

“What’s Good for Boyle Heights Is Good for the Jews”: Creating Multiracialism on the Eastside during the 1950s

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Two magazine articles published in the mid-1950s pointed to the Boyle Heights neighborhood in East Los Angeles as an “example of democratic progress” to a national audience. The first, published in October 1954 in *Fortnight*, focused on the diverse group of Boyle Heights residents and organizations that gathered together to fight the proposed \$32 million Golden State Freeway that would invade Hollenbeck Park and destroy some of the oldest mansions and social service agencies headquartered on Boyle Avenue. This article claimed that “few districts in America are as ethnically dynamic, religiously and politically tolerant, and community proud” as Boyle Heights. Its population was depicted as more civic-minded than the residents of any other neighborhood, with more than a hundred coordinating councils, fifty community centers and associations, and “probably more social workers per cubic feet of sorrow than anywhere else in the world.”¹

While this article and a similar one that followed in *Frontier* in 1955, “U.N. in Microcosm,” both saw the Mexican-American dominated Community Services Organization (CSO) as the most vibrant organization in the Boyle Heights scene, they credited the Jewish community for first instilling a spirit of working together across ethnic lines. “It was the Jews who supplied the initial energy to create ethnic understanding and work-activities on the Heights,” reported *Fortnight*, while *Frontier* proclaimed that “the Jews have worked hard for the advancement of the area as a whole.”² Both articles referred to the support of the Jewish community for Mexican-American Edward Roybal for city council, even when he ran against “one of their own.” Joe Kovner, publisher of the *Eastside Sun* and member of the Eastside Jewish Community Center Board, was highlighted as having campaigned vigorously for Roybal and quoted as saying, “Eddie was the best man. What’s good for Boyle Heights is good for the Jews. We keep pounding away on the theme of sticking together. An injury to one is an injury to all.”³

These articles were written at a time, however, when Boyle Heights was becoming less, not more, ethnically diverse. By 1955, Mexicans had grown to form almost half of the Boyle Heights residents, and it appeared that their numbers would only increase dramatically over the next few years. The Jewish population, by contrast, had plummeted by more than 72 percent in the past fifteen years, and now made up less than 17 percent of the area's population. The Boyle Heights community, once considered the centerpiece of Jewish life in Los Angeles, had collapsed in the postwar period due to out-migration. Other ethnic communities, most notably the Japanese American and African American populations, had held steady at less than 5 percent since 1945. Why then, in the wake of Mexican ascendancy and lessened demographic diversity, did Boyle Heights gain a reputation as the seat of "democratic progress" for Los Angeles of the mid-1950s?

The answer lies, in large part, on the actions of a select group of Jewish residents of Boyle Heights in the late 1940s and 1950s that either remained in Boyle Heights or moved into the area as most others were moving out. These residents came from both liberal and leftist political viewpoints and were committed to building a new multiracial community in Boyle Heights, while Southern California as a whole was becoming more suburban and conservative. Fighting the literal geographic movement of Jews into white America, they collaborated with leaders from the growing Mexican American population and from the smaller ethnic communities on the Eastside to leave a legacy of political interracialism, commitment to civil rights, and a radical multiculturalism in Boyle Heights, despite the growing conservative climate of the 1950s.

Los Angeles's Geography of Difference

Boyle Heights can still be found nestled at the eastern edge of the city, directly across the Los Angeles River from downtown. As the population of L.A. grew in the twentieth century and city limits expanded westward, northward, and southward, the area known in the 1781 charter as Paradon Blanco (or White Bluffs) remained the easternmost community within city limits. In the late nineteenth century, city officials placed Evergreen Cemetery in this remote, sparsely populated outpost, and renamed the area Boyle Heights, after a wealthy Irish immigrant to the city. Although just beyond walking distance to the downtown area, Boyle Heights remained largely rural until World War I, because public transportation to the Eastside and bridges over the unstable Los Angeles River were lacking. From the 1880s to the 1920s, the city solved both

these problems by building and expanding several bridges to span the unruly river, and by extending an interurban railway network across the river to Boyle Heights.⁴

As Los Angeles's population boomed in the early twentieth century, local officials attempted to keep two discrete migrant streams—one of midwestern “folks” and another of distinctively working class and ethnic newcomers—carefully separated from one another in Los Angeles through an intricate residential segregation that placed American-born Anglo newcomers on the west side of the city, while foreign-born and nonwhite residents found themselves largely confined to the east side. While both sides of Los Angeles had stately Queen Anne homes at the turn of the century, city zoning ordinances in 1908 made Westside L.A. the first urban area in the United States exclusively reserved for residential land use.⁵ This government action, coupled with racial segregation initiated by the real estate industry, which took the form of universal restrictive covenants on the west side of the city, meant that the area west of downtown Los Angeles was marked as middle class and a zone of whiteness.

Eastside and Southside Los Angeles, on the other hand, were allowed to develop industrial sites, and immigrants followed these to take up residence near work opportunities. Given their exclusion from the growing middle-class Protestant communities on the west side of the city, working-class migrants from Mexico, Asia, the American South, and the urban Northeast and Midwest all settled in large numbers in these industrial zones, including Boyle Heights. By 1940, the Jewish population of Boyle Heights totaled about 35,000, the Mexican population about 15,000, and the Japanese population approximately 5,000, with smaller numbers of Italians, Armenians, African Americans, and Russian Molokans. These groups had substantial interaction with each other in neighborhood institutions, businesses, schools, and playgrounds. Although Jews never made up a majority of the Boyle Heights population, that neighborhood came to be known as Los Angeles's “Lower East Side,” or the principal community in Jewish Los Angeles. During the two decades before World War II, Boyle Heights developed as a uniquely working class Jewish community, full of Jewish-owned businesses along its major thoroughfare, Brooklyn Avenue. Many Jewish workers brought with them a tradition of radical politics and enthusiastic trade unionism. Their militancy made Boyle Heights home to local chapters of the Workmen's Circle and the hatters, carpenters, and garment workers unions.⁶

For Jews in Boyle Heights, this working-class community contrasted sharply with a more elite Jewish community that developed about the same time in

Westside L.A. A Hollywood collection of Jewish studio chiefs, actors, directors, producers, and writers created a new ethnic community, rooted in the movie industry, which one author has described as “an empire of their own.”⁷ Having broken through restrictive covenants early on to establish a stronghold in several Westside residential communities, this part of Jewish life in Los Angeles represented an intense desire for upward mobility and ethnic assimilation. As several film historians have made clear, Jews helped create white Americanness in the early twentieth century through movies that stressed ethnic assimilation, even while they battled local discrimination by the Protestant elite of Los Angeles.⁸ Most important for our purposes, the two poles of Jewish ethnic identity—the separate world of working-class ethnicity and the middle-class ideal of assimilation—were mapped onto the very geography of the city of Los Angeles.

This geography of difference—which had been rooted in inequalities based on social class and an inclusive sense of ethnic “otherness”—was radically altered in the late 1930s and 1940s by a changing ideology of race and a growing lack of tolerance for social mixing. As historian Matthew Jacobson makes clear, the mid-twentieth century “saw a dramatic decline in the perceived differences among these white Others,” where new racial ideologies were busy “creating Caucasians, where before had been so many Celts, Hebrews, Teutons, Mediterraneans, and Slavs.”⁹ The popular use of the term *Caucasian* grew dramatically during this period, and Jewish placement on one side or the other of the line between Caucasian and non-Caucasian was critical in defining the boundaries of this newly important division in American life.¹⁰ Jacobson concentrates on the ideological and cultural transformation of this division in the 1940s, but clearly sees this new racial ideology also grounded in material and geographic considerations, when “the racial revision of Jewishness into Caucasian whiteness would become the invisible mask of *Jewish* privilege.”¹¹

Boyle Heights, by the World War II era, was not only an anomaly of this new racial ideology; it increasingly became a target for government social engineering designed to separate the races geographically. Through applied social science research, fiscal policy, and direct intervention, the federal government reshaped local communities through housing and transportation policies, and in doing so, was an active presence in redefining the terms of racialization. This did not bode well for multiracial Boyle Heights, which would now be consistently and negatively compared to other neighborhoods in Los Angeles in ways that made it a prime target for government-sponsored reform. In 1939, for example, the Federal Housing Authority gave its lowest possible rating to Boyle Heights specifically because its racial diversity supposedly made it a bad risk for housing assistance:

