

**Originating Proposal: September 1994**  
**Written By: Karen L. Stokes**

**L.A. AS SUBJECT:**  
**Transformative Culture of L.A. Communities**

**Overview**

The intent of this project is to examine how we approach historical research on the cultural evolution of urban Los Angeles, and to combine the academic expertise of scholars and the experiential expertise of community historians/planners to begin compiling more information about local historical resources. The primary goal of this project is to promote new research on L.A., particularly the transformative nature of its culturally layered communities, and to demonstrate leadership in developing a process which can initiate sharing of material resources amongst institutions and private sources that will support new research...

...The strategy used to engage the public in various phases of this project will include: a series of three workshops/lectures sponsored in collaboration with the Center's "Imaging the City in the Americas" seminar, on the subject of historical resources located in L.A. (year one replicated by this project in year two); two public community forums which will examine perspectives on transformative culture in L.A. communities (year three); and, a series of four seminars which will invite a cross-disciplinary group of Getty staff, scholars, researchers, and graduate students to discuss selected sections of the research (year three). Collectively these forums will be used as opportunities to interpret and analyze, in phases, the results of our research.

This project will culminate in year four with a symposium on "L.A. as Subject," which will be presented in conjunction with an exhibition of new historical resources uncovered as a result of our research. The exhibit is expected to be a collaborative effort, planned as a part of a larger exhibition scheduled in conjunction with the "Imaging the City in the Americas" seminar. A primary product of this project will be the publication of a directory on culturally diverse historical resources such as, collections, archives, and artifacts located in L.A.

The project is timed to provide new research and resources on L.A. culture to coincide with the planned scholar year theme of "L.A. as Subject" in 1996-97, and to compliment the Center library's developing collection on L.A. It is also structured to provide linkage opportunities with the scholar year themes of "Memory" (94-95) and "Collections" (95-

96). This project provides both the process and resource linkages for Getty scholars to fluidly participate at whatever level of interest is comfortable by participating as lecturers, seminar presenters, panelists, symposium presenters, or simply observers.

Questions that our research will address include:

- What methodologies are required to locate, examine, track, and preserve adequately community artifacts and other historic materials?
- What cross-disciplinary methodological practices should be used to study the multicultural artifactual legacy and memory of L.A. communities?
- What disparate and common elements exist between historical and contemporary transformative processes in L.A. culture?
- Where and how does the scientific process of conservation intersect with conservation as a cultural practice?
- How can we adapt the more visible historical records and resources such as maps, demographic studies, institutional collections, etc. that exist on the subject of L.A. as research tools that will support the process of our investigation of L.A. culture?

The project components include:

94-95 YEAR 1	95-96 YEAR 2	96-97 YEAR 3	97-98 YEAR 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research Phase I Preliminary</li> <li>• Committee Development</li> <li>• Imaging the City Workshops/Lectures</li> <li>• Scholar Year Memory Linkage</li> <li>• Resource Directory Research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research Phase II Primary</li> <li>• Committee Implementation</li> <li>• Lectures/ Workshops Continuation</li> <li>• Scholar Year Collecting Linkage</li> <li>• Resource Directory Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scholar Year L.A. as Subject</li> <li>• Public Forums</li> <li>• Seminars on L.A. Resources</li> <li>• Resource Directory Draft Review</li> <li>• Exhibition/ Symposium Planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symposium L.A. as Subject</li> <li>• Exhibition L.A. Collections &amp; Resources</li> <li>• Resource Directory Distribution</li> </ul>

It is projected that this project will provide the dual benefits of (1) continuing the process already begun of building relationships with diverse Los Angeles communities, and (2) provide the historical research required for Los Angeles to be examined beyond ethnically clustered artificial geographic boundaries which tend to segment our differences and distort our interpretation of L.A. culture, rather than promote an understanding of L.A. as a "transformative culture" that has the capacity to represent the varied dimensions of our cultural legacy.

### **Rationale**

Over the last three years, the Center has been engaged in an examination of Los Angeles in relationship to the arts and the humanities through a series of public programs produced in collaboration with diverse L.A. community-based organizations. The emphasis has been on popular and ethnic culture, exploring where and how these topics fit into contemporary discussions regarding the status of research in art history and the humanities. This examination was accelerated by our institutional need to further understand and create a credible response to the social implications of the '92 civil unrest. The Center's response through collaborative public programming was, in effect, our

attempt to "walk through a segment of the labyrinth [L.A.]...to show that it can be traversed,"<sup>1</sup> within the context of the Center's mission.

