“Diversity” on Main Street? Branding Race and Place in the New "Majority-Minority” Suburbs

Wendy Cheng

Departments of Asian Pacific American Studies and Justice & Social Inquiry, School of Social Transformation, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, USA

Online publication date: 24 November 2010
“Diversity” on Main Street? Branding Race and Place in the New “Majority-Minority” Suburbs

Wendy Cheng
Departments of Asian Pacific American Studies and Justice & Social Inquiry, School of Social Transformation, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, USA

The emergence in the United States of an increasing number of spaces across the socioeconomic spectrum with majority nonwhite populations merits close attention because of these spaces’ potential in reconfiguring historical and contemporary claims to place. In an era in which the neoliberalization of urban development has spurred local governments toward more active involvement in defining relationships between race, ethnicity, consumption, and space, “majority-minority” suburbs are particularly important sites of study. In the late 2000s, two branding campaigns in majority-Asian American and Latina/o municipalities in Los Angeles’s San Gabriel Valley—a densely populated region popularly known as a “suburban Chinatown”—put forth specific discourses of race, ethnicity, and culture in attempts to actualize specific visions and claims to place, identity, and history. In doing so, these campaigns illuminated and reinforced larger racial, geographic, and ideological divides. “Diversity” on Main Street embraced pluralist multicultural discourses of the nation, while the “Golden Mile” proposal sought to showcase the transformation of a central thoroughfare by ethnic Chinese capital and immigration. A close examination and comparison of these two campaigns shows how struggles over race, geography, and history are intertwined in the contemporary identities of places and integral to the shaping of civic landscapes.

Key Words: Race, suburbs, place, identity, branding, Los Angeles

If it is now recognized that people have multiple identities then the same point can be made in relation to places. Moreover, such multiple identities can either be a source of richness or a source of conflict, or both (Massey 1994: 153).

. . . the branded metropolis provokes us to return to Lefebvre’s question: ‘Who has the right to the city?’ And it pushes us to ask a new question: ‘Who has a right to the image of the city, and, with it, to a shared vision of the city’s future?’ (Greenberg 2008: 251).

The emergence in the United States of an increasing number of spaces across the socioeconomic spectrum with majority nonwhite populations—what Scott Kurashige has called a “new polyethnic majority” (Kurashige 2004)—merits close attention because of these
spaces’ potential in reconfiguring historical and contemporary claims to place.¹ A growing body of work in recent years, particularly in history and ethnic studies, has complicated dominant narratives of urban and suburban history by placing nonwhites and polyethnic relations at the center (e.g., Kurashige 2008; Varzally 2008; Sánchez 2004; Wiese 2004; Garcia 2001). However, less work has focused explicitly on how emergent narratives, as multiple and conflicting “place identities” (Massey 1994) function spatially and in the present in such places. At a time of rapid demographic and political transition, many “majority-minority” suburbs today find themselves caught between varying bids for civic identities with particular material and ideological ramifications. As such, contests over civic landscapes are also struggles over power in which questions of race, history, and identity are implicated, and the stakes include specific and unequal material outcomes.

In the late 2000s, two branding campaigns in neighboring “majority-minority” municipalities in Los Angeles’s West San Gabriel Valley (SGV)—a densely populated suburban region just minutes by car east of downtown—put forth specific discourses of race, ethnicity, and culture. In doing so, these campaigns illuminated and reinforced larger racial, geographic, and ideological divides. The West SGV, which includes the well-known city of Monterey Park, first gained fame in the 1990s as what has been called a “suburban Chinatown” (Fong 1994; also see Davis and Moctezuma 1999). Indeed, Asian immigrants and Asian Americans make up just over half of the population here, and self-identified ethnic Chinese—of whom nearly four in five are foreign-born—make up about two-thirds of this group.² However, despite such an overwhelming emphasis on the immigrant “Chinese” character of the region, most of these communities are, in fact, highly diverse in terms of ethnicity, national origins, and immigrant-generational status. Most strikingly, Latinas/os make up more than a third of the population.³ Mexican Americans in particular have had a long history in the Valley.⁴ The West SGV was also the site of massive white flight from the 1960s through the 1990s as established white residents fled the influx of Asian immigrants and the transformation of many of the area’s commercial and residential landscapes (Saito 1998; Fong 1994). This subregion of Los Angeles thus constitutes not only an important site of Asian American and Latina/o suburbanization in the contemporary period but also a place rich in multiracial political, economic, and social history.

The two branding campaigns contrasted significantly: “Diversity” on Main Street embraced pluralist multicultural discourses of the nation, whereas the “Golden Mile” proposal sought to showcase the transformation of a central thoroughfare by ethnic Chinese capital and
immigration. However, both deployed discourses of race—in particular, that of “diversity”—in attempts to actualize specific visions and claims to place, identity, and history. In her important study of the branding of New York in the 1970s, Miriam Greenberg points out that civic (urban) branding often plays an important role in erasing complex polyethnic pasts and presents, as well as histories of struggle and inequality. Greenberg defines civic branding as a “marketing-led strategy of economic development” (2008: 35) that is both visual and material in that it combines intensive “place marketing” with neoliberal political and economic development and restructuring. While branding is fundamentally concerned with representation, these representations have material effects because they are intimately tied to economic development and restructuring and so privilege “certain social classes, economic sectors, and geographic regions over others” (Greenberg 2008: 10). Indeed, the city-led “diversity” campaign’s articulation of “decontextualized multiculturalism” (Widener 2003) served to retroactively justify the expulsion of small businesses—many of which were owned by ethnic Chinese immigrants—to make way for national chains and businesses with more “mainstream,” implicitly middle-class, white appeal. The Golden Mile branding campaign, backed by a newly elected Taiwanese American city councilmember, also sought to utilize discourses of diversity but met with stiff resistance from other city officials whose opposition was informed by assumptions of Asian inassimilability and the exclusion of “Asian” space and bodies from the polity. The latter was further complicated by the highly contrasting relationship of local elites to what Carey McWilliams has called a “Spanish fantasy heritage” (McWilliams [1946] 1973), denoting Southern California whites’ claims to place via a fabricated European lineage.

