

# Neighborhood Survey Project

*Boyle Heights, California*



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*GEOG 167AC*

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**Picture one:**



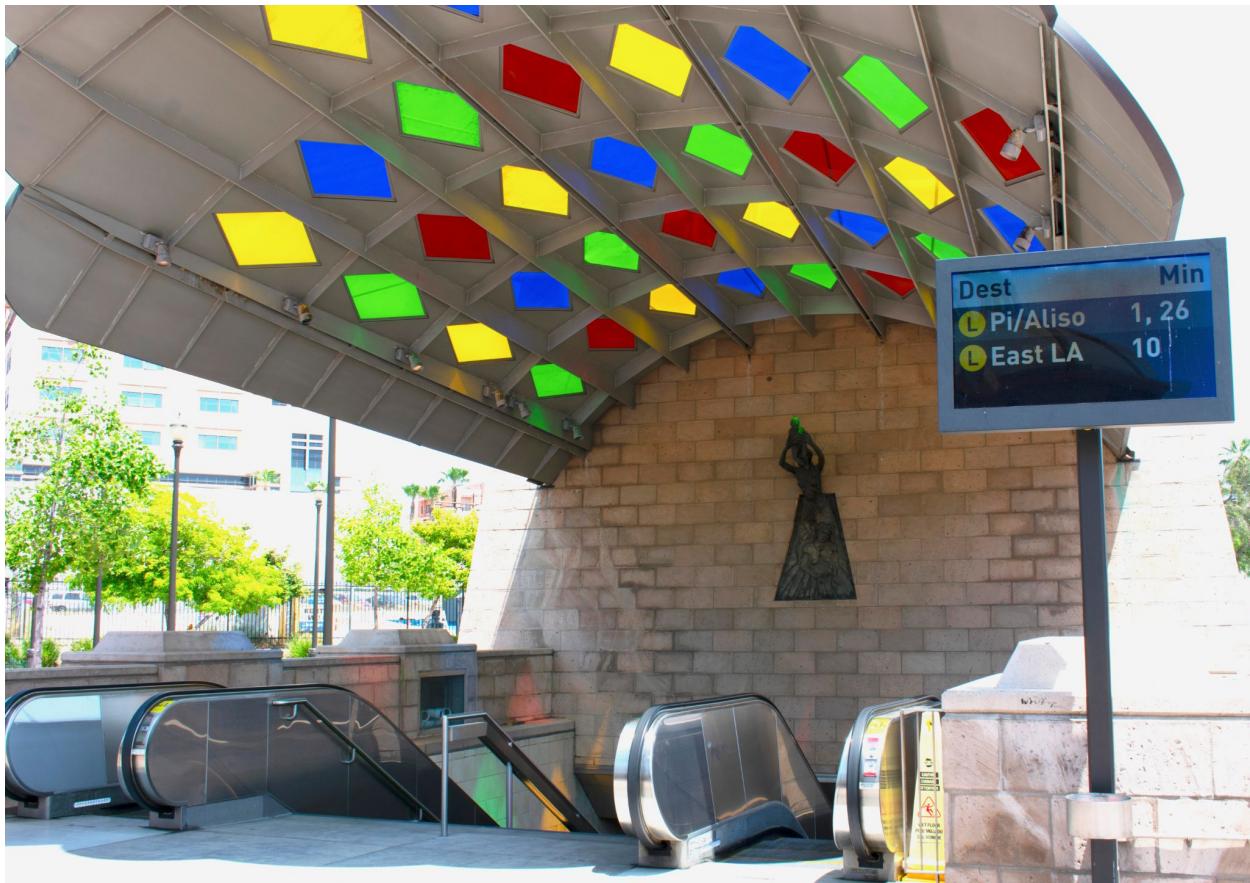
This picture shows the reality of what it is to live in Boyle Heights, gentrification is affecting everyone. I wanted to highlight the fact that there are residents that have lived here their entire lives, but with gentrification they are in danger of becoming displaced. Groups of friends often gather at, where I consider the heart of Boyle Heights, Mariachi Plaza. Mariachi Plaza is a place where mariachi bands come to play music and find work.

**Picture two:**



Hollenbeck park is one of the most popular parks located in Boyle Heights. This park contains a playground, skatepark, a bridge, two water fountains, beautiful trees, and wildlife who roam through the field of grass. Families and friends come to this park to have picnics, take pictures, enjoy nature, etc. Although people that first visit Hollenbeck park only notice the graffiti and homelessness population, it is so much more than that. Many events are hosted at Hollenbeck park because it is accessible to everyone in the neighborhood and allows the residents to come together.