We learned through experimentation and through information gained from our Community Leadership Roundtable, that as the Center continues to evolve as a generator of advanced research and scholarship, L.A. must be one of the components integrated into the Center's ongoing analysis of critical questions regarding place, status, images and paradigms of "high," "low," "elite," and "popular" culture. This focus is important because L.A. is a "global community" with over one hundred and eighty-three different racial/ethnic enclaves coexisting in our urban space. Los Angeles is also one of the most internationally intriguing and influential cities in the world, not only as a major global economic center, but as one of the primary producers and exporters of popular culture.

However, in all of its complexity and status as a "global community," the perception and understanding of L.A. culture remains extremely linear. The city tends to be defined and approached by scholars and researchers conducting historical research on urban Los Angeles in terms of geographic segmentation, which is based on artificial race and class borders, i.e., East L.A. is Latino, West L.A. is Euro-American, South Central L.A. is African American, Civic Center is business and homeless, Beverly Hills is new-wealth, Mid Wilshire is Jewish, West Hollywood is Gay/Lesbian, Pico Union is immigrant, etc. The more visible and accessible historical records tend to show that L.A. has a pattern of segmenting social, economic, and ethnic groups -- not unlike most major urban cities in the U.S. However, L.A. also has a fluid culture of transformation, where the evolution of every community existing today has in fact been influenced and affected by a matrix of cultural practices, landmarks, and traditions. One example is Boyle Heights, which is generally accepted and approached by researchers within the context of Latino culture. In actuality, Latino culture in Boyle Heights has a very limited history that began in the 1950s. The Latino community of Boyle Heights as it exists today has been affected by a shared history with a thriving Jewish immigrant community which occupied Boyle Heights from the 1920s to the 1950s, and whose cultural legacy is still visible in the architecture and dormant monuments and landmarks of a community past.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Salvatore Settis, "Opening Address to Center Staff," (February 2, 1994), p.16.

<sup>2</sup> Andrea Heiman, "Tour Revisits the Roots of Jewish L.A.," Los Angeles Times, Religion (July 23, 1994), Saturday, p.12.

The limited understanding of L.A. culture framed by geographic segmentation brings with it the residual impact of a limited historical context through which we can assess and embrace the matrix of global diversity within communities that make up L.A. Most importantly, it distorts our ability to fully understand the transformative process operating in community culture, and to adequately preserve and study the authentic artifactual legacy of L.A. -- including its art, architecture, history, and urban form, i.e., composition.

It has been said that Los Angeles is a city of images which has no "real" culture. If the comparative model is Western European culture, then this statement is absolutely true because there are no levels or multiple centuries of historical research from which methodology and material resources are readily available for comprehensive study of a certain region or site. By comparison, when the study of Los Angeles is approached, only two centuries of historical research are available. And instead of levels that conveniently categorize and assist in focusing one's research, there are only migratory layers of multicultural occupancy which have been diligently traced by demographers but rarely studied as the source from which L.A. derives its legitimate cultural and artifactual legacy.

In addition to the obvious limitations present in the pursuit of historical research on urban Los Angeles, the short history of L.A. has also been both socially and demographically turbulent making it even more difficult to locate and access the historical resources that could assist in translating the topography of L.A.'s urban culture. Framed by this history, communities continue to evolve from a matrix of ethnic influences, traditions, and cultural practices which have produced a Los Angeles culture that is perpetually transformative. But the question is, how can we understand L.A. culture if the methodology is absent regarding an approach to historical research on urban Los Angeles?