This is a “melting pot” area and is literally honeycombed with diverse and subversive racial elements. It is seriously doubted whether there is a single block in the area which does not contain detrimental racial elements and there are very few districts which are not hopelessly heterogeneous.¹²

This complex transformation of the terms of racialization was never anticipated by the local population as the United States entered World War II in December 1941. The disruption caused by the war led many individuals and families to leave Boyle Heights in the early 1940s, many for the first time in their lives, and while this disruption was seen as temporary by most, it quickly became clear that it would be difficult to resume life as normal immediately after the war. California, known for its booming population growth since the late nineteenth century, experienced a population explosion that was phenomenal during and immediately after the war. By 1946, the population of the state reached nine million, when it had been less than seven million in 1940.¹³ In Boyle Heights, World War II veterans from all racial groups were joined by returning Japanese Americans released from internment camps in 1945, as well as Mexican immigrant *braceros* making their way to urban centers from the San Joaquin and Imperial valleys. It was not uncommon to see families doubling up temporarily in the immediate postwar period within the single-family residences that marked so much of Boyle Heights. This overcrowding occurred throughout Southern California but was particularly acute in working-class communities like Boyle Heights. And many who first looked to return to Boyle Heights could find little housing to match their family needs or pocketbooks, with vital mortgage assistance now funneled away from multiracial communities.

Other communities located in Westside Los Angeles or in the San Fernando Valley were ready to take their positions as leading centers for permanent Jewish settlement in Los Angeles. The Fairfax district—located in the midcity area west of downtown and close to the flourishing Miracle Mile shopping district—already housed four Jewish congregations in 1940, and its expansion of middle-income housing prompted Boyle Heights Jews to consider moving west for resettlement. The Walter N. Marks Company, owned by a young Jewish real estate developer, helped develop a hospitable business climate along Wilshire Boulevard, while the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company purchased exhausted oil fields from Fairfax to Cochran just north of this area and petitioned the city of Los Angeles to annex the region in 1941. Their housing project, which would later be called Park La Brea, would open up the neighborhood for widespread settlement, even though Jews seemed confined to only certain buildings within the enormous complex. Ten other annex-

ations followed this large one, creating new urban settlements in the middle of the city of Los Angeles.¹⁴

In the San Fernando Valley, residential development was even newer than that over the hill in the Fairfax district. Next to new industrial plants placed there during the war and later converted to nonmilitary use, planned communities sprouted up in Panorama City, North Hollywood, and elsewhere to take advantage of a geographic area almost the size of Chicago. By 1950, only New York City could boast of having added more people to its population during the 1940s; the Valley had reached more than 400,000. In 1950, the *Valley Jewish Press* reported that there were about 22,000 Jewish families living in the Valley.¹⁵ The San Fernando Valley, however, would contain fewer than 5,000 African Americans and other “nonwhites” in 1950, so its growth was highly regulated on racial grounds.

As agricultural land was turned into single-family tract housing, racially restrictive covenants continued to operate, but these new restrictions explicitly limited buyers to those of the “Caucasian race.” The new color line placed Jews decidedly into the “white race,” but continued to exclude Blacks, Asians, and probably most Mexicans. Added to this dynamic in the postwar period was the rise of specific Jewish builders who invested and sold real estate properties, particularly targeting Jewish newcomers by advertising in the local Jewish weekly newspaper. Chudacoff’s Coronet Construction Company, for example, advertised a three-bedroom home that could be obtained by veterans for only a \$350 down payment toward the \$11,350 total cost. Estimated at 20 percent of the city’s home builders and accounting for almost 40 percent of the market, Jewish builders grew to represent 19 percent of the total monies raised by the United Jewish Welfare Fund by 1954, replacing film magnates as the leading entrepreneurs in the Jewish community of Los Angeles.¹⁶

Even after May 3, 1948, when the United States Supreme Court ruled that racially restrictive covenants were discriminatory and could not be enforced, discriminatory practices continued against “non-Caucasians” by real estate agents, local property owners associations, and lending companies until the 1970s. For example, when Julius Blue, an African American World War II veteran, and his wife saw an August 1948 advertisement offering “wonderful terms” to GIs in Allied Gardens, a new development of 392 single-family homes in Van Nuys, they jumped at the chance to improve their housing circumstances. The promoters of the development, however, refused to show them floor plans and instead gave them a mimeographed sheet reporting the following:

No person whose blood is not entirely that of the Caucasian race (and for the purpose of this paragraph no Japanese, Chinese, Mexican, Hindu, or any person of the Ethiopian, Indian, or Mongolian races shall be deemed to be Caucasian) shall at any time live upon any of the lots in said tract 15010.¹⁷

An extensive December 1948 report from the Anti-Defamation League made clear that this was not an isolated incident in Southern California. In El Monte, the realty board expelled a member in August 1948, Maurice Curtis, who sold a house to a Mexican American in violation of the Realtor's Code of Ethics and the board's own constitution, which stated: "A realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood."¹⁸ Cross burnings, threatening phone calls, property damaging, and personal physical abuse were all parts of enforcing racial restrictions before and after the Supreme Court decision, but so was open and organized opposition to blacks, Latinos, or Asian Americans moving into specific neighborhoods. From Kiwanis Clubs in Eagle Rock to Security First National Bank of Huntington Park, various local institutions worked hard to keep areas strictly limited to Caucasians.¹⁹ What is critical about the postwar legal and illegal restrictions, for our purposes, was that Jews and other European ethnics had, for the most part, moved across the line of exclusion into the world of Caucasians.

Of course, most Jews who purchased new homes in these areas did not migrate from Boyle Heights, but rather were complete newcomers to Southern California altogether. Deborah Dash Moore reports that during the peak year of 1946, 500 newly arrived Jews poured into Southern California each week, making up roughly 13 percent of all newcomers to Los Angeles during this period. The city's Jewish population, estimated at 130,000 before the war, grew to more than 300,000 by 1951. By 1950, only 8 percent of adult Jews in Los Angeles had been born in the city. By the end of the 1950s, only one Jewish head of household out of six had been a prewar resident, and more than half of all Jewish household heads had arrived since the end of World War II. With this accelerated migration to Los Angeles, even while those from other faiths were also pouring into the city, the overall Jewish population of the county grew from 4 to 7 percent of the total. In 1940, Los Angeles Jewry ranked seventh among the nation's cities; by 1955, Los Angeles ranked second only behind New York, and within a few years, only behind New York and Tel Aviv as the world's largest Jewish cities.²⁰

This overwhelming of the local population by newcomers was nothing new in Los Angeles, of course, neither within specific ethnic groups nor for the

population as a whole. But for Jews in Boyle Heights, it meant that the historic importance and respected place of Boyle Heights among Los Angeles Jewry was forgotten. New families quickly were establishing themselves elsewhere in Los Angeles, and communal institutions, from schools to synagogues, raced to serve this new population, often moving up economically by taking advantage of new industrial and entrepreneurial occupations as well as suburban living. Jewish institutions in Boyle Heights immediately had to consider their own future, given the falling Jewish population in the district, as well as the monumental growth of local Jewish populations elsewhere in Southern California.

“A Laboratory and Training Ground for Democracy”

While new suburban Jewish communities were sprouting up all over Southern California, Boyle Heights surprisingly experienced a renaissance of sorts in the post–World War II period. Jews who staunchly decided to remain in Boyle Heights were joined by newcomers attracted by the history of Jewish local radical tradition and multiracialism. Indeed, after World War II political radicalism increasingly became associated with promoting and defending multiculturalism throughout Southern California.²¹ As the rest of the Los Angeles basin became increasingly stratified by race and class through growing residential restrictiveness and the growth of overwhelmingly white suburbs, it was neighborhoods like Boyle Heights that emerged as models for interracial harmony and cooperation. The combination of political radicalism and racial diversity in a relatively small neighborhood like Boyle Heights made the two seem uniquely intertwined in Southern California, and various leftist organizations utilized this combination to defend their politics in the McCarthy period of antiradicalism. Boyle Heights, therefore, became something of an ideological bunker, somewhat protected by its geographic isolation, defending its residents from outside attack, while nurturing a particular brand of radical ideology and multicultural sensibility.

