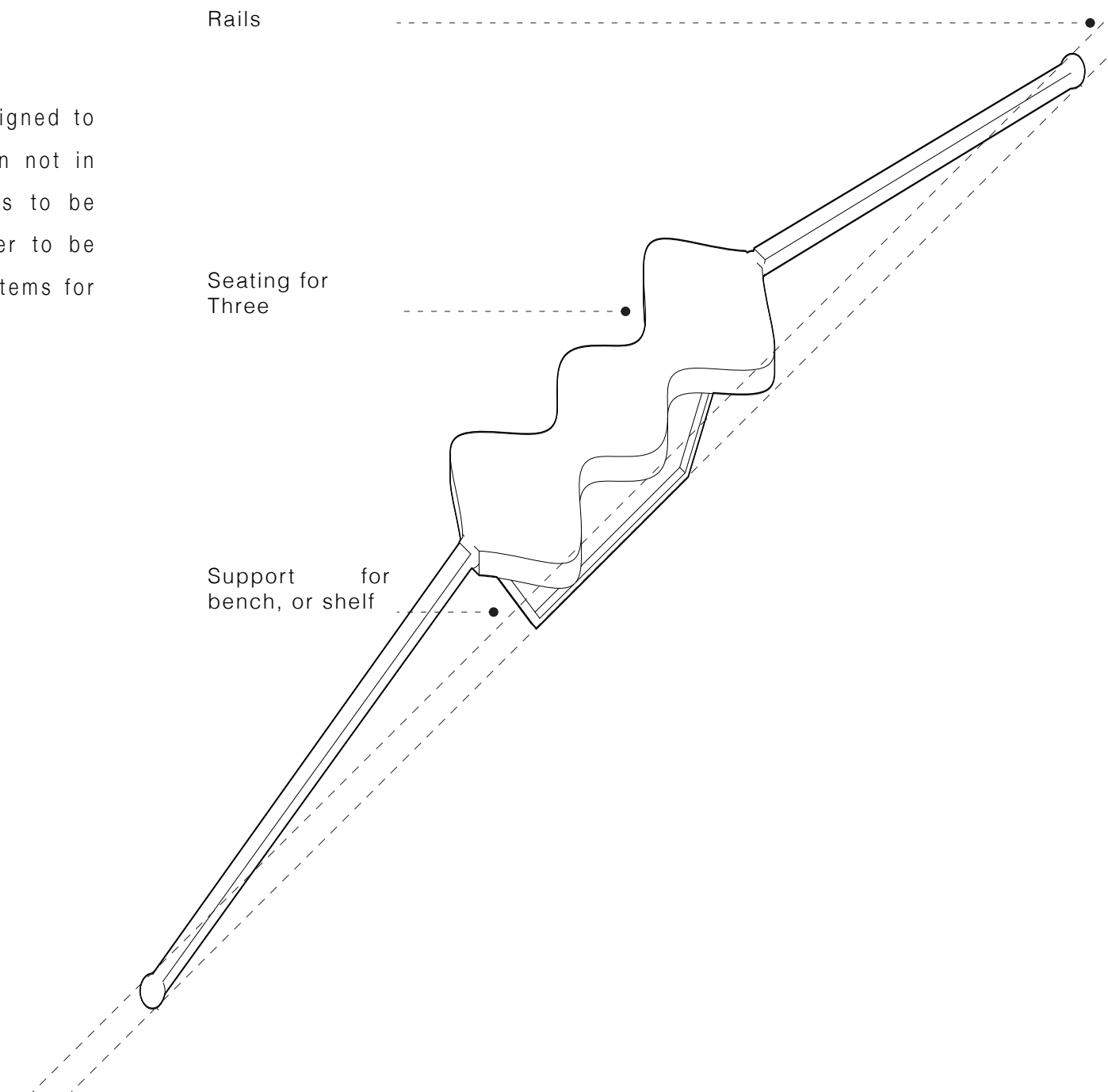
Links: Hybrid Equipment

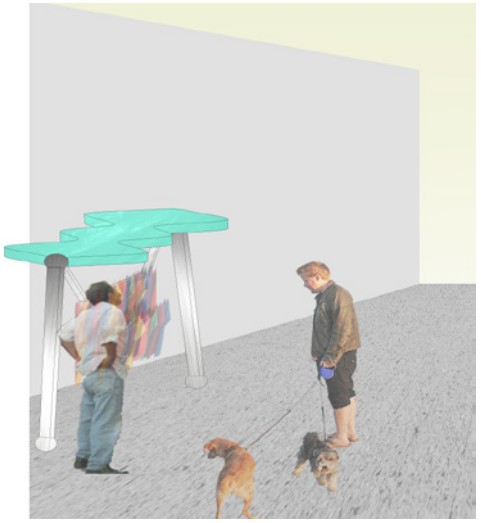
Dual-use street furniture has been designed with two considerations in mind: One is how to bring more about more street presence in general and give Koreatown as an entirety a unique identity; another consideration is how this furniture can be a dual use device that functions as an aid to informal street vendors. Given the current street vending requirements, such as need of a proximity to a garbage can, food prepping station, warming station, refrigerator, etc, we embed these functions within current furniture designs.



Flat-Pack Vendor

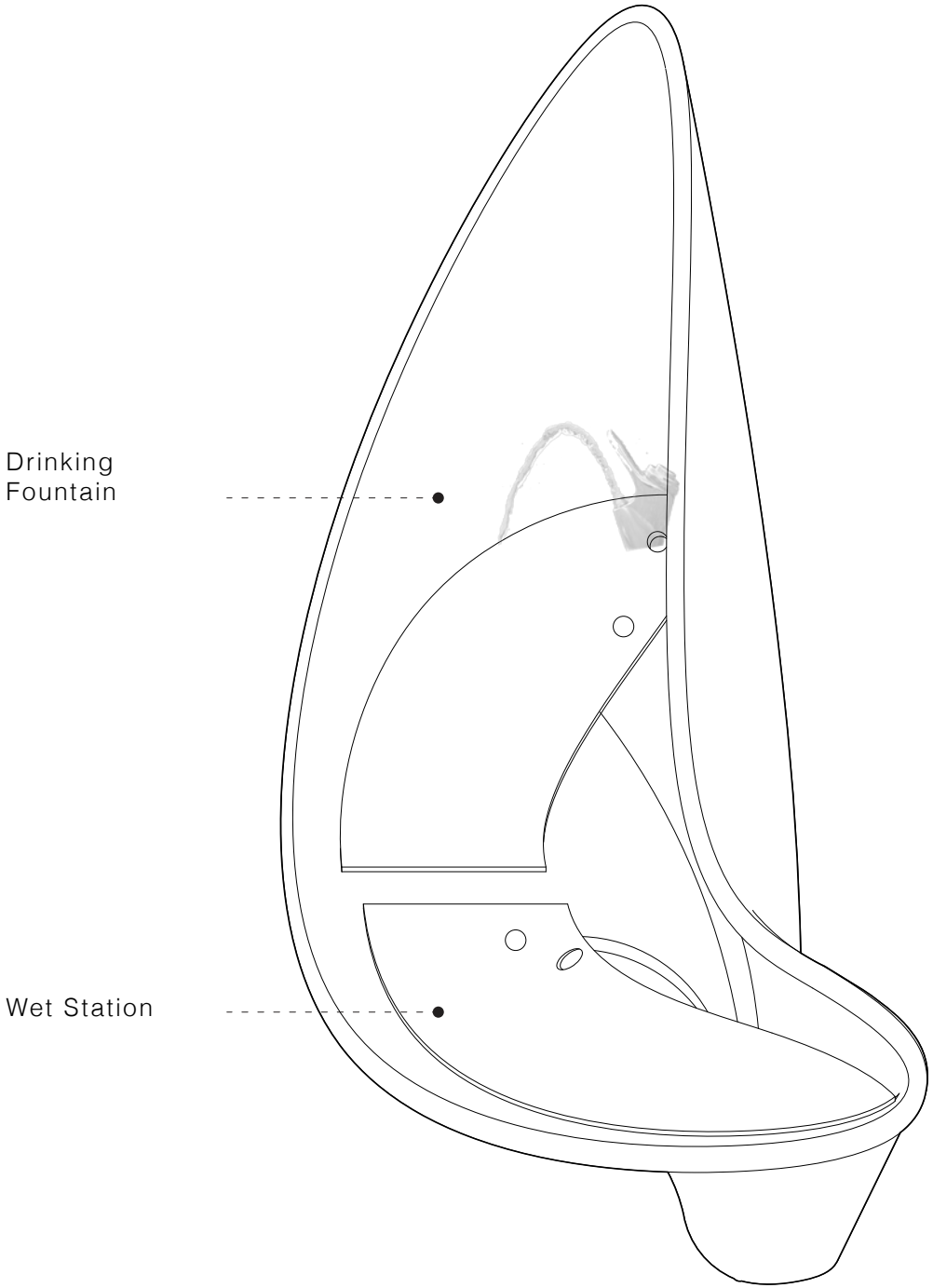
The Flat-Pack Vendor is designed to be flush to the ground when not in use, lifted through its rails to be seating, or lifted even higher to be a shelf from which to hang items for sale.

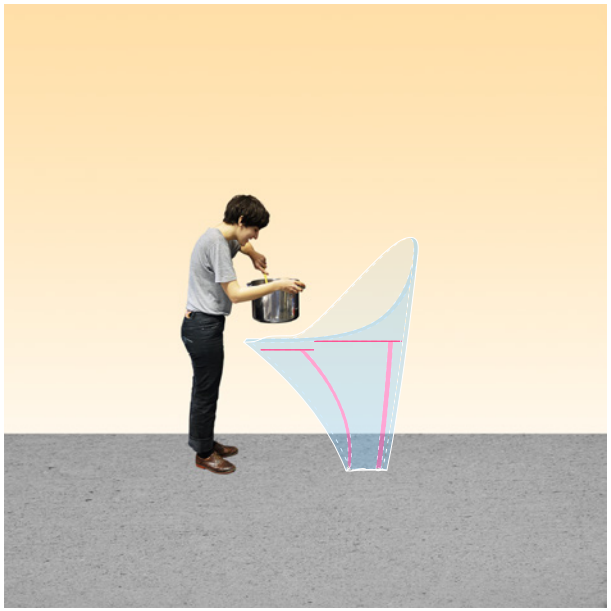


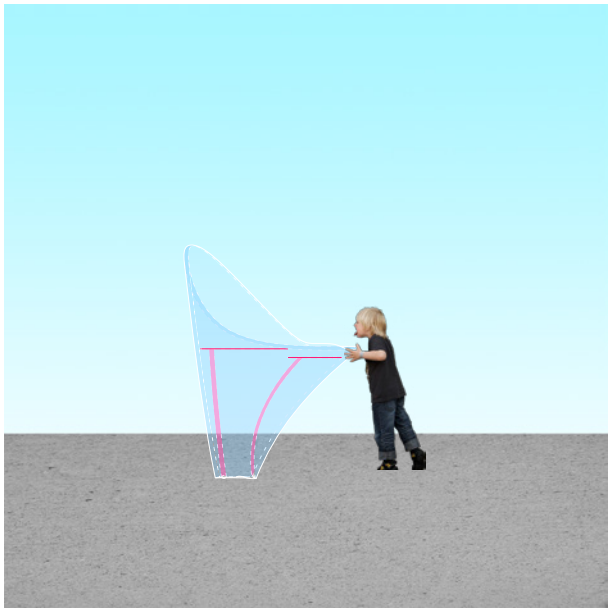


Wet Bar

The Wet Bar is both a drinking fountain and a preparation and cleaning station. The consideration here for vendors who, by LA county street vending regulations, are required to have access to potable water and clean food equipment.