The most common approach to the study of Los Angeles has been based on topographic or demographic profiles, producing numerous profiles of the physical characteristics and ethno-economic sociology of urban L.A. The results have tended to promote theories on L.A. culture based primarily on historical research in the areas of (1) migration patterns of population groups, (2) architectural transformation and preservation, or (3) ethno-political paradigms that emerged from geographic segmentation reflecting attitudes of different periods in the cities history regarding race and social class. As a result, we currently have access to historical facts concerning migratory patterns and architectural transformation/preservation which outline the history of L.A. growth and development;

such facts as 26 of the original 44 settlers in Los Angeles had some African ancestry, making African Americans the majority group among the cities first inhabitants,<sup>3</sup> or that before El Pueblo Plaza came to symbolize the heart of Latino culture in Los Angeles, it was occupied by Chinese and African American communities which were displaced in the 1920s due to the construction of Union Station.<sup>4</sup> What we do not fully understand are the social dimensions of L.A.'s historical record, which underscores the evolution and definition of contemporary L.A. culture.

To study L.A. culture and produce research that begins to clarify L.A., it is important to continue to develop, examine, and analyze demographic profiles, migration patterns, and the more visible historical records. But, we must also create new methods for investigating the multicultural layers of transformation found in L.A. communities, which can uncover less visible historical resources found in archives, collections and oral histories yet to be discovered and/or incorporated into the city's historical record. These less visible historical resources are required for the production of new scholarship on the social dimensions of artifacts, landmarks, monuments and architecture, and can add depth to our interpretation, understanding and knowledge of Los Angeles culture. When the record is incomplete, the resulting research is incomplete -- regardless of the credibility of the institution providing the resources or sponsoring the research. One example is the case of the photographic collection on the history of Los Angeles, maintained by the Los Angeles Central Library, Department of History.

A few years ago it was discovered that the L.A. Central Library's photographic history collection -- which researchers and scholars rely on as a comprehensive source of L.A. history -- primarily documented Euro-American life in L.A., though other historical records document the presence of active ethnic groups in L.A. civic life beginning with the City's inception in 1781. As a result of this discovery, the coordinator of photographic history, Carolyn Kozo Cole, developed a project to capture a legitimate photographic history of Los Angeles. This project invited people of Asian, Latino, Middle-eastern and African heritage whose families have a long history in L.A., to donate

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<sup>3</sup> Lawrence deGraaf, "City of Black Los Angeles: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930," *The Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (August 1970), p.327.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Reese, "Memory, Value, and Preservation in Five Los Angeles Communities of Diversity," collaborative proposal with the Getty Conservation Institute (1993-94), to Harold Williams, Getty Trust, (September 1992), p.5.

some of their family photo archives to the Library's collection.<sup>5</sup> In response, numerous photographs and other material artifacts were incorporated into the Central Library's record of L.A. history and culture.

As demonstrated by this example, the discovery of less visible resources found in archives, collections, and other material artifacts is key to the production of informed historical research and to the development of a comprehensive introduction to urban L.A. culture. Currently the methodology does not exist to model the type of research needed on the subject of L.A. However, by adapting and combining cross-disciplinary methodological practices from urban archeology, urban planning, and the humanities, it may be possible to create a prototype for such investigative research. At the very least, the research process will allow the Center to begin to uncover, catalogue, and preserve new historical resources and materials that can inform us about the true cultural legacy of L.A. and enable us to more articulately translate our present and interpret our future.

## **Format**

### ***Phase I: 1994-95***

#### ***Preliminary Staff Research & Development***

Phase I will focus on preliminary staff research, which will develop the resources necessary for in-depth research to occur in year two. Of particular interest is (1) identification of a roster of potential advisory committee participants, (2) a listing and examination of less visible collections/historical materials on L.A., located in L.A, and (3) identification and recommendation of potential sites from which the advisory committee can recommend three sites to be studied. Components within Phase I are as follows:

#### **Preliminary Site Research**

Center staff will conduct preliminary research on potential sites to be studied by scholars during the second year. The scope of this research activity will include identification of historical maps of the city, which will be used to provide indicators of possible sites to be studied based on the extent of documented transformation that has occurred at the site. These indicators will be used to assist staff in developing grids of potential sites and to then trench potential sites for depth of new historical resources such as (1) community

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<sup>5</sup> Carolyn Kozo Cole: "Shades of L.A" project, Los Angeles Central Library, (1992)

landmarks and monuments like schools, churches, etc., (2) community archives and/or collections, and (3) memories found in community historians (including oral histories). As well, this preliminary research phase will produce recommendations on our approach to site research, i.e., possibly reconstructing the site at a certain period in its history, or constructing a picture of each site over a protracted period., etc.