The transformation of Boyle Heights from a nominally Jewish enclave to a predominantly Mexican community with a selective Jewish population committed to multiracialism meant that new individual and institutional efforts were required to achieve ethnic cooperation. The postwar demographic transformation of Boyle Heights created the conditions for a neighborhood that collectively saw its fate as intertwined across ethnic lines, and mobilized to protect the community against encroachments and attacks hoisted onto the area. Even while the Jewish community of Los Angeles as a whole was trans-

formed by the demographic changes, clearly becoming “white” in the racial hierarchy of the region both geographically and politically, Jews in Boyle Heights chose a different path. Increasingly, those Jews who decided to remain in Boyle Heights battled to retain an ethnic community tied to its working-class origins, leftist sensibilities, and ethnic distinctiveness.

Growing up in the 1940s, Leo Frumkin remembered that unique mix of Jewish and multicultural sensibilities that shaped Boyle Heights in the postwar era. Living with an extended family whose politics ranged from social Democrats who voted for Roosevelt to communists, Frumkin helped organize a Socialist Youth Club at age sixteen, when he was in eleventh grade at Roosevelt High School. While leftist Jews had been attracted to the heterogeneous Boyle Heights neighborhood since the early 1930s, Frumkin’s youth was spent in a Boyle Heights neighborhood in which secularists and leftists already dominated the Jewish landscape. He remembers the Jewish community of Boyle Heights of his youth in very specific religious and political terms:

I would say, 85 percent of the population were secular Jews. I hear there were so many synagogues here, so many synagogues there. I remember three. That’s all. Three is all I remember. You never saw anybody with yarmulkes . . . So it was a secular community. And of this 80 or 85 percent who were secular Jews, I would say 10 or 20 percent of them were apolitical. Liberal, but apolitical. The balance of them, let’s say 60, 70 percent of the Jewish population, were pretty evenly divided between communist and socialist. So there were discussions going on all the time . . . But the community was extremely political, extremely political.²²

In 1945, when the Los Angeles Board of Education allowed fascist Gerald L. K. Smith to speak at Polytechnic High School, Frumkin helped organize a protest composed in part of five hundred to six hundred students out of Roosevelt High School. The protest also included students from Hollenbeck Junior High School in Boyle Heights, as well as Jefferson High School in South Los Angeles. The unity between Boyle Heights and South Los Angeles, two racially mixed areas—albeit increasingly becoming dominated by Mexican and black populations—became a staple of leftist political organizing in the postwar era. By the time the protest march arrived at the L.A. Board of Education offices downtown, the group numbered close to one thousand students, having marched from both Eastside and Southside Los Angeles.²³

Frumkin already saw the distinction between his community of Boyle Heights and the growing Jewish community on the Westside in 1945. There was “an unspoken solidarity among all the neighbors” on the Eastside, including the 60 percent of his neighbors who were Mexican. “We never had a lock on our door, never had a key. You just didn’t do it. I don’t know if it was

unspoken, but as poor as we were, nobody stole from anybody else.” In this working-class solidarity, a certain level of contempt was reserved for the more middle-class surroundings on the Westside.

When we would smoke, for instance, we would keep the cigarettes in the car. We would never dump them out in East L.A. When we used to go to West L.A. to the Jewish Community Center to dances, we’d dump all our ashtrays out, because we knew the streets were going to be cleaned there. But we never did it here.²⁴

Indeed, one Jewish institution that profoundly changed its orientation, melding new programs with a traditional spirit drawn from its origins in the social settlement house movement, was the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center in Boyle Heights. This uniquely American institution affected all Jews in the neighborhood, both religious and secular, and potentially could reach beyond the Jewish community to serve all peoples in a given neighborhood. The Boyle Heights area had been served by a Jewish community center since the 1920s, after a group of community leaders presented the need for such a center to the Federation for Jewish Charities in 1923. In 1934, a new center complex was established at the corner of Michigan and Soto Streets, renaming itself the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, along with continuing its emphasis on serving youth in the community.²⁵

In the post–World War II period, the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center began to distinguish itself through innovative programming aimed at addressing the changing nature of the Boyle Heights community and the need for increased intercultural work in the neighborhood. Led by Mel Janapol, board member in charge of “intercultural activities,” this effort began by inviting non-Jewish youth from outside the community to a model seder at the Jewish Center. At the same time, youth director Mark Keats organized the first Friendship Festival in spring 1949 at the Fresno Playground, to “bring together Mexican, Japanese, Negro, and Jewish youth in a cooperative venture.”²⁶ By the following year, the “Festival of Friendship” had grown to include a three-hour formal arts program, a parade, food sales, and an art exhibit. More than 12,000 people attended, with 1,500 participating in the parade alone. Later that year, a late autumn intercultural week included a Jewish-American cultural night next to evenings dedicated to the cultural contributions of Japanese Americans, Negro Americans, and Mexican Americans.²⁷

The paid and volunteer staff members of the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center were critical to the expansion of this effort toward minority populations in Boyle Heights. Mark Keats, the co-coordinator of the “Festival of Friendship,” quickly became acknowledged within the center as the general

community relations person for his sustained work with the non-Jewish youth of Boyle Heights. In addition to the summer festival, Keats organized celebrations of Negro History Week and Mexican Independence Day at the center. He also worked directly with youth and parents groups at Pico Gardens public housing project in his role as youth project worker. This activity was fostered by the multicultural ideology of the Soto-Michigan Center, which Keats explained in this manner: "Our feeling is that each group has a culture which it should be proud of, should retain, and add to the American culture, so that our total culture can be richer than it is at the present time."²⁸ While Keats's activity expanded beyond the walls of the Soto-Michigan Center, Janapol and other Jewish leaders were committed to seeing the Soto-Michigan Center expand its activities to all the youth in the surrounding community. By 1952, a report on center activity showed that almost 15 percent of participants at Soto-Michigan were non-Jews.²⁹

As Jewish adult membership and participation lagged in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Mel Janapol, as director of the Community Relations Committee, encouraged the board to take a wider look at the very meaning of community in Boyle Heights by actively engaging both Jewish and non-Jewish groups in the immediate neighborhood. In late 1949, Janapol and his committee contacted B'nai B'rith, the American Jewish Congress, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), the Community Services Organization (CSO), and other groups to meet on future programming at the center. Janapol reported that while "they recognized the essential Jewish purposes of the Center . . . [they] felt that there were many common platforms on which all groups could unite for discussion and debate." The group decided to pursue "programs which would be in line with all the philosophy of the Jewish Community Center, and at the same time could be of service to the various cultural groups of the area." In particular, they supported town meetings on controversial subjects. Their first forum, held April 12, 1950, focused on the hydrogen bomb, and the Community Relations Committee announced the event in both English and Spanish over loudspeakers in various areas of Boyle Heights, through literature in four different languages, and in several paragraphs publicizing the event in the *Daily News* and other metropolitan newspapers.³⁰

This intercultural work on the part of the Soto-Michigan Jewish Center increasingly received praise from within and outside of the Jewish community of Los Angeles. The director of the Soto-Michigan Center, Joseph Esquith, told the board in April 1950 that "the intercultural activities of the Center . . . continue to grow with Soto-Michigan becoming the laboratory and training ground for democracy." After a particularly successful intercultural week in

November 1950, when more than four hundred people attended the Japanese-American night, the board of the Soto-Michigan Center unanimously commended Mel Janapol, chairman of the Community Relations Committee, for “the finest job in intercultural activity being done in the entire city.” By 1951, Director Esquith spoke in front of the Los Angeles Community Chest Budget Committee regarding this intercultural work, which then became a model for a citywide intergroup committee sponsored by the Community Chest. Moreover, the Soto-Michigan Board received numerous commendations from various ethnic organizations following intercultural programming, such as one from Tats Kushida, regional director of the JACL, in November 1950, “expressing pleasure in having participated in the intercultural program and offering future cooperation wherever possible.” In 1951, letters of commendation followed from the Parents Group of Pico Gardens, the Community Services Organization, the *Asociacion Nacional de Mexico-Americanos* (ANMA), and Mayor Fletcher Bowron, all extolling various activities involving intercultural programming.³¹