Each episode illustrates the inseparability of such branding campaigns from larger-scale regional and national spatial imaginaries and ideologies, even as they also represent the neoliberal privatization of public spaces as spaces of consumption (Dávila 2004). The actions as well as perceptions of leadership associated with these episodes, including two recently elected Asian American city council members, also signal the complexities of translating individual into public identities within the context of longstanding racial, class, and geographical divides. These dynamics were rooted in a recent regional past characterized by striking disparities between who lives in the area and who makes decisions regarding civic space. A close examination and comparison of these two campaigns shows how struggles over race, geography, and history are intertwined in the contemporary identities of places and integral to the shaping of civic landscapes.
“Diversity” on Main Street

Driving north toward Main Street in the West SGV city of Alhambra in the summer of 2006, you would soon see banners featuring the face of a blond, white woman with blue eyes and black-rimmed glasses (Figure 1). She was a prominent face of the city’s “diversity” campaign, a face that, unlike the vast majority of Alhambra’s population, looked neither Latina/o nor Asian American. How do we read such a scene, in which a young, white woman is touted as an official representative of diversity? In the image below (Figure 2), the blond woman’s face looms over a cluster of Asian senior citizens, on the left, and a passing Latina/o family, on the right. In its neat triangulation, the photograph encapsulates a particular set of struggles over race and ethnicity in contemporary suburban civic landscapes, in which the question of

FIGURE 1 Photo courtesy of the author.
white social, political, and economic dominance looms over the assertion of Asian American and Latina/o pasts and presents in racially coded bids for the future.

First, however, to understand the context out of which the diversity campaign grew, one must begin by going back several decades. The central stretch of Alhambra’s Main Street was declared officially “blighted” in 1972. City officials used this designation to secure redevelopment funds and United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) monies. During the 1970s and 1980s, vacancy rates continued to increase to the point that, by the early 1990s, according to city manager Julio Fuentes, “You could have shot a missile down Main Street and not hit anyone” (quoted in Shirey 2005).

In 1994, Fuentes was hired to take a more aggressive approach to redevelopment (Chavez 2002). Between 1994 and 2006, the city spent more than $30 million (drawn primarily from HUD grants and redevelopment-area tax increments) on public improvements, including land acquisition, tenant relocation, façade improvements, and the building of three new parking structures, to attract commercial development (Vincent 2006; Peschiutta 2002; Liu 1998). A large portion of the efforts were concentrated on a stretch of Main Street that measures not quite one mile long, between Almansor and 5th Streets (see Figure 3). City officials spearheading the efforts acted in an explicitly entrepreneurial manner, behaving “like real estate brokers, scouting out... sites for new businesses that fit their vision for Main Street” (Peschiutta 2002). As Fuentes put it, “We thought: ‘Why don’t we try to become developers ourselves?’”5 (Liu 1998).

By 2002, 40 new businesses and a plaza anchored by a fourteen-screen movie theater complex had opened (Chavez 2002). When some national chains were initially hesitant to move into Alhambra—due,
some city officials thought, to chain representatives’ belief that these businesses would not be popular with “Asian” residents—the city provided extra incentives. For instance, after the national restaurant chain Tony Roma’s refused several overtures, the city bought it an 8,000-square-foot building for over $1 million and spent $350,000 on upgrades. The restaurant opened in 2002 (Peschiutta 2002). The redevelopment agency gave Edwards Theatres a 43,000-square-foot parcel and $1.2 million from a HUD loan for the Renaissance Plaza movie theater. Alhambra was also the first city in the state to give Starbucks a “tenant improvement allowance,” using $136,000 of HUD money (Liu 1998). Although the city used eminent domain only twice during this period of time, some existing business owners and tenants complained about favoritism toward new businesses and “high-pressure tactics.” Arthur Wong, who owned one of the buildings the city wanted to raze, complained that the city’s “vision” was nothing more than to turn Main Street into “a yuppie thing”—excluding, at least implicitly, immigrant-owned, small businesses. Bryan Kan, the son of the owner of a restaurant supply business who sued the city during condemnation proceedings, described how the lump sum for which his father eventually settled still represented a loss of what the family had hoped would be their monthly retirement income. Their family business was replaced by a national smoothie franchise and two small shops, and this was counted by city officials as a redevelopment success story. To Kan, however, it was a misuse of eminent domain: “Normally, you use
W. Cheng

eminent domain for a public use, but not to bring in a juice stand” (Chavez 2002).

Although the dynamics at play in the redevelopment of downtown Alhambra can be explained in part by broader shifts in the neoliberalization of urban development, many Chinese Americans felt that redevelopment had a racial cast, perhaps in part because there was no Asian American representation on city council until 2004—long after the Main Street redevelopment juggernaut had been set in motion. Specifically, according to a Taiwanese American city council member (and developer, by profession) in the neighboring city of San Gabriel, some believed that eminent domain had been exercised disproportionately “to drive away a lot of the Chinese-owned businesses, or properties that were held by Chinese Americans, and they were handed over to developers . . . with a huge advantage” (interview with Albert Huang, 3 March 2009).

Such sentiments cannot be understood fully without considering how Main Street functions as part of a broader north-south, racial-ethnic divide in the West SGV. Generally, whites have lived in the north, Asian Americans in the south, and Mexican Americans in the west (and, in a less concentrated way, in the north and south). Local historian Susie Ling has traced the north-south racial and class divide in the SGV back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when landed wealth and more racially restrictive strictures characterized the area north of Huntington, and railroad depot towns and smaller-scale orchards, farms, and vineyards lay to the south. Accordingly, most nonwhites living north of Huntington during this period were servants and laborers. South of Huntington, some nonwhite groups were more able to carve out modest niches, such as Japanese American truck-gardening families (Ling 2005), and Mexican and Mexican American farmworkers living in camps or colonias in and around El Monte (Garcia 2001). These boundaries were policed and enforced, first with official codes and white vigilante violence, and then by real estate agents in the 1950s through the 1970s, as Mexican Americans and Asian Americans began to settle in the bedroom communities that sprouted along newly constructed freeways (see Figure 4).