#### Advisory Committee Development

This component will identify and recruit advisory committee participants. The intent of this committee is to advise staff on all components of the primary research phase. This advisory committee will be composed of local scholars and community historians/planners who have been active producers of scholarship and other work in the areas of urban archeology, urban planning, preservation of ethnic histories, etc., with a concentration on LA. Potential participants include: Jeff Lusting, Director of Center for California Studies, CSU Sacramento; Jim Steinberg, Urban Issues, Rand Corporation; Paul Ong, Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning, UCLA; Alan Heslop, South Central Atlas, Claremont Rose Institute; J. Eugene Grigsby, Urban Planning Department and Center for African American Studies, UCLA; Carolyn Kozo Cole, Historical Photographic Collections, L.A. Central Library, etc. Some of the advisory committee members will also be asked to use their resources, such as classes, to participate in field research, in some cases as paid scholar consultants, and as presenters for lectures, forums, symposia, and seminars.

#### "Imaging the City in the Americas" Workshop Collaboration

This project will collaborate with the Center's "Imaging the City in the Americas" seminar to present three "L.A as Subject" workshops on the topic of "Urban Transformation of Los Angeles in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." The intent of the workshop series is to explore local resources available for study on LA. culture, promote new research on the city, and to provide a point where the public can intersect with our research. While the information presented in these workshops will be supportive to our preliminary research, they will also provide a forum to expose the audience to the contents of new resources. This may be accomplished by possibly using the location of the resource as the venue for the workshops (still to be determined). Examples of possible workshops include (1) the director of the Black film archive, with perhaps a known conservationist from one of the L.A. based museums (like the Getty Museum) as respondent, or (2) a panel at the L.A. Central Library discussing photography as historical record with panelists such as Carolyn Kozo Cole, Camillo



Vergara, and Photographer, Roland Charles, etc. The intent is to present these workshops within the context of other lectures scheduled in the series, i.e., late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century L.A. These workshops will serve as a prototype for a continuing lecture series during Phase II on L.A. resources.

Linkage to Scholar Year Theme, "Memory"

Where appropriate, this project will make linkages to the scholar year theme of "Memory" and make resources that emerge through this phase available to the Getty Scholars.

Resource Directory Research

Center staff will develop a data base of local collections on the subject of L.A. that are located in L.A. The intent of this data base is to produce a "Directory of Historical Resources" that are available for study by scholars and researchers, but that are not commonly known or used. Staff will also conduct a site visit of each collection/archive to review content and accessibility, and include a summary of results in the data base. The data collected through this effort will be used as the source document for development of the directory which will be made available to the public in 1997-98.

Timeline

July	Aug.	Sept	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	Jun.		
<u>Preliminary Site Research</u>													
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<u>Resource Directory Research</u>													
							+++++						
<u>Linkage to Scholar Year Theme, "Memory"</u>													
				+++++									
<u>Committee Development</u>													
							+++++						
<u>"Imaging the City in the Americas "Workshops</u>													
					+++		+++		+++				

***Phase II: 1995-96***

***Primary Research & Development***

Phase II will focus on primary research, based on data generated during Phase I, preliminary research. Center staff will continue to guide the research process, which will be conducted by scholar consultants. The consultants will study each site within the parameters of the research approach recommended and agreed upon by the advisory committee and Center staff, which will consider the topography, demographics and

material resources located at each site. The intent of this research phase is to construct a record of each site which will provide new information on the social dimensions of the site's transformation during selected periods of L.A. history regarding economics, ethnic cultures, community rituals and traditions, and local artistic, architectural, artifactual, and archival symbols of value. Each site will be documented by a combination of position papers, audio-taped presentations, transcripts, and identification of material resources. The advisory committee will be implemented at the beginning of this research phase and will provide general guidance regarding site selection and approach to site research. The public will have limited access to this phase of the research process, through a series of three public lectures that are intended to continue sharing information on new material resources that represent aspects of L.A. history as they emerge at the study sites.