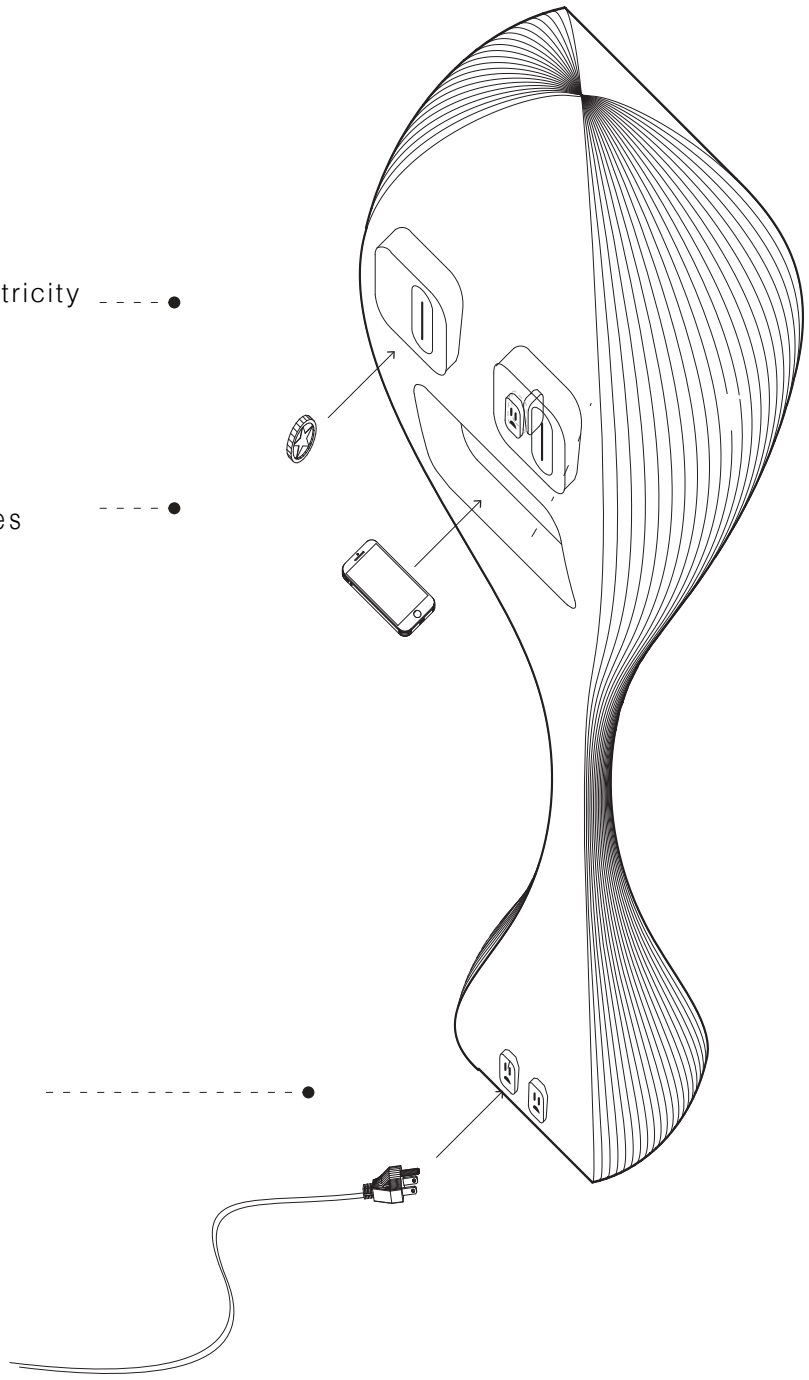


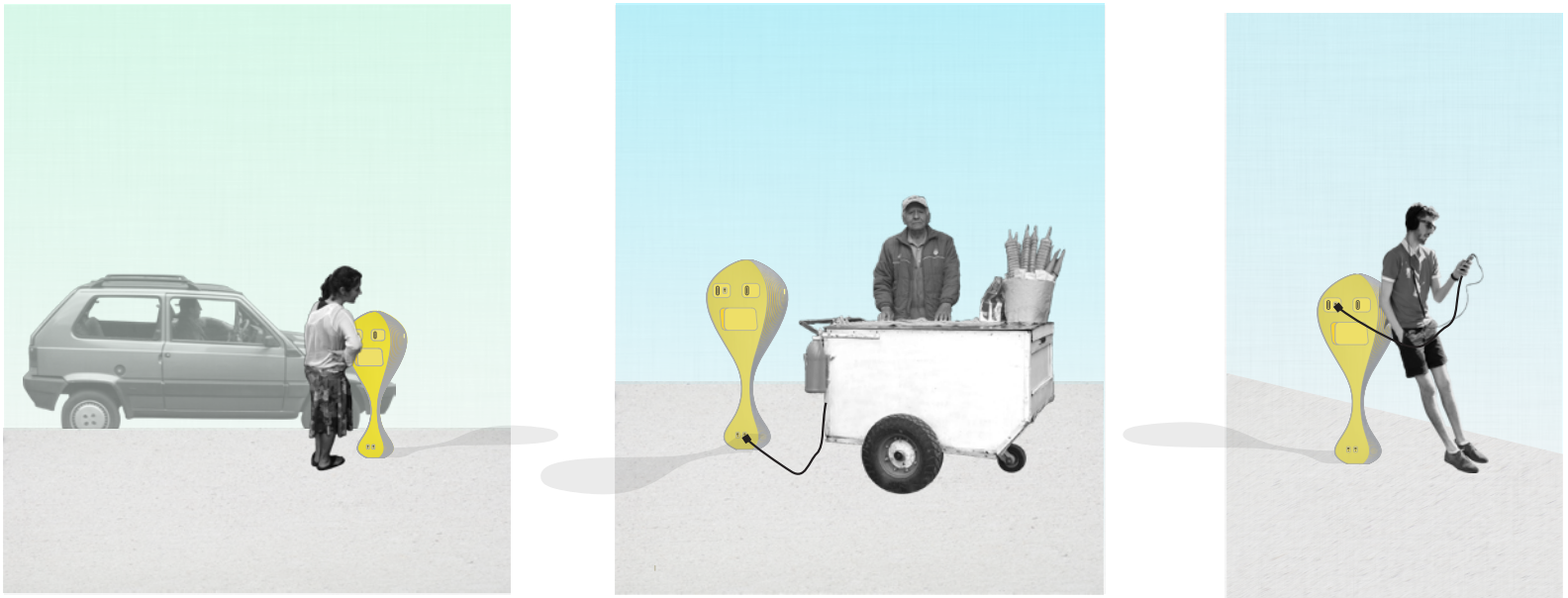




Charging Meter

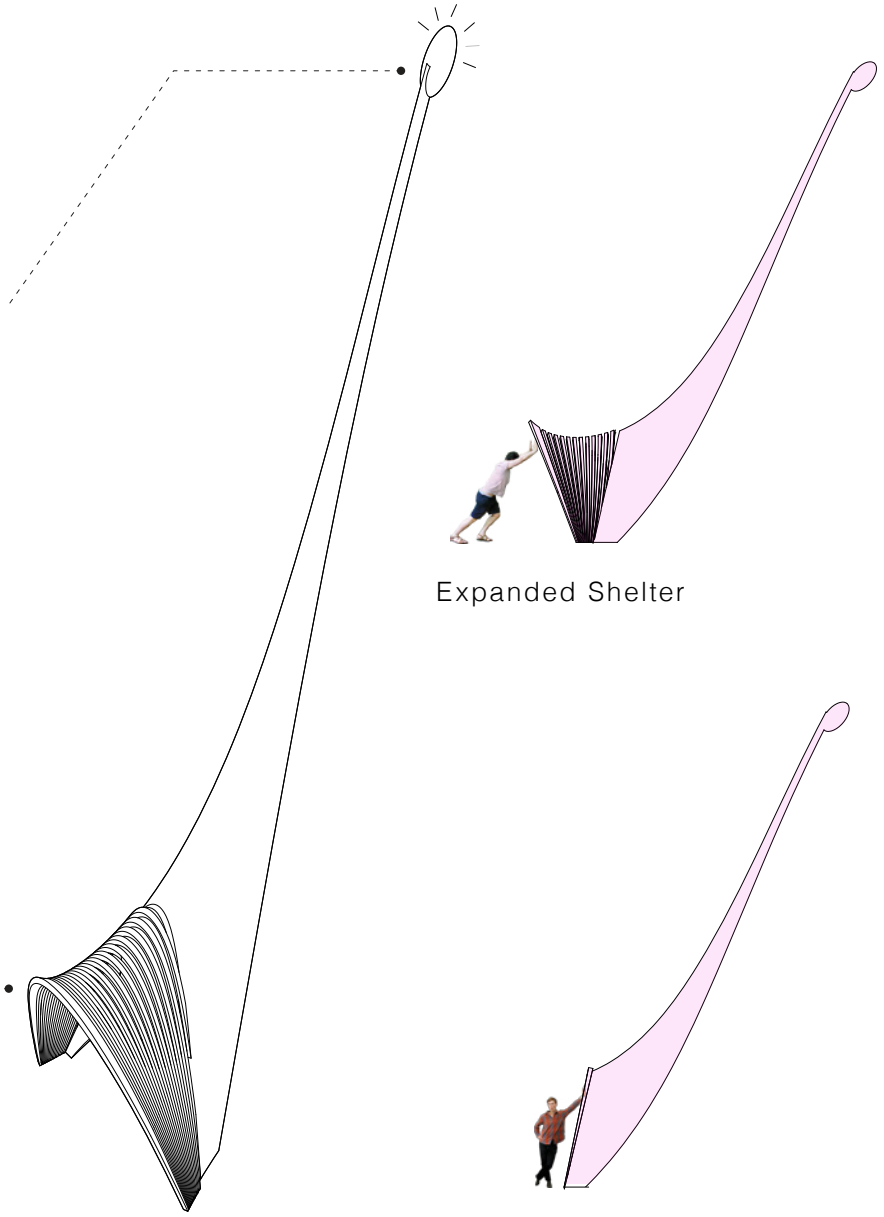
The Charging Meter is a dual parking meter and charging station. One can both pay to park and pay to charge an electronic device, which could range from a cell phone to cooler, to keep food at a safe temperature.





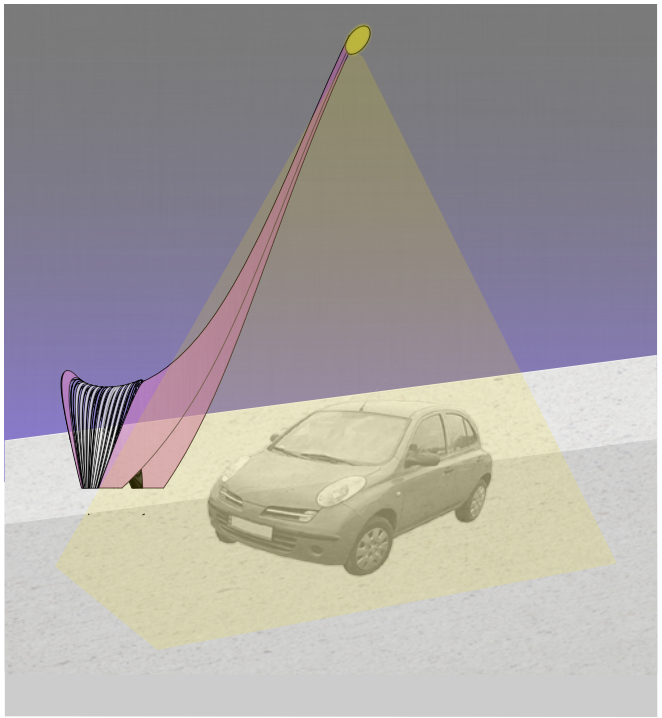
Day to Night Lamp

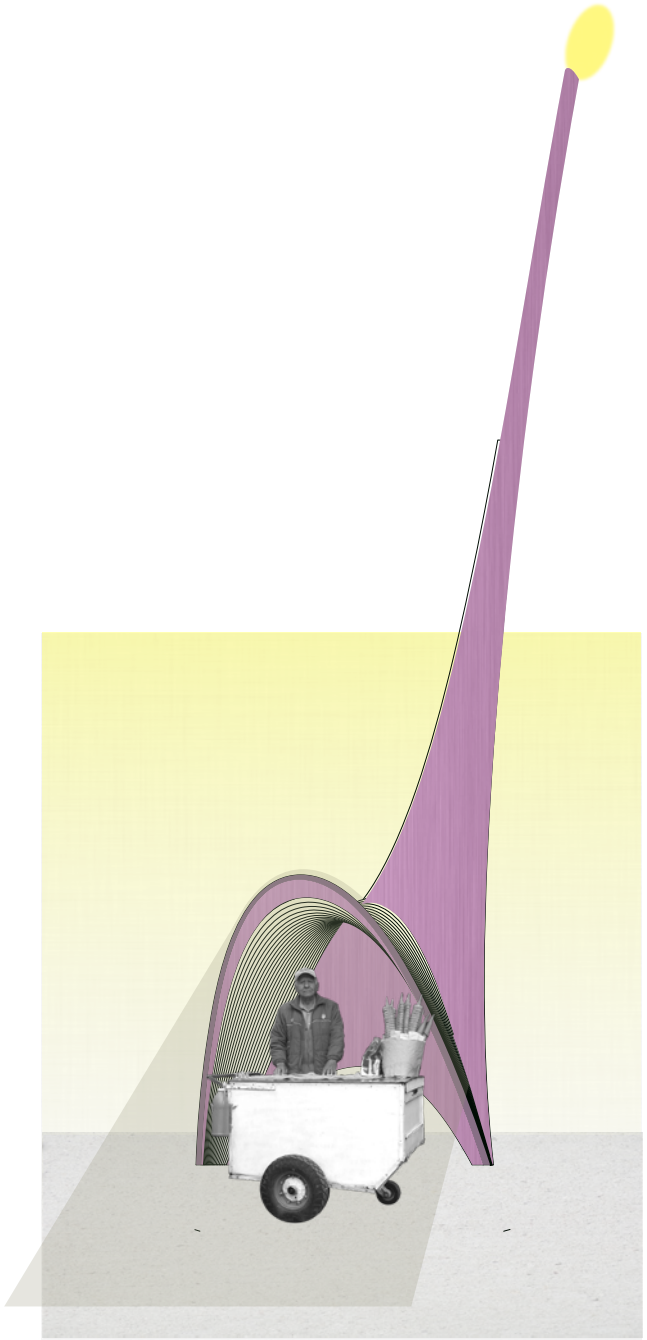
The Day to Night Lamp both provides light and protects from it. It is a regulation street lamp, but on the pedestrian facing side, provides shading for vendors during the day and a source of lighting for them in the evenings.