In recent decades, this racial and geographical divide has manifested through more subtle struggles in the civic landscape as well as in local politics. In the 1980s and 1990s, numerous racially coded struggles occurred in Monterey Park over growth, commercial development, and signage (Saito 1998; Horton 1995; Fong 1994). For instance, in a protracted struggle over the architectural design of the Atlantic Square shopping center, a group of predominantly white and Latina/o
established residents banded together to affirm non-Asian culture (Saito 1998: 39–54). In one public hearing, a young white man, active in a citizens’ group advocating for “a strong local definition” to the shopping center, asked, “What’s the theme? Things have changed so fast that our roots are blurred. We have to go back to the history of the town”—meaning “European,” not “Asian,” roots (field notes taken by Leland Saito in 1989, quoted in Horton 1995: 92). Planners first evoked Southern California’s Mexican past, suggesting a Mexican architectural theme that was eventually “whitened,” becoming Spanish and, finally, vaguely “Mediterranean.” Saito notes that the wide acceptance of “Mediterranean” style as somehow more “American” than “Mexican” or “Asian” styles also played a role in the struggles in Monterey Park over business signs written in Chinese and other visual markers of Chinese culture.10

Similarly, during the push for redevelopment on Alhambra’s Main Street, Susie Ling remembered that, at “that corner where the Applebee’s is now, they had this huge sign that said, ‘Wanted: American restaurant’ . . . I drove by every day. And I was like, well, screw you” (interview with Susie Ling, 16 April 2007). Ling’s understanding of the word “American” on the sign as unequivocally anti-Asian taps into local memory of a large sign placed at a gas station and printed onto car bumper stickers in Monterey Park in the mid-1980s that read, “Will the last American to leave Monterey Park please bring the flag?” (Horton 1995: 79; Fong 1994: 4). The slogan was widely understood to be an expression of nativist hostility against incoming
Asian immigrants and Asian-owned businesses, and it is still vividly engraved in the minds of long-term Asian American and Latina/o residents today. The “Wanted: American restaurant” sign on Main Street, read in the context of local history as an expression of nativism and barely veiled racism via consumer desires, or the idea that restaurants serving Chinese food, and, by extension, ethnic Chinese people themselves, could not be “American,” suggests that the struggles that began in the Monterey Park of the 1980s and 1990s are not over.

These residential and commercial divides were, and are, also political divides in the eyes of both voters and political candidates. Stephen Sham, a Hong Kong-born, Alhambra city council member, described his experience walking door-to-door in neighborhoods north of Main Street during his campaign for election in 2006:

I went up north, one sentiment that I got from the residents there is—some of them expressed strongly, some of them not, but you can see from their facial expression—one person in particular says, ‘you guys [are] Chinese invaders. They [Chinese] took Monterey Park, they took Valley Boulevard, they now come to Main Street—when [are] you guys gonna stop?’ (interview with Stephen Sham, 14 June 2007).

In this exchange, the white, north Alhambra resident depicts Main Street as the last stronghold of territory that has not yet been “taken” by “Chinese invaders” in their northward sweep. Sham described what he felt was the general attitude of such north-of-Main residents: “when I send my propagandas, my brochures, out to the voters—especially up north—they see the Chinese family [and think], ‘To hell with you. I don’t know you, I’m not going to vote for you.’ ”

In sum, Main Street was never neutral territory, a blank slate upon which a harmonious multicultural future could be drawn.

In 2003, the merchants of the Downtown Alhambra Business Association (DABA), a merchants’ association independent of the Alhambra Chamber of Commerce and covering a more limited geographical area, were ready to solidify the identity of Alhambra’s reconstituted Main Street. The work was initially contracted to a high-profile design firm in Santa Monica. DABA asked Gregory Thomas, the head of the firm, “to give the area one alluring brand image.” Thomas interviewed about twenty business owners and civic officials and noted that “the same word—diversity—came up over and over again in his interviews” (Chang 2003). Thomas also drew inspiration for a “Mosaic on Main” theme from mosaic tiles decorating the new Edwards movie theater plaza. “With the colors all working together, a mosaic reflects the quality of the restaurants and the shopping, and
the diversity of the people, which is what makes Alhambra unique.” DABA spent $28,000 on the branding effort in 2003 and had budgeted an additional $30,000 for 2004 (Chang 2003). The four faces meant to represent Alhambra’s “diversity” on banners hung on and around Main Street in subsequent years, selected from stock photographs to “match” the area’s demographics (e-mail correspondence with Gregory Thomas, 24 May 2010), included what appeared to be a young, blond and blue-eyed white woman; a middle-aged Asian American man; a young, olive-skinned woman with light freckles and dark hair (labeled as “Latina”); and an older, blond white woman (Figures 5–8).

Municipal celebrations of diversity or multiculturalism are often, as various scholars have pointed out, a flawed panacea in their “reification of decontextualized ethnicity” (Widener 2003: 136). In such pluralist expressions of multiculturalism—of a “mosaic” “with all the colors working together”—distinct racial, ethnic, and immigrant groups are leveled and presented, in the words of Lisa Lowe, as “equally ‘other’ . . . metaphorized as equally different and whole without contradiction.” Official multiculturalist narratives that suppress tension and opposition suggest that the American dream has already been, or will imminently be, fulfilled; that “multiculturalism” has already been

**FIGURE 5** Photo courtesy of Gregory Thomas Associates.
FIGURE 6 Photo courtesy of Gregory Thomas Associates.

FIGURE 7 Photo courtesy of Gregory Thomas Associates.
achieved and “is defined simply by the coexistence and juxtaposition of greater numbers of diverse groups” (Lowe 1996: 96). With their celebratory tone, multiculturalist narratives allow us to gloss over structured inequalities, conflicts, and heterogeneity among different racial, ethnic, and immigrant groups (Lowe 1996: 84–96). Indeed, in their presentation, Alhambra’s diversity banners imply equivalence without specificity and present whiteness as just another “ethnicity,” one of a rainbow of ethnic options (cf. Waters 1990). Race is reduced to individuals of various ethnic provenances and different kinds of consumption, as suggested by a banner that is also titled “Diversity,” but which features, instead of faces, an image of a colorful plate of salad (Figure 9). In such a “festive public deployment of race and ethnicity” (Cocks 2001: 194), cultural differences are celebrated largely as commodities available for possession to an implicitly white Anglo public (also see Kropp 2006: 207–260; Deverell 2004: 49–90; Valle and Torres 2000: 67–99).

In the end, the “diversity” and “mosaic” themes, with their implications of egalitarian multicultural harmony, belied two important aspects of Alhambra’s Main Street. First, the celebratory multicultural
version of Main Street did not merely reflect the municipality’s diverse population but had been produced via concerted efforts by city officials to excise particular types of small businesses—many of which were ethnic-Chinese and immigrant-owned—to make room for national chains with “mainstream,” implicitly white, appeal. Second, Main Street was, and remains, contested terrain, a key dividing line in the racial geography of Alhambra.

**The Golden Mile proposal**

The Golden Mile will serve as one of Southern California’s most vibrant shopping, dining and entertainment destination districts with emphasis on its rich heritage and well influenced Asian and fusion cultures. . . . The essence of the Golden Mile is defined by the pursuit of the American Dream and the symbol of the Golden Opportunity (Huang 2009).