#### Advisory Committee Implementation

The project advisory committee will be implemented at the beginning of this phase. The intent of the advisory committee is to bring together a network of scholars and community historians/planners with the expertise and technical skill to assist Center staff in meeting the goal of this project. The committee will be composed of a maximum of twenty-five members who reflect (1) a cross-disciplinary profile of scholars in areas of urban planning, architecture, humanities, art history and urban archeology, and (2) community historians and planners whose knowledge and/or experience represent diverse periods of a community's evolution. It is projected that from this committee, project consultants will be identified and resources for field research will be readily accessible through collaboration with committee member affiliate university classes. The duration of this committee is planned for one year of formal sessions, followed by small group review meetings during the remainder of this project as needed.

#### Continuation of Lecture Series

Using the "Imagining the City in the Americas" workshop collaboration implemented during Phase I as a prototype, a limited series of three lectures will be presented at different L.A. venues on the topic of "New Historical Resources on the Evolution of Urban Los Angeles." The subject of these lectures will be resources uncovered at the sites being studied by this project. The lecture format will vary: from lecture with a panel of respondents, to experiential lectures where participants will be invited to interact with the resource in its environment. The audience will be composed of an invitational list of community advocates, scholars, politicians, researchers, and Getty staff and scholars, as well as members of the general public.

Resource Directory Development

This phase of the Resource Directory will be devoted to development, using the resource data base created during phase one to create a user-friendly directory which can be made available to a public audience to support research on urban Los Angeles. This directory will catalogue, and provide a description (including access information) of historical resources located in Los Angeles, that are about Los Angeles.

Linkage to Scholar Year Theme "Collections"

Where appropriate, this project will make linkages to the proposed scholar year theme of "Collections," and make resources that emerge through this phase available to the Getty Scholars.

Timeline

July	Aug.	Sept	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	Jun.
<b><u>Primary Site Research</u></b>											
+++++											
<b><u>Committee Implementation</u></b>											
*+++		+++		+++		+++		+++		+++	+++
<b><u>Continuation Of Lecture Series</u></b>											
			+++				+++				+++
<b><u>Resource Directory Development</u></b>											
					+++++						
<b><u>Linkage to the Scholar Year Theme "Collections"</u></b>											
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\* The advisory committee will meet bi-monthly except for the closing meeting which will occur in June .

***Phase III: 96-97***

***Research Review and Analysis***

L.A. as Subject

The scholar year theme planned for 1996-97, "L.A. as Subject," is a driving force behind the conceptualization of this project. The project concept is based on the theory that scholarship on L.A. will remain incomplete until a focus is placed on the methodology and process required to both continually discover and catalogue new material resources that inform us about the evolution of urban Los Angeles, and to make these resources more accessible to the scholarly community, and to a broader public. One of the primary objectives of Phases I and II is to develop a wealth of new information on the evolution of urban Los Angeles and greater access to corresponding historical resources that can assist the 1996-97 Getty Scholars in their examinations of L.A., and ultimately translate as new scholarship on the subject of L.A.



***Phase IV: 1997-98***

***Symposium, Exhibition & Publication***

Symposium: L.A. As Subject

The information generated from the site studies will only be useful if it is thoroughly reviewed and analyzed through the lens of scholars, researchers and policy-makers. These categories of participants will be targeted for a two-day symposium held at the new Center building. Emphasis of the symposium will be placed on the broader question of how the historical record clarifies L.A. and influences our discourse and scholarship regarding the cultural evolution of urban Los Angeles. The proposed symposium will be open to a broad audience including scholars, artists, historians, ethnographers, folklorists, community activists, etc. Priority objectives of the symposium are to expand the dialogue, dissemination of information, and access regarding Los Angeles historical resources to a wider, yet informed, network of individuals that have the capacity to influence the production of new research on L.A..

Exhibition

An exhibition on L.A. will be presented in collaboration with the Center's "Imaging the City in the Americas" seminar. (Ref. Phase III for further description.)

Directory of Historical Resources Distribution

The Directory of Historical Resources will be published and available for distributed to the public during this phase.

Timeline

<u>July</u>	<u>Aug.</u>	<u>Sept</u>	<u>Oct.</u>	<u>Nov.</u>	<u>Dec.</u>	<u>Jan.</u>	<u>Feb.</u>	<u>Mar.</u>	<u>April</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>Jun.</u>
<b><u>Symposium: L.A. As Subject</u></b>									+++		
<b><u>Exhibition</u></b>				(after)+++							
<b><u>Resource Directory Distribution</u></b>						+++++					