While board members of the Soto-Michigan Center rightly took great pride in opening up new avenues for intercultural activity, they also worried about the repercussions of a dwindling Jewish community in Boyle Heights. Nowhere was this more evident than in their collective concern over the turnover in their own board membership due to individuals leaving Boyle Heights for other parts of Southern California. As early as March 1950, Sidney Katz, member of the board’s Budget Committee, expressed concern that young leadership at the center was absent from the Eastside, and “that the shift in population accounted in part for the lack of local leadership.”³² Throughout the early 1950s, various committees of the center experienced formal resignations due to active members moving out of the Boyle Heights region. This undoubtedly led to a certain openness toward who was a legitimate member of the community, and the board allowed, and possibly even encouraged, Jewish entrepreneurs who no longer lived in Boyle Heights to assume leadership positions. William Phillips, for example, owner of Phillips Music Store on Brooklyn Avenue, was elected second vice president of the board of directors in April 1950, almost one year after he had moved residentially to Beverly Hills.³³

The personal history of William Phillips, and his famed Eastside music store, is a strong indication of the sort of adaptation to new realities that characterized the decision making of Jewish entrepreneurs in Boyle Heights. Originally founded during the Great Depression, Phillips Music Store decided to stay in the community after World War II and adapt its merchandise to the new populations of Boyle Heights. Committed to the ideals of diversity, Wil-

liam Phillips, the store's owner, even went so far as to encourage a returning Japanese American from the internment camps, Kenji Taniguchi, to open his sporting goods store inside of the music store in the 1950s until it took off on its own. During the 1950s, many budding Latino musicians coming out of Roosevelt High School credited Phillips with introducing them to a wider network of musicians from Central Avenue or the Hollywood Studios. Phillips was considered such an integral part of the changing community that he was selected to chair the Citizens Committee to Re-Elect Roybal for City Council in 1951.³⁴

Like many other businessmen from the Jewish community, however, Phillips residentially moved out of the Eastside even while keeping his business located in Boyle Heights. He and his wife moved from the City Terrace neighborhood in 1949, concerned about its rising crime rate, to the "poor side" of Beverly Hills, south of Wilshire Boulevard. Phillips, however, kept his music store in Boyle Heights until the mid-1990s, and remained an active presence in both the institutional Jewish community of the Eastside, as a member of the board of directors of the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, and in the interracial group that formed to support city councilman Edward Roybal, who represented the district from 1949 to 1963 before moving to the U.S. Congress.³⁵

Part of the reason that some Jewish businessmen remained in Boyle Heights, despite the exodus of many Jewish customers, was that certain critical groups of Jewish residents also opted to stay in the Heights, regardless of a larger demographic transformation. While many young couples just establishing themselves decided not to start families in Boyle Heights in the postwar period, elderly Jews, particularly those whose children had already left the family, stayed behind in the community in which they felt comfortable and that had met their needs in the past. Politically, Jews who were traditionally Democratic in their political orientation took advantage of newfound economic and social benefits in suburban communities. On the other hand, Jews who were committed leftists—be they socialist, communist, or embedded in secular Yiddish culture—received less cultural benefit from leaving the Eastside and chose to remain in Boyle Heights or City Terrace, where established unions and leftist organizations remained centered. In short, specific groups of Jews resolutely stayed in Boyle Heights long after most others had abandoned the Eastside. This steadfastness altered the nature of the Jewish community of Boyle Heights that worked with the wider multiracial population of the neighborhood during the 1950s.

Radical Innovations and Multicultural Perspectives

Boyle Heights was increasingly associated with political radicalism in the late 1940s and 1950s, as political ideologies in greater Southern California moved decidedly to the right. Although Boyle Heights had a long tradition of working-class politics and was home to various labor unions before World War II, after the war institutions in the area were specifically attacked for harboring communists, socialists, and sympathizers. In and out of the Jewish community, Boyle Heights grew to be seen as an anomaly in Southern California by the early 1950s, and for being sympathetic to liberal and leftist causes. This growing reputation led many leftists, including those in the Jewish community, to remain in Boyle Heights while political moderates left, and it encouraged leftists from other parts of Southern California to move into Boyle Heights just as it was becoming known as a Mexican American “ghetto” neighborhood. To study radicalism in Southern California during the 1950s, therefore, requires a spatial investigation of Boyle Heights and its continued reputation for political tolerance and radical ideologies.

Many radicals from various backgrounds had been drawn to Boyle Heights years before the 1950s, with some of the most well known leftists in Los Angeles migrating there to establish ties to other activists within this tolerant working-class community. Dorothy Healey, who would later become the most important Communist Party organizer in California, moved to Soto Street in 1931 on assignment for the Young Communist League.³⁶ Saul Alinsky spent summers as a child with his father in Boyle Heights, an experience that would influence him in the late 1940s to fund the work of the Community Services Organization through his Chicago-based Industrial Areas Foundation.³⁷

Another leftist family that had settled in Boyle Heights during the 1930s displays the multigenerational aspects of a radical tradition in the neighborhood. Russian-born Rose Chernin, who would later become executive secretary of the Los Angeles Committee for Protection of the Foreign Born, moved to Boyle Heights in the mid-1930s, after joining the Communist Party in New York City in the late 1920s. What pulled Rose Chernin to Boyle Heights was family; her parents and aunt’s family had already moved there from New York. Rose described Boyle Heights of the 1930s as a community of “working people; it had trade unionists, cultural groups, a synagogue, kosher stores, a place where you could buy a Yiddish newspaper and books.”³⁸

Unlike other Jews in the postwar period, some deliberately chose Boyle Heights in which to raise families, even after exploring other options in Southern California. Ida Fiering had been born in Boyle Heights in 1926, into a Jewish

family with a strong socialist background, committed to the preservation of Yiddishkeit culture. Her parents, both born in Kiev, Russia, came to the United States in 1910 and into the City Terrace section of Boyle Heights in 1922. Her father had been among the charter members of the Painter's Union, Local 1348. After attending Malabar Elementary, Belvedere Junior High, and Roosevelt High School (class of 1945), Ida herself attended Berkeley and UCLA before marrying in 1949. After the newlywed couple lived in East Hollywood for one year, they decided to move back to Boyle Heights to start a family and raise their children in what remained of Yiddish culture in the area in 1950. Like many on the left in Boyle Heights during the 1950s, Ida would be involved in secular Jewish organizations such as the Jewish People's Fraternal Order (JPFO) and the City Terrace Cultural Center, but she also majored in Spanish at UCLA, participated in the campaign of Ida Alvarez for state assembly, and claimed a Latina neighbor as her best friend.³⁹

This stark political geography of Southern California increasingly made Jewish individuals and institutions in Boyle Heights targets for the growing anticommunist movement in California in the postwar period. On September 7, 1948, Joseph Esquith, the director of the Soto-Michigan Jewish Center, was summoned to testify in front of California's Un-American Activities Committee, chaired by state senator Jack Tenney, a right-wing Republican from Los Angeles. The California committee, which lasted from 1941 to 1949 under Tenney's command, shared information with the federal House Un-American Committee (HUAC), utilizing many of the same tactics of public confrontation, humiliation, and red-baiting pressure in front of media and public officials. Tenney, well known for his anti-Semitism by 1948, often equated communism with Judaism in confronting Jewish witnesses.⁴⁰

Early in the hearings, Tenney accused the Soto-Michigan Center of allowing communist front organizations to use the center, charging that the center's staff, member organizations, and programming all contained communists. His evidence was based in the fact that movies prepared by the Peoples Educational Center had been shown, the Actors Laboratory Theatre had presented several plays, and the International Workers Order had been allowed to rent the facilities. Committee counsel R. E. Combs read into the record references from the *People's Daily World* in which activities at the Soto-Michigan Center had been listed. The most damning evidence to the committee was that the center received substantial funding from the Community Chest, which Tenney alleged was used to fund "communist propaganda."⁴¹

Esquith, for his part, responded eloquently, reminding the committee that the center "was a laboratory of democracy where free speech, free association,

and free assemblage flourished.”⁴² The Soto-Michigan Center welcomed all groups, in a tradition of an open forum that hearkened back to the social settlement period at the beginning of the twentieth century, its only explicit exception being overt political parties.⁴³ When the center’s board met one week later on September 14, they rushed to support Mr. Esquith and the reputation of the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, unanimously passing a resolution protesting Tenney’s attack, condemning the committee’s action, and demanding an immediate public response on the part of the Jewish Centers Association governing board. Al Waxman, member of the Soto-Michigan Center board and editor of the *Belvedere Citizen*, felt that “the entire Jewish community was on trial in not having made an immediate answer to the Tenney attack.”⁴⁴

