

Concord, California and 'La Monument'

CHANGING SPACES, SHIFTING NARRATIVES



Source: "Photograph of Monument Boulevard (1969)." *East Bay Hills Project* | *The Gentle Curve of Monument Boulevard*. Web. May 8, 2021.
<https://www.eastbayhillsproject.org/gentle-curve-monument-boulevard>.

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It is a spectacularly ordinary Tuesday night in the East Bay Area city of Concord, California, yet Monument Boulevard continues to buzz with life and unwavering charisma. The drool-inducing aroma of freshly prepared tacos and pupusas emanates from rows of food trucks, the cheerful chatter of satisfied customers discussing the events of a long day's work, and the uninterrupted hum of vehicles driving along a bedraggled road altogether suggest that the beating heart of Concord is a single, lengthy street which remarkably links labor, migration, community, and multiculturalism in a physical space that outsiders are quick to label as 'sketchy' or 'ghetto.' For six years, I called the Monument Corridor my home, and it was only after moving to Walnut Creek (a predominantly White and notably 'affluent' neighboring city) that I began to yearn for the sense of intercommunal solidarity and unpretentiousness that Concord so often exudes.

However, as best described by activists with the Community Coalition for a Sustainable Concord, there appears to be an "imaginary wall" that distinctly separates the middle-class city from high-income areas in its immediate vicinity,¹ notwithstanding Concord's alarming gentrification rate.² Given that some 27 percent of the city's population consists of immigrants of varying statuses, the history and physical landscape of Concord has been unequivocally shaped by migration, grassroots community-building, and counternarrative storytelling.³ Taking these points into consideration, the following discussion will prioritize Concord's development, demographics, and the presence of a unique space dedicated to inter-cultural recognition and partnership known colloquially as 'La Monument.'

¹ Community Coalition for a Sustainable Concord. (2008). "Turning Swords into Ploughshares: Diverse Coalition Emerges in Concord to Transform Weapons Station." *Race, Poverty, and the Environment*, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 84. Accessed May 8, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41554600>.

² Tepperman-Gelfant, Sam. (2014). "Gentrification: Coming Soon to a Neighborhood Near You." *Public Advocates*. Accessed May 8, 2021. <https://www.publicadvocates.org/resources/blog/gentrification-coming-soon-to-a-neighborhood-near-you/>.

³ Data USA | Concord, CA. Accessed May 8, 2021. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/concord-ca/#health>.

Those familiar with Anzaldúan theorizations may recognize the Chicana scholar's use of the term 'nepantla'—or the Nahuatl word which signifies an in-between, constantly transitioning space—and its typical application to complex identity-related matters.⁴ Although the city of Concord is no human being grappling with an intense period of psychosocial transformation, 'La Monument' is by all accounts a geographic space whose landmarks, developments, and residents exist in an intermediary zone that is somewhat similar to (yet largely detached from) surrounding localities and, as a result, is oftentimes belittled or erased altogether from dominant narratives and discursive representations of the area.

According to researcher Adriana Cruz-Manjarrez, it is well-documented that upon entering a new and intimidating country such as the United States, the tight bonds and social networks that immigrants of a given community inevitably create increase the likelihood that more newcomers will join them.⁵ Not unlike the Yalalteco immigrants who came to settle and build flourishing communities in Los Angeles, primarily Mexican and Central American immigrants have unremittently preserved the backbone of Concord's tight-knit community for decades and arguably built today's presentation of 'La Monument' from the ground up. When two crucial Mexican land grants were assigned to Californio elites Don Salvio and Don Miguel Pacheco during the 1830s, a majority of Ygnacio Valley became rapidly populated by pueblos which catered to the basic needs of laborers and vaqueros. Eventually developing into the town

⁴ Keating, AnaLouise. (2006). "From Borderlands and New Mestizas to Nepantlas and Nepantleras: Anzaldúan Theories for Social Change." *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*: Vol. 4: Iss. 3, Article 3. <http://scholarworks.umb.edu/humanarchitecture/vol4/iss3/3>.

⁵ Cruz-Manjarrez, Adriana. (2013). *Zapotecs on the Move: Cultural, Social, and Political Processes in Transnational Perspective*. Rutgers University Press. Accessed May 10, 2021. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hjc97.8.

of Todos Santos in 1868, the later renamed Concord had become a profitable and community-oriented space for Spanish-speaking individuals and gold-hungry Anglos soon thereafter.⁶

Contemporary ‘La Monument’ represents much of what the nineteenth century pueblos would have looked like at the time. With popular local businesses such as Señor Burbujas Laundromat, Los Rancheros Supermarket, and Tortilleria El Molino, in addition to accessible affordable housing units like Sun Ridge Apartments scattering either side of the boulevard, a single street transformed into a city within a city—dedicated to culturally representing and directly serving Concord’s 32-percent Latinx population, low-income families, and otherwise underserved communities.⁷ However, existing maps of Monument Boulevard do not necessarily depict this truth and are thus indicative of what anthropologist Fernando Coronil would characterize as “incomplete representations” of the multitudinous realities that occupy a given space. This is to say that while the pursuit of a ‘complete’ map is a fruitless undertaking, the creation of a one which illuminates and de-mystifies the spaces inhabited by those whose stories are not often told is a worthwhile enterprise that contributes to practices of decolonization.⁸

Despite being the largest city in Contra Costa County and close in proximity to its ‘affluent’ neighbors, Concord still struggles with combatting its alarming pollution emissions,⁹ demilitarizing its police presence, and resisting widespread gentrification.¹⁰ Given the city’s adjacency to numerous military bases and compliance with robust enforcement, it is no surprise

⁶ “Chronology of Concord History.” Concord Historical Society. Accessed May 10, 2021.