**Picture three:**



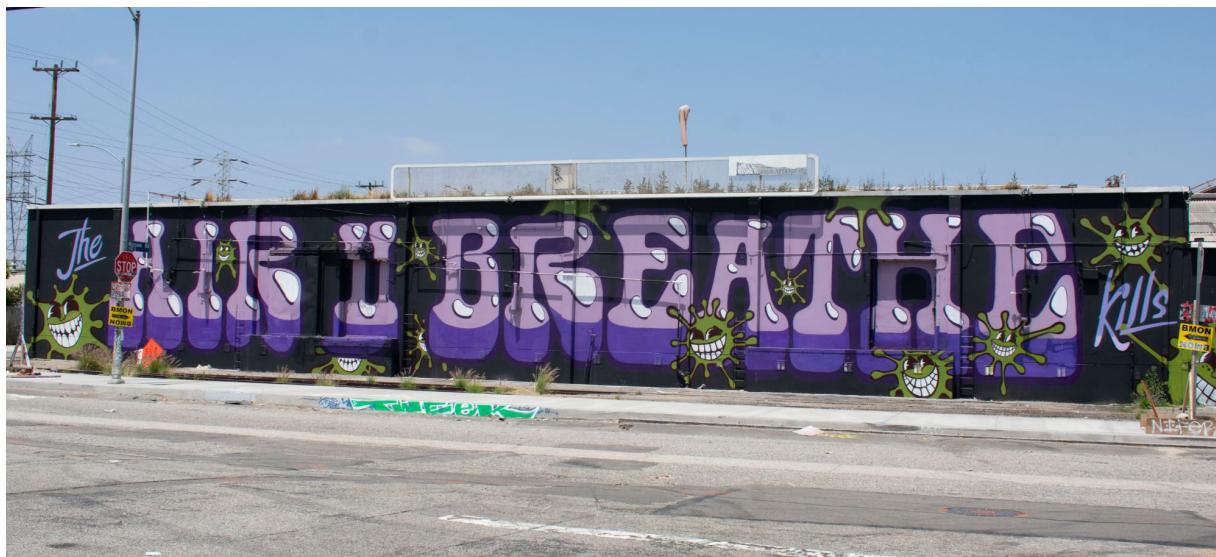
This is a metro station located in Mariachi Plaza. Since Boyle Heights is a low-income community, it is important that we have modes of public transportation that are accessible. Many people rely on public transportation to get to and from work/school every day. This particular station is very popular because it connects Mariachi Plaza to Downtown Los Angeles. Therefore, we see many occurrences where people from other communities come to Boyle Heights to enjoy our family-owned restaurants, street vendors, and celebrations.

**Picture four:**



This mural shows an image of a mariachi in honor of the many mariachi bands that come together to play music for our residents. This is located in Mariachi Plaza to remind everyone that is how the name came to be. Mariachi Plaza is one of Boyle Height's six landmarks and arguably the most important one because it serves as a gathering place for businesses and community members. However, with gentrification now affecting Boyle Heights we are in danger of losing the significance to the names of our landmarks, therefore it is important that we have artwork to remind our community of how we came together.