Expanded Shelter

Collapsed when not in use





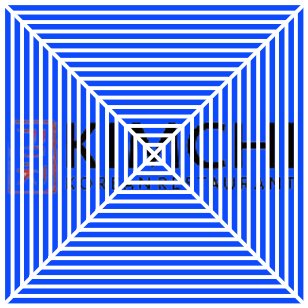
Folded Tyvek As Vending License

The street vending license is re-conceptualized with a Latino Urbanism attitude in mind. The proposal for official licenses is to have a tyvek sheet, which can be folded as a roof structure in various ways. These sheets will not only be a visible sign of the legitimacy of the vendor, but can also act as a form of advertisement for the vendor. These tyvek sheets can attach to the infrastructure on the ground.

V-form sp

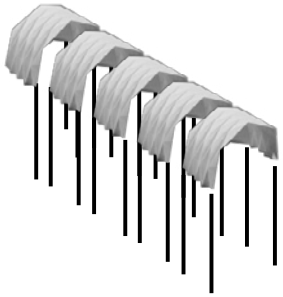
X-form sp

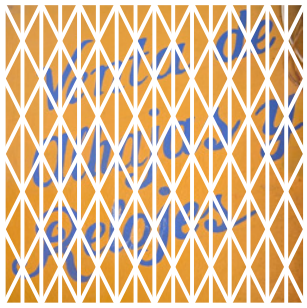
Parabola

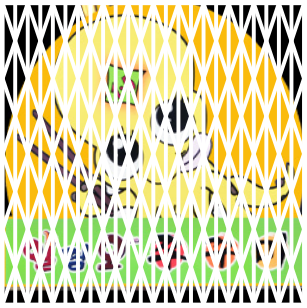


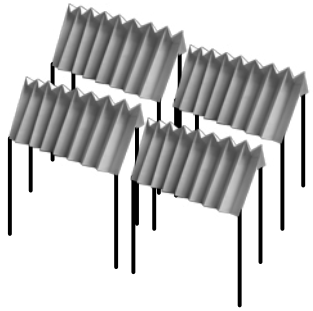
ESAYUNO
ORTAS
DE JAMON
$45

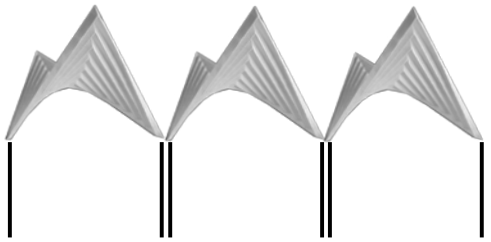
TEQUILA











Current Street Furniture Politics

One note about the current street furniture politics in Los Angeles and other American cities more broadly: Much of the equipment within cities also serve as advertisement, which fund the existence of these equipment. Thus, public spaces also become advertisement spaces. Our proposal is to fund these equipment through the taxes from legitimizing the informal merchants. In this way, there is a direct relationship between taxes paid and the equipment that they are funding.

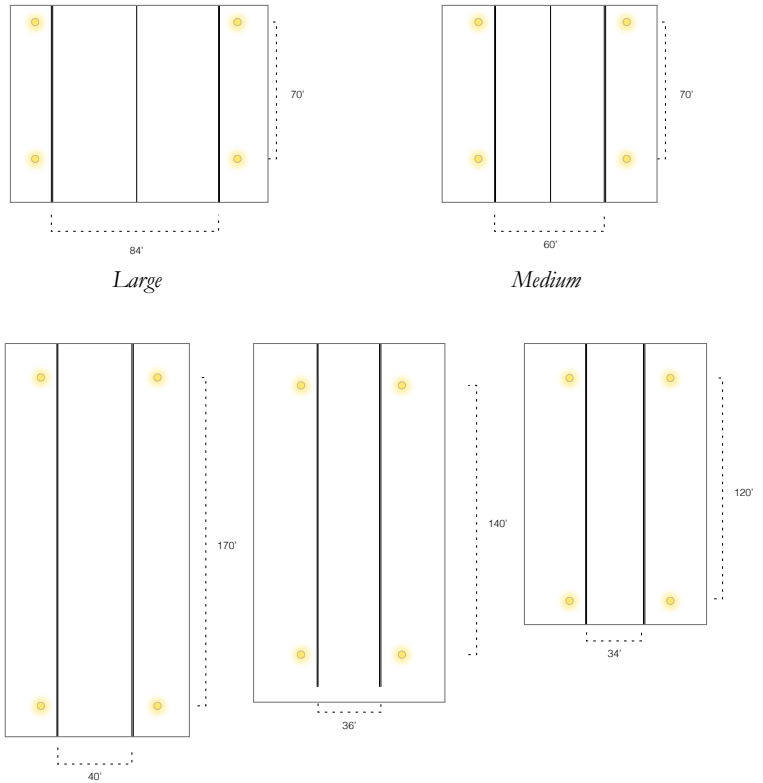
ogram is ....for your community.

Lighting Requirements

Street lighting occurs in two forms: lighting for vehicular traffic and pedestrian traffic. The spacing, luminosity, and designs of these two types of lamps are different.

Pedestrian Street Lights

Roadway Street Lights



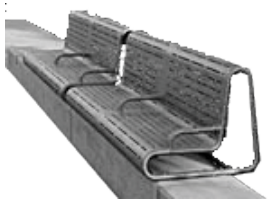
Large

Medium

Small

Seating Requirements

The question about outdoor seating in Los Angeles is fraught, as the city attempts to provide seating but avoids a design that makes this into a place to sleep.



