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Impacts of Urban Renewal on Community Identity and Sense of Place in Las Cruces, New Mexico

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IMPACTS OF URBAN RENEWAL ON COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND SENSE OF PLACE IN LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO

by

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THESIS

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Bachelor of Science in Geography, University of New Mexico, May 2021
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ABSTRACT

Las Cruces is the second largest city in New Mexico which has experienced exponential growth in the last three decades. The city has been cultivated by a rich history of Native populations, Spanish colonialism, and American democratic government. The culmination of these influences on Las Cruces had much influence on the Mesquite Historic District, the original townsite of Las Cruces. This area is home to many generational families and is adjacent to the downtown Main Street corridor. Downtown was built from the destruction of the Mesquite Historic District caused by waves of urban renewal projects. Through organizing, legislative action and mutual aid, generational families are now taking charge of the development of their neighborhood to reflect the original economic, social, and cultural landscape. With the rejuvenation of downtown Las Cruces in the last two decades, community members have empowered themselves to have influence in these project plans. Identifying how residents' perceptions of their neighborhood and community identity has changed is significant as the city of Las Cruces enacts more plans to stimulate the economic growth of the downtown area.

The purpose of this study is to identify placemaking of residents in the Mesquite Historic District neighborhood in Las Cruces. Utilizing oral history methods, this thesis captures residents and generational families' strong sense of place within the area, expressed through lasting memories, familiarity with neighbors and businesses, frequenting gathering places and place-making practices. Community identity and sense of place

were altered from these waves of urban renewal projects. Community organizing and preservation will be key to meeting the needs of downtown residents.

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1. Introduction

Background

Located at the geographic center of the Mesilla Valley, Las Cruces has grown from the original townsite now known as the Mesquite Historic District. The original 84 blocks of Mesquite, as shown in Figure 1, were laid out and documented in 1849 by United States (U.S.) Army surveyors by arranging rawhide ropes as dividing markers, reserving two blocks for a church and cemetery (Placemakers, LLC et al. 2016; National Park Service Staff 2020). Mesquite was a stop on the original El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (now shown with wayfinding signs such as in Figure 3), a route led by Spanish conquistador Don Juan de Onate. The group of Spanish and Native Americans journeyed from Mexico City to Santa Fe, establishing colonies for the Spanish empire. A year after the establishment of Mesquite, the village of Mesilla was founded by loyalists to Mexico. The two urban centers at the time were sitting on highly contested land which was secured as U.S. territory by The Gadsden Purchase in 1854 (Placemakers, LLC et al. 2016)

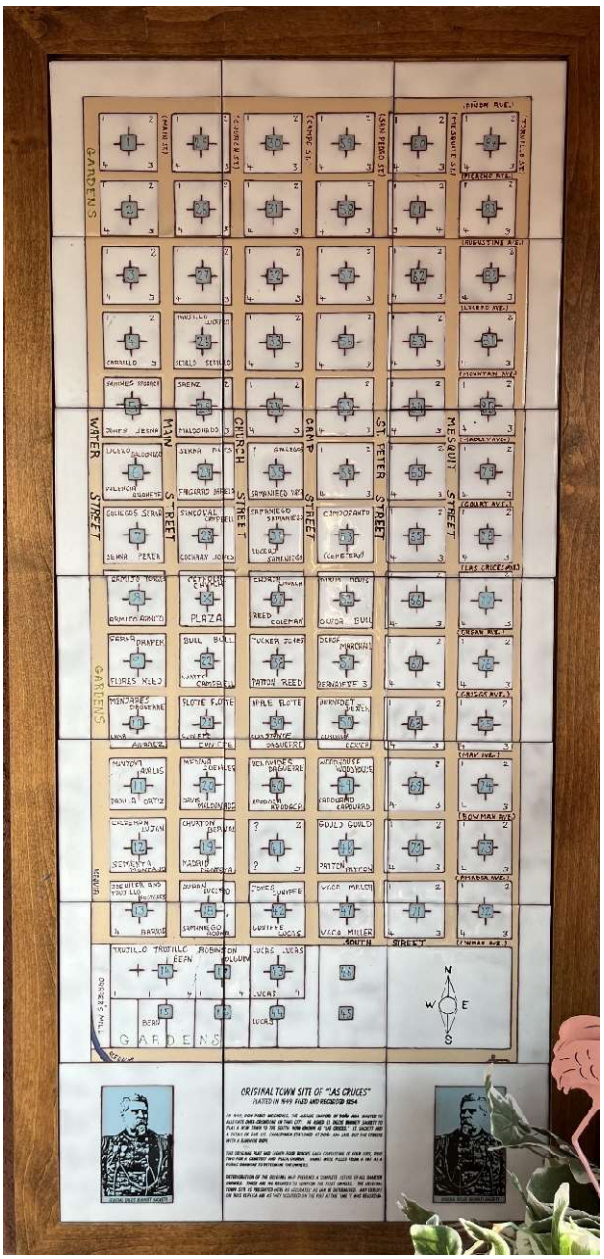

FIGURE 1 TILE MAP OF ORIGINAL 84 BLOCKS OF MESQUITE PHOTO PROVIDED BY IRENE OLIVER LOUISE

FIGURE 2 MAIN STREET LOOKING NORTH 1891 PHOTO FROM MARTIN LOHMAN RESIDENCE COLLECTIONS

The Mesquite Historic District is home to some of Las Cruces' oldest generational families. Figure 2 illustrates the way Las Cruces' original Main Street looked in 1891. Many of the Hispanic families originally migrated to the area after its establishment from the village of Doña Ana located 10 miles north after a severe flood hit the town in 1918, as well as from current day Mexico (Oliver Louise 2022). Native families primarily from the Piro-Manso-Tiwa tribe established homes in the district after being displaced from their ancestral land by Spanish, Mexican and American military. Anglo families that had moved to the southwest seeking economic opportunities in agriculture and trade, started cotton harvesting in the Mesilla Valley. After the collapse of Blackdom, New Mexico many Black families moved to Vado (southern Doña Ana County) and Mesquite for agricultural jobs. In the early days there existed segregation of groups in the district though the community still shared in similar economic and social activities. Of the four main racial groups living in the district the Native and Black families were the most

segregated. The Native families mostly lived in the southeast part of the district while Black families lived in the northeast part of the district, notably Clara Belle Williams, the first Black person to graduate from New Mexico State University in 1937. The closer to Main Street the whiter and wealthier the families were, this mostly included Hispanic and White families. Though this segregation was present, and the neighborhood was integrated considering the absolute segregation in other parts of the United States.

Federally subsidized urban renewal projects swept the U.S. in the 1960's and 1970's, including in downtown Las Cruces. Urban renewal as defined by Richards, "refers to a set of plans and activities to upgrade neighborhoods and suburbs that are in state of distress or decay. Urban renewal programs address the physical aspects of urban decay" (Richards 2014). Before urban renewal the district was a dynamic mix-used neighborhood with adobe family compounds, restaurants, cottage industry stores (families selling hand-made products in the front of their homes), raising small-scale livestock and small grocery stores (Morales 2016).

FIGURE 3 IMAGE OF THE EL CAMINO REAL ORIGINAL ROUTE SIGN AND MESQUITE HISTORIC DISTRICT PLAQUES ON EAST GRIGGS AVE PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

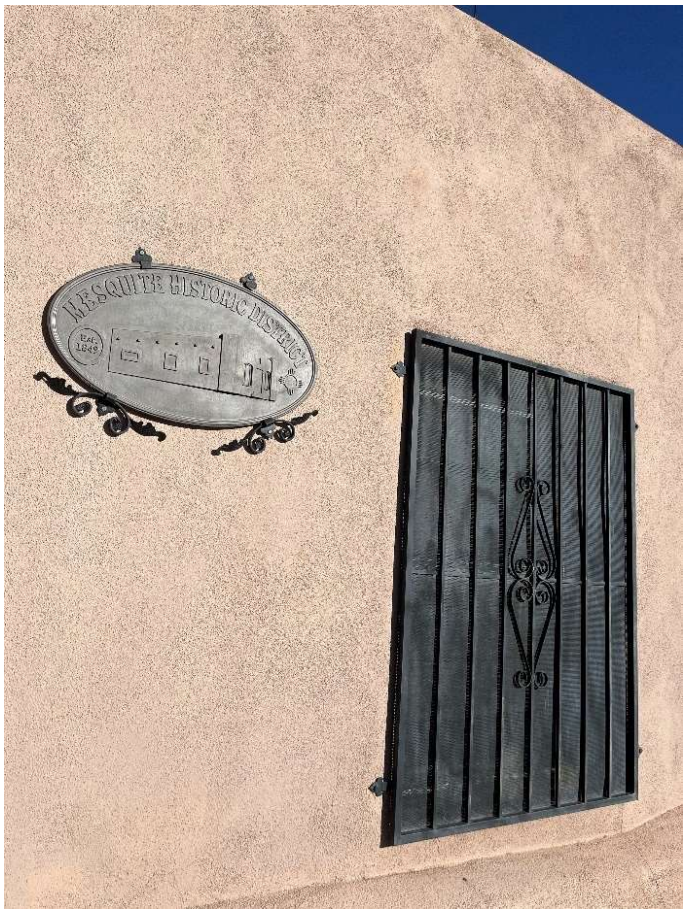

FIGURE 4 MESQUITE HISTORIC DISTRICT PLAQUE ON ADOBE HOME PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

The Mesquite Historic District was placed on the state registry for historic places in 1980 and the national registry in 1985 (Morales 2016). The current District, which includes the national, state, and local overlay zone is situated in between Madrid, Colorado, Campo, and Solano streets in downtown Las Cruces, as shown in Figure 5. Within these boundaries are many historic adobe and vernacular buildings preserved through time as shown in Figure 4. As of 2007, there were 713 historic buildings and homes throughout the district; of the remaining buildings 49% could be considered in good condition, 30% in fair condition and 20% in poor condition (Newby 2007). The original buildings were constructed with adobe as the primary building material and due

to scarcity of lumber mills at the time of construction, logs were used as roof supports called vigas. A new survey of the district's buildings will be conducted in 2023 looking at the current condition of historic buildings after the area has had the historic district designation for a few decades, the implementation of the Mesquite Overlay Zones and undergone large changes in immediacy to downtown redevelopment. The district is only half of its original size as major urban renewal projects by the city removed the west half of the district for parking lots, expanded roads and commercial use in the 1960's (Wolberg 2011). These city projects not only failed to create a vibrant downtown but displaced generational families, destroyed much of the history of the district and created a new narrative about the area (National Park Service Staff 2020).