<https://concordhistory.com/chronology-concord-history/>.

⁷ Data USA | Concord, CA. Accessed May 8, 2021. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/concord-ca/#health>.

⁸ Coronil, Fernando. (1996). “Beyond Occidentalism: Toward Nonimperial Geohistorical Categories.” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 73. Accessed May 11, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/656209>.

⁹ “CalEnviroScreen 3.0.” California Office of Health Hazard Assessment. Accessed May 10, 2021. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/report/calenviroscreen-30>.

¹⁰ Tepperman-Gelfant, Sam. (2014). “Gentrification: Coming Soon to a Neighborhood Near You.” *Public Advocates*. Accessed May 8, 2021. <https://www.publicadvocates.org/resources/blog/gentrification-coming-soon-to-a-neighborhood-near-you/>.

that the approximately 16 percent¹¹ of undocumented Concord residents are more often than not subjected to what philosopher Giorgio Agamben refers to as ‘states of exception,’ or the process of suspending legal protections while concurrently unleashing the full force of the carceral state.¹² Although a significant proportion of noncitizens who live in the Monument Corridor work essential, yet low-wage jobs in upscale cities such as Walnut Creek, ICE and, by extension, ‘crimmigration’ is omnipresent throughout the area.¹³

Setting aside Concord’s many problems, it is important to recognize that ‘La Monument’ residents and organizations are leading the way to ensure their marginalized communities are adequately represented, protected, and afforded equitable resources—regardless of background or immigration status. Such organizations include Neto Community Network¹⁴ and Monument Impact¹⁵—both of which have seemingly adopted a philosophy of what scholars Tara Yosso, Daniel Solorzano, and guest lecturer Carlos Hagedorn would agree is ‘counter-storytelling.’¹⁶ By challenging widely accepted narratives which perpetuate white-washing and racism through amplifying Concord’s most vulnerable voices, Monument Boulevard’s sociopolitical presence has become as pervasive as its cultural influence. Although ‘La Monument’ may retain its nepantla status for the foreseeable future, perhaps it is one of the reasons why this special

¹¹ Data USA | Concord, CA. Accessed May 8, 2021. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/concord-ca/#health>.

¹² De Leon, Jason. (2015). *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. University of California Press. Accessed May 10, 2021. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=2025610>.

¹³ Davis, Aaron. (2018). “As ICE raids ramp up, Contra Costa launches hotline for legal help, reporting ICE sightings.” East Bay Times. Accessed May 9, 2021. <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2018/03/02/as-ice-raids-ramp-up-contra-costa-launches-hotline-for-legal-help-reporting-ice-sightings/>.

¹⁴ Neto Community Network. Accessed May 9, 2021. <https://www.netocn.org/about>.

¹⁵ Monument Impact. Accessed May 9, 2021. <https://monumentimpact.org/en/home/>.

¹⁶ Solorzano, Daniel G. and Yosso, Tara J. (2002). “Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Educational Research. Qualitative Inquiry.” *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 1. Sage Publications. Accessed May 10, 2021. https://www.academia.edu/1756376/Critical_Race_Methodology_Counter_Storytelling_as_an_Analytical_Framework_for_Educational_Research_Daniel_G_Solorzano_and_Tara_J_Yosso_Qualitative_Inquiry_2002.

geographic space has continuously succeeded in its mission of cultural resistance despite its proximity to the forces of universalism.

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Surrounded by prominent cities such as Walnut Creek, Pleasant Hill, and Clayton, Concord is the largest city within Contra Costa County — carrying with it a complex history that has been (and continues to be) shaped by migration, marginalization, community organizing, and counternarrative storytelling. Although each distinct part of Concord has its own story to tell, one that is particularly fascinating and oftentimes overlooked is that of the Monument Corridor, which is home to what is commonly referred to as 'La Monument.' Unlike some other parts of the East Bay Area, Monument Boulevard alone serves thousands of primarily Mexican and Central American immigrants of varying immigration statuses, low-income residents, and other sidelined communities. As such, contemporary cartographic representations and dominant narratives surrounding the locality tend to leave such crucial details out and, in doing so, further silence those whose stories have never truly been told. While philosopher Fernando Coronil initially contends that there is no such thing as a complete, perfect map, there is such a thing as a map that validates, reclaims, and recognizes the existence of such tight knit, culturally diverse spaces. This map attempts to do just that by almost exclusively emphasizing local businesses and community spaces such as Monument Impact, La Mercaderes Supermarket, and Señor Burbujas Laundromat — all of which have been central to Monument Boulevard's impressive cultural resistance in the face of intensifying gentrification. Altogether, the map not only represents some of Concord's central features, but also the places which make spaces like 'La Monument' worth appreciating.

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