Grand Park Bench 1

bench

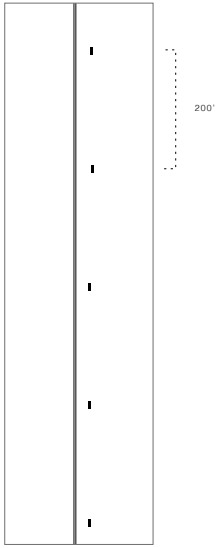
Recreational Benches

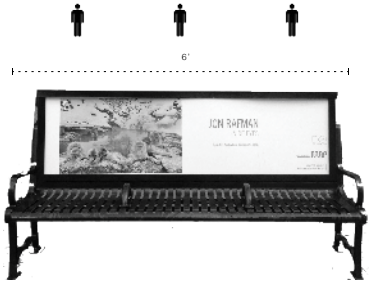
Santa Monica Blue Bus Bench

Los Angeles Bus Bench 1

Soofa

Grand Park Bench 2

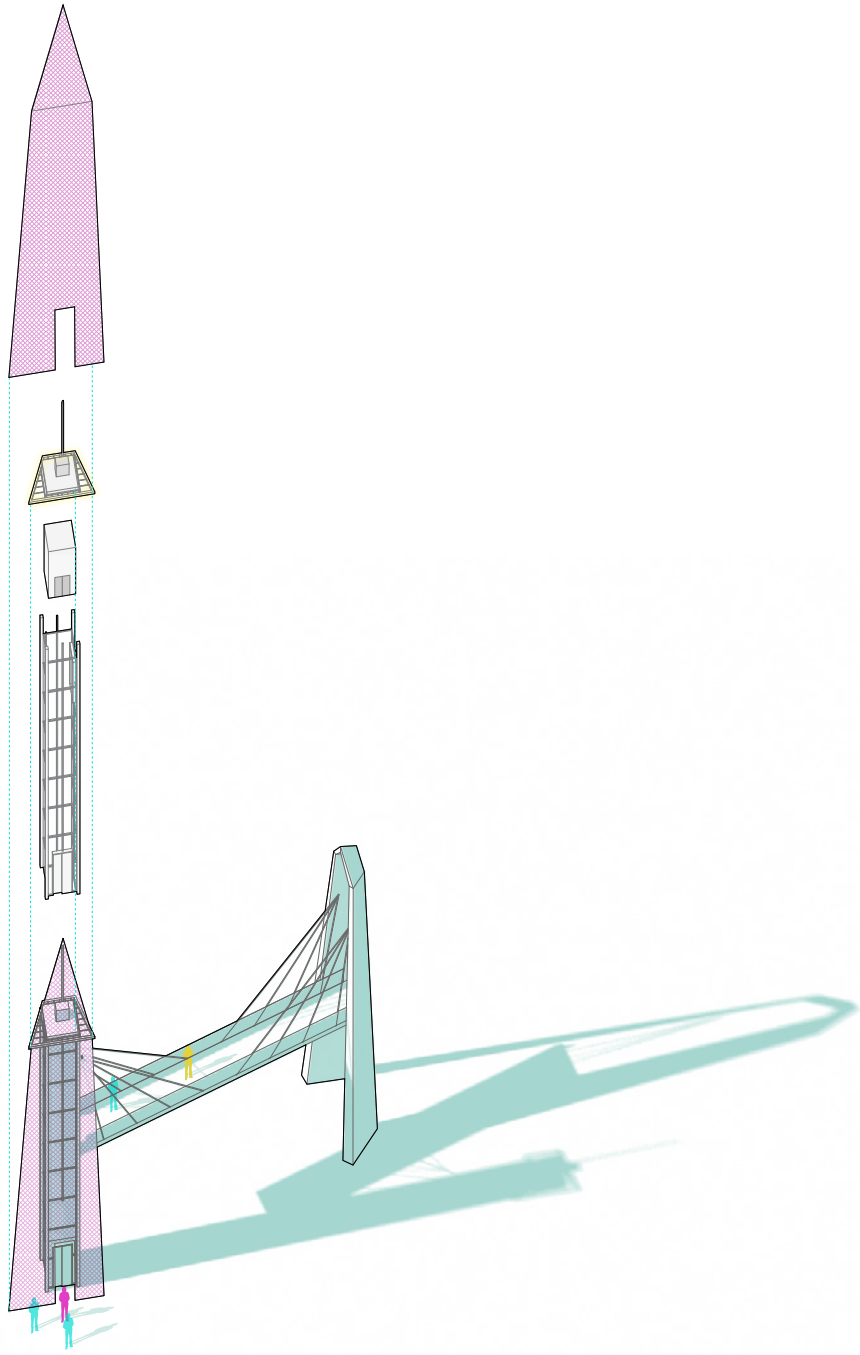




Los Angeles Bus Bench 2

Nodes: Infrastructural Crossings

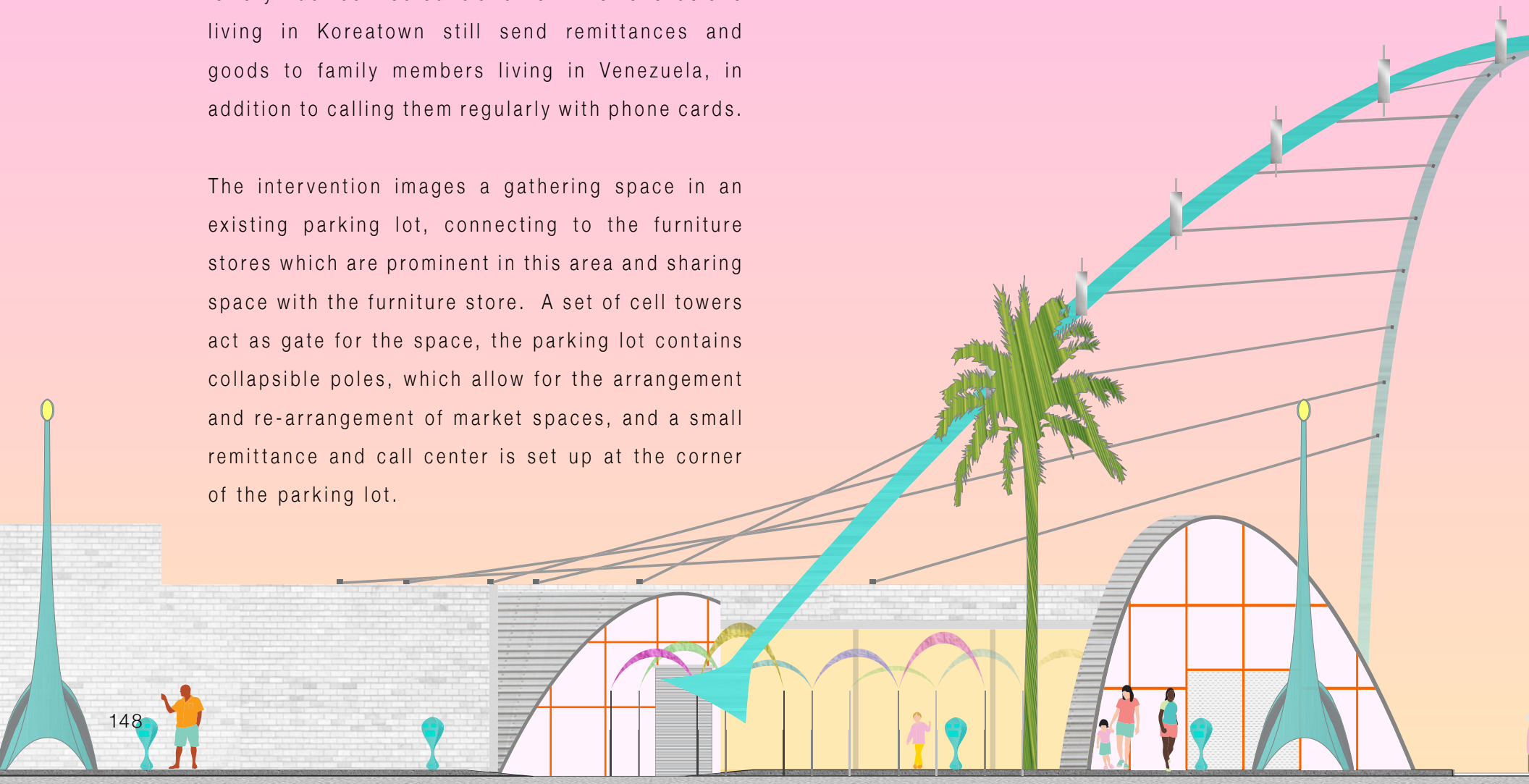
Borrowing from Los Angeles' tendency for large signage, infrastructural 'crossing' are conceived as programmatic gates that mark the entrance to an enclave. Visually, these crossing are meant to be seen and recognized from a distance. Programmatically, they are responses to the needs and dynamics of each enclave, whether that is the need for a market, open space, or source of revenue or commercial activity.



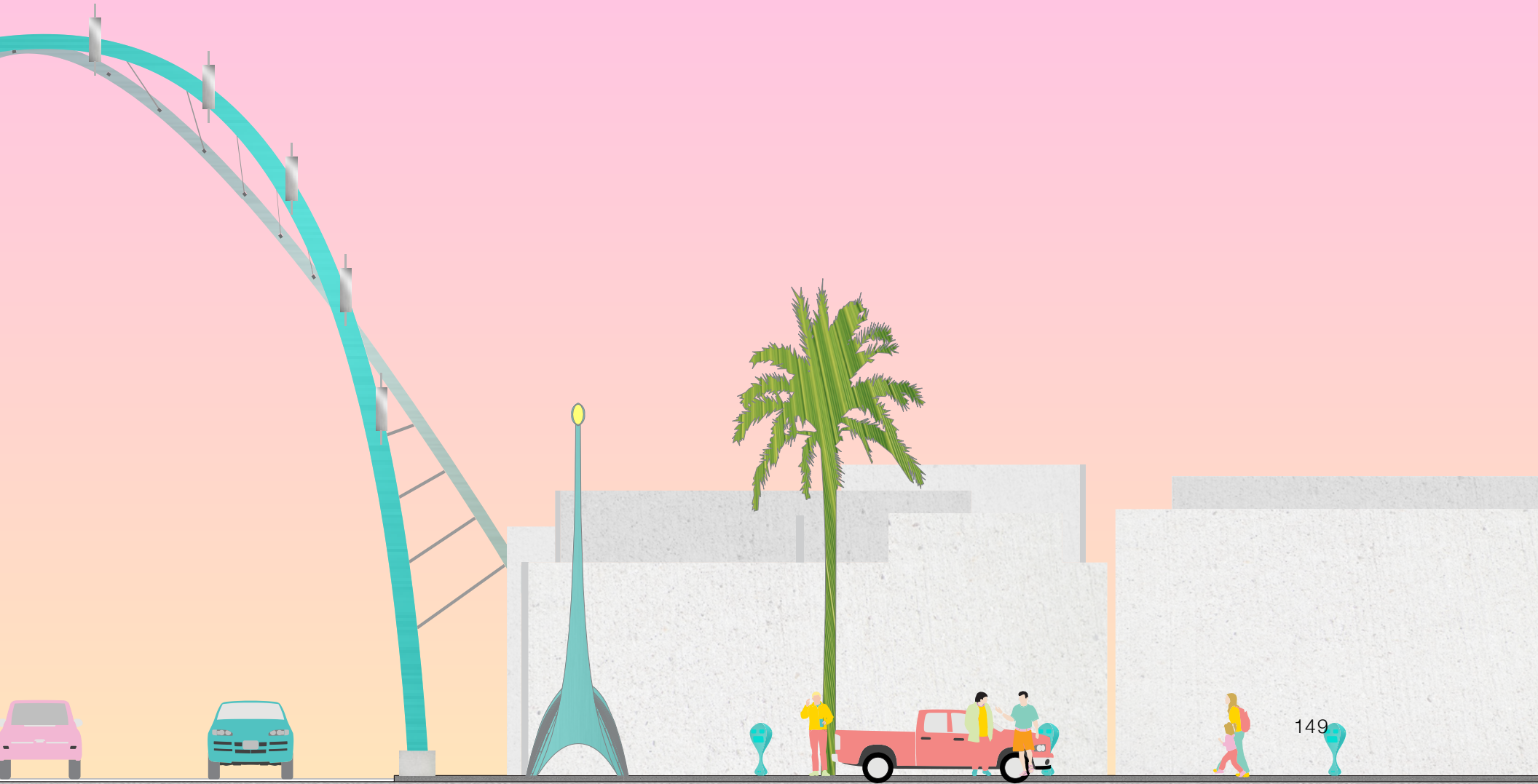
LITTLE VENEZUELA | Cal

This proposal addresses the tension that arises from a community that physically in one area, but is very much connected to another. The Venezuelans living in Koreatown still send remittances and goods to family members living in Venezuela, in addition to calling them regularly with phone cards.

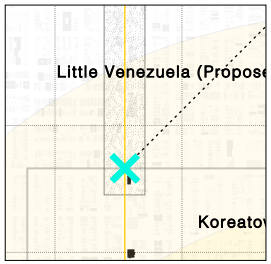
The intervention images a gathering space in an existing parking lot, connecting to the furniture stores which are prominent in this area and sharing space with the furniture store. A set of cell towers act as gate for the space, the parking lot contains collapsible poles, which allow for the arrangement and re-arrangement of market spaces, and a small remittance and call center is set up at the corner of the parking lot.



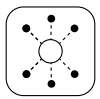
l and Remittance Center



Little Venezuela is on the edge on Koreatown and its nascent identity is threatened by the ever-growing spread of Koreatown. Thus the site for the intervention is at the intersection between these two enclaves.