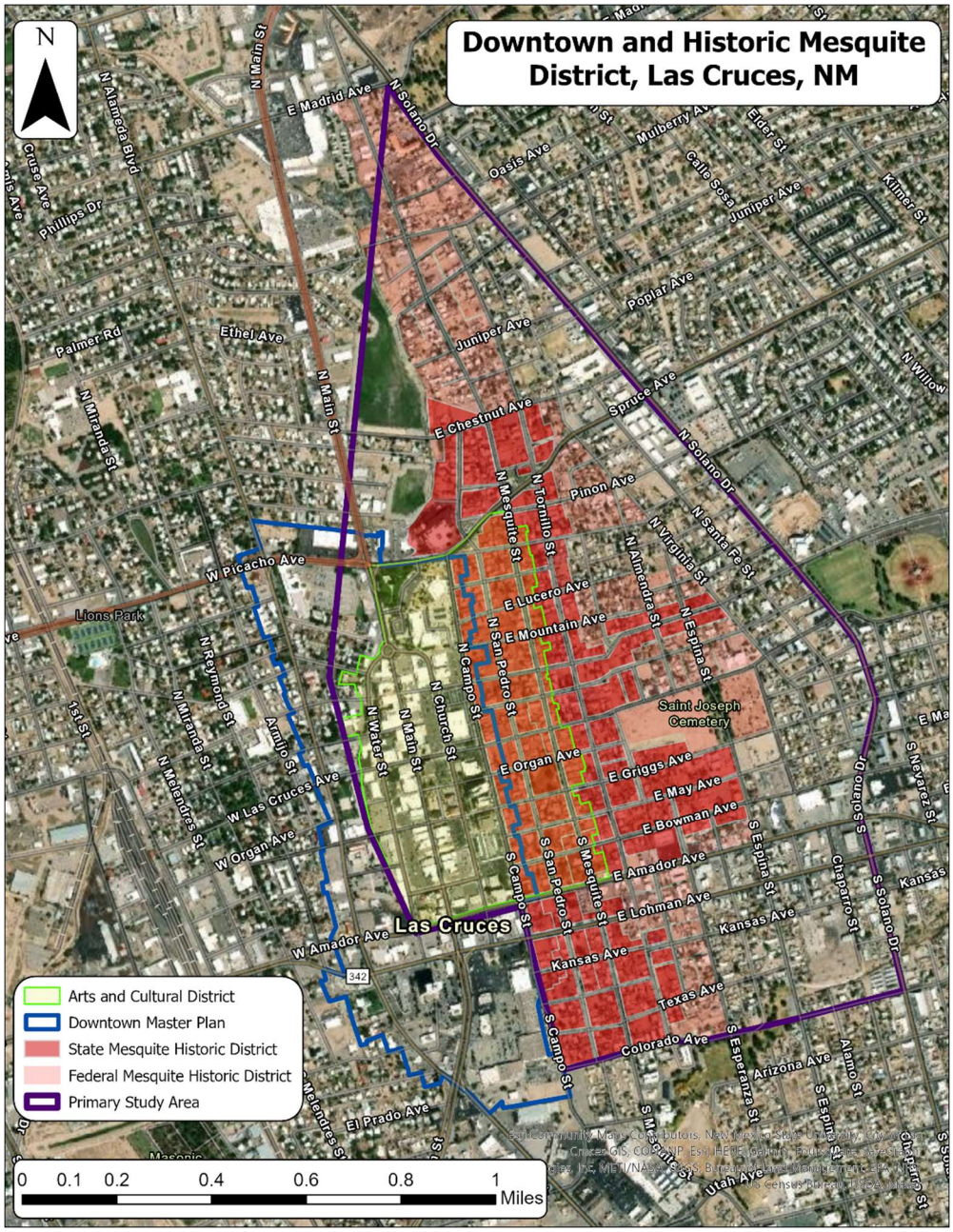

FIGURE 5 MAP OF STUDY AREA BY THEODROS WOLDEYOHANNES

Las Cruces is New Mexico's second largest city and has grown exponentially in the last three decades due to increasing relevance of borderland cultural and economic exchange. Las Cruces is an important urban center for the southern part of the state yet is often forgotten in conversations about New Mexico's largest cities. The city of Las

Cruces is intimately connected to the state of New Mexico's cultural history and identity, yet it is in more proximate association with economic and social activities of El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua; referred to as the Paso del Norte region. Las Cruces grew out of the small plaza villages of Mesilla and Mesquite as stops on the original Camino Real just as many of the largest cities in New Mexico. This legacy of spatial and cultural colonialization has lasting effects on the traditions of cultural practices, architecture, and the demographic makeup of city. Paso del Norte is a functional region of three cities divided by state and international boundaries yet come together in tri-state trade, large scale manufacturing and smaller scale consumerism. These boundaries are fluid for people in the region. Many people work, go to school, and live between the three cities. It is not uncommon for someone to live in Cuidad Juarez, go to the university in Las Cruces and work in El Paso, for example. The culmination of influences on Las Cruces has impacted the urban form of downtown.

Positionality

This project grew out of a deeply personal place, I am a local to Las Cruces and grew up two miles from the center of downtown. When deciding on an area for my thesis project, I wanted to feel connected to the area and come from a place of empathy when examining the lived experiences of people. This is why I chose downtown Las Cruces and the Mesquite Historic District. I have a deep appreciation for this community and want to highlight the voices of the people who have lived in this area for multiple generations and whose identities are connected to the neighborhood. I have worked, sought entertainment, and grew up downtown. I am of a Hispanic background and identify with those who traverse the complex cultural landscape of New Mexico and the

borderland. My family is from Northern New Mexico and in our knowledge tradition we pass down stories through coming together to share knowledge in a conversational style called plática. Plática as described by Dr. Francisco Guajardo and Dr. Miguel Guajardo is, “an expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation”(Guajardo and Guajardo 2013). Throughout this experience I wanted to honor the experiences and traditions of those I was interacting with and my own. New Mexico is culturally diverse, by acknowledging and honoring this I was able to connect as a New Mexican to my fellow New Mexicans who take just as much pride in this state and city as I do. My motivation is to document the uniqueness of the city of Las Cruces and the state of New Mexico while contributing to the yet to be evaluated evolution of downtown development.

Statement of the Problem

Federally subsidized urban renewal projects swept the nation in the 1960’s and 1970’s. These initiatives often scarred communities across the United States, leaving legacies of displacement, dispossession and disrupting community bonds (Thompson Fullilove 1996). Urban renewal projects started in the early 1960’s in Las Cruces. Half the Mesquite Historic District, the original townsite of Las Cruces, was destroyed and families were displaced through eminent domain. After years of failed projects, the only outcome was a hollowed out downtown Main Street corridor. During these years, Mesquite was characterized as a poor and dangerous neighborhood with primarily residents of color. The relationship between downtown and Mesquite is nuanced and intimately tied. Projects aimed at downtown development have a large effect on the

neighborhood community of Mesquite. This is historically supported and is visible today. The City of Las Cruces has a complicated and storied history with the downtown area, as leaders and planning agencies have had different agendas. Despite causing major destruction for the residents of Mesquite and exploitation of their spaces, the city shifted their approach to the neighborhood and residents. A partnership between city and neighborhood leaders began in the early 1990's with the Weed and Seed community policing program and the establishment of Las Esperanzas neighborhood association. By deciding to create a new plan based on community members involvement and shifting to honoring Mesquite and roots of downtown, the city was able to recognize the value of community input. The 2016 Downtown Master Plan and the 2018 Arts and Cultural District Plan were developed by the Las Cruces City Council, extensive consulting teams and community member input. By intentionally incorporating community member's concerns and goals into the project plans the city aims to create a more holistic approach to economic and cultural development. In 2023, the city continues to implement the 2016 Downtown Master Plan and the 2018 Arts and Cultural District Plan. Both plans incorporate more community input than any previous plan implemented. Though different in project goals, both plans acknowledge the failures of the past, honor the adjacent Mesquite Historic District, and stress the preservation of historic buildings still standing in downtown and the district. The city now views Mesquite as a cultural, economic and tourism asset. Parks, gathering spaces, community planned events, historical architecture and local businesses in the district are examples of assets recognized in the city plans.

After years of destruction by the city, they are now attempting to right the wrongs of the past by leaning into community identity, preservation, and cultural cultivation of the original townsite. This is a complicated balancing act; as my study will show residents have praise and skepticism for the recent changes and actions by the city.

Community identity has been altered by changes to urban form, city run programs and acceptance of the historical designation. While downtown is making a comeback as the Las Cruces community gathering space and local business hub, it is important to identify how community identity has changed from urban renewal and current redevelopment. In the last two decades city officials have made significant strides in turning this legacy around by working with community members to honor the original townsite and character of the city and residents.

Significance

The significance of this study is urban renewal has rarely been studied in small cities like Las Cruces looking at the effects of urban renewal. Urban renewal scholarship needs to pay attention to the voices of people who have experienced it as this study does. This aligns with ethnic studies fields such as Black Studies, Chicana/o Studies, and Ethnic Geographies, and how these fields have highlighted the voices of those affected by city planning and government policies.

When I first approached the subject of downtown development and preservation of the Mesquite Historic District, I thought I would be doing a historical study. Instead, I found myself in an active debate, ongoing struggle, and lively community creation. History is happening now, and this is especially true for the evolving downtown Las Cruces area. Every person I encountered made sure to tell me how significant a time it is

for the area and how important it is for someone to take interest and study what is happening right now. The community was telling me where to look and my seemingly mundane interest in studying my hometown became an act of resistance and cultural appreciation. Valuing the stories of the marginalized who now have the power in a city that had previously caused destruction to those most vulnerable.

Urban renewal has had a huge impact on the spatial arrangement of downtown and Mesquite as well as the cultural and social composition of the city as will be explained in detail in the discussion section. There is a strong sense of community identity in the Mesquite Historic District so pursuing elders and community members to explain the effects of the past and their current efforts gives heart to the somewhat dry analysis of the city project plans examined in this study. To look at the problems urban renewal caused as well as the unexpected positives that came from community is necessary to have a holistic picture of a city 50 years post renewal.

The purpose of this study is to provide insights into the consequences of urban renewal on the downtown Las Cruces area and to highlight the needs and wants of the community. These insights I hope to inform policy as the city continues to redevelop, grow, and attract new residents.

Research Question

How has community identity and sense of place been impacted by the legacy of urban renewal in downtown Las Cruces, New Mexico?

Terminology

This thesis discusses the cultural and ethnic identities of Hispanic, New Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicana/o, and Latina/o peoples. As an umbrella term I will be referring to these groups as Hispanic. There is much on-going discussion and debate around the term Hispanic but for the sake of continuity and grounding in a regional context, I will use the term to describe these groups of Hispanidad. Hispanidad is a Spanish word defined as the group of people, countries and communities that share the Spanish language and Hispanic culture (Tienda and Mitchell 2006). The participants in my study identify differently ethnically from one another and I will use their identifier when discussing their stories. I use the term Hispanic to capture that these individuals are not Anglo. I do not intend on diminishing participants or the community's identity by using this term rather my goal is to be inclusive of the identities that live amongst the diverse population of my study area and Las Cruces. Referring to the history of New Mexico, Hispano is used more widely that Latina/o to describe non-Anglos and those who see themselves as connected to Mexican or Spanish descent. John Nieto-Phillips in his book, *The Language of Blood,* wrote extensively on the regional influences and legacies that gave rise to the term Hispano in New Mexico (Nieto-Phillips 2004). This was mostly due to the nation-building ideology that took hold in the state during the early 1900's. This effort was to connect the population to European ancestry in order to make the territory more attractive to American politicians in Washington DC as New Mexico started their campaign to gain statehood (Nieto-Phillips 2004). The idea was that if American politicians viewed the state as mostly people of color, they would not receive statehood and remain as a territory but if the population was seen as Spanish-American or

mostly white, they would receive statehood. This campaign proved to be successful as New Mexico gained statehood in 1912 and to this day many New Mexican families identify as Spanish-American or Hispanic. As a way of acknowledging and honoring the state for which this study is conducted and the empowerment for marginalized peoples by forming collective identities, I have chosen to use this term. In the literature review and discussion sections there is more in-depth dialogue around these identities in a regional context.

Throughout this thesis I refer to the Mesquite Historic District and Mesquite, both names encompass the state, Federal and local overlay zones recognized as historic areas. The Mesquite Historic District is what the area is called presently while Mesquite is used in the past tense before the area was given the historic designation.