However, an immediate and supportive response was not forthcoming from the Jewish Centers Association (JCA), the newly formed umbrella organization (1943) responsible for coordinating activities, controlling finances, and setting policy for all the Jewish community centers in Los Angeles.⁴⁵ Instead, the association and the individual centers held a tension-filled joint meeting that, while reaffirming established policies toward openness, also made it clear that the JCA was concerned about getting smeared and labeled by the broad stroke of communism or communist sympathizer.⁴⁶ On September 23, the president of the Welfare Federation of Los Angeles wrote to Sam Bates, president of the executive board of the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, asking for “a statement from your Board as to what steps have been taken to investigate and determine whether or not there are grounds for such allegations” as put forward by the Tenney Committee.⁴⁷ As the Boyle Heights group received letters of support from various labor unions for their position, a special committee was formed to investigate the situation at JCA urging.⁴⁸

Their report, which showed that less than 3 percent of the total attendance at the center came from accused “communist” organizations, did not satisfy the Welfare Federation of Los Angeles, who continued to worry about being branded as a potential communist front organization. By the end of 1948, the Welfare Federation issued a directive to all its agencies, including the Soto-Michigan Center, to deny its facilities to any organization on the attorney general’s subversive list, which had been created by the Tenney Committee. The Soto-Michigan board rejected this directive, claiming that it infringed on its right to set its own policy and that it contradicted the open forum philosophy of the Jewish Centers movement. While this tension led to a standstill between the two organizations, others in the wider Jewish community had already begun to purge perceived communists from their midst. The Jewish

People's Fraternal Order (JPFO), which met regularly at the Soto-Michigan Center and was considered "an integral part of the Jewish Community of Boyle Heights," was challenged as a member within the Los Angeles Jewish Community Council in 1949 and 1950. By early 1951, as the Cold War heated up in Korea, the JPFO had been purged from local ties to the organized Jewish community for being subordinate to the International Workers Order and, therefore, to Moscow.⁴⁹

Most historians of the McCarthy period in Los Angeles have focused on attacks on University of California professors and leftists in Hollywood as defining the era.⁵⁰ In working-class districts of Southern California, however, the anticommunist crusade hit labor union and ethnic community leadership with a vengeance that was only hinted at on the west side of town. A series of legislative acts in the late 1940s and early 1950s targeted suspected and former communists, particularly those who had been born abroad, with deportation, denaturalization, and unlimited detention without benefit of trial. The 1947 Taft-Harley Act made it illegal for communists and those "calling for the overthrow of the U.S. government" to participate in American labor unions. The Internal Security Act of 1950 allowed the federal government to deport aliens who admitted or were suspected of ever having joined the Communist Party or any affiliated group. But the law that solidified and expanded the reach of the anticommunist crusade was the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, which included the provision that naturalized aliens could be "denaturalized" if found to have been communist sympathizers at the time of their citizenship statement of allegiance. Not surprisingly, the U.S. Justice Department almost immediately began to focus on former union leaders in this growing anticommunist campaign, including many who had participated in the growing labor movement of the late 1930s centered in Boyle Heights.

As the implications of these acts for the working-class communities of Southern California became clear, one organization, formed in 1950, took as its sole focus the protection, legal and otherwise, of those held under threat of deportation: the Los Angeles Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born (LACPFB). The LACPFB was ostensibly a branch organization of the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, identified as a communist-front organization based in New York City.⁵¹ While the American Committee had branches across the country, the Los Angeles-based group was by far its largest. Yet the very different histories of the two organizations point to a history of difference between East Coast and West Coast versions of radicalism, immigration, and multiracialism. The American Committee was formed in New York in the early 1930s, working overwhelmingly with Euro-

pean immigrant groups that dominated East Coast unions, and was an important Popular Front organization of the late 1930s and early 1940s. By 1959, the American Committee was moribund.⁵² The Los Angeles Committee was formed at the height of the anticommunist campaign of the 1950s, dominated by a multiracial group of activists who were often those targeted by the McCarren-Walter Act itself, and lasted well into the late 1960s, when the organization changed its name and became part of the radical milieu of the New Left period.

Most important for our purposes, the LACPFB emerged out of the multiracial communities of Los Angeles's Eastside and Southside, most notably from Boyle Heights. Rose Chernin, from a strong Jewish radical tradition in Boyle Heights, became the organization's executive director in 1951, promptly leading to her arrest later that year under the antiradical Smith Act. However, the largest national group the L.A. Committee sought to protect in Southern California was Mexican, with fourteen Mexican nationals targeted for deportation as early as 1953 out of a total group of eighty. Russia, with thirteen, and Poland, with six, were next in line, and most of these were undoubtedly Jewish. The truly international character of the work was indicated by the diversity of the numbers that followed.⁵³ By the time the committee looked back on its work from 1965, it had processed 225 cases of threatened deportation and/or denaturalization.⁵⁴

Boyle Heights, and the Eastside in general, probably led the count of those targeted for deportation, and therefore attracted a large amount of the attention of the L.A. Committee. While the LACPFB maintained its major office in downtown Los Angeles, it established an Eastside branch at 3656 East 3rd Street within three years of its founding, with activities directed at the Mexican community by Josefina Yanez. The Eastside Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, however, included active members from both the Jewish and the Mexican communities of Boyle Heights. This defense committee was initially formed around fourteen deportees who lived in East Los Angeles in 1953. When "Operation Wetback" was launched in 1954 by the Immigration and Naturalization Service to apprehend "undocumented aliens" in the American Southwest, the LACPFB was uniquely positioned to place this heightened assault on Mexican aliens in a wider historical framework.⁵⁵

In Los Angeles, the unique diversity of the membership of the LACPFB made its protest against the racial profiling of Mexicans by the INS a distinctively multiracial appeal. In May 1954, the LACPFB issued a call to "all democratic-spirited, fair-minded Americans" to protest the actions of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service in raids conducted throughout Los

Angeles. Utilizing the recently approved provisions of the McCarren-Walter Act, the INS had launched mass detentions of Mexican nationals in open-air pens in Elysian Park in downtown Los Angeles under a campaign called “Operation Round-Up.” The LACPFB called this campaign a “concentration camp order” by Attorney General Brownell, using rhetoric that could be identified as harassment “by the 350,000 members of the L.A. Jewish Community who are reminded of other pogroms and other concentration camps when they saw or heard of the noon-hour sweep-down on Wilshire Blvd.’s Miracle Mile, wherein 212 young Mexican workers were carried off summarily.”⁵⁶

In this manner, the LACPFB flyer went on to link oppressive detention in World War II by the U.S. government of Japanese Americans, with that of Germany under Hitler, pogroms in Eastern Europe, and the actions of the U.S. Immigration Service in the 1950s. It sought to remind “all other Americans who recoil to think that—in our America—people are sought out by the color of their skin; are followed, fingered and picked up on the streets, in their homes and their factories as ‘alien,’ as ‘illegals,’ and who can say how many citizens among them.” In short, the shared racial histories of various groups that had made up Boyle Heights and other working-class communities in Los Angeles were now marshaled, by the LACPFB, to come together to support the latest victims of mass arrests and unfair jailings: the “thousands of defenseless Mexican nationals” being targeted by the INS.⁵⁷

The Los Angeles Committee replicated this multiethnic appeal in almost all their publications and public pronouncements. The programs from their yearly conferences almost always contained specific appeals to the “Japanese American community” or the “Jewish community” or the “Mexican American community.” Rather than collapse all the disparate histories together into one large melting pot approach, the LACPFB consistently kept separate appeals distinct, while placing them all in the same program, brochure, or flyer. The consequence of this sort of political approach, if not its intention, was to both utilize and foment a multiracial sensibility that could be used no matter what specific group was targeted in anti-immigrant measures. Most of these appeals relied on a shared history from neighborhoods like Boyle Heights, as well as an attempt to link histories across the current geographic and social divides in a city like Los Angeles.