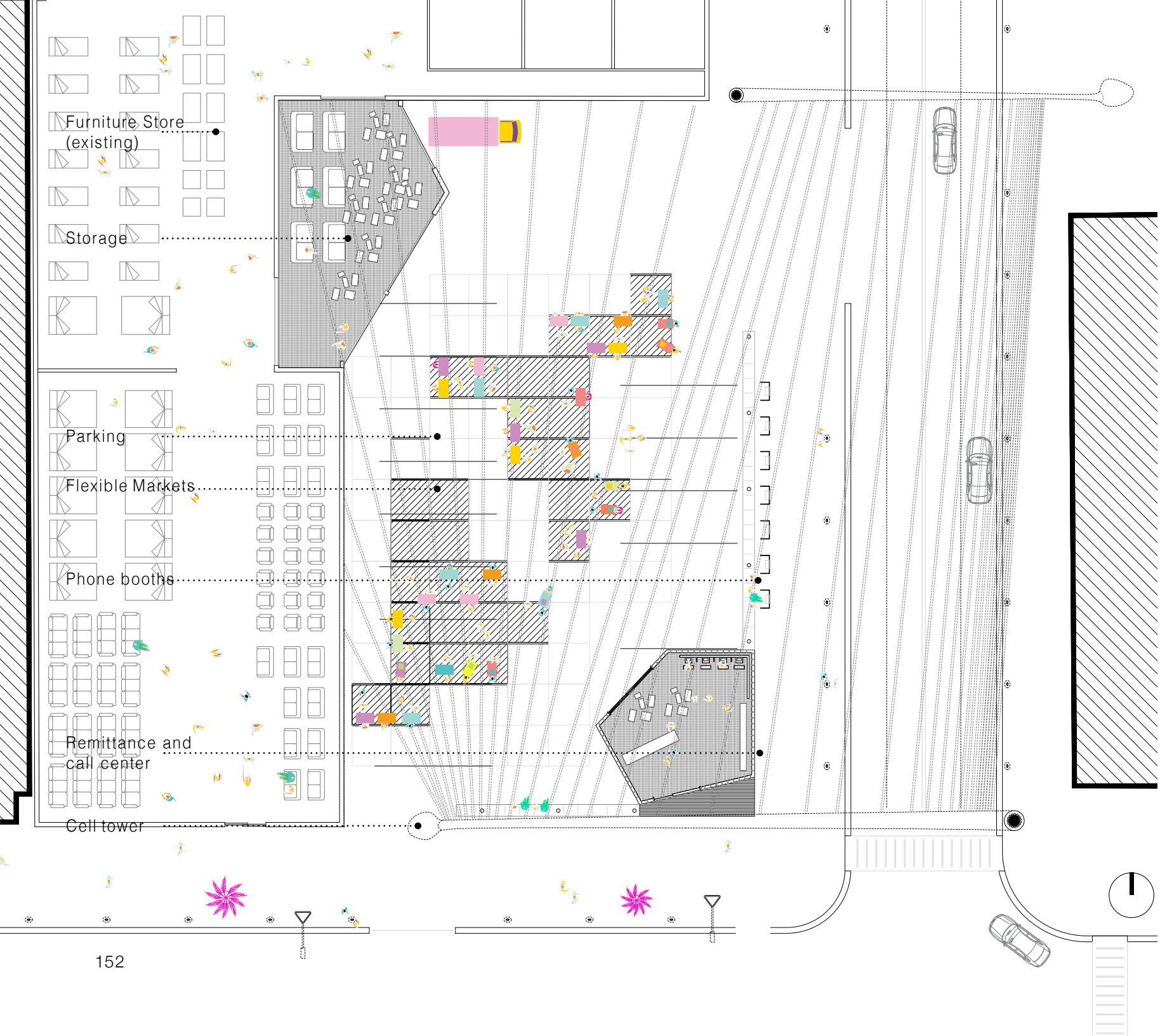


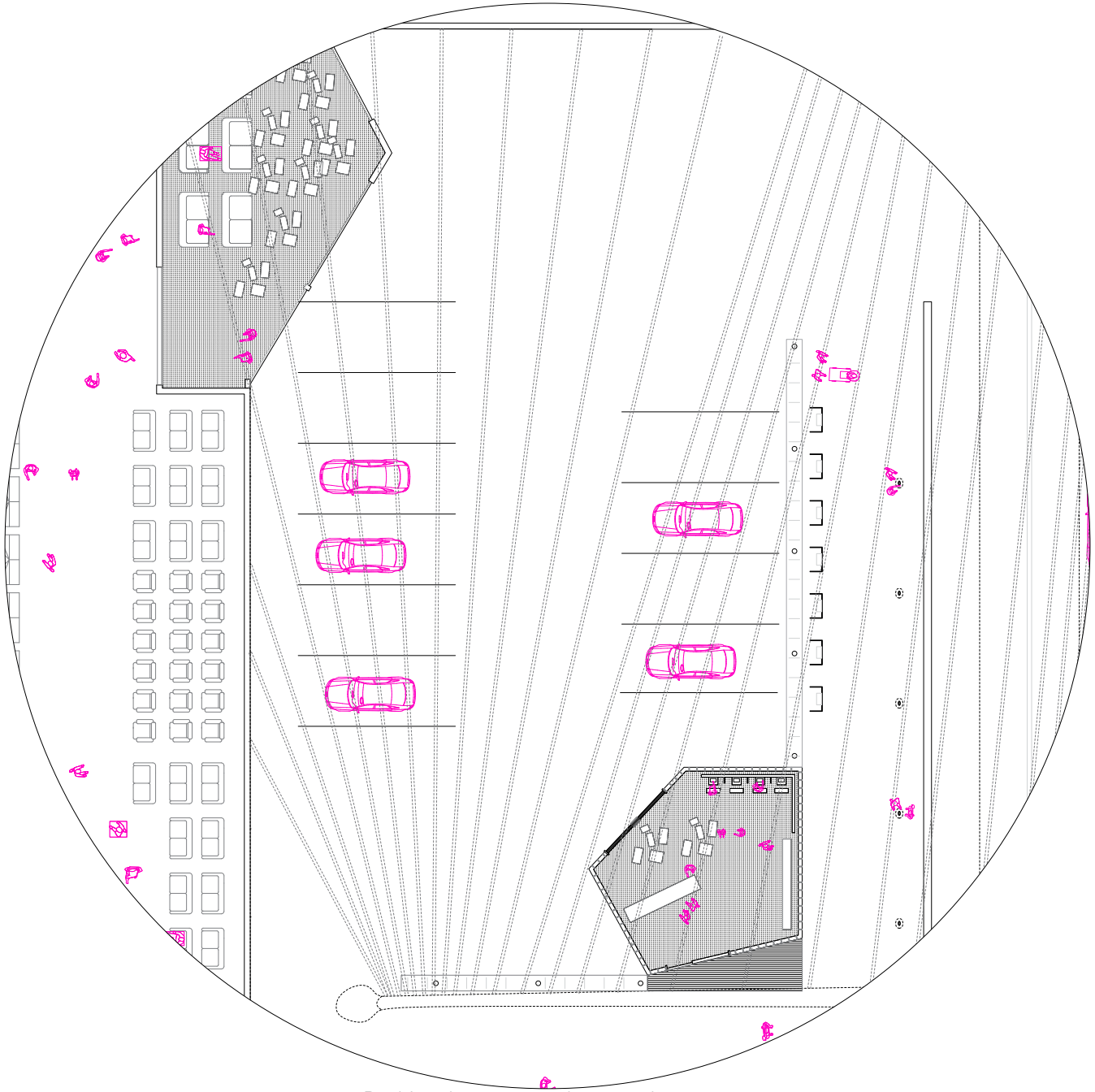
Site Condition 1
Specific Commerical



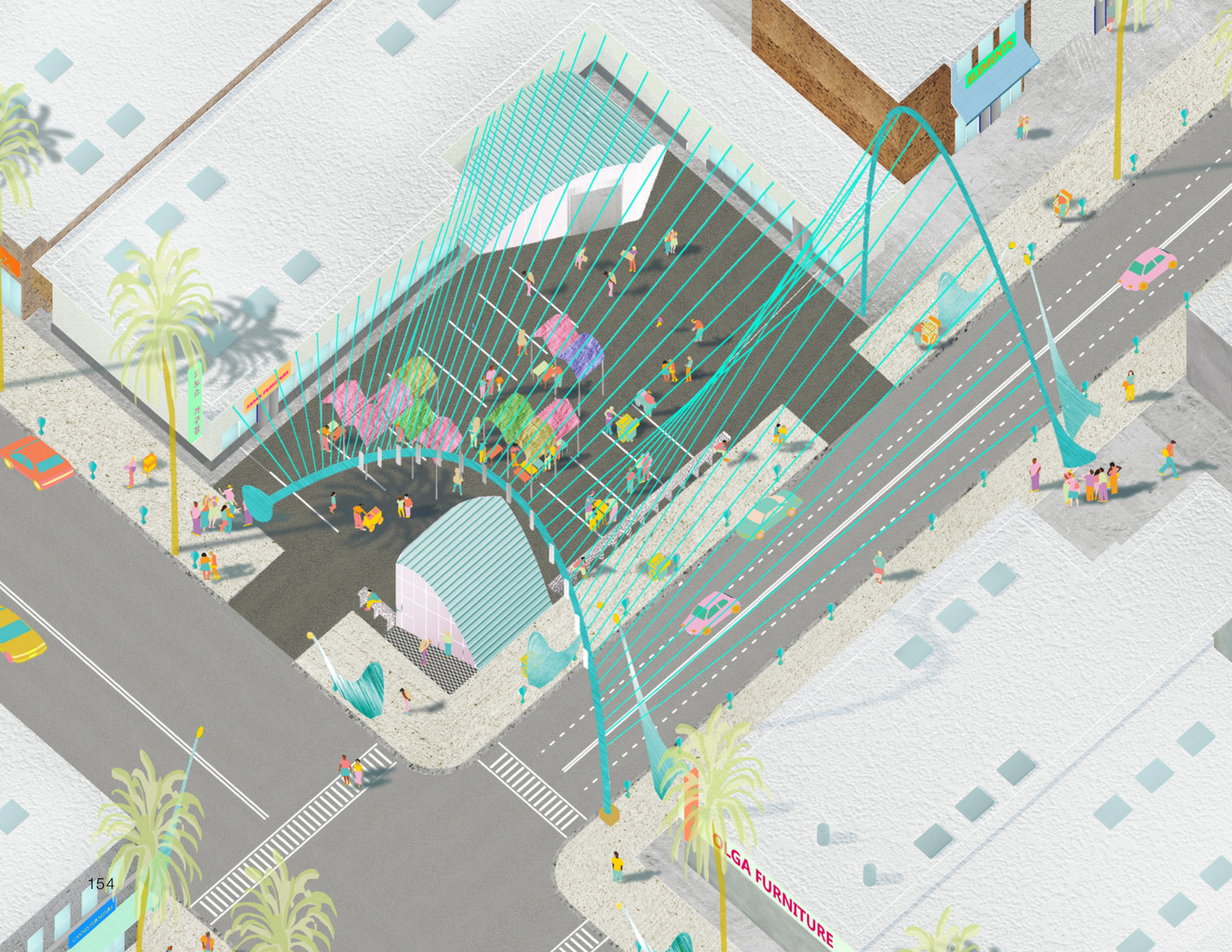
Need 1
Support Network

Little Venezuela
Koreatown


Furniture Store
(existing)
Storage
Parking
Flexible Markets
Phone booths
Remittance and
call center
Cell tower



Parking lot space when markets are not present


OLGA FURNITURE

Little Venezuela
Axonometric

NYC Green C
TELEMUNDO
Apples
$3.75
Super
FRUIT
BLEND
$3.75
NYC Green C

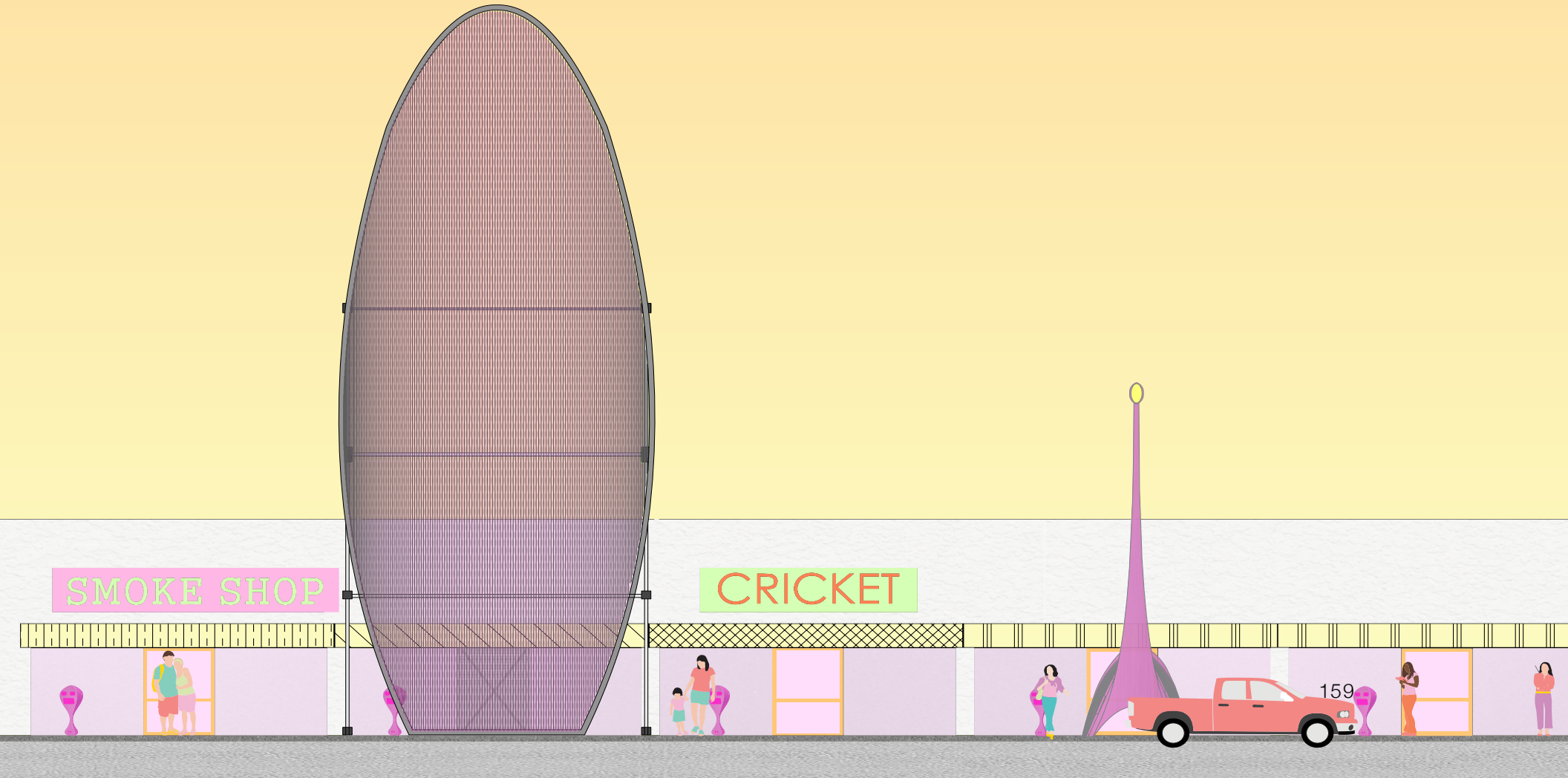
LITTLE BANGLADESH | D

Little Bangladesh is a small enclave - it centers on Third Avenue, between South Alexandria Avenue and South New Hampshire Ave - that sits within Koreatown. In fact, its attempt to create official neighborhood boundaries for itself, as a defensive mechanism against the growth of Koreatown, was what spurred the establishment of Koreatown's boundaries.

The enclave's needs are to develop both a sustainable and vibrant commercial region as well as establishing a stronger community identity.

The proposal is a set of lightweight screen 'towers' that run throughout the corridor and mark the entire zone. These screens are also functional - behind them are vertical hydroponic gardens, in which the residents of the area can use to grow food.