In May 2006, 30-year old Albert Huang, a 1.5-generation Taiwanese immigrant, was selected by the San Gabriel City Council, whose members are elected at-large, to replace Chi Mui. Mui, an immigrant from
Hong Kong, had been elected as the first Asian American city council member in San Gabriel’s history in 2003. Mui was a well-loved public official known for bridging language and cultural gaps and had become the city’s first Asian American mayor only two months earlier, before passing away from liver cancer in April at the age of 53 (Pierson 2006). Huang considered Mui a mentor and came into office determined to honor the older man’s legacy, particularly Mui’s habit of referring to San Gabriel’s vibrant, commercial stretch of Valley Boulevard as the “Golden Mile.” Like Alhambra’s “diversity” campaign, Huang’s “Golden Mile” plan would use banner-based branding to market the city’s approximately one-mile stretch of Valley Boulevard to both visitors and locals. Valley Boulevard, according to city planner Mark Gallatin, “has been the economic engine for the city of San Gabriel for the past decades” (Ho 2006a). Emblematic of the character of Valley Boulevard is San Gabriel Square, a huge complex of pan-Asian restaurants and stores dubbed by mainstream English-language media as “The Great Mall of China” and a “Chinese Disneyland” (Carpenter 2005). San Gabriel Square is anchored by a department store that caters to Chinese-speaking clientele and 99 Ranch Market, the largest Asian American supermarket chain in the United States and Canada, and it features restaurants like the 1,000-seat Sam Woo Seafood Restaurant. By the mid-2000s, San Gabriel Square alone provided as much sales tax revenue to the city of San Gabriel as some of the other commercial streets “along their entire length.” Initially funded by a Taiwanese commercial bank and private investors, San Gabriel Square is indicative of how coethnic local, regional, and transnational flows of capital have shaped the contemporary development of the West San Gabriel Valley (cf. Zhou and Tseng 2001).

According to Huang, Chi Mui, a “true champion of diversity,” emphasized the retail and business opportunities on Valley Boulevard that offered a “golden opportunity” to immigrants: “it’s where people from different walks of life go . . . to pursue a better tomorrow.” Since the Golden Mile’s “essence” was “the pursuit of the American Dream” (Huang 2009), it was “for everybody”: “In the Chinese community it kind of refers to Golden Mountain, but it’s also ‘golden opportunity, the American Dream” (interview with Albert Huang, 4 May 2007). More generally, Huang envisioned the Golden Mile as a “destination district” that, while emphasizing “its rich heritage and . . . Asian and fusion cultures” (Huang 2009), would also “serve the entire community” and “celebrate . . . not only the current vitality, prosperity, but also the diversity that we want it to . . . achieve.” In the spring of 2007, after transitioning into a new four-year term as councilman, Huang began in earnest to push forward the “Golden Mile” concept.
To understand the struggle that ensued over Huang’s vision, one must first understand the historical geography of San Gabriel. Like its neighbor Alhambra, San Gabriel is divided internally north to south, with the north holding larger numbers of wealthier, long-term, white residents and the south being home to a more heterogeneous mix of working-class to middle-income Asian Americans and Mexican Americans. Symbolically, the “historic Mission district,” where city hall and other municipal buildings are located, anchors the “north,” while San Gabriel’s portion of Valley Boulevard looms large in the “south.”

The question of civic identity in San Gabriel is complicated by the fact that it is home to Mission San Gabriel (official city slogan: “the city with a mission”), the first of the Spanish missions in California and a key signifier of California’s Spanish fantasy past. In California, and to some extent in the American Southwest as a whole, struggles over space codified as “Chinese” or “Asian” must be discussed alongside the erasure of Mexican and indigenous pasts and presents from the landscape. More specifically, in Southern California, the fabrication of a “Spanish fantasy past” was key to the establishment of a newly arrived Anglo American power elite in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (McWilliams [1946] 1973; Deverell 2004). Indeed, the selective incorporation into the San Gabriel social and political elite of middle-class Mexican Americans with long family histories in the area—some of whom are descended from land-owning Californio families—as well as the presence of a significant working-class Mexican American population and recent local activism that seeks to highlight San Gabriel’s Chicana/o history, indicates the regional complexity and ambivalence between Californio, Mexican American, and Chicana/o identities.

As in Alhambra, such racial and political dynamics were often described in spatial terms. Mike Murashige, whose Japanese American family has lived in San Gabriel since the 1920s, described the train tracks just below Las Tunas Boulevard as “a hard barrier” between a working-class, Mexican American barrio, ringed by industrial corridors, and “everything else.” He also described how “a lot of people” noted the differences between the two zip codes in San Gabriel (interview with Mike Murashige, 30 March 2007). Indeed, in 2000, an average resident of the northern zip code reported a median household income almost 50 percent higher than her southern zip code counterpart and a per capita income almost 75 percent higher. She was much more likely to own a home, and northern home values were much higher, on average, than those in the southern zip code. Finally, she was three times more likely to be white. Albert Huang did not realize the degree of “the polarization of the city, the north versus the south,”
until he became a city official. He characterized the political power in the north as dominated by mostly white, wealthy residents, as well as some Latinas/os, who had lived in San Gabriel for a long time. “It’s kind of weird, because people say, well, you’re very diverse. To the north, you’re mostly Caucasian, to the middle part, you’re mostly Latino, south, you’re Latino and Asian. That’s not diverse” (interview with Albert Huang, 4 May 2007). San Gabriel residents like Eloy Zarate, who is Mexican and Argentinean American, had heard people say that the “Asian” population was “taking over,” “spilling over” northward from Monterey Park. Some felt that “Monterey Park wants to take over San Gabriel” (interview with Eloy Zarate, 18 April 2007).

In this divided racial and geographical context, the Golden Mile proposal ran into opposition from other city council members almost immediately. In Huang’s view, when he presented the initiative to the chamber of commerce and other city officials, he encountered opposition that was clearly expressed in racial terms. In May 2007, he described the proposal’s reception:

Some major concerns that came out of the initial proposal was that people were uncomfortable with . . . the street being renamed. And I said, it’s not about renaming the street . . . We’re adding that name to this area. That’s one. Number two . . . another concern that came out was well, when you say diversity, what diversity are you celebrating? . . . And I think the concerns mainly came out from the non-Asian groups. They said . . . does Golden Mile have to do with Hong Kong’s Golden Mile? . . . So there was, again, some concerns about that, that I’m serving—primarily serving the Chinese American community by renaming this area (interview with Albert Huang, 4 May 2007).