Even their major fund-raising annual event had this same sort of focus. The “Festival of Nationalities” seemed patterned after the Soto-Michigan Center’s “Festival of Friendship,” although this one-day event was intended to raise operating expenses for the LACPFB. Held every year from 1950 until well into the 1960s at the Croatian-American Hall and Picnic Grounds just out-

side Boyle Heights at 330 South Ford Avenue, this Sunday event saw “garden and meeting turned into booths and squares offering the good, rare foods of many countries.” The festival was billed as an “all-day tribute to the Armenians, Mexicans, Africans, Poles, Greeks, Koreans, Jews, Hungarians, Italians, Czechoslovaks, Yugoslavs, Russians, English”—in other words “those who built Los Angeles” and “those who made our country.”⁵⁸ In the organization’s own internal get-togethers, the same spirit of multiculturalism prevailed. When the seven-year deportation case against Edo Mita, the Japanese-born editor of the LACPFB’s newsletter, the *Torchlight*, was won in 1958, the LACPFB celebrated by sponsoring an “International Smorgasbord Dinner.” Held at the Hungarian Hall just west of downtown, the celebration included “turkey, ham, chicken-flavored Japanese sushi, Mexican guacamole, delicious Hungarian cakes, West Indian punch, Jewish delicacies, Italian antipasto . . . and more.”⁵⁹

What the LACPFB could not prevent, however, was the growing tension within various ethnic communities over radicalism in the 1950s, particularly the ideological attack that consistently linked communist infiltration with multicultural sensibilities. A significant segment of American patriotism of the 1950s linked Americanism to staunch anticommunism and support for McCarthyite tactics of exposure and humiliation.⁶⁰ Not only did this ideology expand within the growing suburban communities of the United States, but also in ethnic communities trying to reposition themselves around a growing civil rights agenda that could be successful in conservative times. No community better exemplified this growing split, on both ideological and geographic lines, than Los Angeles’s Jewish community.

One 1958 incident best exemplifies how far away Jewish members of the LACPFB had moved from establishment Judaism in Los Angeles. Mainstream Judaism was now firmly situated out of Boyle Heights and on the west side of the city, where a middle-class liberal, antiradical sensibility prevailed. On February 7, 1958, the *B’nai B’rith Messenger* reported that Marion and Paul Miller had been honored by the Los Angeles City Council for “their distinguished service to their country,” the latest of a long line of commendations for the couple who lived in Rancho Park on the Westside, which also included the honor of naming Marion Miller “outstanding Jewish woman of the year.” These accolades came to them because they had been paid informers to the FBI and various anticommunist government committees about the inner workings of the Los Angeles Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born from 1950 to 1955. Marion Miller, at the urging of the FBI, rose to become the recording secretary for the LACPFB, earning \$80 a month for her efforts. Herman Gluck, author of the article, felt that “the whole Jewish community has reason to be proud of these intrepid spirits” due to “their patriotic and self-

sacrificing service performed in imminent peril of discovery.” The article ended with an emphatic ethnic ring: “The Millers are Jews—good Jews—and I, as a Jew, am as proud of them as I am of Einstein.”⁶¹

Even more revealing was the fact that the citation was presented to the Millers by Rosalind Wyman, the first Jew elected to the Los Angeles City Council in the twentieth century. Often discussed as the second liberal on the council in the 1950s—joining Edward Roybal from Boyle Heights—Wyman critically shaped her political ideology from the postwar suburban sensibilities of Los Angeles’s Westside liberalism. While this liberalism included moderate support for civil rights efforts in the city, it also was staunchly anticommunist. Wyman joined the vast majority of her colleagues after 1952 in viewing public housing, for example, as a suspicious socialist experiment, and she led efforts within the city council from 1956 to 1958 in handing over Chavez Ravine to Walter O’Malley to facilitate the move of the Brooklyn Dodgers to Los Angeles.⁶²

Not surprisingly, this honor incensed the Los Angeles Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, especially its executive director, Rose Chernin, who clearly saw the work of the committee as exemplifying the better half of Jewish tradition during the 1950s. She orchestrated a letter-writing campaign to the city council, particularly directed at Wyman, protesting the honor. One of the committee’s biggest supporters, Charlotta A. Bass, editor of the *California Eagle*, Los Angeles’s main African American newspaper, wrote Councilwoman Wyman directly to protest an honor for someone “who would spy for a fee.”⁶³ But no one wrote to the city council with more wrath than Rose Chernin:

We of the Committee, are shocked at this action on the part of the City Council. It is our considered judgment that the Council acted very unwisely in choosing a paid informer to honor as an example for Young Americans . . . It is our considered judgment that this can be construed as a slur on the Jewish Community . . . We believe that an aroused citizenry should protest the action of the L.A. City Council in wasting time to glorify an informer, who like Marion Miller, for \$80.00 a month, which she was receiving according to her own statement under oath in Washington, would sell her birthright as an American of Jewish parentage.⁶⁴

This incident clearly showed that the bifurcation of the Jewish community in 1950s Los Angeles had been firmly implanted. While the LACPFB would continue to work on behalf of the undocumented in the 1960s, and Rose Chernin increasingly found sympathetic speaking audiences on college campuses, the local activity of the committee binding various communities together would decline precipitously after 1958.⁶⁵

By 1958, even the liberal Jewish tradition in Boyle Heights began to dwindle considerably due to the aging of the population and the mounting pressures on individuals and institutions that remained in Eastside L.A. to move out. In that year on September 4, the Eastside Jewish Community Center's board met for the last time, formally dissolving after selling the property on Michigan and Soto Streets to the All Nations Foundation. In the six previous years, the Jewish Centers Association had merged the two Eastside centers, cut the resulting organization's budget dramatically, reduced staffing, and finally decided to completely close their Eastside work and completely shift operations to the west side of the city.⁶⁶

For the diminishing numbers of individual Jews who remained in Boyle Heights, it became more and more difficult to retain the quality of Jewish life that had drawn them to Boyle Heights in the first place. Leo Frumkin, who lived in the house in which he had been born in 1928, finally moved out to Monterey Park in 1958 "because the house literally began to fall apart" and he was able to buy a tract home further east for \$18,000. By this time, most of his friends, both Jewish and Mexican, had already moved out of the neighborhood to Lakewood and other lower-middle-class neighborhoods farther east near expanding employment opportunities.⁶⁷ Another Jewish family, who found themselves to be the last remaining Jews on their block in Boyle Heights, were concerned about their child remaining at his middle school, as it gained a reputation for growing violence and tension. So the father picked the largest Mexican boy in his neighborhood and paid him to protect their son through junior high school in the late 1950s.⁶⁸

Jewish families were faced with difficult choices, and most of them would eventually move out of the neighborhood, no matter how committed they were to Boyle Heights. Committed socialist Ida Firing, who had been born in Boyle Heights and returned there to raise her own family in 1950, faced a painful dilemma for herself and her family in the fall of 1961. As she surveyed the roster of her child's fifth-grade class, Ida came to the startling conclusion that her son was the only Jewish child left in his class at Malabar Elementary School. Indeed, by 1960 only 4 percent of all Jews in Los Angeles now lived in Boyle Heights.⁶⁹ With her strong commitment to raising children in a Jewish environment steeped in radical tradition, Ida and her husband now decided to leave Boyle Heights. This move was made with utter reluctance and ambivalence, given the family's deep roots to the cultural and political history of working-class Jewish life in East L.A.⁷⁰

Only two significant groups of Jews remained in Boyle Heights after the late 1950s, and each remained significantly separated from the rest of L.A.

Jewry. The Jewish elderly of Boyle Heights tended to maintain their residences if their families could not convince them to move out and if their health remained good. As one elderly Jewish woman who had spent thirty years in the garment industry put it, “I’ll spend my last days here. And why not? My husband is dead, my children are all grown up. Why should I bother my children, they have their own families. I visit them, once in a while, they come here to take me for a drive, that’s all.”⁷¹ Harry and Hilda Hoffman, for example, remained in their City Terrace home until 1965, when their grown children “were getting tired of ferrying them to the West Side where all their social activities seemed to be taking place.”⁷² For those who needed additional care, a move into the Jewish Home for the Aged on Boyle Avenue remained an option until the site was sold in the 1970s and became the Japanese Home for the Aged.

But the longest lasting remnants of Jewish Boyle Heights were the Jewish-owned businesses along Brooklyn Avenue that catered to a multicultural clientele. The owners of Canter’s Delicatessen had kept open the original shop on Brooklyn Avenue even after opening a new Fairfax branch in 1948. By the early 1970s, however, even Canter’s on Brooklyn shut its doors. Only Phillips Music Store and Zellman Clothiers would remain in Boyle Heights until the 1990s, even though their owners now lived outside the neighborhood, as they adapted to meet the buying needs of the growing Mexican immigrant community.⁷³ And Jews transplanted to other parts of Los Angeles continued to venture back to the “old neighborhood,” and specifically to these businesses, if they wanted to connect to a part of their youth and a time in which Jews lived in a multiracial working-class enclave in Los Angeles.