Methodology and Methods

Methodology

My methodological approach is Testimonio. Testimonio as a methodology comes out of Latina/o Critical Race Theory (Hajek 2014), as a form of counter-storytelling that "offers space to conduct and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of color" (Solorzano and Yosso 2016). Testimonio values the lived experiences, stories, and knowledge of people of color as told from their perspective. This is fundamental to my study as I use oral history interviews as my method for collecting and documenting the ways in which participants experience and connect to their homes, neighborhood, and spaces. Testimonio is different from traditional oral history methodology. Methodologically they take similar approaches, however the difference is testimonio focuses on counter-storytelling and highlighting the voices of

people of color and non-dominant stories. Counter-storytelling is a tenant of Critical Race Theory which magnifies the experiences, narratives, stories and truths of marginalized communities (Solorzano and Yosso 2016). Whereas oral history may do the same, but it does not have to.

Oral history is not necessarily about counter-storytelling but testimonio's focus is as it was developed by Latina/o scholars specifically to serve this purpose. Anzaldúa challenged academia to find theories that "will rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries… In our mestizaje theories we create new categories for those of us left out or pushed out of existing ones"(Anzaldua 1990). Testimonio allows me to analyze the stories, words and descriptions participants shared in their interviews and provide the human perspective of those who have been historically marginalized along with the more bureaucratic aspects of city project plans and archival research. By using various methods to support my methodology I am creating a multidimensional study that looks at numerous aspects of the conditions of the study area. "If methodologies have been used to silence and marginalize people of color, then methodologies can also give voice and turn the margins into places of transformative resistance"(Solorzano and Yosso 2016).

Methods

Methods are different from methodology as methods are the ways in which data has been collected. For this study I use oral histories, archival research and collected photographs as my methods. Oral history interviews as a method is "a vital tool in the understanding of the intersections between the private and the public"(Hajek 2014) and can provide a complex and inclusive history. By directly capturing oral history

interviewee's lived experiences and first-hand knowledge, I was able to document and study history from the perspective of those who are intimately familiar with the context and legacy of downtown Las Cruces and the Mesquite Historic District. Bridging the western concept of oral history methods with the traditional New Mexican concepts of querencia, resolana and plática (Romero 2001, 2019) in my methodology allowed me to move past western science's narrow theories of people's attachment to a place, definitions provided in the literature review section of this thesis. Querencia is a concept which describes homeplace, sense of place and placemaking(Arellano 1997; Romero 2019). Resolana is a communal oral story tradition and knowledge exchange(Romero 2001). Plática is an multi-dimensional communication tool passed down generationally in borderland culture(Guajardo and Guajardo 2013). The project is intended to be healing for the community, oral history participants and New Mexicans by using a culturally relevant methodology, including concepts passed down through the generations.

In my oral history interviews, residents of the Mesquite Historic District and Las Cruces reflected on former economic, social, and cultural practices and provided ideas for new ways of supporting the area. Snowball sampling was employed to locate interviewees from my network in the Las Cruces area, including neighborhood residents, city leaders, and New Mexico State University. I conducted oral history interviews with five individuals, four are residents of the Mesquite Historic District, and the Las Cruces City Council Mayor Tempore. The additional three oral histories I draw from were found at the New Mexico State University Special Archives department.

Archival Research

Archival research as a method has long been used to analyze the past from the dominant group's perspective. Archives are from the perspective of the dominant group this includes states, cities, universities, and most institutions. For this reason, I am triangulating my methods by also using oral histories to balance the dominant narrative in the archives because I recognize that archives often offer select pieces of information. In recent decades scholars in Latina/o Critical Race Theory and similar disciplines have been utilizing archival research to illuminate marginalized people's history and stories through archival resources. For example, Hajek writes Latina/o Critical Race methodologies should be expanded to methods such as archival research to empower people of color using the same methods that have been used to marginalize them. Thus archives can be used to gather great insights into groups of people and their communities by the ways in which they have been documented in archives, "archives have long served as the preservers of cultural and intellectual history, and therefore also of the collective identity of communities and nations"(Hajek 2014).

Building off Hajek's ideas I chose to look at the Las Cruces City Council meeting minutes from 1966 to 1974, the 2016 Downtown Master Plan and the 2018 Arts and Cultural District Plan. I chose these archival resources because they provide context for past spatial and community changes, as well as informing the current physical and social landscape of downtown and the Mesquite Historic District.

The New Mexico State University Special Archives department houses the Las Cruces Urban Renewal Archive, which holds city council meetings, council resolutions, zoning information, etc. This is where I accessed most of the information, used to

describe Las Cruces and the actions by city leaders from the time of urban renewal. These city council meeting minutes illustrated how the city approached urban renewal, contestation and characterization of residents and the vision they had for the area at the time.

The Downtown Master Plan was adopted in 2016 by the Las Cruces City council and is the current plan the city is following for redevelopment in Las Cruces. Included in the plan are key priorities, summaries and actionable steps from research studies, and ways in which the city plans to bolster the Mesquite Historic District. The city does incorporate community input into their plans and the intentional ways in which the city plans to fix past mistakes. Similarly, the Arts and Cultural District plan adopted in 2018 is the current plan in effect which aims to grow the creative economy, encourage cultural preservation and cultivation in the downtown area as well as market Las Cruces as a cultural destination. Through analyzing this plan, I want to identify how the city and community leaders see culture, history, and the place they are promoting. Both plans are publicly available on the City of Las Cruces website from the Community Development Department.

Translations

The Spanish to English language translations in this thesis were completed by the author.

2. Literature Review

This research was informed by literature uniting concepts of social, spatial, and economic processes of urban renewal, identity, and place. The following literature review

explores spatial effects of urban renewal as well as the social repercussions on identity, community, and culture. The following three sections will look at the emerging dialogues within urban renewal, identity formation and placemaking. These concepts have yet to be considered in academic literature in downtown Las Cruces and the Mesquite Historic District.

Urban Renewal

History and Displacement

The history of urban renewal in the United States began in 1949 after a new program was created by Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 (Teaford 2010). This policy fell short of expectations to stop blight in downtown areas and to provide for a large amount and variety of interests. The large scale urban renewal projects couldn't deliver for its initial supporters like housing advocates and social reformers. In the 1960's, skeptics of new planning conventions started exploiting the program for their agendas. The original urban renewal program sponsored by the Federal government has had lasting impacts on federal revitalization programs which gave local governments more flexibility and encouraged "rehabilitation" of urban centers (Teaford 2010). Teaford offers a few lessons from Title I of the Housing Act of 1949.

- First, Federal involvement can slow progress and development. State and local authorities can make more place specific decisions in a more streamlined fashion, allowing for more creativity and personalization of projects not adhering to generalized guidelines.
- Second, the customs and principles of American society are democratic with a dedication to individual rights which conflicts with big government

and corporations' displacement of everyday citizens. There will be retributions for politicians who purposefully ignore the needs and wants of localities either through press or elections.

- Third, policymakers must take caution of planning strategies hailed as being the fix-all to city problems.
- Fourth, change in planning and architectural styles are constant.
- Fifth, critique and appreciation for the intricacy and uniqueness of place should be the foundation of all renewal projects.

The Federal urban renewal under Title I of the 1950's and 1960's was a test in the public's confidence in big government and planners' belief in particular planning fads (Teaford 2010). In the end, state and local governments should use creativity and rehabilitation preservation rather than destructive development.

The 1949 Title I legislation was the start to technocratic solutions to urban problems by planners and public officials (Hochfelder and Appler 2020). There were many different experiences of both large and small cities across the U.S. and the interconnected social and urban design problems that came with renewal projects. Federal urban renewal funds went to geographically diverse communities and by acknowledging them, small and large, the effects can be more critically analyzed. It is small city's experiences with urban renewal that collectively tell the tale and consequences of the Federal interventions. There were 1,258 localities that were given grants for urban renewal projects after the 1949 legislation (Hochfelder and Appler 2020). For example between 1949 and 1974 the state of New York was the second largest recipient of federal funds and about 60 percent went to communities with less than 100,000 residents

(Hochfelder and Appler 2020). Cities with less than 100,000 residents made up 40 percent of approved federal grants. Large and small cities experienced targeting of neighborhoods and business areas predominately owned by African American, immigrants and poor populations forming the character of urban renewal in the U.S. It was also an overarching theme in minority communities that after demolition there was not commitment to new accessible construction. Urban renewal projects did build the capacity of local planning and administrative entities in large and small cities (Hochfelder and Appler 2020). Regionality has had an impact on where localities took federal funding for urban renewal. Hochfelder and Appler draw attention to the lesser number of localities in the Southwest that took federal funds for urban renewal. Citing the urban crisis that affected the Midwest and Northeast as a major reason for requesting more funds versus the Southwest that did not have that crisis and conservatism in local governments may have prevented more widespread use of Federal funds in the region.

Urbanism and Planning

Between the 1950's and the 1970's the United States faced many forms of urban renewal and fad urban planning. This led to a counter-culture of urban planning such as the notion of the organic unplanned city, Latino urban form and examinations of gentrification caused by urban renewal.

The notion of the organic unplanned city became popular against the destructive actions of fab urban planning and urban renewal attempts. Jacob's identified four attributes to a successful downtown including, "the neighborhood had mixed uses, short blocks and narrow streets lined with continuous commercial use, a dense population, and structures built over time"(Jacobs 1958). These attributes encourage many types of

people to walk the area at different times of the day, providing both economic vitality and community surveillance. The two important characteristics of a downtown which make them unique, individuality and the people. Individuality is drawn from the area's history, natural resources and the people who are attracted to centrality and clustered activities. Jacobs explains city planners have been obsessed with order, created by scale models and easy to "read" city blocks; buildings are their focal point to creating a conceptually "good" city. A planning strategy that starts with people's use of downtown spaces by identifying the area's strengths to bolster and reinforce them is favorable to large scale urban renewal projects that follow a prescription used in other cities. People should be the starting point. Using a general prescription does not make a city; people's action, movement, and behavior do. Downtown streets need to be a mixture of buildings with an implicit, understandable amount of choice worked into the pedestrian experience. Streets should not be too narrow, and variety is necessary, such as wide alleys and targeted areas closed to traffic. Planners generally plan blocks rather than streets as a shortcut in their analysis techniques. Rather it is the street that pedestrians experience, "when blight or improvement spreads, it comes along the street"(Jacobs 1958). Jacobs argues attention must be given to the street level experience by providing a focal point, "A focal point can be a fountain, or a square, or a building – whatever its form, the focal point is a landmark, and if it is surprising and delightful, a whole district will get a magic spillover. All the truly great downtown focal points carry a surprise that does not stale" (Jacobs 1958). Though lacking a critical lens that incorporates identity, Jacob's work is still useful to critically analyze the development of downtown Las Cruces. From the 1950's to the 1990's the city leadership followed many other cities throughout the United States in

accepting federal funding for one-size-fits-all urban renewal projects. From these 50 years of failed attempts it can only be assumed that this was an effort by the government to create what Scott describes as "urban order easily legible from outside is that the grand plan of the ensemble has no necessary relationship to the order of life as it is experienced by its residents"(Scott 1999). The lack of consideration for the prior 1950's function and lasting needs by residents led to the disintegration of downtown Las Cruces; all in the name of controlling the physical organization of people and finances. These impacts are discussed in the discussion and analysis sections of this thesis.