In contrast to the relative ease with which the city of Alhambra was able to wield a decontextualized “diversity” campaign, Huang’s proposal to ground a vision of present and future “diversity” in an ethnic-Chinese dominated space was subjected to intense scrutiny and skepticism. Councilwoman Juli Costanzo, a longtime resident of north San Gabriel, and a member of the Mission District Partnership (to be discussed in more detail below), wondered publicly whether “limited staff time and resources would be better spent on other commercial areas”: “Valley is such a phenomenon to begin with. We’re very well known for Chinese restaurants, but I would like more variety throughout the city and not just focused on one area” (Ho 2007). Councilman David Gutierrez was also reluctant to support the initiative, although, unlike Costanzo, he did not oppose it outright. Indeed, Gutierrez acknowledged that, “we need an identity that will not only preserve the
history of the city, but one that remains open to the new members of the community.” However, regarding Valley Boulevard, he stated that “non-Asian residents,” whom Gutierrez characterized as the “forgotten 50% of the population,” complained about the lack of “Western world” restaurants, like national chains Tony Roma’s or the Claim Jumper. For many such residents, Gutierrez believed, shopping in an Asian supermarket was outside of their comfort zone, adding that he himself felt “more at home” buying groceries at a nearby Vons or a Mexican market: “I like my beans, my tortillas, my carne asada” (Chavez 2004).

It is notable that, at least on the public record, Costanzo and Gutierrez focused their comments on food (restaurants and supermarkets), giving the impression that any opposition to municipal support of initiatives on Valley Boulevard such as the Golden Mile were based on a desire for more “variety” and balance in “ethnic” options (cf. Waters 1990); it was a matter of culture and diversity, not race, consumer options rather than civic representation. In addition, although Gutierrez’s evocation of the “forgotten 50%” might contain some ambiguity (regarding who was forgotten, and who was doing the forgetting), his categorization of this segment of the population as “non-Asian,” and encompassing both “Western world” restaurants and “my beans, my tortillas, my carne asada,” grouped Mexican (American) culture together with “mainstream” Americanness and created an alignment from which “Asian” supermarkets were explicitly excluded.

In March 2009, I met again with a visibly beleaguered Huang. He seemed more dedicated to bringing the Golden Mile proposal to fruition than ever, but, even though nearly two years had passed, he was still fighting to get the proposal off the ground. After failing to get any definitive support from his fellow council members and the chamber of commerce in 2007, Huang began to approach Valley Boulevard-based businesses and ethnic organizations, trying to “get all the organizational support . . . the property owners’ support, and the business support.” He worked with Chi Mui’s widow, Betty Mui, to raise money “to help buy the banners,” “completely outside of city money” (interview with Albert Huang, 10 March 2009). In working primarily through private channels, Huang followed an already existing pattern of development on Valley Boulevard, at least among ethnic Chinese immigrants. The massive growth of restaurants, stores, and services, on San Gabriel’s and adjacent sections of Valley Boulevard since the 1980s has been largely funded by private capital stemming from businesses and banks helmed by ethnic Chinese (cf. W. Li 1999, 2006; W. Li et al. 2002; Y. Zhou and Tseng 2001; Y. Zhou 1998; Tseng 1994a, 1994b), an infrastructure that, it is important to note, initially stemmed from structural racism against Asians and other
groups categorized as nonwhites. After the lukewarm reception of the Golden Mile proposal by city officials, Huang’s choice to pursue funding through private, ethnic community-based sources confirmed the continuing need of ethnic Chinese immigrants to draw financial support from sources other than state-based institutions. In 2009, the text of Huang’s “Golden Mile” proposal included the statement, “The corridor is an economic phenomenon without any financial assistance from the government” (Huang 2009). Indeed, few business owners on Valley Boulevard were members of the San Gabriel Chamber of Commerce—a situation Huang suggested may be due, at least in part, to the chamber not making sufficient efforts to recruit there—and, since there was no unified Valley Boulevard merchants’ organization, Huang had to go literally door-to-door to drum up support for the proposal.

Huang was now also considerably more blunt about resistance to the Golden Mile proposal, stating that there was, in his opinion, definitely “persecution, discrimination” against Asian immigrants, especially from wealthy white residents in the north, signified by attitudes toward businesses and issues on Valley Boulevard, such as the perception that there must be illegal activities going on and that “Asians are dirty.” Furthermore, since the “propensity to vote” was up north, Huang believed that many city council members thought they should serve the people who voted them in: the north, and not the south. Huang, still the sole Asian American on the council, felt that race and ethnicity was an element in city issues “all the time.” In the city council campaign that had just ended,

we’ve heard people say, ‘Valley Boulevard doesn’t serve the residents of San Gabriel.’ And that’s crazy. Because 60 percent of the population is Asian American. And you’re saying Valley Boulevard doesn’t serve the residents? I mean, it obviously serves somebody. It serves predominantly Asians, because there’s so many Asian businesses here. But . . . you know, it’s just very unfortunate that people speak of things like that (interview with Albert Huang, 10 March 2009).

The concerns posed by “non-Asian groups” to Huang speak to how Asian American politicians with immigrant backgrounds such as Huang (and Stephen Sham in Alhambra, as discussed above), have both had to contend with what Ruth Wilson Gilmore has called the “performance effect,” in which an audience member or interlocutor attributes motivations and interests based on an identity (e.g., racial) ascribed to the speaker by the audience member or interlocutor himself (Gilmore 2005). According to Huang, as the only Asian American member of San Gabriel’s city council, “it was easy for them [city officials
and members of the public who opposed the Golden Mile plan] to think that I’m doing this kind of with a . . . selfish intention, for my ethnic community, you know, my Chinese heritage prompted me to do this.” Therefore, when asking, “When you say diversity, what diversity are you celebrating?” and “Does Golden Mile have to do with Hong Kong’s Golden Mile?” questioners may have been unable to separate Huang’s appearance and position as the sole Asian American body on the council from his (presumed) motivations. As Huang puts it succinctly, “[S]ome people thought when I say ‘Golden Mile,’ that it was meant to serve the Chinese.” When he was told this, Huang says, “I [was] shocked because to me, it’s essentially [the] opposite . . . It’s not to serve the Chinese, it’s to serve the whole community” (interview with Albert Huang, 4 May 2007). On the other hand, Huang believed that, when “non-Asians” argued for the Golden Mile, including two economic consultants and a white city councilman, Kevin Sawkins, audiences were much more willing to listen. Referring to Sawkins, Huang said, it “absolutely” made a difference: “People have a tendency to think this is an Asian concept. So when he [Sawkins] comes in and he speaks on . . . the Asian community’s behalf, it’s superb” (interview with Albert Huang, 10 March 2009).