Forgetting and Remembering Multiracialism

In December of 1998, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton kicked off the West Coast version of a White House initiative dedicated to preserving historic American sites by visiting a run-down, largely abandoned synagogue located in Boyle Heights. The selection of the Breed Street Synagogue for preservation was intended to evoke a particular kind of historical remembrance, one intended to connect generations of immigrants and immigrant children from different backgrounds together—while ignoring the complex history of racial interaction in Boyle Heights. While Clinton addressed a crowd of about five hundred made up of local politicians, academic conservators and historians, and representatives of Los Angeles’s dispersed Jewish community, local Mexican American residents stood on the sidelines, curious and somewhat

bemused. “This shul and the work we are doing together to preserve it for future generations is an important statement,” the First Lady told the crowd. “We believe that there must be continuity between generations . . . Boyle Heights immigrants today can think back to those immigrants 60 to 70 years ago who did not speak English—they spoke Yiddish. In honoring this particular building, we honor the past.”⁷⁴

Mrs. Clinton’s comments reflect an assumption by most Americans that the racial diversity we now see in urban America is a recent phenomenon, and that the changing demographics of American cities are simply a continuing saga of ethnic succession, with one immigrant group gradually and naturally replacing another group of former newcomers as they move up the economic ladder. The complicated racial history of Boyle Heights points instead to a story in which few population movements are “natural,” much discontinuity between generations and groups is evident, and the geography of urban America has been decidedly shaped by racialized policy and political turmoil. Moreover, these comments speak to the way in which we have collectively forgotten the history of racial interaction in the past, and the particular way in which the legacies of racial conflict in Los Angeles are erased from the urban landscape.⁷⁵

This particular “forgetting,” however, was initiated by the very anticommunist forces that sought to silence progressive politics in the 1950s. From the deportation of ethnic labor leaders to the outright banning of certain forms of speech, the McCarthy and Tenney Committees, and the government bureaucrats who carried out radical purges, began the process of making sure that the history of leftist multiracial organizing in Boyle Heights would be erased. Moreover, ethnic organizations of all groups with an interest in the neighborhood, from the Jewish Centers Association to the Community Services Organization, had to be careful to hide, if not outwardly attack, any connections to leftist organizers who might threaten their own funding or standing in the wider public of Southern California. Yet, it was the ethnic nationalisms of the 1960s, with their focus on empowerment from the grass roots that would be drawn from single ethnicities, that insured the “forgetting” of this multiracial movement.

The multiracialism that had begun as a homegrown neighborhood movement in Boyle Heights would be difficult to sustain once significant numbers of individuals left the confines of the neighborhood for personal, political, or professional reasons. Yet many of the central players continued to be involved in efforts at racial justice in the wider context of Southern California as the civil rights movement gained steam nationally. In 1952, Mel Janapol, who

had led the Eastside Center's efforts at multicultural programming, stepped down as board president, and his wife, Esther Janapol, left the board to concentrate her efforts on working directly with Edward Roybal on juvenile delinquency programs. Indeed, many members of the Eastside Center remained loyal supporters, as well as staffers, for Roybal on the city council, leading his efforts at reelection into the 1960s.⁷⁶

The politically committed Jews who moved out of Boyle Heights in the late 1950s and 1960s did not generally leave their politics and multiracial sensibilities behind them. But unlike earlier generations of Jews who moved westward into the suburban communities within the city of Los Angeles, many moved east into the growing multiracial cities increasingly reshaping eastern Los Angeles County, along with former Mexican American and Japanese American residents of Boyle Heights. While this geographic mobility moved them outside of the electoral politics of the city of Los Angeles, they often entered the new racial politics of the county's modest suburbs, such as Monterey Park.⁷⁷ Membership in the Monterey Park Democratic Club, for example, included a large number of Jewish Americans, prompting Matthew Martinez, a former Monterey Park City Council member, to note, "All of these people were part of the Democratic Club who were fighting from a strong, heartfelt view of what the Constitution stood for—everybody's equality, everybody's rights."⁷⁸

In the late twentieth century, Jewish Boyle Heights would increasingly become part of the historical memory of a few, rather than a continued part of the present of the neighborhood, yet in time the nature of even this historical memory would be recast by a new Los Angeles desperate for stories of multiculturalism in the city's past. Mrs. Clinton's commemoration of the Breed Street Synagogue was one attempt to recast this history as a story of ethnic succession, but what was missed was the radical politics and multiracial collaborations that had often marked Boyle Heights as a particular site of ethnic cooperation in the midst of racial segregation and political conservatism in Southern California of the 1950s. It is this story that better situates our own search for neighborhoods of diversity that truly worked together in the past and our hope for a multiracial Los Angeles that can work together in the future.

Notes

1. "Boyle Heights: A Sociological Fishbowl," *Fortnight*, October 20, 1954, 20–23.
2. *Ibid.*, 21; Ralph Friedman, "U.N. in Microcosm; Boyle Heights: An Example of Democratic Progress," *Frontier: The Voice of the New West*, March 1955, 12.
3. *Frontier* article, 12; quote is from *Fortnight* article, 21.
4. Robert Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850–1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 88, 93, 173; Scott L. Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of the Modern City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 14–15; Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 68, 78–79, 81.
5. Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 100, 116.
6. Max Vorspan and Lloyd P. Gartner, *History of the Jews of Los Angeles* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1970), 117–19; David Weissman, "Boyle Heights: A Study in Ghettos," *The Reflex* 6.2 (July 1935): 30–31; David Philip Suldiner, "Of Moses and Marx: Folk Ideology Within the Jewish Labor Movement in the United States" (doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1984), 222–32; Wendy Elliot-Scheinberg, "Boyle Heights: Jewish Ambiance in a Multicultural Neighborhood" (doctoral dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, 2001), 98–142, 234–48.
7. Neil Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988).
8. See Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*, and Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
9. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 14.
10. See Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 91–135, 171–99, and particularly 92. See also Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998).
11. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 197.
12. Home Owners Loan Corporation City Survey Files, Area D-53, Los Angeles, 1939. National Archives, Washington, D.C., 7. Also quoted in George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 137.
13. Kevin Starr, *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace, 1940–1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 193.
14. Lynn C. Kronzek, "Fairfax . . . A Home, A Community, A Way of Life," in *Legacy: Journal of the Jewish Historical Society of Southern California* 1.4 (Spring 1990): 15, 23–36; Eshref Shevky and Marilyn Williams, *The Social Areas of Los Angeles: Analysis and Typology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949), 157–59.
15. Letter from Morris J. Kay, publisher, *Valley Jewish News*, to John Anson Ford, February 9, 1950, John Anson Ford papers, Box 75, Folder B IV 5i cc(15), Huntington Library.
16. Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 42–44; Jackson Mayers, *The San Fernando Valley* (Walnut, Calif.: John D. McIntyre, 1976), 172; James Thomas Keane, *Fritz B. Burns and the Development of Los Angeles: The Biography of a Community Developer and Philanthropist* (Los Angeles: Thomas and Dorothy Leavey Center for the Study of Los Angeles, 2001), 70–71; Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 186–215.
17. Memorandum from Milton A. Senn, director, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, December 31, 1948, "Report on Efforts in the Los Angeles Area to Circumvent the United States Supreme Court Decisions on Restrictive Covenants," 8. John Anson Ford papers, Box 75, Folder B IV 5i cc(13), Huntington Library.
18. *Ibid.*, 3.
19. *Ibid.* Tellingly, the only mention of restriction targeted specifically against Jews in this 1948 ADL report was in Lake Elsinore, located in the mountainous region of Riverside County, quite a distance from the major urban or suburban neighborhoods of metropolitan Los Angeles; 5.
20. Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 23.
21. On the local level, see Mario T. Garcia, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930–1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 221–22; and Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 182–85. On the national level, see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*