Another important response to urban renewal was the increased attention by Chicano/Latino planners to look at urbanism and planning. Looking specifically at how Latino/a forms of urban spatial structures have been created, manipulated, and maintained while calling attention to the lack of support for Latinos' work in this field. The barrio is a neighborhood built and developed by Chicanos or Latinos as both a place of celebration and control. The barrio's original intent was segregation and discrimination, yet in the urban decentralizing sprawl of the last few decades, the everyday experience and sense of place in these neighborhoods are still strong. It is in barrio urbanism that Latina/o culture finds its power (Diaz and Torres 2012). By holding strong to the barrio as the symbolic resistance to racism, social traditions become a celebration of culture that had been threatened with urban renewal (Otero 2010; Diaz and Torres 2012). Diaz and Torres stress sustainable urbanism will not happen if the "art of the social that barrio communities vividly exemplify," is not deconstructed. Latinas/os have fought throughout the last century to protect neighborhoods from urban renewal(Otero 2010). From land grant battles in New Mexico, to La Raza Unida

protesting lack of urban amenities in the 1960's across the southwest (namely Tucson), to the resistance of eminent domain in the Segundo Barrio in El Paso (Diaz and Torres 2012); the southwest and borderlands are the regional center for Hispanic/Latino resistance over urban renewal. Since Latinas/os have had less access to decision making spaces on the periphery or inside of the planning profession or politics, those who would face the consequences of the renewal projects have had few avenues to form policy. Though marginalized and facing neighborhood destruction since WWII, Latinas/os have still demanded their rights to participate in land use decisions (Diaz and Torres 2012). Authors Diaz and Torres point to the failure of academia to recognize the work that has been done by Latinas/os providing evidence that barrios and Latina/o urban structures can provide examples of sustainable urbanism. With attention toward the Southwest, plazas as community and open space, "integrated business districts and environmental justice are all incorporated into the spatial structure of barrios (Diaz and Torres 2012).

More locally examining New Mexico's Hispano and Chicano villages is important in evaluating the construction of people's perceptions of how Hispanics/Chicanos live, grow, and develop relationships with urban spaces now. "Understanding villages grows more fascinating and urgent as we watch them become encircled, transformed, or erased" (Wright and Campbell 2008), in the public mind, New Mexican Hispanic plaza villages have "classic," mystic and idealized qualities that have been constructed by Anglo colonization for economic manipulation. The state of New Mexico and Chambers of Commerce specifically promote cultural tourism of plaza towns framing the Law of the Indes guidelines as relicts of the past and not active communities. These towns are characterized by their past, while struggling to maintain their cultural

integrity as generational families fight the exploitation of their culture for economic gains. Plaza towns have been heralded as a standard in New Mexico and have heavy influenced the current Downtown Master Plan which built a plaza in the center of the downtown Main Street corridor.

Gentrification

In the United States, gentrification is correlated with higher income and social class whites (non-Hispanic) moving into areas that faced disinvestment, particularly in majority Black or Hispanic/Latinx inner cities. Gentrification can be defined as the influx of new residents and investment into a neighborhood typically by people with higher incomes, educational attainment and upward social-economic mobility (Finio 2021). "Gentrifiers" or the people who are investing into these areas, can also be of any race or class and are not a homogeneous group; therefore, race isn't always the defining trait of gentrification.

The process of gentrification has been growing in cities around the U.S. since the 1970's and particularly since 2000 (Finio 2021). This is of increasing concern because gentrification is the observable and tangible result of inequity across urban space. The biggest issue that comes from gentrification is displacement. Social and economic inequity particularly at the intersection of culture and race cannot be separated from displacement. Finio (2021) defines displacement as "the forced removal or blocked relocation of residents out or into certain areas that have experienced rent or home price increases and further includes the phenomenon of indirect displacement via social and cultural shifts". Similarly, the concept of social mix-style gentrification is used as a tool

to distract from the gentrification occurring across space. Yet, it is an inequitable process of transitioning a neighborhood to a different social and economic class (Addie 2019).

To productively look at gentrification, it is important to use a neoliberal and racial capitalist lens (Thompson Summers 2019). Displacement becomes a vehicle to capital accumulation. For example, the Segundo Barrio is the historic Chicano and Bracero center of El Paso, Texas. The promotion of transborder business, media and activism is being utilized to gentrify the barrio by gentrifiers when locals had supported the same measures without profiting off of the cultural heritage of the place (Iyall Smith and Leavy 2008). A similar phenomenon can be seen in the Duranguito neighborhood of downtown El Paso where the city government has been buying properties and systematically investing around the historically Mexican-American neighborhood to push out generational residents in order to build a new "multi-use" entertainment stadium. This was a direct attempt at demolition of the historic barrio of Duranguito. Urban geographers have begun to look at the legacy of colonialism and settler mentalities as they relate to gentrification. Placing New Mexico in the settler colonial context, redeveloping urban areas is recreating the same political, economic, and cultural structure that has been established throughout colonialism.

Settler colonialism is complementary to theories on racial capitalism which focusses on matters or areas of production with social reproductions arbitrated through racial violence and the reproduction of class relations in a capitalist society that has met "modernity" (Launius and Alan Boyce 2021). When this framework is applied to an urban landscape, the processes of urban renewal, capital accumulation, and gentrification

cause displacement and dispossession of property belonging to people of color (Razack 2020; Launius and Alan Boyce 2021).

The cultural landscape of urban neighborhoods are threatened by redevelopment plans, rising rent prices and incompatible land use changes (Neldam 2021). There is dissonance between the revitalization and cultural preservation narratives in neighborhoods while they are actively experiencing urban renewal and gentrification. This is a contributing and confounding aspect of residents supporting or resisting cultural centers as part of multiple waves of redevelopment (Walker et al. 2020). Walker et al. found in a study of a Tucson, Arizona neighborhood experiencing urban renewal, that length of time residents lived in a neighborhood influenced their support of a cultural center. The three groups surveyed were representative of the city including generational, predominately Indigenous and Latina/o. The authors found, "differences in priorities among newer residents and planners who focus on tourism and streetcar-related economic development versus generational residents and activists who focus on people, culture, and place" (Walker et al. 2020). Chicanos have long struggled for economic and social equality in the United States. This struggle can was evaluated in Las Cruces by Armando Sandoval in his 1990 dissertation evaluating Chicanos and power relations, looking specifically at urban renewal in downtown. He found that in Las Cruces the conflict between Chicano culture and Anglo culture is important for understanding political participation. Chicanos lost resources with urban renewal and did not acquire any new resources or skills advancing their place in society. "An historical analysis reveals that from their annexation into Anglo-American society in 1848, Chicanos were affected by an Anglo-developed legal order, subjected to taxes and levies which led to

their loss of land and began to dissolve community relationships. Further, Chicanos were required to operate in a capitalist economy which was unfamiliar and in which their labor power was placed at a low value. In Las Cruces, New Mexico, the loss of land by Chicanos, the movement to the city and the lack of any resources is evident. The increasing domination by Anglos of all major institutions, the local political structure, and private industry is evident"(Sandoval 1980). As of 1980 Sandoval is stating that there was still a great inequity between Chicanos and Anglos holding power, and this is a significant reason residents of Mesquite had lost resources, power and the ability to effect policies impacting their spaces. This history is important as I evaluate the current power holders making political and business decisions in downtown Las Cruces and the Mesquite Historic District.

Geography, Identity and Place

Cultural landscape, and identity

There are many ways people in the southwest identify ethnically. Evaluating these definitions of cultural identity is necessary to understand the ethnic, social, and spatial understanding of urban spaces.

In 1598 settlers of New Spain crossed the Rio Grande near present-day El Paso, Texas, traveling north to establish some of the first colonies of North America led by the brutal conquistador Don Juan de Onate. These settlers were of Spanish, Indigenous and mestizo descent. For four hundred years the descendants of the original four hundred settlers lived, fought, and intermarried with native tribal and Puebloan people in New Mexico, creating the unique culture of New Mexicans now. Many New Mexicans refer to themselves as Hispanic of Spanish descent (Hunner 2001; Nieto-Phillips 2004). People

that refer to themselves as Hispanic feel connected to the idea of being of Spanish descent, but this identity can also be used to describe groups of people from Mexico or Latin America. The term "Hispanic," is an English word and as observed by Rodriguez, illuminates the nature of Spanish descendants' relationship with the U.S. as a complex minority in the settler colonist Anglo world (Conversations in Latino Identity 2000). The identities of 'Hispanic' and 'Nuevo Mexicano/a' are used in New Mexico specifically by those who are making a connection to Spanish descent (Hunner 2001). Latino/a is used to describe people of Spanish descent in other parts of the United States as well. Early New Mexican Hispanic intellectuals were encouraging of Anglos enthusiasm for the Southwest's colonial past as a former "Castilian" nation, unique to the north of the Rio Grande, different from Mexican in the south and untouched by Pueblo American cultural influences (Zazula 2014). This campaign was politically convenient as New Mexican politicians were trying to attain statehood for the territory. This can be labeled as "nation building" work of "imagined communities" (Anderson 2006), which aimed to differentiate Spanish-speaking colonized nations as having deviating national ideologies. "New Mexican Hispanists consistently relied on the trope of "purity" in their descriptions of the racial characteristics, the language, and the folklore of Hispanic New Mexicans"(Zazula 2014). This was intentional in promoting "Spanishness" to build a more tolerable "whiteness" that American politicians could sponsor the territory into full statehood. This concept has been deconstructed because it wasn't able to hold up against demographic and cultural changes (Zazula 2014) from in-migration of Mexican immigrants and other groups from Latin America. Instead, Zazula explains this identity

has been replaced by celebration of mestizaje and Chicano identity in the Southwest and Hispanidad which is constructed from cultural not ethnic identifiers.

The concept of Hispanic identity living out in the urban context has been discredited by Chicano scholars as this "pastoral image and uncomplicated identitarian origins" (Diaz and Torres 2012). In Ernesto Galarza's autobiography, *Barrio Boy*, in which he provides a critical look at the early Chicano movement's fixation on forming the Chicano identity. Galarza was skeptical of Chicano scholars in the 1960's and 70's trying to represent themselves in a one-dimensional way as a movement looking for racial recognition. Rather he stayed away from ethnicity and focused on the movements potential to represent and bolster occupation and economic class (Galarza 1982). Diaz and Torres aptly discredit the terminology "Hispanic" as it is used in Arizona and New Mexico, yet the argument is a Chicano is the same in San Jose, San Francisco and Imperial Valley (Diaz and Torres 2012). Their explanation addresses regionality in California but not the rest of the Southwest as they are trying discredit. Diaz and Torres conclude with a timely question, "But do lingering notions of identity politics freeze us in a neoliberal status quo that acknowledges diversity while preventing us from facing the brutal economic reality of our time?"(Diaz and Torres 2012). These similar contradictions were explored by Bejarano, who uses ethnographic methods to explore tensions among Latinas/os along the U.S.-Mexico border region. Bejarano considers the border experience as a material reality and symbolic features of situations that many face (Bejarano 2008). Using a high school in Arizona as the study location, Bejarano finds the group labeled "Hispanics," are far from being a simplistic homogenous group. Shortly after being familiarized with the high school population, it became clear that there were

two distinct groups of Latinidad present: Mexicanas/os and Chicanas/os. Mexicanas/os were recent immigrants who have similar language and class that connects them to each other. Chicanas/os were a range of either second-generation or farther removed Mexican-Americans with English as a first or second language. Legal status places them in a higher class position as compared to the Mexicanas/os who might not have complete "legal" status. Anzaldua has done work finding that the struggles many immigrants face in gaining full citizenship or documentation in the U.S. can pit more recent and older immigrant groups against one another (Bejarano 2008). This relates back to the struggles within the Hispanic, Latino/a, and Chicano ethnic groups to define themselves based on race, culture, economic class, and immigration status.

The simplistic narratives of Anglo aggression and Mexican resistance came from the 1960's theories of internal colonialism and did not consider the situational accounts of class, gender, legal status and politics (Goodman 2013). There are many ways people with Mexican origins identify in the U.S. such as, Mexicanas/os, Mexican-Americans, Chicanas/os, Tejanas/os, Hispanas/os, Latinas/os, mestiza/os, or Spanish-Americans. It wasn't until the 1970's and 80's when Chicano scholars moved away from victimization that had been placed on these groups and opened the door for more nuanced, specific and complex perspectives (Goodman 2013).