**Picture five:**



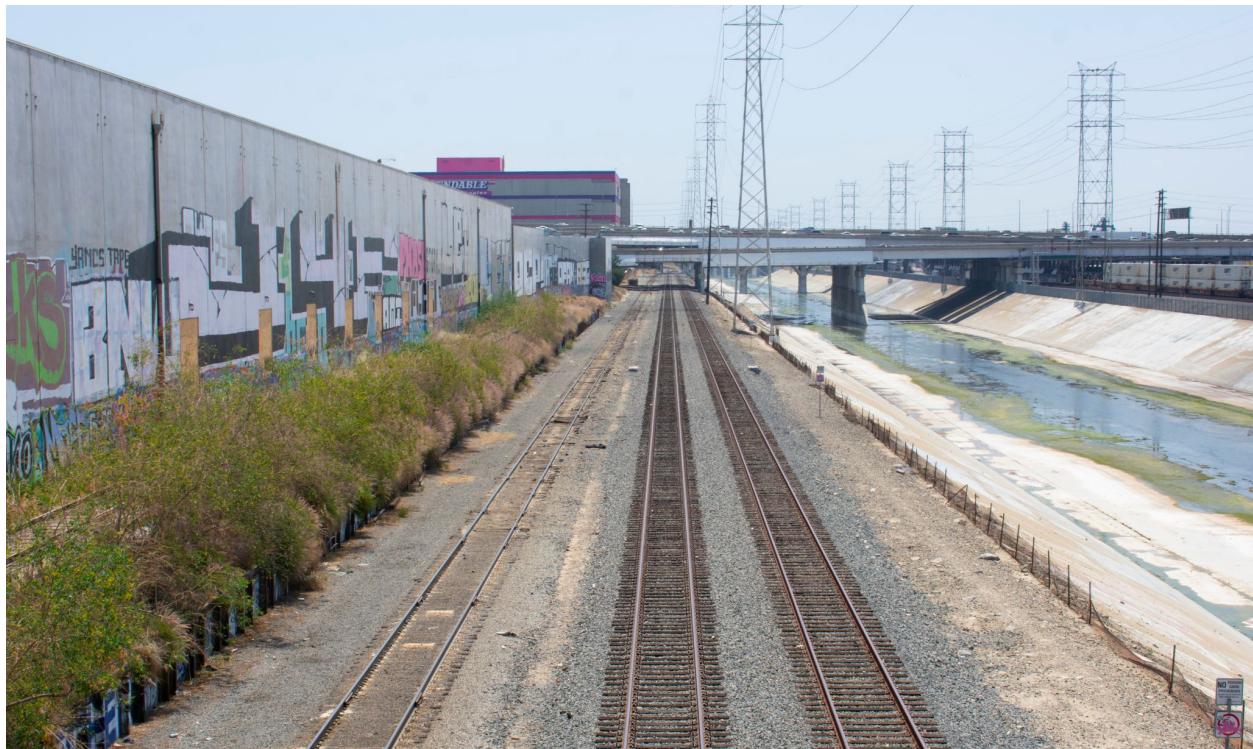
This is a mural created by an anonymous artist in the industrial area of Boyle Heights. I took this mural to mean protect yourself and others from COVID 19. This is an important message because most residents are elders that typically do not have health care, therefore reminding everyone that this is a serious issue that benefits all in the long run. This is an example of graffiti being a way to reach everyone in the community because many people walk past this street every day on their way to work.

**Picture six:**



I wanted to show one example of how our community comes together to help each other and to help the planet by having a yard sale. Living in a low-income neighborhood there are yard sales almost every day in almost every street you walk down since many people are not financially accessible to shopping malls and other stores. This helps our community come together because it allows for the residents to communicate and socialize with one another.

**Picture seven:**



This is one example of the many trains we have in my community. The reason we have so many is because Boyle Heights is surrounded by industrial buildings that manufacture and release products into the world. These train tracks lead to all over California whether it is to offer a mode of transportation or to transport goods to another city. Many people use these trains every day to travel to work that is outside of the city. These train tracks are especially important to the community because it is the most popular thing of Boyle Heights that is shown in the media. Musical artists use the bridges and the train tracks as a place to shoot music videos and photography.

**Picture eight:**



This mural was made by Nani Chacon. She is a Dine and Chicana artist that focuses her art on pressing issues that affect people of color, more specifically women of color. My community uses art to express themselves on a level that anyone can understand to make it more accessible. I understand this mural to mean that no matter where we are in the world, we are bonded together by our experiences that come from similar ethnicities. We must stand up for each other and protect each other in need.

**Picture nine:**



Pictured here is the Sears tower that everyone in Boyle Heights knows. Sears offered a place for people of the community to shop for name brand, good quality things without spending too much or having to travel out of the neighborhood. However, things have recently changed. The Sears tower has now gone out of business after 94 years. Rumors of it becoming a COVID testing, and vaccination site have been floating about but no confirmations yet.

**Picture ten:**



Murals of the Virgin Mary are quite common around Boyle Heights. Almost every empty wall contains art, and we use these murals of her to honor her. We often gather to appreciate her by leaving her gifts and decorating the mural with flowers and lights. This is a symbol of my community because many Chicano residents follow Catholicism.

**Picture eleven:**



This is a famous tree that appears in many movies such as Blood in Blood out. Recently, they had tried to chop this beautiful tree down to build in the lot. However, the community came together to protect the tree and its significance on both East LA and Boyle Heights.

**Picture twelve:**



This is a sign that sits right in the middle of Boyle Heights. Many kids, teens, and adults pass through this street to get to school and to work. You can see the Downtown Los Angeles skyline in the background to highlight how close we are to nearby famous landmarks. This can also be seen as a negative because it makes Boyle Heights more susceptible to gentrification due to the wealthy people that visit from Downtown.