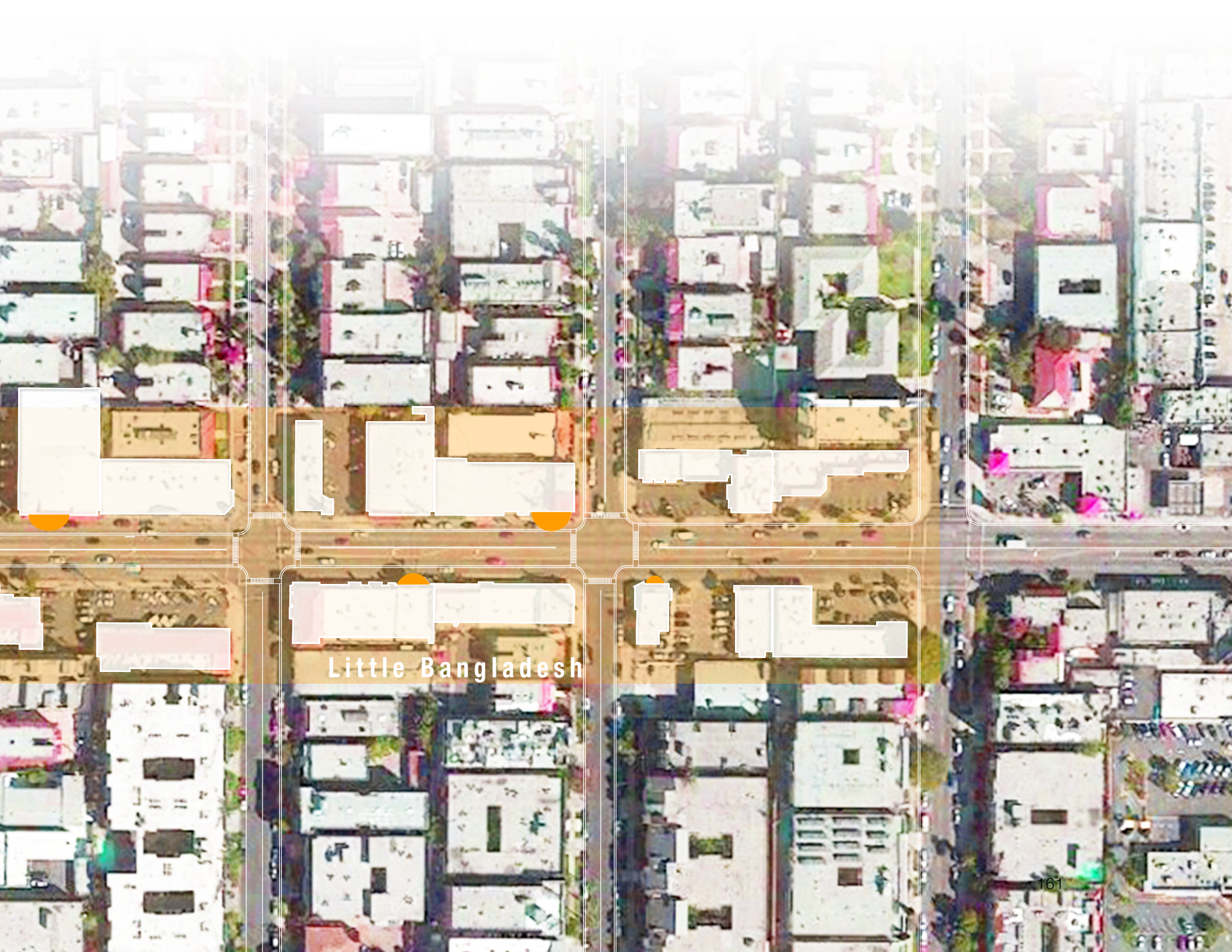
avid versus Koreatown

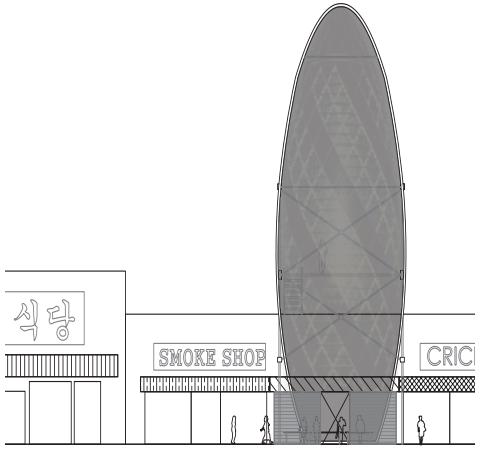


The site highlighted here represents the entirety of the official designation for Little Bangladesh. As we can see, its footprint is currently a single