Identities formed through struggle and as a form of resistance is a theme in the southwest. The term tucsonense is an ethnic self-identifying term dating back to the 1800's expressing a cultural and historical connection to an area of Tucson where generational families put down roots prior to American colonization (Otero 2010). Tucson's historic Mexican and Mexican American community that originally lived in the

center of Tucson, were driven out by urban renewal projects implemented by Anglo Americans creating a form of progress that did not value the tucsonense culture or economy. Another example being the story of Smeltertown. ASARCO was the most powerful and important company in El Paso in the early 1900's according to Perales, as it defined the city and continues to do so through memory. Esmeltianos or residents of Smeltertown created life around a small world the company made; characterized by inequality, segregation and corporate paternalism (Perales 2010). Esmeltianos were not a homogenous group rather there were differentiating traits such as citizenship, economic/occupational status, generation north of the border, place of origin and location within Smeltertown. The collective identity of working for ASARCO and living in proximity to one another gave them a sense of community. Place mattered greatly to Esmeltianos as Perales found using oral histories. By evaluating memories of residents in a historical context, Perales illuminates the realities that the community dealt with from industrial capitalism and the connection people in El Paso still have to a place that no longer exists (Goodman 2013). Identity is connected to place and the history of a place. Examples provided in this section that exemplify this include, Hispano is uniquely Nuevo Mexicano, tucsonense is uniquely describing Mexican-American residents of Tucson and Esmeltiano were residents of Smeltertown. These identities were formed in specific places and the history of people in this area.

Historic Preservation

Historic preservation of buildings and neighborhoods in the southwest has mostly been enacted by wealthy whites wanting to preserve the narratives of westward expansion and frontier individualism. Differently, efforts in Tucson, Arizona and Las Cruces by

locals have flipped these narratives and are utilizing preservation in their favor to save their historical neighborhoods. The struggle to save “la calle” in Tucson was an effort by organized Mexican-American activists around the protection of shared cultural space. A group of tucsonense activists formed their own committee called La Placita Committee after years of battling with the City of Tucson to enact preservation efforts to the historic core of Tucson and home to the tusconense. Through sustained resistance, the committee pressured the mayor to create the Tucson Historic Committee as an officially sanctioned historic preservation group. The designation of the Historic Committee provided the tucsonense a formal channel to resist physical and cultural displacement. La Placita Committee was a reaction by activists after years of abuse, displacement, and disempowerment by the city. Similar themes will be discussed in the discussion and analysis section of this thesis about Las Esperanzas neighborhood association in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Tourism

Tourism as a marketing strategy in spaces of cultural significance for locals is a concept that has become popular by planners, city officials and companies. This is especially a theme in locations with past experiences with urban renewal and current redevelopment. Otero highlights how the city decided to focus on tourism in downtown Tucson which began the process of cultural exploitation, erasure of Mexican-Americans from their historic spaces and opened up the area to gentrification. Tourism became a central tool for politicians and business elites to drive out the tucsonense population from the historic core by creating an imaginary landscape and narratives of a heritage created by Anglos (Otero 2010). Modernity and whiteness were calibrated as the only way

towards progress for Tucson. This intention excluded the tucsonense community and their history. Booster organizations and politicians were trying to attract a white and wealthy group to the city by not only hiding the history of the place, but by replacing it with an idyllic version. This is similar to themes identified in Ferguson's, *The Anti-Politics Machine,* whereas the all-knowing wealthy class controls the narrative about the place and thus people, the want to "develop"(Ferguson 1994). To create this modern, attractive, and anglicized version of Tucson, investors bought up property to control both the physical landscape and the narrative, thus bringing "progress" to the once backward place. Summers points to similar efforts in Washington DC when the city decided it would clean up the H-Street corridor for new tourists and a potentially white housing market, pushing out the Black residents and businesses. Using the black aesthetic of the neighborhood combined with a stylized version of diversity, has caused increased investment and displacement of families that have lived in this neighborhood for generations, forcing them out to less expensive areas (Thompson Summers 2019). Tourism in the area is being bolstered by the District of Columbia and private tourism companies. They are using the history of diversity over time, rather than the more recent and longer history of black residents, to market the area for tourists. Walker et al. found that placemaking, keeping and guarding have often been exploited in the past to drive economic development and gentrification. Art, culture and story are often employed in placemaking, keeping and guarding which has been exploited in the past to drive economic development and gentrification (Walker et al. 2020). Planners and investors tout a one-of-a-kind marketable history of the place to build tourist attractions within cities rather than honoring placemaking. Black placemaking as a perspective counters

pervasive narratives on black and marginalized communities as "as bounded, plagued by violence, victims and perpetrators, unproductive, and isolated" (Hunter et al. 2016). Hunter et al. offer that true placemaking that values, honors and is created by and for a community focuses on "agency, intent, and even spontaneity of urban black residents – across genders, sexualities, ages, classes, and politics – in creating places that are sustaining, affirming, and pleasurable"(Hunter et al. 2016).

Inclusive planning includes a variety of understandings and knowledges across time and space of the land, history, people, migration (Walker et al. 2020) and existing infrastructure. Walker et al. looked at how generational Latino/a families would constantly promote their culture and resist the devaluing of their culture and land. Those who have had consistent rights to own land, vote and participate in political process due to advantages in our government structures have had the privilege to plan and preserve their identities (Walker et al. 2020). The authors presented best practices for engaging in communities of Indigenous and Latino/a peoples. These practices emphasize treating everyone as equals within partnerships, with equal decision making authority of how to focus on their stories and relationship to places with deep connection as they have experienced waves of development, because urban renewal has taken that power away.

Gentrification

Gentrification of urban spaces that have historic roots as communities of color is a pervasive and deeply exploitative method to urban development. Gentrification is a socio-economic process that Summers defines as a process of commodifying space with activities that move investment capital into urban areas.

Summers highlights the H-Street corridor in Washington DC, as an example of outside investors using space occupied by black people to make a profit. In H-Street, increased investment in the neighborhood is occurring because of it's proximity to another gentrified, attractive area where investment has boosted property values. Using the growth-pole model to understand, capital investment moves outward from the center to the periphery (Brown 2006). Since areas near H-Street have already been invested in, others are moving their way from the center, out to the periphery to find ways to connect capital accumulating activities. In H-Street the Union Station is a major transportation hub, investors and the city are focusing on developing the surrounding areas to attract people engaging with the station. The neighborhood is facing a deteriorating social fabric, via displacement and new residents are changing the social landscape. The aesthetics and space are being used and exploited. The new residents like the idea they are living with ethnically diverse neighbors in a place with diverse history. This history is often not completely true in that it leaves out the years of majority black residents who struggled in poverty. It is a façade of cultural approval that make white residents feel like they are appreciating other people's culture (Summers, 2019). Black culture, labor, and place are exploited through racial capitalism, to further capital accumulation. Racial capitalism is the understanding that capitalism is dependent on anti-Blackness and black labor exploitation as a precondition to capital accumulation (Adam Bledsoe, 2019). Brandi Summers furthers this definition by explaining capitalism is not only dependent on black labor, but black culture is commoditized further for capital gain in the younger generations. This is the exploitation of black people, culture, and the ultimately causes displacement. These concepts work together through gentrification to displace black

bodies, communities, and traditions. It was a combination of public redevelopment projects and private investment that put in motion altering the neighborhood, using its history of different ethnic groups and black aesthetics to market the area for increased investment.

Summers indicates this is not a new problem, gentrification happens all over the city and world, but the H-Street corridor is unique in that it is a part of this new wave that attempts to cover up the displacement and negative effects which come with diversity. This neighborhood had been exploited for their labor and now are being pushed out and their aesthetic spatial stamp exploited for profit.

Otero points to similar efforts in Tucson, as she documents displacement, destruction, and movement of the tucsonense or Mexican-American population with generational family connections to Tucson. The tucsonense community's settlement patterns, sense of place and community life was centered in downtown Tucson. The tucsonense community, prior to the 1960's, lived in and around the central business district and local government buildings. La Calle was the name given to the neighborhood where most Mexican American and Native American families lived, centered around La Placita (central plaza). Otero details the movement of tucsonense south to La Calle from Barrio Libre as the first displacement of Mexican Americans. In a pointed quote by Raul Homero Villa describes resistance to this displacement and its collective identity formation, "the experience of being displaced in multiple ways form a perceived homeland… an essential element of Chicanos' social identity in their country" (Otero 2010). After the Gadsden Purchase new social hierarchies, economic and political structures were imposed on Tucson by Anglo Americans. By creating the economic

pressures to drive out tucsonense from the center of Tucson, Anglos were not seeking to revitalize the retail potential of downtown rather they were "cleansing" the area for a new purpose that served the wealthy elites as propelled by politicians at the time. The theme of racial capitalism as Summers describes above, this dominance through economic and spatial means continued throughout the 20th century where Anglo Americans saw whiteness as a requirement for development. Tucson experienced a population boom from the establishment of the railroad through the southern United States, bringing nearly a million people to the area (Otero 2010). With the newcomers came transplanted ethnocentric ideals which reconstructed the physical, economic, and social landscape of Tucson. The tucsonense's place, cultural and economy were to be replaced by an American ideal, creating a "modern" city which didn't include an ethnic enclave at its center. Urban renewal provided Anglo Americans control of Tucson's social and physical urban center by creating space only accessible by whites and elites. Documenting narratives of residents with strong bonds to the area, Otero is resisting the dominant social, cultural, and economic agendas that have led to the destruction of communities and cultural minorities' place-making practices. Tucson is considered a small southwest city that grew from Spanish colonial influence. Federal funding for urban renewal projects in the twentieth century has changed the social and cultural landscape of the tucsonense of today.

The examples of Washington DC and Tucson are different as the two locations have different history, policies, and populations but are similar as the people, history and economic power of minority groups are being exploited by the city governments and investors. Gentrification caused by the exploitation of these populations historic

neighborhoods has led displacement of marginalized peoples in Washington DC and Tucson. The City of Las Cruces and Mesquite neighborhood leaders need to be mindful of this kind of gentrification and cultural exploitation as they implement the Downtown Master Plan and the Arts and Cultural District Plan. There is a fine line between promoting culture and exploiting it for capital.

Querencia and Placemaking

Querencia is a concept developed in Northern New Mexico which describes a person's sense of homeplace and belonging. It relies on one's worldview, their conception of the world that they either grew up in or developed through the environment and people around them. Love is central to querencia; love of place, people, environment, a building, cultural practice, or food. Great New Mexican thinkers describe querencia in many ways. Arellano describes querencia as "a place where one feels safe, a place from which one's strength of character is drawn, where one feels at home" (Arellano 2007). Gorman further explains Arellano's description of querencia "as a multilayered and complex 'sense of place', 'knowledge of place', and 'love of place', framed through discourse revolving around land and water in New Mexico. Yet the notion provides a useful framework for theorizing home and connecting distinct US Latina/o/x experiences with place both within and outside of New Mexico" (Gorman 2020).

While Romero describes his querencia with more nuance, "I speak of querencia from an experience embedded in an upbringing amongst close-knit relations. For me, querencia is not only personal, it is communal and deeply connected to the people and place where I was raised, mi gente, mi pueblito (my people, my hometown). ¿Quién soy? Soy yo. Yo soy. Y soy como soy porque soy de aquí, y no me parezco a nadien. (Who am

I? I am myself. I am how I am because I am from here, unique and unlike like anyone else)"(Romero 2019). Home and sense of place goes beyond the house where we grew up with our blood relatives. Community and shared spaces are just as much a part of querencia. It is any place you find a sense of home, love, passion, or acceptance. In discussing oral history participants, the community's sense of place and placemaking practices in the Mesquite Historic District, I use querencia as a way to understand these connections passed academic definitions. Using this New Mexican concept to identify love of place and people, placemaking practices, artful cultivation of space and spirituality.