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### The Beauty of Boyle Heights

Boyle Heights, formally known as Paredon Blanco, is located in the Los Angeles area west of East Los Angeles. Boyle Heights is a predominantly Chicano neighborhood that is full of traditional Mexican and Latin culture. However, this was not always the case. In the early 1900s, Boyle Heights was beaming with diversity. Many people migrated here from neighboring countries such as Mexico, Russia, Japan, etcetera. With the hundreds of immigrants coming from all over the world, we witnessed the collision of cultures come together to form what we now know as Boyle heights. There were many positive aspects of the neighborhood that formed because of the collision of cultures, like the many religions and religious worship places that bloomed. However, there were downfalls to having so many immigrants in one place; Boyle Heights was then deemed dangerous and untrustworthy by racist and xenophobic people. Since the neighborhood was low income and had such a bad reputation, people were often redlined by banks, unable to buy homes, and had trouble finding work. Also, since the train station was so close to the community many people often used this to their advantage to find jobs in Boyle Heights without having to go through all the trouble of proving themselves as trustworthy and responsible. Another example of Boyle Height's xenophobic history is when an executive order was put into place that stated to incarcerate the Japanese American people. Boyle Heights was deeply affected by this due to the large amount of Japanese American residents living there at the time. It had been reported that “1/3 of the senior class at Roosevelt High School was

incarcerated" (Ohanesian 6). The removal of the hundreds of residents alongside the construction of freeways caused displacement among everyone in the community. However, eventually, the community settled and came together to fight for just causes.

Throughout the years, I have noticed that whenever Boyle Heights is represented in the media, they always highlight the bad parts of it, like the gangs, graffiti, and violence, however in this project, I wanted to highlight the positive aspects of this neighborhood. My experience here started when I began attending elementary school in Boyle Heights. Since I had been secluded from my culture because I was previously attending a predominantly Asian American school, I was interested to learn more about my culture from people other than my family. I learned about the Chicano influences on the neighborhood and how that has indirectly influenced my life as well as my parents' lives, allowing us to attend school in such a diverse place. This community contains multiple popular landmarks, parks, schools, etc. that are beaming with Chicano culture. For example, when I was growing up, I associated graffiti with bad things considering it always ruined the look of a building until I witnessed firsthand just how impressionable it could be. That is the reason I wanted to feature graffiti in my pictures. Factoring in that since most of the residents are immigrants, many did not have the opportunity to go to school to learn. Therefore, I now see graffiti as beautiful art that people use to express themselves and tell stories in a way that makes it accessible to everyone. One positive aspect of our neighborhood is the amount of respect we have for our past residents in Boyle Heights. There is a museum dedicated to telling the history of the Japanese American community that was affected by the executive order. Many schools take their students there to learn about their history to make sure we fully understand what happened. We especially learn about Chicano culture, which is the most predominant in Boyle heights. I was taught from a young age not to be

afraid to express myself in any way, including representing my culture. We as a community pride ourselves on being Mexican/Latin because we were told to be ashamed of and to hide our culture since we were given such a bad reputation. For example, in the 1960s Mexican American students that attended Roosevelt High school walked out in protest of racism, lack of college planning, and inequality amongst all students. Those students, of all races, stood together to fight for a cause that would affect them as well as future generations. Almost 60 years later, my generation planned a walkout in protest of racism we experienced due to the election of our former President, Donald Trump. We protested because we saw this as an opportunity to show that we are all connected in this neighborhood and we fight what we feel is unjust. In this project, I want to make it known that what is primarily shown in the media is gangs and violence, but all I have known is love, bravery, and celebration. We celebrate being able to be surrounded by many people who have had similar experiences. We celebrate Mexican holidays to honor our ancestors. We walk around our community to shop at family-owned businesses and support street vendors who have been running for years.

I have now realized that times are changing, with gentrification on the rise, Boyle Heights is under attack and might not be able to preserve our culture. One author state, "once the neighborhood became "safe," Los Angeles real estate developers, administrators, and politicians had a newfound interest in its development and began laying down plans for a new arts district, which will result in mass displacement" (O'Brien 389).

Since we are so close to Downtown Los Angeles, we have had people start traveling down to Boyle Heights that are suddenly interested in our neighborhood. They travel here to open new shops owned by wealthy families that will eventually cause Latin-owned businesses to shut down. New art exhibits are opening that will erase the history that has already been painted

on the walls. New apartment buildings are being built that cause rent to rise and eventually displace residents. However, we have learned from our past and realize we have more options than to just accept being displaced. We are now starting to educate the community about the harmful effects of gentrification to combat it together.

When creating my project, I wanted to show the beauty of the different cultures and people in Boyle Heights. I wanted to emphasize that we are a family that can come together in support of one another. We must remember the past and learn from it because “lack of access to these lost fragments of memory, ignorance of this history, almost got me killed” (Lovato xxvi). In other words, if we do not learn from our mistakes, we are in jeopardy of losing our culture, the place we call home, and even our family. In Boyle Heights, we do not believe in borders, we believe that everyone is created equally no matter their gender, sexual orientation, race, etc.

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