In fact, “Golden Mile” is a popular name for numerous locales around the world in addition to Hong Kong’s Golden Mile, from the stretch of banks and financial institutions in San Juan, Puerto Rico; to beachfront promenades in South Africa and England; to swaths of expensive real estate in Moscow; and even to a stretch of Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles (King 2003). However, former mayor Chi Mui’s upbringing in Hong Kong, Albert Huang’s Taiwanese background, and the plethora of restaurants and shops on Valley Boulevard primarily targeting ethnic Chinese immigrants, made only the Hong Kong reference salient to the chamber of commerce.

As a final point, the city’s approach to the Mission District, compared to its approach to Valley Boulevard, is illuminating: in marked contrast to the absence of any official city support for the Golden Mile proposal, the city has been continuously, and conspicuously, involved in promoting and “revitalizing” the Mission District, which is central to its identity as “the city with a mission.” In 1996, the city formed the Mission District Partnership, an organization of “businesses, residents, government, schools, organizations and various entities with an ongoing interest in the success of the San Gabriel Mission District” (San Gabriel Mission District Partnership 2005). The Partnership’s stated goal is “to cooperatively develop, promote and market the District as a destination for tourism, culture, entertainment, dining and shopping” (San Gabriel Mission District Partnership 2005). Juli Costanzo, the
white city councilmember and longtime resident of North San Gabriel who has consistently opposed the Golden Mile proposal, is an affiliate of the Partnership, and the city provides it with significant staffing and organizational support. As Huang puts it, “the [Mission District Partnership] meetings are completely organized by the city. Versus the Valley Boulevard stakeholders meeting, this is something that, it’s kind of like, thrown at us—‘Hey, you go and organize it.’ It’s a completely different idea.”

In the early 1990s, the city spent about $2.6 million in state and local funds in the push to develop the Mission District. Revitalization attempts have continued into the present: a current plan encompasses several new mixed-use developments and remodels. The first project to be built under this plan, Mission Villa, is a mixed-use development “designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival architectural style to complement the historic character of the district.” Mission Village, another mixed-use project, proposed by the owners of upscale Chinese restaurant Mission 261 (brothers Harvey, Lewis, and York Ng) in a site adjacent to the restaurant, would include a “Spanish Colonial style boutique hotel” (San Gabriel Grapevine 2009: 3). The willingness of ethnic-Chinese immigrant business owners to participate in promoting a “Spanish,” or broadly “Mediterranean,” theme, particularly to gain “mainstream” acceptance, has also found expression on Valley Boulevard in retail developments such as those built by Sunny Chen, a Taiwanese businessman, who opened a $60 million-dollar Hilton Hotel across from San Gabriel Square in late 2004. Chen chose a “contemporary Tuscan décor” “to make non-Asian visitors feel more at home.” A buffet featured both “Western” and “Asian” food, and the hotel’s meeting rooms were named after California missions (Chavez 2004). Indeed, in many Pacific Rim countries, a Spanish-fantasy or faux-Mediterranean architectural style has now become emblematic of the “good life” that can be achieved by Asian immigrants in Southern California21—as apt an indication as any of the potent ideological caché of this fabricated regional history.

The validating function of vaguely “Spanish” and “Mediterranean” references in the Mission District as well as on Valley Boulevard stands in stark contrast to city council members’ negatively coded speculations about Golden Mile’s possible linkage to Hong Kong. The contrasting civic investments and attitudes toward these two areas illustrate how an elite, white-dominated north continues to keep a tight grip on who can make claims to San Gabriel’s identity and history, as well as what the nature of those claims can be. The nurturing of the Spanish fantasy past, via Mission District revitalization and “Mediterranean” architectural styles, was prioritized, while city officials maintained a “let it be” attitude toward Valley Boulevard
through coding it as perpetually foreign, autonomous “Asian” space.\footnote{W. Cheng} Just as nineteenth-century Chinese settlements were officially considered unsanitary, morally aberrant, and sources of bodily and territorial contagion (Molina 2006; Shah 2001; Lin 1998; Anderson 1987, 1995), these contemporary struggles over the West SGV’s landscape are racially coded in terms of values and territory.\footnote{478} In short, places coded as “Chinese” or “Asian” (e.g., Valley Boulevard) are still seen as either threats encroaching upon implicitly white, “American,” suburban space, or autonomous foreign spaces that may be tolerated but are not to exceed their prescribed bounds or to be incorporated within official civic identities. The prescription and negotiation of these bounds, which are both symbolic and material, are precisely what is at stake in such spaces.

**Conclusion**

Alhambra’s “diversity” campaign and San Gabriel’s Golden Mile proposal illuminate how conceptions of race, space, and history work in tandem with state-structured processes to produce specific power relations that are sedimented and recodified in the landscape. In these two struggles over branding civic landscapes, officials and residents in majority-minority, suburban municipalities fought to put forth particular representations of history and identity. In Alhambra, the deployment of multiculturalism in the “diversity” branding campaign on Main Street papered over a divisive process of redevelopment and larger racial and geographical divides in the region. In San Gabriel, a predominantly white elite nurtured a Spanish fantasy past while refusing a Taiwanese American council member’s bid to claim Valley Boulevard as a “diverse” space and celebrate the city’s economic transformation by localized and trans-Pacific ethnic Chinese business networks. In these episodes, it is clear that state practices, in the form of local government, have the power to perpetuate existing, as well as create new, racial meanings through the conflation of racial and spatial discourses (cf. Shah 2001; Anderson 1987, 1995; P. Li 1994).

In Los Angeles’s San Gabriel Valley, despite rapidly transforming demographic and economic contexts, an “old guard,” white elite still holds sway in its municipal governments, with significant ramifications for the region’s civic landscapes. Each episode also speaks to the confluence of particular spatial configurations within the region, as well as larger-scale ideologies. Chinatown typologies of race and space are still salient in discourses of Chinese “takeover” or “invasion.” Such struggles over “Chinese” (usually used interchangeably with “Asian”) space must also be put in conversation with ambiguous constructions of Mexican Americans as both more and less “American”
than Asians and understood in the historical context of the erasure of Mexican and indigenous pasts and presents from the Southern California landscape and the fetishization of a partial and illusory European heritage. In lobbying for the Golden Mile, a proposal that would acknowledge Valley Boulevard, with its predominance of Asian and Asian American-owned businesses, as integral to San Gabriel, Albert Huang troubled the waters and revealed that civic landscapes are intimately tied to particular conceptions of regional identities and histories; in this case, the illusion of an authentic, “Spanish” European past, upon which Southern Californian whites’ claims to power rest, left room for little else.