Resolana by definition is "a sunny spot in an exterior setting, usually along a south-facing wall or building"(Romero 2001). As Romero discusses in his article, *La Nueva Resolana*, the concept in the manito culture of northern New Mexico, "has traditionally served as a communal discourse for the acquisition and dissemination of information and knowledge"(Romero 2001). Mostly associated with men sitting in the sun discussing the latest news, resolana is being deconstructed by New Mexico Chicana/o scholars as a way of understanding communal knowledge sharing that is multi-generational, sharing community and does not conform to one gender. "While the oral story tradition may form an artful backdrop for the exchange of ideas and opinion, it's also been a means by which collective memory, language, and cultural tradition has sustained the spiritual essence of village life"(Romero 2001). Resolana is an important aspect of village life cultivated by locals to share ideas and issues they face in their community. It is a traditional means for communicating information necessary to sustaining community. Resolana manifests in many forms, this is why I utilized and

cultivated resolana while collecting oral histories and communicating with the community.

Plática as described by Dr. Francisco Guajardo and Dr. Miguel Guajardo, "we learned plática—an expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation—from our parents, Angel and Julia." In borderland culture, plática is an important communication tool that is passed down generationally. "When engaged in plática, we learned you have to pay attention to the story, to the form of the story, to the environment surrounding the story; you have to pay attention to the question, to the form of the question, and to context"(Guajardo and Guajardo 2013). Plática is powerful in relationships, family, professional setting and in the community. It is intentionally communicating by both sharing and receiving information. I use plática in this way for both my oral history interviews and engaging with community members about my project. One of my oral history interviewees, Irene Oliver Louise, used plática in her educational programing at her arts school. This is a culturally informed way of communicating and is very important to my methodology.

Querencia, similar to placemaking, is an act of resistance, endurance and belonging as Hunter et al. document in their article using Chicago as a case study for black placemaking. The authors find that "black placemaking also offers a framework for understanding the placemaking of other deeply disadvantaged, stigmatized, and often segregated groups – e.g. poor people, Native Americans, some immigrants, the mentally ill, and people with HIV/AIDS – since all such groups must find meaning in hostile spaces. The concept of black placemaking, then, attempts to counter the scholarship that

contributes to the unrelenting negative portrayals of black neighborhoods without losing sight of the dialectical relationship between structure and agency, between domination and resistance"(Hunter et al. 2016). Thus Hunter et al. are furthering the idea that by marginalized groups engaging in placemaking "as fun, as witty, as soulful, as smart, as biting, and as rejuvenating"(Hunter et al. 2016). That many times in social science research these communities are portrayed as "bounded, plagued by violence, victims and perpetrators, unproductive, and isolated from one another and the city writ large, if not also pathological, dangerous, and depressing"(Hunter et al. 2016). This article challenges these assumptions about neighborhoods with marginalized peoples by countering the "narrative by focusing on the agency, intent, and even spontaneity of urban black residents – across genders, sexualities, ages, classes, and politics – in creating places that are sustaining, affirming, and pleasurable"(Hunter et al. 2016). These intersections of identity are important in evaluating how people engage with their spaces and how the city engages with these residents and their neighborhoods.

The literature reviewed for this project informed methodology, community engagement and provided historical context to the issues being addressed in the following discussion section. Urban renewal, identity formation and placemaking are all vital components to the issues and solutions being sought in downtown Las Cruces and the Mesquite Historic District.

3. Discussion

In this next section, I present oral histories, memories, and photographs of how residents remembered the Mesquite Historic District before urban renewal, during renewal and the unexpected consequences and benefits after renewal. Prior to urban

renewal the Mesquite neighborhood was a dynamic mix-use area where social and economic activities were integrated between the Main Street corridor and Mesquite. Oral history interviewees who lived in the area before urban renewal as well as newspaper articles written by residents show the strong querencia residents felt in the area. During urban renewal local character, community gathering spaces and the economic center of the once thriving downtown Main Street corridor were largely erased. The changes from urban renewal are multifaceted and destructive. The primary ways urban renewal effected the community during it's height was by eminent domain land seizure of generational family homes, destruction of significant community gathering places, major spatial changes and disinvestment by business and community in the Main Street corridor. After urban renewal the Main Street corridor and Mesquite Historic District were altered both spatially and socially. While the legacy of urban renewal produced largely negative consequences for the community, there were some minor benefits.

Before Urban Renewal

Before urban renewal started in 1966, downtown and the Mesquite Historic District was a dynamic mix-used urban area. There were no barriers between the Main Street downtown corridor and the neighborhood of Mesquite, it was all a continuous and harmonious economic and social urban space.

FIGURE 6 IMAGE OF MAIN STREET CIRCA 1950'S PHOTO PROVIDED BY IRENE OLIVER LOUISE

Downtown began as the Central Business District (CBD) and cultural hub of Las Cruces, centralized on one city block, the Main Street corridor as seen in Figure 6. This corridor was relatively short but prior to urban renewal it is estimated there were 160 businesses on Main Street owned mostly by Las Cruces locals and residents of Mesquite. The Main Street corridor offered all the goods and services necessary for the small community of the time; grocery stores, mom-and-pop stores, retailers, essential services, restaurants, and bars.

FIGURE 7 IMAGE OF SUNSHINE GROCERY AND GRILL PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

Before urban renewal the Mesquite Historic District was also a dynamic mix-used neighborhood with adobe family compounds, restaurants, bakeries, cottage industry (families selling hand-made products in the front of their homes), small grocery stores (like the one in Figure 7) and small-scale livestock ranching. Economically the neighborhood offered all the residents needed connected to Main Street. People who lived in Mesquite ran businesses out of their homes and many owned businesses on Main Street. This symbiotic relationship extended passed economic structure into communal and social life of Mesquite and Las Cruces residents. Residents had great relationships with the businesses and the urban ecology of Mesquite, as Brito describes,

> “they used to have it was a tortilla factory. Torres Tortilla Factory. They had a little restaurant in front. You could drink coffee, or they served quick lunches”(Brito 1980).

This was a place where residents could find resolana with neighbors in the Mesquite neighborhood. To capture the experiences of the residents who knew downtown and the Mesquite District before urban renewal, I conducted an oral history interview with sisters Irene Oliver Louise and Sylvia Camunez. Both sisters grew up in the southern part of the Mesquite Historic District in their family compound on Kansas Street. In describing life in the area prior to urban renewal Oliver Louise and Camunez shared with me many memories and descriptions of their interactions in Mesquite and downtown. Designated a building of significance worthy of preservation by the Doña Ana Historical Society in 2002, the Oliver Fitch Compound is where Oliver Louise and Camunez grew up. The property is located on the original townsite plot of 1849, laid out by American surveyors. Most people picked plots to build close to downtown near Main Street and East Las Cruces Street. It wasn’t until the early 1900’s when people started to develop the southern part of the district. According to Oliver Louise, Samuel Bean was the first to build in the southern part of the district in 1906.The Oliver Fitch Compound is located on Kansas Street in the south part of the Mesquite District adjacent to the former Bean residents. This compound was established by Oliver Louise and Camunez grandparents, the Triviz family who moved to Mesquite from Doña Ana after a large flood that eradicated most of the village in 1918. Their grandparents moved onto the land in the 1930’s and their grandmother saved up her money until she was able to buy the plot herself. Comprised of two adobe houses surrounded by an adobe wall, the first house

was built room by room with help from neighbors. The second house came later after the sister's mother married Camunez father, and they built their home on the property. For the sisters these houses, on this street have always been home for them and generations of family members.

> "And there were a lot of relatives that lived in the Mesquite neighborhood. A lot of them, especially up past like May and Court and Mesquite. All those streets. Yeah, they were here. And then if you go back, go another generation. Prior to that it was all still, so our grandparents, our grandmother's father was from Doña Ana"(Camunez 2022).

The sisters inherited the compound from their parents after they passed away, they have updated parts here and there but have kept the integrity of their elders in mind. When talking about early memories of the house she grew up in Oliver Louise describes the smell of the wet dirt just out the back door of the kitchen as her mother would water the dirt on hot summer days, "natural evaporative cooling" she told me. These thick adobe walls are the history of the sisters and their ancestors containing many memories.

FIGURE 8 IMAGE OF SYLVIA CAMUNEZ (LEFT) AND FAMILY MEMBER PHOTO PROVIDED BY SYLVIA CAMUNEZ

Camunez connection to the family home started from the day she was born in the front room of the original adobe house.

> "Sylvia was born in the living room. Right there with a midwife" (Oliver Louise 2022).

Camunez was born and grew up in her family's compound on Kansas Street in the Mesquite Historic District, shown in Figure 8. Camunez early life was spent surrounded by family in their home with thick adobe walls. She spent much of her young life at home and spending time with family and friends in the Mesquite District. The neighborhood was where their whole family lived within a few square miles.

FIGURE 9 IMAGES OF TRIVIZ SISTERS INCLUDING CECILIA (BOTTOM RIGHT), CAMUNEZ AND OLIVER LOUISE'S MOTHER PHOTO PROVIDED BY IRENE OLIVER LOUISE

During our plática the sisters enthusiastically described the businesswomen in their family. The sisters shown in Figure 9.

> "Both her (their mother) and Auntie Lucy. They were really great businesswomen. And our mother, that was her career. She was a sales lady all her life in our living room here, she would sell everything. Presto, Pride, Stanley, Nambe (cookware company started in Nambe, New Mexico) …they came to our mother when they started Nambe, and they said, will you be our representative? Our distributor in Southern New Mexico? She hated it. She thought it was ugly. Oh, she was incredible… cosmetics, like Avon and stuff like that. Anyway, the

two of them knew business… My mother could sell anything. She would sell. We had a little store when we were young… she sold tacos, taquitos, hamburgers. And our brother Gilbert, our brother David and Elizabeth would work there after school. And they were the pre-McDonald's, the pre-everything. And it was a huge success. Cecil Snack Bar… Do you know where Lujan's Bakery is at (shown in Figure 10)? So they rented a space from him where Lujan Bakery is at, and they called it Topsy Turvy. And that's where my mother had all her merchandise, the display. But they only kept it like two years… we now know that dad had post-traumatic stress from the war, but we didn't know it then. They would get bored with things, wouldn't they? And then they go to something else. But everything they touched was successful. They just weren't meant to be rich. No, cause they could have been rich many times. Where Auntie Lucy was rich. My mother and dad liked to spend their money on what they wanted to do. They had a great life. They left us with things though, but we're okay"(Camunez 2022).

FIGURE 10 IMAGE OF LUJAN'S BAKERY PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

When Camunez was 12 years old she started working for her Aunt Lucy in her store located on Main Street.

> "I was her maid. For her house and the store. Oh, well, she lived in the store, she had three little rooms, and she had a bathroom, a kitchen, and a living room, attached to the store. So my mother says, you girls need to learn to work, so I'm going to send you to my sisters and you're going to wash dishes. I was 12 years old. So, I used to go wash her dishes, I mean a pile of dishes because she would feed all her kids at lunch. Then she says, you're going to do other things for me. You're going to start cleaning my house. She's the one who taught me how to clean. Mrs. Clean before Mrs. Clean. And so she says, this is what I want you to

do in the bathroom… All the tile, you scrub down and then you mop the floors. And I had to vacuum and mop the floors and all that for $3 a week. And then she had built this beautiful house over there in the Alameda District area on Princeton. So, she would take me to that house. It was a huge house to clean that house, $5 a week the same way. Well, I worked with her through high school. I did all that through high school. So now I don't want to clean"(Camunez 2022).

Camunez's early life was spent with family in Mesquite and on Main Street when the two areas were connected economically for families. The sister's immediate family was not "rich" like their aunt, but they got by through entrepreneurial ventures and creativity all within a two miles radius they lived, worked and socialized.