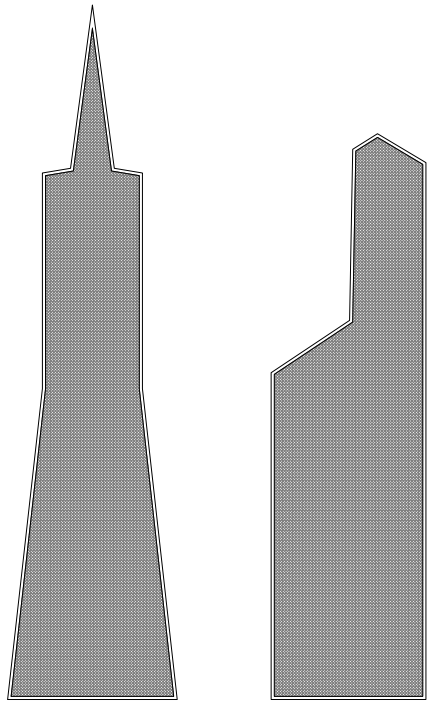
Site Condition 5
Failing Businesses

Need 2
Basic Amenities

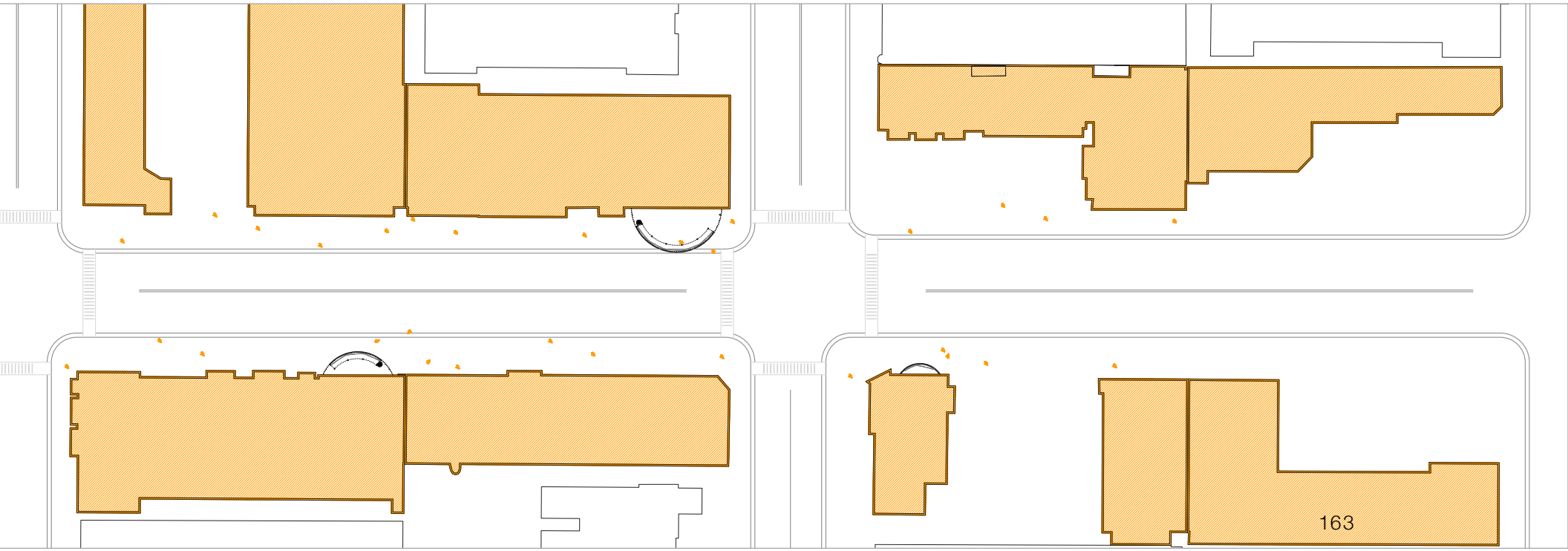

Little Bangladesh

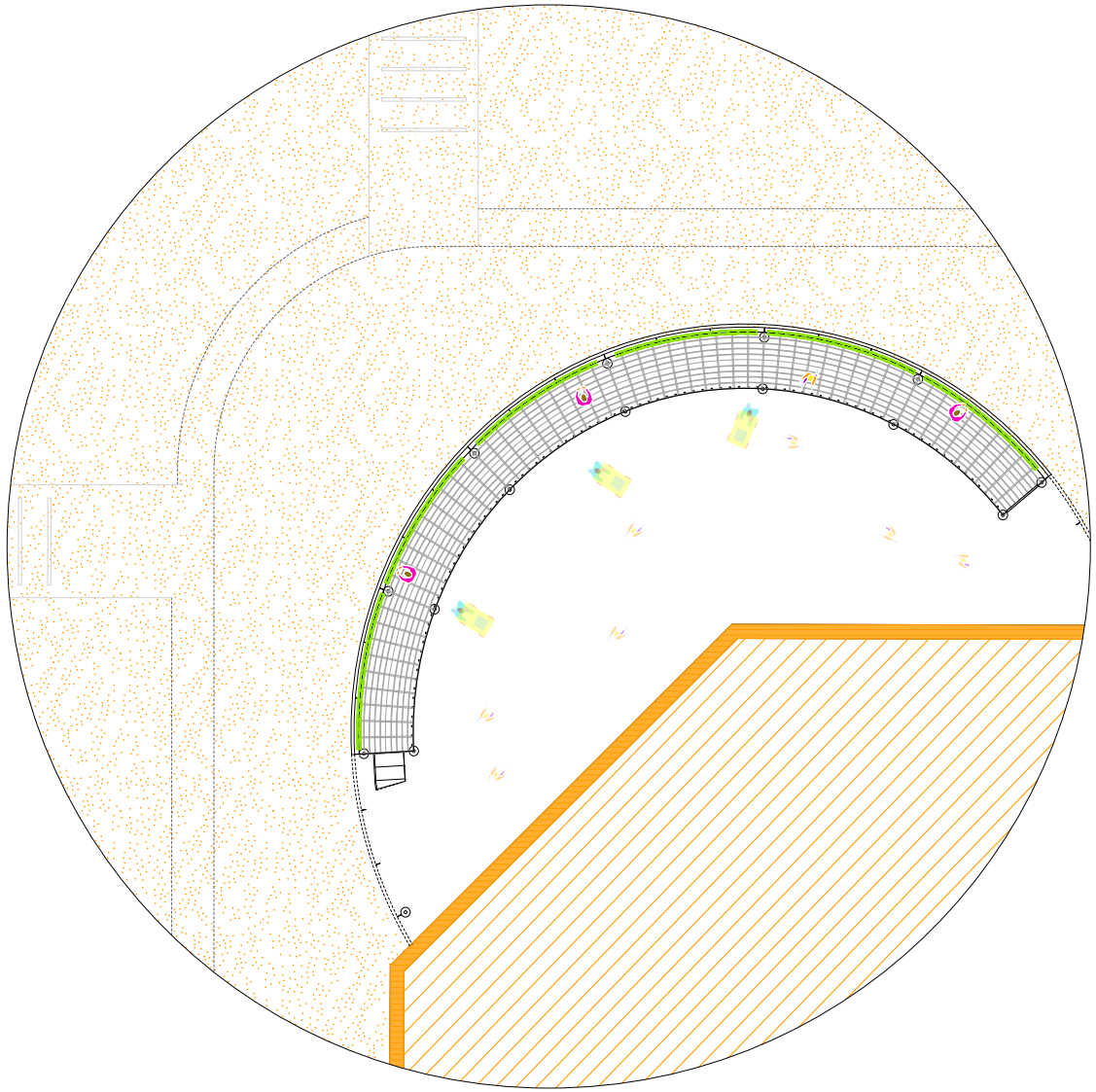


Hydroponic screens

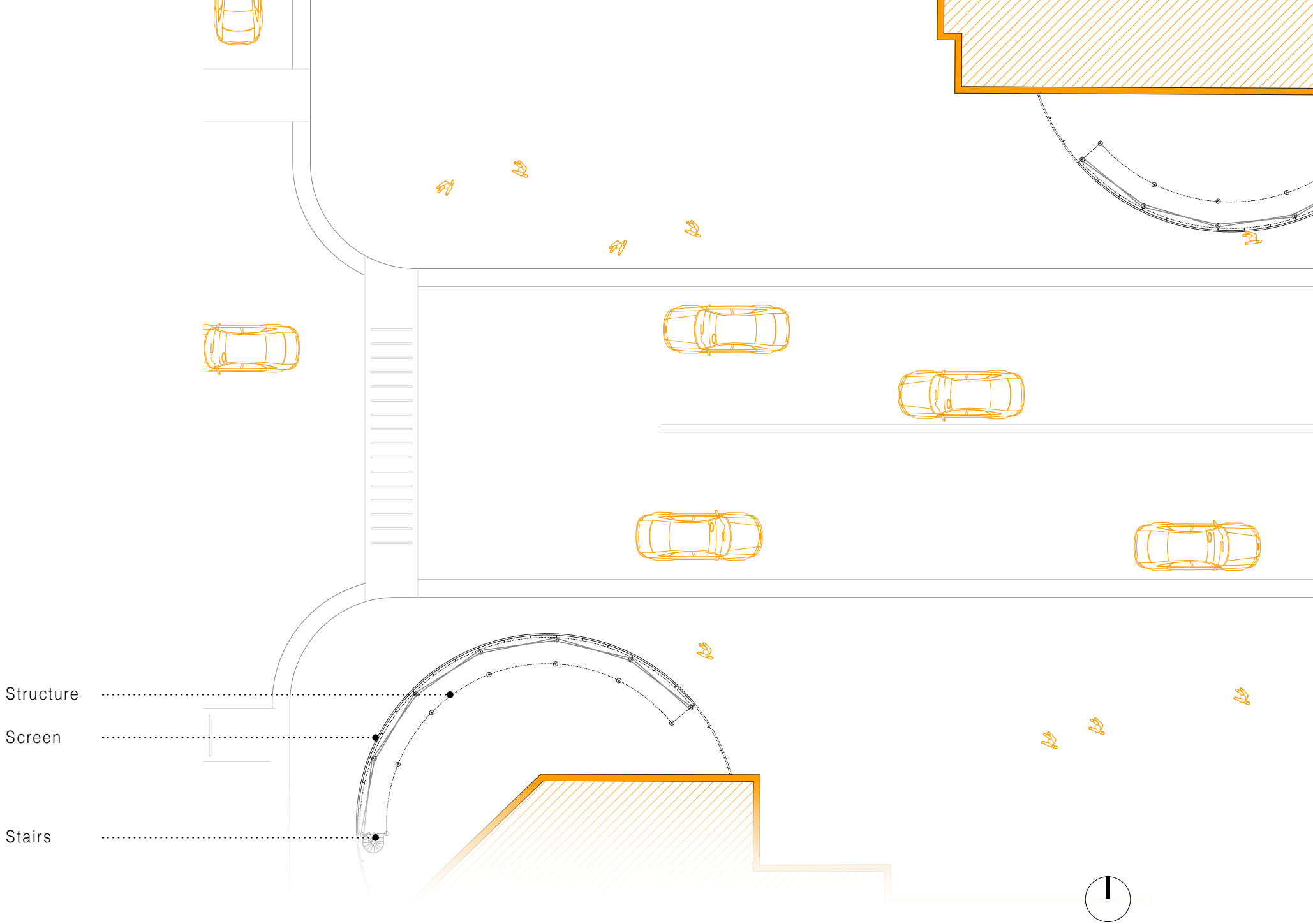


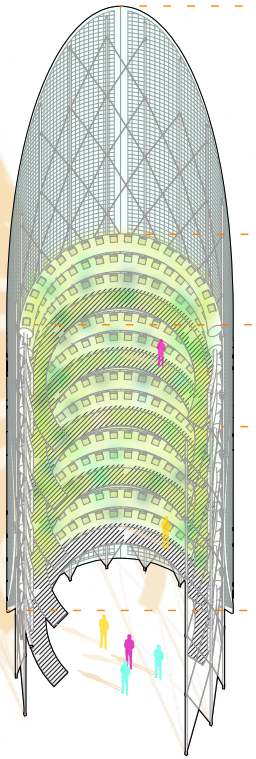
Alternative Screen Designs

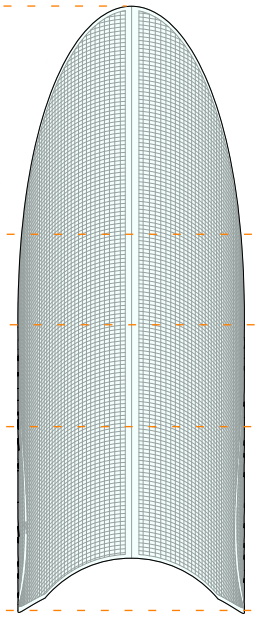




Second-story plan

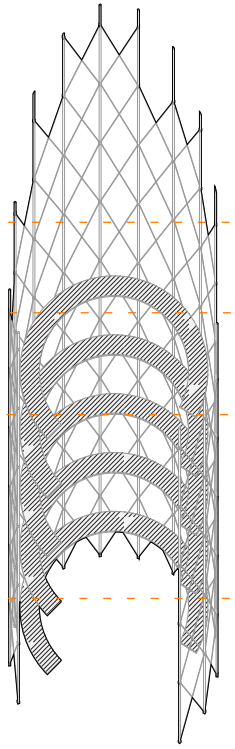

Structure
Screen
Stairs



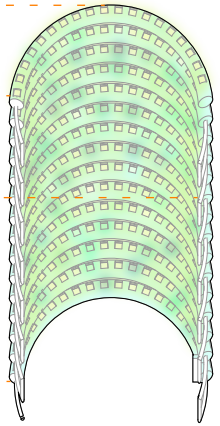


Towers of Food

Steel Mesh



Scaffolding



Hydroponic Agriculture

HISTORIC FILIPINOTOWN

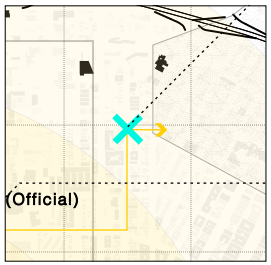
Filipinotown is an older enclave in the area and, despite the current dispersal of Filipinos across the greater metropolitan region, the neighborhood still has a strong presence. It has existed as an area where Filipinos settle since the beginning of the 20th century, thought it only in 2011 received an official neighborhood designation. Its designation as a 'historic' area comes from the fact that it is the first area outside of the Philippines that honors Filipinos.

Despite its relatively abundant cultural institutions, Historic Filipinotown is located in a physically difficult to access area between Koreatown and Echo Park. Not only is the western entrance to the enclave bisected by the 101 Freeway, but the enclave itself also sits in on a steep hill.

The proposal for this enclave is a tiered public park and series of elevators which also act as towers to both physically bring people up to the enclave, but lights the way there as well. This intervention, which could be used for the nearby school, will facilitate physical access to the enclave.

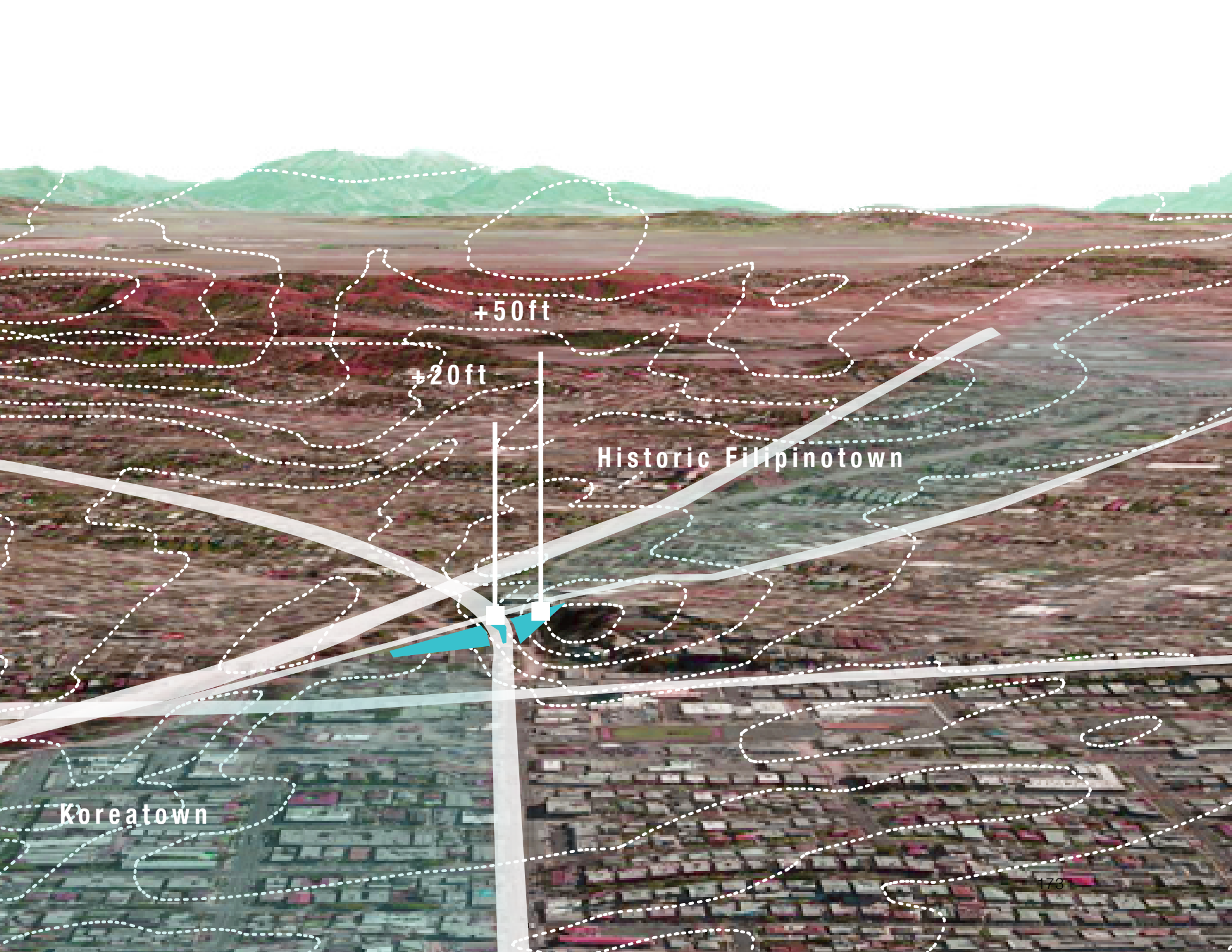
l City on a Hill

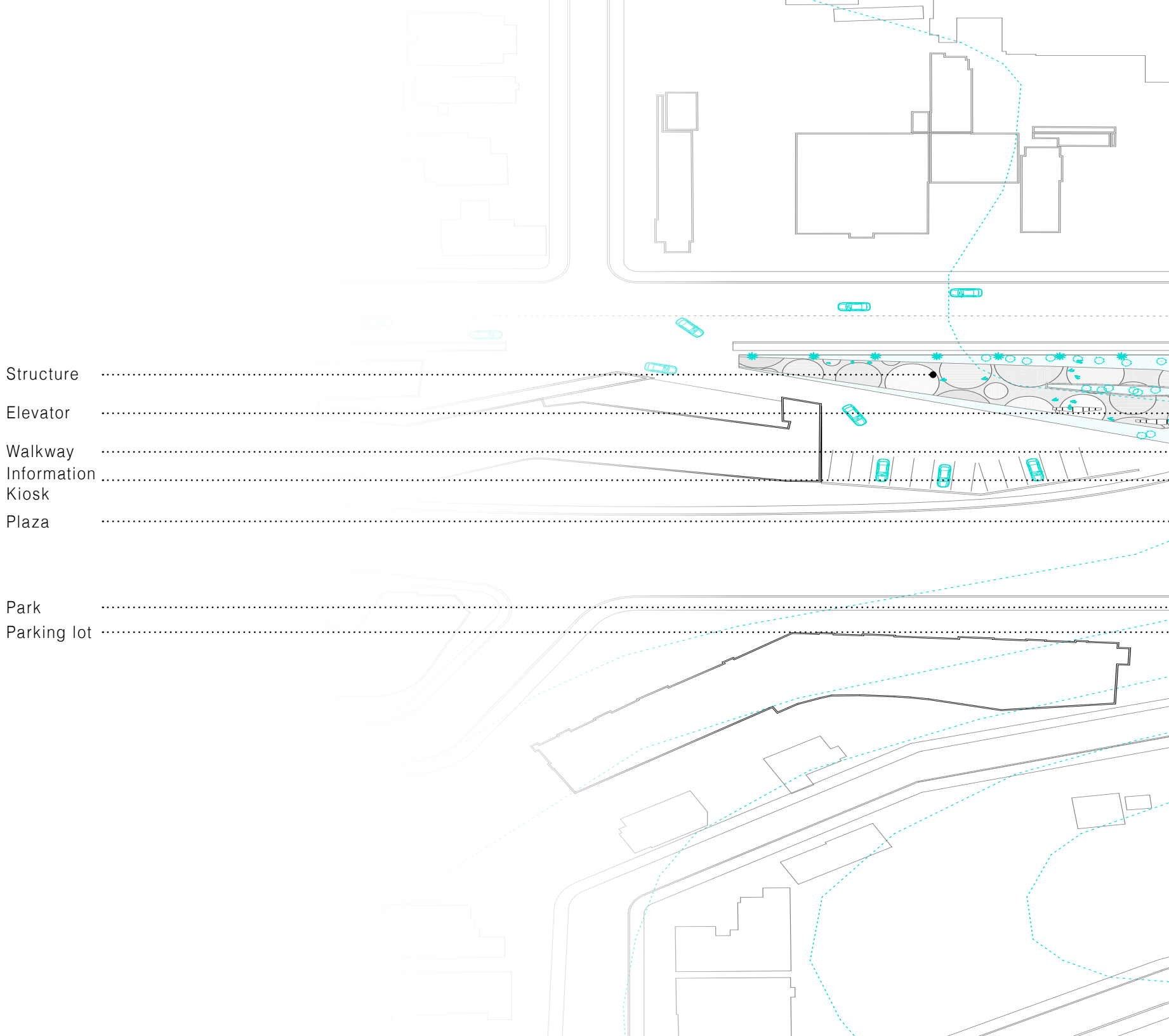
Looking at both the topography and the highway infrastructure around the entrance to the enclave, we can see that it sits in an awkward location at the crossing of many different roads as well as at the foot of a rather steep hill.