In the present moment, in the West SGV, celebrations of decontextualized multiculturalism (Widener 2003) and, conversely, the denial of claims to “diversity” to populations that are predominantly non-white, serve a purpose similar to that of the deployment of the Spanish past by Anglo elites in the early nineteenth century (Kropp 2006; Deverell 2004): to obscure material inequalities built into landscapes, institutions, and economies (Lowe 1996). By emphasizing the conflicts and disjunctures within officially endorsed narratives of place, critical evaluations of civic branding initiatives—as in the two examples discussed above—can expose institutional and ideological processes by which systemic inequalities are naturalized. More ethnographic study and comparative analysis of how local governments shape civic space in contemporary majority-minority suburbs will improve understanding of how historical geographies and state practices actively produce familiar, everyday landscapes, particularly vis-à-vis intertwined discourses of race, ethnicity, and space. Following Gramsci (2005; cf. Hall 1986), future research might also explore the ways in which such rapidly changing demographics present moments of crisis for entrenched leadership and local elites and, as such, offer potentially rich opportunities for the reconfiguration of existing power relations.

**Notes**

Received 18 January 2010; accepted 9 July 2010.

I thank Arlene Dávila and Johana Londono for their guidance in developing this article. Juan David De Lara, Christopher Niedt, and two anonymous reviewers provided assistance in the process of revision. I presented a version of this paper at the Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica in Taipei, Taiwan on December 28, 2009, and received valuable feedback from several audience members, including Yen-fen Tseng, Naiteh Wu, Mau-kuei Chang, and Jonathan Ying. This article began as a portion of a chapter in my dissertation, and I thank my chair, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and committee members, Laura Pulido, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and David Lloyd, for their intellectual provocations and continuing support.
1. In the specific context of the San Gabriel Valley, see Ochoa 2004; Saito 1998; Pardo 1998; and Fong 1994.

2. As of 2000, Asian Americans were 51.5 percent of the total populations of Alhambra, Monterey Park, Rosemead, and San Gabriel, and self-identified Chinese made up 66.8 percent of those Asian Americans (calculated from U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 1, DP-1.).

3. Cumulatively 34.3 percent (calculated from U.S. Census 2000 data, Summary File 1, DP-1.). The total population of these four cities in 2000 numbered 239,164—comparable to Scottsdale, Arizona (235,677) and Jersey City, New Jersey (242,389), and larger than, for example, Orlando, Florida (227,907), or Madison, Wisconsin (228,775) (calculated from U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 1, DP-1.). The population of the San Gabriel Valley as a whole numbered just over 1.5 million in 2000 and was estimated to have grown to nearly 1.8 million in 2006, a population comparable to the San Francisco metropolitan area (Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation, “San Gabriel Valley, 2006 Economic Overview and Forecast,” http://www.visitsangabrielvalley.com/wis%5CReports/SGV-2005.pdf).

4. Mexican Americans’ history in the San Gabriel Valley dates from before the United States conquest of Alta, California, and continues through the formation of citrus labor communities in the East SGV from the early to mid-twentieth century. Since the 1950s, a significant population of middle-income Mexican Americans has moved east from East LA into the West SGV. Suburbanizing later-generation Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans began to arrive with their Mexican American counterparts beginning in the 1950s as well, unwittingly laying the groundwork for the massive ethnic Chinese immigration that would begin in the late 1970s (Saito 1998; Fong 1994). In the 1970s and 1980s, new Asian immigrants—Vietnamese and other Southeast Asians political refugees, many of them ethnic Chinese, and immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong seeking to escape political uncertainty—flowed into the area, as well as to eastern SGV cities like Rowland Heights and Hacienda Heights. Latina/o immigrants moved into cities slightly further east, such as El Monte and La Puente (Ochoa 2004). The 1980s saw an increase in Asian American, as well as Latina/o, political power in the area, with the election of several Latina/o and Asian American politicians (M. Zhou, Tseng, and Kim 2008).

5. In 1997, Alhambra was awarded HUD’s Best Practices award for economic development, for, in the words of HUD spokesman Larry Bush, “acting as an entrepreneur” and being an example of “government shouldering the responsibility to meet the economic opportunity needs of its own community” (Liu 1998).

6. For example, to make way for the Edwards theater complex, several immigrant-owned small businesses, including a bakery, a wig shop, a dental office, and a Vietnamese restaurant, were told to move or face eminent domain proceedings; three national chain restaurants (Johnny Rockets, Panda Express, and Applebee’s) eventually replaced the small businesses (Liu 1998).

7. Here I refer broadly to the rise of the entrepreneurial state, in which decentralization and increased mobility of capital forces municipal governments to compete for investment and wherein public spaces are reshaped as arenas of privatized consumption (cf. Dávila 2004; Brenner and Theodore 2002; Weber 2002; Gregory 1998; and Harvey 1989).

8. The most conspicuous example of north-of-Huntington wealth is, of course, railroad tycoon Henry Huntington’s vast estate in exclusive San Marino. San Marino,
which borders both eastern Alhambra and San Gabriel to the north, was incor-
porated in 1913 by Huntington and a group of wealthy ranchers when neighboring
cities threatened to annex their extensive land holdings. Ever since, San Marino
has prided itself on being what the local newspaper calls “the finest, exclusively
residential community in the West.” Beginning in the 1980s, the historically old-
money, white community changed substantially with a large influx of affluent,
ethnic Chinese immigrants; currently, Asians are a slight plurality, making up
nearly half of the residents. However, the community’s deep investment in prop-
erty values (with a median home sales price of $1.4 million in 2007) and exclusivity
has changed very little: in 1990, San Marino residents opposed a bid to join the city
from 900 households to the north and in 1993 resisted a state mandate to provide a
minimal thirteen units of affordable housing (Pulido, Barraclough, and Cheng n.d.).

9. Mike Davis and Alessandra Moctezuma (1999) have written of a suburban “third
border” in the West SGV, in which wealthy, ostensibly white, suburbanites effec-
tively racially police public space such as municipal parks by limiting access to their
working-class (assumed to be) Latina/o neighbors through instituting stiff entry
fees or blocking pathways in certain neighborhoods.