- (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 26–29.
22. Transcript of interview with Leo Frumkin, conducted by Ken Burt and Sojin Kim, Tazana, California, December 19, 2001, Japanese American National Museum, 7–8.
 23. *Ibid.*, 4–7. For an earlier example of Jewish student radicalism in Boyle Heights, see Abraham Hoffman, “Jewish Student Militancy in the Great Depression: The Roosevelt High School Blowouts of 1931,” *Branding Iron: Los Angeles Corral*, no. 121 (March 1976), 6–10.
 24. *Ibid.*, 9.
 25. Herbert Morris Biskar, “A History of the Jewish Centers Association of Los Angeles with Special Reference to Jewish Identity” (doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California, School of Social Work, 1972), 42–45.
 26. Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, May 18, 1949, Box 9, Jewish Centers Association (JCA), Histories file, Archives, Jewish Community Library, Jewish Federation Council of Los Angeles.
 27. Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, June 13, 1950, and October 10, 1950, Box 9, JCA.
 28. “Boyle Heights, California: A Sociological Fishbowl,” *Fortnight*, October 20, 1954, 23. Keats also set up an intercultural teenage chorus, met regularly with a Mexican American boys group that met at the center, and was a principal organizer of the Hollenbeck Coordinating Youth Council, an activist group set up in the wake of the city’s Zoot Suit Riots of 1943.
 29. Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, June 13, 1950, and January 8, 1952, Box 9, JCA. Indeed, Keats would go on to photograph many of the most progressive and intercultural activities of the 1960s, as evidenced by his photographic collection now available at the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles, California.
 30. Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, November 10, 1949, February 14, 1950, March 14, 1950, and April 12, 1950, Box 9, JCA; Biskar, “A History of the Jewish Centers Association,” 67–69.
 31. Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, November 14, 1950, January 9, 1951, and October 30, 1951, Box 9, JCA.
 32. Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, March 14, 1950, Box 9, JCA.
 33. Interview with William Phillips, conducted by Tamara Zwick, February 22, 1990; Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, April 12, 1950, January 9, 1951, and February 12, 1952, Box 9, JCA.
 34. Text in museum exhibition, “Boyle Heights: The Power of Place,” Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, California, September 2002–February 2003; “Bill Phillips Elected to Head Citizens Committee to Re-Elect Roybal,” *Eastside Sun*, February 1, 1951; Anthony F. Macias, “From Pachuco Boogie to Latin Jazz: Mexican Americans, Popular Music, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1940–1965” (doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 2001), 127.
 35. Interview with William Phillips; JANM exhibition.
 36. Dorothy Healey and Maurice Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers: A Life in the American Communist Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 39.
 37. Rozina Lozano, “The Struggle for Inclusion: A Study of the Community Services Organization in East Los Angeles, 1947–1951” (senior thesis, Stanford University, 2000), 19.
 38. Kim Chernin, *In My Mother’s House* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1983), 161–62, 177–78; Healey and Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers*, 135.
 39. Interview with Ida B. Fiering, conducted by Leslye Sneider, February 23, 1990.
 40. Edward L. Barrett Jr., *The Tenney Committee: Legislative Investigation of Subversive Activities in California* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1951), 37–39; Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 201–2.
 41. Transcript, vol. 48, 55, quoted in Barrett, *The Tenney Committee*, 38.
 42. Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 201.
 43. See Biskar, “A History of the Jewish Centers Association,” 67–68.
 44. Minutes of Board Meeting of Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, September 14, 1948, Box 9, JCA.
 45. Biskar, “A History of the Jewish Centers Association,” 46–51.
 46. Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 201.
 47. Barrett, *The Tenney Committee*, 38.
 48. Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 201–2; Barrett, *The Tenney Committee*, 39; Minutes of the Board Meeting of Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, December 14, 1948, Box 9, JCA.

49. Minutes of the Board Meeting of the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, December 14, 1948, Box 9, JCA; Biskar, "A History of the Jewish Centers Association," 68-69; Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 202-5.
50. See Kevin Starr, *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace, 1940-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), particularly chapters 10 and 11, for one of the best accounts emphasizing the cultural tension between Southern California "folks" like Tenney and Sam Yorty, who led the anticommunist crusade, and elite liberals and leftists in Hollywood and on campuses.
51. The one book dedicated to the AFCPFB, which directly calls the organization "a tool of American communism" (1) is John W. Sherman, *A Communist Front at Mid-Century: The American Committee for Protection of the Foreign Born, 1933-1959* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 2001).
52. See Sherman, *Communist Front*.
53. Following Mexico, Russia, and Poland, the national origins of targeted deportees of 1953 were (in diminishing order): Armenia, England, Greece, Japan, Austria, Italy, Korea, Romania, and Sweden. Eight other countries had one member each represented in the 80 total targeted deportees of 1953. By 1954, the group of deportees had grown to 110. *The Torch*, May 1953, 7, "Correspondence and Publicity: 1953" Folder, Box 14, American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, Labadie Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
54. 1965 program for Fifteenth Annual Conference, Folder 20, Box 1, Los Angeles Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born (LACPFB) papers, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles, California.
55. For a fuller account of the relationship between the LACPFB and the Mexican American left, see Jeffrey M. Garcilazo, "McCarthyism, Mexican Americans, and the Los Angeles Committee for Protection of the Foreign-Born, 1950-1954," *Western Historical Quarterly* (autumn 2001): 273-95.
56. "A Call to the People of Los Angeles!!" LACPFB: Correspondence and Publicity, 1954 folder, Box 14, ACPFB, Labadie Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Torchlight*, May 1954, LACPFB: Correspondence and Publicity 1954 folder; and program for "Festival of Nationalities," June 7, 1953, LACPFB: Correspondence and Publicity 1953 folder, Box 14, ACPFB, Labadie Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan; Festival of Nationalities poster, June 14, 1964, folder 21; and press release for the Third Annual Festival of Nationalities Conference, 1954, Folder 22, Box 1, LACPFB papers, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles, California. See also Chernin, *My Mother's House*, 243-44; and Garcilazo, "McCarthyism," 283-84.
59. Flyer for Edo Mita Victory Celebration, Folder 22, Box 1, LACPFB papers, Southern California Library.
60. One of the best studies of this kind for Southern California is Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 29-53, which focuses on Orange County, California.
61. Hershel Gluck, "City Council Honors Marion and Paul Miller: Jewish Couple 'Led 6 Lives' for Their Country," *B'nai B'rith Messenger*, February 7, 1958, 4.
62. See Neil J. Sullivan, *The Dodgers Move West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 103-5, 145-46, 154-55; and Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), Chapter 5.
63. Charlotta A. Bass to the Honorable City Council, Att. Mrs. Rosalind Wyman, undated, Folder 25, Box 1, LACPFB papers, Southern California Library.
64. Rose Chernin to Los Angeles City Council, February 11, 1958, Folder 25, Box 1, LACPFB papers, Southern California Library.
65. Garcilazo, "McCarthyism," 294.
66. Facts about the Eastside Jewish Community Center of the Jewish Centers Association, prepared for Budget Subcommittee #10, Community Chest-Welfare Federation of Los Angeles, February 1954, Jewish Centers Association files; Minutes of the Eastside Jewish Community Center, 1954 to 1958, Jewish Centers Association, Box 9.
67. Interview with Leo Frumkin, 35-36.
68. Interview with Richard Duran, conducted by Stephanie Duran, February 18, 1990.
69. Vorspan and Gartner, *History of the Jews of Los Angeles*, 297; Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 58; Elliot-Schienberg, "Boyle Heights," 11.

70. Interview with Ida B. Fiering, conducted by Leslye Sneider, February 23, 1990.
71. Quote is from *Fortnight* article, 21.
72. Abraham Hoffman, "My Boyle Heights Childhood, Los Angeles, 1940–50s," *Western States Jewish History* 35.1 (fall 2002): 81.
73. Kronzek, "Fairfax," 36–37; interview with William Phillips, conducted by Tamara Zwick, March 5, 1990; Leilah Bernstein, "The Changing Flavors of Jewish Cooking in Southern California," *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1999, Metro, B1; Matea Gold, "Era Ends as 78-Year-Old Men's Store Calls It Quits," *Los Angeles Times*, October 4, 1999, Metro, B1.
74. Joseph Trevino and Caitlin Liu, "First Lady Visits Historic Synagogue, Movie House," *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1998, Metro, B1.
75. See Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (London: Verso, 1997) for a longer exploration of this subject.
76. When Roybal decided to give up his council seat in 1962 to run for the U.S. Congress, the shift in Jewish geography in Los Angeles led the city's Democratic Party establishment to pick African American Gilbert Lindsey to replace him, leaving Latinos and the Eastside in general left out and forgotten in the new multiracial coalition. See Raphael J. Sonenshein, *Politics in Black and White: Race and Power in Los Angeles* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 31, 43–51, 61–66.
77. Leland T. Saito, *Race and Politics: Asian Americans, Latinos, and Whites in a Los Angeles Suburb* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 133–35.
78. Saito, *Race and Politics*, 64.