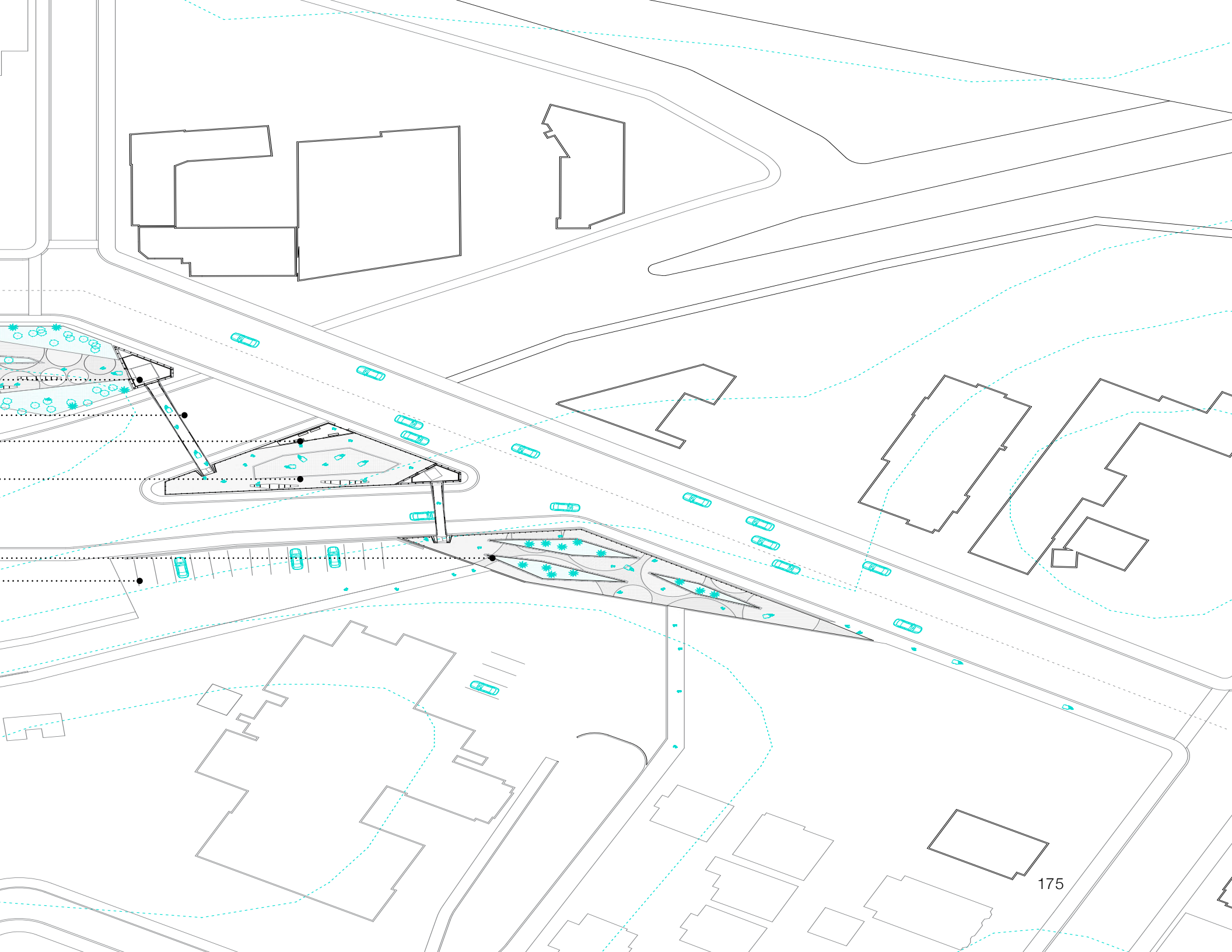


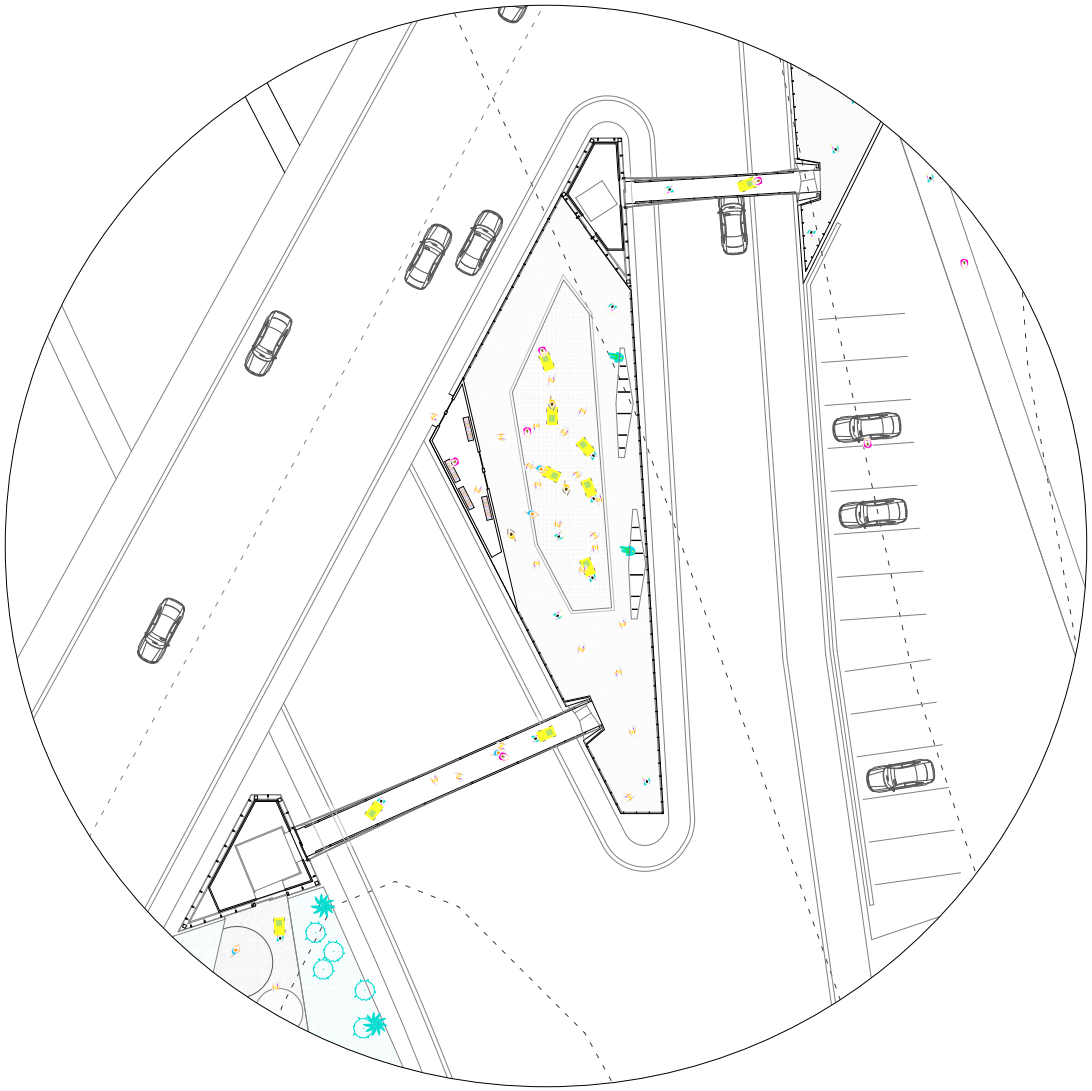
Site Condition 2
Hilly

Need 5
Public Park

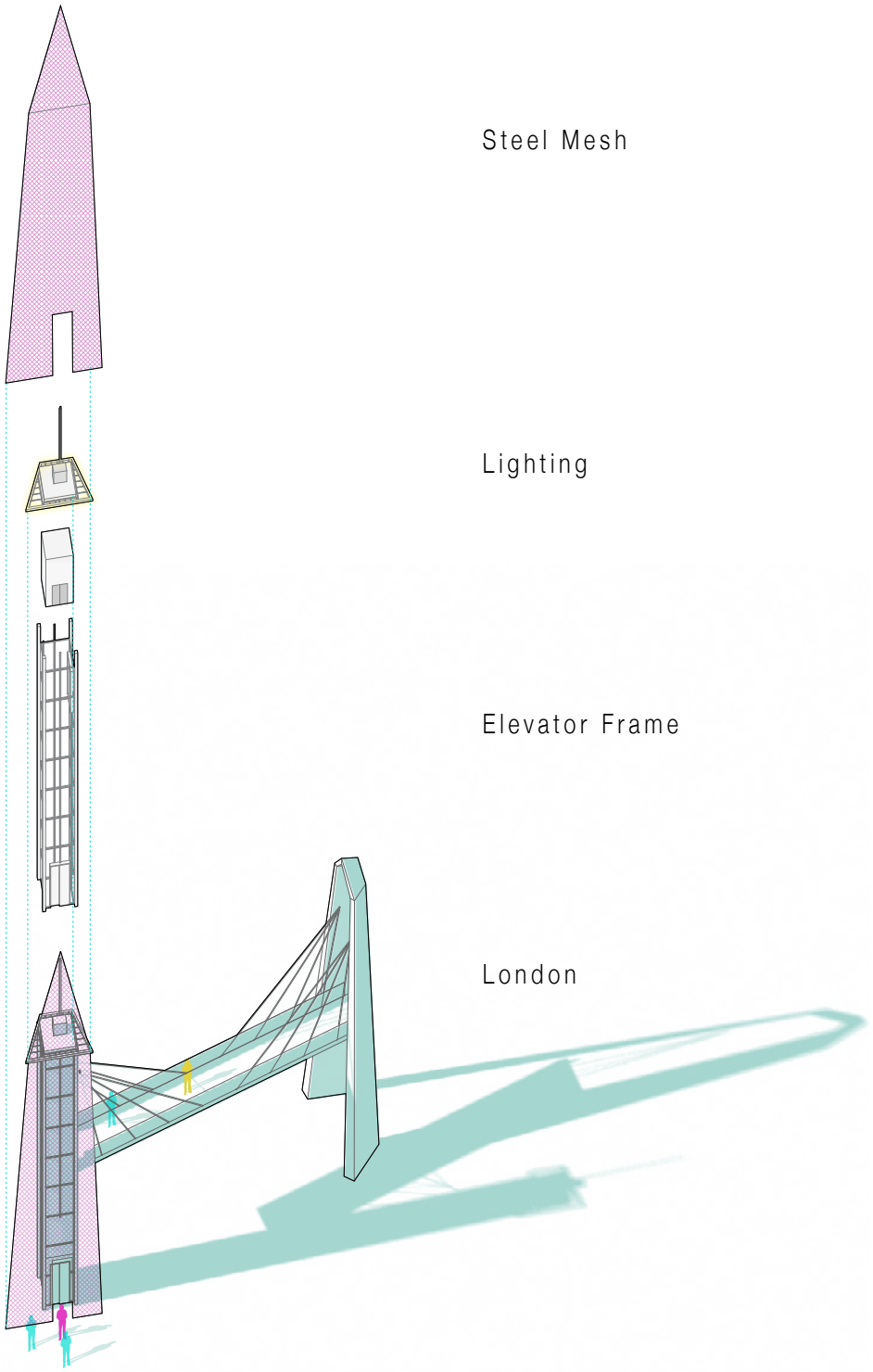

+50ft
+20ft
Historic Filipinotown
Koreatown


Structure
Elevator
Walkway
Information Kiosk
Plaza
Park
Parking lot





Monumental Elevator


Steel Mesh
Lighting
Elevator Frame
London

Metro

KOREATOWN
OXFORD PLAZA
3224

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the discourse between cultural identification and the physical constraints that can shape them. Its documents the infrastructural events that have not only come to shape the urban form of the city, but the urban mentality and behavior of its residents. We pragmatically receive the car-centric organization of Los Angeles as a given and see its non-hierarchical sprawl as a uniquely American archetype. Thus, an understanding of the cultural impact of sprawl in Los Angeles allows creates a lens through which to study other cities such Phoenix, Houston, San Diego, and the like.

The strategies for intervention undertaken in each of the enclaves studied and the network proposal overall all have an underlying belief system that organic, flexible, and temporal design can often better serve the needs of a community. While the designer can offer a unique perspective into how to intervene, the users of infrastructure, markets, and public space, are given the responsibility to arrange and use their spaces in a manner of their choosing. The decision to design in manner was very much motivated by Latino Urbanism and peoples' ability to produce ingenuity from necessity.

Lastly, a strong motivation for researching Los Angeles and its ethnic community comes from the fact that the US is increasingly diverse. The US Census Bureau predicts that by 2020 more than half of the nation's children are expected to be part of a minority race or ethnic group.[1] Thus, the recognition the shifting racial landscape in the country and to need to create an architecture reflecting these changes is at the heart of the project.

1 "New Census Bureau Report Analyzes U.S. Population Projections." New Census Bureau Report Analyzes U.S. Population Projections. US Census Bureau, 2010. Web. 18 May 2016.

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