10. In addition, in the United States, the commonly accepted connotation of the term
“Mediterranean” as exclusively European serves to create an ideological erasure of
the geographical fact that the Mediterranean Sea is encircled by West Asia and
North Africa as well.

11. The geographical area covered by DABA is bordered by 3rd St to the west, Chapel
Avenue to the east, Alhambra Road to the north, and Beacon Street to the south. An
assessment on businesses within these boundaries pays for licenses and promotion
(phone conversation with Sharon Gibbs, Business Outreach Manager, Alhambra
Chamber of Commerce, and formerly of DABA, 11 February 2009).

12. In the case of Los Angeles, an implied linear narrative, which depicts Los Angeles
as the city of the multicultural future, proffers a false version of history that denies
Southern California’s Mexican, indigenous, and multiracial pasts (Deverell 2004;
Widener 2003). Also see Kurashige on a political shift from integrationist goals to
the use of multiculturalism as “world-city” boosterism in Tom Bradley’s mayoral

13. In 2005, San Gabriel Square brought in $378,000 in sales tax revenue for the city,
which receives 1 percent of all taxable sales (Ho 2006a).


15. By ensconcing “Spanish” architectural references in the landscape and placing the
Spanish Franciscan missions in a mythicized narrative of European racial succe-
sion, Anglo Americans relegated Native Americans and the Spanish to the past,
asserting their place in national narratives of manifest destiny and frontier colo-
nialism. In the process, “Mexicans” were rendered as both invisible laborers and
hypervisible, threatening foreigners; indigenous Californians were reduced to van-
ishing, picturesque figures in a sentimentalized history (Kropp 2006). Dating back
to 1848 and continuing through the twentieth century, discriminatory spatial and
economic practices, buttressed by such ideologies, have contributed to both the “bar-
rioization” (Camarillo 1979) and dispersal (e.g., through practices of urban renewal
and freeway building) of Los Angeles’s Mexican American population (Villa 2000).
Partially in response to such practices, Chicana/o activists and scholars both in and
following the 1960s Chicano Movement have placed issues of history and repre-
sentation in civic landscapes at the forefront of contemporary struggles for social,
political, and economic equality (Valle and Torres 2000; Villa 2000; Acuna 1996).
16. For example, in a struggle to save a local park, the organization Friends of La Laguna centrally placed the immigrant, Chicana/o history of San Gabriel (KCET 2007a, 2007b; Ho 2006b, 2006c; Lubisich 2006; see also Cheng 2009).

17. As scholars, such as Mary Pardo (1998) and José Calderón (1991, 1992), have noted, in predominantly middle-class-identified, suburban settings, such as the West SGV, the role of ethnic and political identifications for Mexican Americans is far from clear cut.

18. The homeownership rate was 64 percent, compared to only 39 percent in the south. Median value of single-family owner-occupied homes was 41 percent higher in the northern zip code than in the southern ($282,400 compared to $199,900) (U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 1, DP-1; Summary File 3, DP-2, DP-3, and DP-4).

19. Approximately one in three residents in the northern zip code were white, whereas south of Las Tunas Drive, in the southern zip code, only one in ten were (U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 1, DP-1; Summary File 3, DP-2, DP-3, and DP-4).

20. Cathay Bank, the first Chinese American bank, was founded in Los Angeles’s Chinatown in the early 1960s specifically to counteract mainstream lending discrimination and to help new immigrants navigate United States financial institutions. Cathay Bank proceeded to open the first Chinese American bank branch in Monterey Park in 1979, planting the first seed of what would subsequently become the largest concentration of ethnic community-oriented banks in the United States (W. Li et al. 2002; Y. Zhou 1998).

21. See Rosenthal 2003, among others, on Orange County, China, a suburb of Beijing.

22. Although patterns of immigrant Chinese settlement in the United States have shifted over time, from the dispersed settlement of laborers and merchants in the nineteenth century to central urban Chinatowns to, currently, what Wei Li calls an “ethnoburb,” or a multiethnic suburb (W. Li 1999, 2005, 2006), the racial ideologies that inform discourses around “Chinese” race and place have remained remarkably the same. Indeed there is a long history of discourses about Asians “taking over” or trespassing the boundaries of their allotted space, in North America as well as other Pacific Rim British settler societies, such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (see especially W. Li 2006). Such sentiments are inextricable from conceptions of areas of Chinese settlement as foreign spaces that operate autonomously, a notion whose currency in Eurocentric thinking dates back at least to the eighteenth century, when a class of diasporic Chinese merchants began to establish themselves globally in interstitial spaces created by European imperialism (cf. Ong and Nonini 1997). The eventual abstraction of these historically grounded conceptions into (racial) common sense gave them a normative quality, leading to the conjectural leap that “Chinese” or “Asian” spaces should operate autonomously, neither requiring nor being worthy of partaking in public resources. The spaces produced and reproduced by such ideas and discourses are made most obvious in the numerous urban Chinatowns in the United States and Canada. For example, geographer Kay Anderson (1987, 1995) documents how Vancouver’s Chinatown became a “physical manifestation” of the abstraction “Chinese,” in no small part due to state practices. In Anderson’s words, “Chinatown accrued a certain field of meaning that became the justification for recurring rounds of government practice in the ongoing construction of both the place and the racial category.” Chinatowns are, therefore, a “western landscape type,” shaped and produced by racial ideologies and state practices in Western societies, rather than any straightforward expression of “Chinese” culture or practices (Anderson 1987: 583–585).
23. In addition, the ideological tactics involved in such struggles are similar in Chinese “ethnoburbs” throughout California. For instance, discourse around “monster houses,” or the practice—usually attributed to wealthy Chinese immigrants—of purchasing a house, then tearing it down to build a larger house, often resulting in a significant reduction of yard space, are one way in which ethnic Chinese immigrants are seen as unable to conform to American values and ideals and are therefore somehow unfit as neighbors and, by extension, as members of American civil society (W. Li and Park 2006; W. Li 2006). For discussions of similar discourses in Canada, see Mitchell 2004 and P. Li 1994.

References

Davis, Mike and Alessandra Moctezuma 1999 (9 October). Policing the Third Border. *Colorlines.*


Ho, Patricia Jiayi 2006c (21 December). Group rallies to keep playground structures at park. San Gabriel Valley Tribune.


“Diversity” on Main Street?