Oliver Louise early life was a bit different from her sister's but she also was born and raised within a few square miles of Mesquite.

"I was born at the hospital, the old hospital that is now right there on Alameda, that used to be the original Memorial Medical Hospital, Memorial General Hospital in 1949. It was built, I think 48 or 49. It was a brand new hospital. So, I was born in the hospital. So the see it goes along where mother wanted me from the very beginning to be different like, to be white"(Oliver Louise 2022).

Oliver Louise was born in the first hospital in Las Cruces on the other side of the downtown corridor.

"They walked to the hospital. Yeah, everybody walked everywhere that morning. Mother and dad. Dad was going to the university (NMSU), and he says, Cecilia,

‘I'll take you to the hospital and then you're probably going to have the baby after’ whatever class he had. And I was out in half an hour” (Oliver Louise 2022).

“My mother said she was anxious to get out. She's been running since she was born”(Camunez 2022).

This was life in early Las Cruces and growing up in Mesquite, the area was walkable and accessible, exemplified in Oliver Louise’s birth story. People were always flowing in and out of Mesquite to go shopping, seeking entertainment, going to church or community events and also seeking resolana. Men typically would gather outside in resolana, while women would gather inside each other’s houses, kids would play with family and neighbors who lived close by.

The people of Mesquite had their own placemaking traditions which manifested into querencia. This is an example of how placemaking and querencia work together for individuals and a community.

“Well, it was a neighborhood. All the families knew the families from one end of town to the other. The children all gathered together. They all mingled and had fun. To me, the memory that I have the most is at Christmas time, where the Franciscan priests would do a man size paper mache, nativity set…And then they'd have music throughout the city at Christmas, and we had simple designs like lights going across Main Street. And then you go around touring where people would decorate their homes... Well, and what I remember it is as a walking neighborhood. So walk, we would walk home, we would walk to school. We would, after Holy Cross, we would my friend Mickey Martinez's, dad worked at

> one of the Rexall drugstores. And so he would occasionally he would treat us for Cokes and he would make us French fry potatoes, the best French fry potatoes... So we would walk down Main Street after school. There were about five of us. And so Rexall was two blocks down from the school… Sometimes we'd start on one side of the street, and we would window shop, and we would pretend and look at what they have here and look at this... and when we got to the end of Main Street, which was just before the convent (Loretto), we all split up"(Oliver Louise 2022).

For Oliver Louise and her friends, Main Street was a space of resolana. A natural meeting place to catch up and connect with the community. The city of Las Cruces revolved around Main Street for commerce and entertainment. The Historic Rio Grande Theatre, which still stands as the oldest adobe structure on Main Street now, was their movie theatre. These structures are an important part of querencia which expands passed an individual onto the community.

> "Well, we went to Holy Cross… so we saw a lot of downtown… the original Holy Cross, where the Plaza is and Bank of the West. That's where Holy Cross was. And then the church was where the plaza is, what's now the Downtown Plaza. And we ran around with people around here, all the cousins around the area, because we all went to Holy Cross… because our elementary school was so much of the neighborhood and how we grew up"(Oliver Louise 2022).

Oliver Louise and her family not only attended St. Genevieve's Church many days a week for mass and church activities, but she also went to the Holy Cross School which was located on the church grounds on Main Street. Both St. Genevieve's Church

and Holy Cross School are shown in Figure 11. The querencia Mesquite and Las Cruces community members found in this place of worship was multidimensional. For Oliver Louise this is where she learned about religion, socialization within a community, and the formative years of her education.

FIGURE 11 IMAGE OF ST. GENEVIEVE'S CATHOLIC CHURCH AND HOLY CROSS CATHOLIC SCHOOL

In an oral history conducted in 1974 with Mr. Santiago Brito, he describes how the priests would farm the land at St. Genevieve's and after the nuns ran the Loretto Academy,

> "they used to farm their own land. The Franciscan fathers, they used to do. Before that it was the Sisters of Loretto. They had it. Now the fathers, the priest came here were from Mexico. Right after the revolution. They had to come up during the revolution. So the sisters used to have it. That's why they were the Sisters of

Loretto. And they used to have this as an academy… and they had the sisters used to do the teaching at Holy Cross"(Brito 1980).

Within the community the St. Geneieve's Church was a very important gathering place, place of worship and educational institution. It is where neighbors would gather out front after mass, school kids attended elementary school and community events would take place. St. Genevieve's represented a cultural symbol for the catholic community who was mostly of Hispanic descent.

FIGURE 12 IMAGE OF A FIRST HOLY COMMUNION MASS AT ST. GENEVIEVE'S CATHOLIC CHURCH CIRCA 1965 PHOTO PROVIDED BY IRENE OLIVER LOUISE

The Main Street corridor was the CBD of Las Cruces at the turn of the century which grew out of the economic activities of the original townsite of Mesquite. Main Street offered residents all the stores, services, restaurants, and bars needed to sustain the small population at the time. In Mesquite there were small stores, groceries, bakeries, cottage industries, and small livestock raised by residents following practices passed down by the generations of families who lived in the neighborhood. Resolana could be found in Mesquite by men gathering outside, women in each other's homes, kids outside with family and neighbors who lived close by. Main Street was also the social and community center. St. Genevieve's Catholic Church and Holy Cross School were the heart of downtown. The young and old would gather along Main Street, coming and going from shopping, work, or school. There was an economic and social harmony between Mesquite and the Main Street corridor during the early days of Las Cruces. There did not exist barriers between the areas of the city as was created with urban renewal.

During Urban Renewal

Urban renewal erased local character, community gathering spaces and the economic center of the once thriving downtown Main Street corridor of the 1840's to the mid-1960's (Von Maur 2014), which had grown organically out of the economic activities of Mesquite in the early part of the century. The changes that occurred in downtown from urban renewal were multifaceted from eminent domain land seizure of generational family homes, destruction of significant community gathering places, major spatial changes and disinvestment by business and community in the Main Street corridor.

Archived city documents found at the New Mexico State University's Las Cruces Urban Renewal Archives in the Special Archives Department revealed many instances of seizure of property from Mesquite residents for the use of road widening, parking lot construction and business activities. An example particularly striking was in 1971 numerous city council meeting minutes approved eminent domain acquisition with a 90-day notice for numerous properties located in the former western section of Mesquite. One property owner responded to this notice with a letter from their lawyer to the commission stating the price the city was presenting was far below market value and they would like to be compensated fairly. The city countered the letter by simply sending another letter affirming the property must be vacated in 90 days, stating the city urban development agency held "direct power," this exchange was documented on April 14th, 1971. In January of 1971, the Las Cruces City Council Board of Commissioners for the Las Cruces Urban Renewal Agency passed Resolution No. UR-258, the Establishing the Fair Reuse Value of Fragments of Property resolution established the creation of alleys for the price of $3.00 per square foot, for the purpose of enlarging commercial property sizes and improving the adjoining properties for continuation of business activities (City of Las Cruces). On July 14th, 1971 city council approved a resolution dedicating certain property (acquired through eminent domain) for street widening. Parcels in the downtown area were going for a rate of $2-3 per square foot as part of the Fair Reuse Value for Disposition parcels resolution. Though this was typical pricing for the city, it is pertinent to mention this was only for properties located on the most desirable streets or for the property of residents with means to fight the city's actions, that were given payment.

Many properties were seized without payment to the owners. Oliver Louise recalls her grandmother's house being taken through eminent domain.

> "She was a really great lady… but urban renewal came along and knocked on her house. So going back to your story, they literally knocked out her house," I asked "Did she get any kind of compensation for it?" She responded, "I think it was one of those that they had to do it because they were widening Lohman Avenue…eminent domain…And some people got compensation and some didn't. And I'm saying she didn't because she didn't fight it. She wasn't that type of person. And then her daughter that lived right next to her, she didn't fight it either, because she wasn't that type of person. That's the way, it happened overnight…and they (the city) didn't see that, didn't value the original town site"(Oliver Louise 2022).

The city took advantage of the poorest and often those of minority backgrounds including indigenous, black, and Hispanic residents. Eminent domain "has long been used in the United States to acquire property for public use" (US Department of Justice 2022). Eminent domain has been used by US government agencies for many years to acquire land for public use though as part of the fifth amendment to the US Constitution states "nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation"(US Department of Justice 2022). Even though the constitution states this, many families during urban renewal across the country lost their homes to the government via eminent domain without just compensation. Cities across the US have used eminent domain to take land away from people in order to implement urban renewal. In Las Cruces the various property seizures were excused through a variety of resolutions; alleys, street

widening, parking. Families lost their homes, land, and community from the city's actions. Figure 13 shows Ana Salazar's mother's home before it was taken through eminent domain and demolished to build the Las Cruces Police Department.

FIGURE 13 CAMPO STREET, "MY MOM'S HOUSE WAS DEMOLISHED WEEKS AFTER THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN. THE POLICE DEPARTMENT IS NOW SITTING WHERE WE ONCE LIVED." PHOTO AND QUOTE BY ANNA SALAZAR

What occurred in downtown Las Cruces can be described as a textbook example of the destruction federally subsidized urban renewal projects have had on cities across the United States. For Las Cruces this included abundant parking lots, sterile corporate architecture, and a one-way loop the "racetrack," around the Main Street block encircling a canopied walking mall known by locals as "the yellow brick road" (Von Maur 2014; Stevens 2023), shown in Figure 14. Downtown Las Cruces has seen significant changes since the 1960's and has gone through many of the same aesthetic and spatial trends as other downtown corridors in the southwest United States (Otero 2010). The destruction

of historic downtown took place in waves. Downtown began as the CBD and cultural hub of Las Cruces, centralized on one city block. It then became a covered walking mall typical of 1960's and 70's urban renewal, which led to a deserted shell of a city center from poor planning and disinvestment by business owners. Prior to urban renewal it is estimated there were 160 businesses on Main Street, after closing off the thoroughfare, there remained about 90, which slowly dropped further to around 20 at the lowest point(Wolberg 2011; Von Maur 2014). As a reaction to the failure more fad planning was sweeping the U.S. in the 20th century in an effort to stop blight and decline of centralized cities by the Federal government (Teaford 2010). Las Cruces municipal leaders were among the local, state, and federal governments in the late 1970's that were funding "slum" clearance (Mesquite neighborhood), building demolition and revitalization attempts in CBDs. In their efforts they were trying to rehabilitate the struggling downtown deserted due to urban renewal attempts. The city was encouraged by locals who thought revitalization would bring life back to downtown and raise falling property values. Instead, these projects took a lot of time to complete and left many people unsatisfied, which led to greater decay and hardly any return on the city's investment (Wolberg 2011). This dissatisfaction and decay occurred rapidly as businesses moved or shut down and residents followed with their economic activities.

> "Going back to your theme of the downtown, it's all mixed in because what happened to the urban renewal, it was the destruction, not only of businesses, it was destruction of our culture because we had commerce. Mexican and the native people here on Church Street. So, you had optometrists, you had doctors, you had lawyers, you had our Aunt Lucy, the store she owned would be the equivalent to

Albertson's for that era of time. And so you had all of these people that were well off and they were from this neighborhood, who had bars and pawn shops and a lot of mom-and-pop stores where people made their living. So, they destroyed bricks and mortar, but they destroyed a neighborhood, and they destroyed the soul of people. Exactly, for money. That goes back to culture, place is very important in it. The culture of people" (Oliver Louise 2022).

The community and economic structure were broken with urban renewal. By destroying the physical urban landscape that was built for gathering and economic trade within the neighborhood structure, the city diminished the community.

FIGURE 14 MAIN STREET FACING NORTH CIRCA LATE 1970'S/1980'S, PHOTO BY DAN FLORES

Urban renewal had long lasting and traumatic effects on the residents who existed in these spaces. Perhaps the ripest and mostly widely agreed upon examples being the destruction of St. Genevieve's Catholic Church and Holy Cross Catholic School (formerly Loretto Academy) in downtown Las Cruces. The destruction of St. Genevieve's Catholic Church might be the single most traumatic incident to happen to

the community in Las Cruces. Alfred Navarez, a resident of Mesquite, captured the connection, sadness and anger in an op-ed published in the local Sun-News newspaper. His piece shows that Las Crucens were aware and heartbroken that the church was sold out by the diocese to a wealthy banker. Another resident wrote a letter to the editor of the Las Cruces Sun News in which he describes the community's connection to St. Genevieve's Church and pointed to the trauma caused by the property being sold to a wealthy banker who demolished the Church and built a bank.

> "Not that I would disagree with your editorial – Adios St. Genevieve – Which appeared in the Sun-News October 1, but we must admit there are other schools of thought on the subject.
>
> As a boy wearing knee pants and going bare-footed with another friend, we used to roam the length and breadth of Main Street, which, as I remember was still unpaved. A horse and buggy was still not an uncommon sight in that day and in our little Pueblo of Las Cruces, the structure that housed St. Genevieve was well built, sturdy and more than awe inspiring, for it was at St. Genevieve's that its parishioners, and especially their children, were taught the real meaning of Faith.
>
> Many of us were baptized at St. Genevieve's, many received confirmation there and many have been married there. It has even been said that the remains of a good padre will be found for he was buried within the Church. Thus, it is not surprising to hear people talk with sadness and with a solemn note in discussing the how and why the life of the Catholic structure was condemned to its fate. Many still feel and justly so, that our church could have been rebuilt on the same location.

To a large segment of the people of Las Cruces, it's not 'Adios St. Genevieve,' for like that spirit of faith that she implanted in our hearts at a tender age, St. Genevieve lives and another church will go up in her name though on another location. Before signing off, I must impart to the reader, that money is power and in my opinion our church finally gave ground that led to its demolishment, not in the name of progress, not for the lack of love of God, but somewhere down the line somehow, for the love of money.

Respectfully yours,

Alfred Nevarez"

(Nevarez 1972)

FIGURE 15 ST. GENEVIEVE'S CHURCH PHOTO PROVIDED BY IRENE OLIVER LOUISE

In this op-ed Mr. Nevarez captures the history of querencia the catholic Las Cruces community felt in St. Genevieve's church and the sadness that came from its destruction, knowing powerful elites with money caused this trauma. He points to inequity, destruction, pain, and loss. The patrons of this church were primarily from the surrounding neighborhoods including the Mesquite District, Nevarez, a cousin to Irene, grew up in this area. Querencia can be a place, community, and a symbol. All three were lost.

> "The heart of the city. It is an interesting phrase, often spoken around these parts when referring to Saint Genevieve's Catholic church, a structure torn down by order of the bishop of this region during the 1970's. While the church was very important to the families of this area, in reality it was only a symbol. To the families that still mourn its loss, it is remembered as the place where generations of couples exchanged vows, where generations of children were baptized, and where generations of deceased loved ones were laid to rest. For a community whose cultural life is centered around the church, the destruction of this symbol was devasting" (Hartly 2000).

FIGURE 16 IMAGE OF THE DEMOLITION OF ST. GENEVIEVE'S CHURCH PHOTO PROVIDED BY IRENE OLIVER LOUISE AND DAVID CHAVEZ

These are two pieces of emotional writing published in Las Cruces' two largest newspapers and were written nearly 30 years apart. This underscores the legacy of this destruction and its generational toll on the catholic Las Cruces community. The physical destruction shown in Figure 16 by the wreckage of the church.

FIGURE 17 AERIAL IMAGE OF ST. GENEVIEVE'S CHURCH AND HOLY CROSS SCHOOL CIRCA 1950'S PHOTO PROVIDED BY IRENE OLIVER LOUISE

Oliver Louise, Camunez, and their family not only attended St. Genevieve's many days a week for mass and church activities, but she also went to the Holy Cross School which was located on the church grounds on Main Street. Oliver Louise's querencia for this place was multidimensional. This is the place where she learned religion, socialization within a community, and the formative years of her education. Since this place held so many memories for Oliver Louise, she felt the loss just as was described in the article's above.

The community has felt this loss for generations,

> "I wish we'd had this program (oral history project) before they tore down St. Genevieve's. Why did they do the urban renewal. You remember, you must remember the Loretto Academy then" (Brito 1980).

In the oral history conducted with Rachel Stevens, she explains further how the trauma and loss felt when St. Genevieve's was demolished extends past the Catholic community, it has rippled through the generations and whole Las Cruces community.

> "When they destroyed the church, they tore the heart out of Las Cruces. The heart… one of your questions is ethnicity, and I'm whitish I don't really feel like I'm white I'm Jewish, and there's a Jewish principle… which means healing the world. And spiritually I feel like to heal a house, it's a good thing for the inhabitants. It's a good thing for the community"(Stevens 2023).

Urban renewal caused tangible and intangible damage to the Las Cruces community, exemplified in St. Genevieve's Catholic church. Generations of Las Crucens, Catholic and non-Catholic are aware and touched by this damage, and it is not lost on the community that it was caused by money, power and greed. During our oral history interview Dr. Jack Wright called for action on starting the healing process for this trauma caused by the city,

> "They know it, but somehow the Government doesn't move. We know this, all of us. Let's go and then have community meetings in earnest and talk about the loss of the church. You know reconciliation. We really want to listen now"(Wright 2023).

This plea shows the depth to the injustice visible to the public. Dr. Wright and Stevens are not from Las Cruces but now live in the Mesquite Historic District and have learned in their time there from generations of neighbors the impact of urban renewal on this community.

FIGURE 18 MEMORIAL STRUCTURE OF ORIGINAL ST. GENEVIEVE'S CHURCH LOCATED IN FRONT OF NEW ST. GENEVIEVE'S CHURCH PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

In a fascinating study by Sandoval, urban renewal uncovered the inequities that existed in Las Cruces in the 1960's, 1970's and prior. "Examination of the urban renewal process disclosed that Anglos dominated the planning and implementation processes, determining the scope and nature of the project based on their particular vision. In choosing the downtown area for rejuvenation, the project directly affected many Chicano residents, forcing many to move" (Sandoval 1980). Sandoval identified that urban renewal was spearheaded and carried out by Anglos, while the Chicano population most affected by these decisions were not included in the decision-making process. "In addition, the old Chicano neighborhood bordering the project (Mesquite) was disrupted and an historic Catholic Church (St. Genevieve's) important to the Chicano community

was destroyed. Analysis of the project demonstrated the political impotence of the Chicano community to affect this issue or to receive any substantial benefit. Instead, Chicanos suffered from the project and were further fragmented and pauperized. On the other hand, Anglo businesses seemed to exercise influence over the entire project. They participated from the beginning and reaped most of the benefits. Even though the project failed to rejuvenate the downtown, it did provide for an injection of funds into particular businesses and banks, further impoverishing the Chicano community"(Sandoval 1980). Sandoval's dissertation was written in 1980 only a few years after urban renewal had made its initial mark on the area. He clearly states the power inequities between the Anglo and Hispanic residents and consequences to Hispanic and Catholic community identity.

Across Las Cruces between 1966 and 1974, city leadership supported low-density development from annexations, subdivisions, and commercial strip construction. The impact of these actions can be seen throughout Las Cruces to this day and have characterized the development of the city as a whole. Moving forward a decade, downtown Las Cruces experienced the same phenomena as many other cities across the nation, as decentralization of the CBD moved most businesses to Lohman and Telshor Avenues farther east in the city.

When urban renewal projects funded by the Federal government swept the nation, Las Cruces city leaders jumped at the opportunity to rejuvenate the downtown Main Street corridor. In order to do this they envisioned an area larger than was being utilized for commercial use. The Las Cruces city council and the urban development agency exercised harmful power by seizing land from residents of the Mesquite neighborhood to

build alleyways, parking lots, and widen streets, tearing down generational family compounds. They employed typical planning fads of the time by closing off Main Street to traffic, building a canopied walking mall and one-way roads surrounding it. Business elites had significant sway and in a devastating move, the dioses sold St. Genevieve's Catholic Church to Bank of the West and thus the "heart" of Las Cruces was destroyed. Destruction of the Mesquite neighborhood and St. Genevieve's Church was damaging to the community then and still is one of the worst traumas to happen to the community. Many still feel the impacts of the communities querencia being ripped away from them for money. Urban renewal left a hallowed out shell of the former economic and social center of Las Cruces and at the same time as trying to revitalize downtown the city started investing in an alternative CBD.

After Urban Renewal: Unexpected Consequences and Outcomes

FIGURE 19 BEGINNING TO TAKE DOWN THE ARCHES ON THE DOWNTOWN "MALL", PHOTO BY BOBBY DIVEN

Urban renewal altered downtown, the Main Street corridor and the Mesquite Historic District spatially and socially. While the legacy of urban renewal produced largely negative consequences for the community, there were some minor benefits.

Consequences

The consequences of urban renewal have continued to show themselves over the decades and have proven to be multidimensional. The original impact on the downtown Main Street corridor was a closed off and hallowed out walking mall used primarily on Wednesday and Saturday mornings for the Las Cruces Farmer and Craft Market. As mentioned before, prior to urban renewal there was an estimated 160 businesses on Main Street, after closing off the thoroughfare, there remained about 90, which slowly declined (Wolberg 2011; Von Maur 2014). Essentially the small business industry in downtown and the Mesquite Historic District collapsed.

Though more businesses have been opening in the last two decades there are continued gaps in goods and services necessary for residents. The Mesquite Historic District is in a food desert. For the elderly and residents without a car this makes getting groceries of nutritional value difficult to acquire. City councilor and Mayor Pro-Tempore Kassandra Gandara addressed this in our oral history interview,

> "we've done studies on housing in the downtown and we're a food desert in this area, and we need grocery stores"(Gandara 2022).

The food situation the residents face is a prime example of the legacy of urban renewal on this community. The grocery stores that once served this area were eradicated

from the waves of city projects and due to the perception of Mesquite as being a poor dangerous area and zoning not being conducive to these types of businesses, the neighborhood is left without. This is luckily not lost on the current elected official as she states, they have done studies proving this and are working to get grocery stores in the area.

To reiterate, the largest consequence of urban renewal was the destruction of homes and displacement of families which were the physical representations of the loss that the community felt.

> "So, we lost our place, we lost our physical place when they destroyed, from urban renewal and tore down all the things. And we lost our mental and spiritual heart. That's why a lot of people call it the heart of Las Cruces. It was destroyed. Completely ripped away from people caused displacement and trauma for many families generationally"(Oliver Louise 2022).

The physical destruction permeated the social fabric of the community. Mesquite was characterized as crime written, dangerous, poor, and delipidated. As Sandoval explained, "analysis of the project demonstrated the political impotence of the Chicano community to affect this issue or to receive any substantial benefit. Instead, Chicanos suffered from the project and were further fragmented and pauperized"(Sandoval 1980). Fragmented and pauperized, Mesquite became the ghetto of Las Cruces from urban renewal as the prosperity that had run through the neighborhood before was stripped away. This was convenient for city leaders because Mesquite residents were disempowered from fighting and the Federal government financing of "slum clearance" gave the city the funds to overhaul the existing infrastructure. Many residents were not

able to find jobs within close proximity to their neighborhood as they had been accustomed to living directly next to the CBD. In my interview with Oliver Louise and Camunez they discussed this feeling amongst the community. Problems with drug use and crime did enter Mesquite as the neighborhood lost its economic and social strength. Though these problems existed the perception of crime and drugs being a unique issue to Mesquite was misleading and only gained political and financial power for elites.

An overlooked consequence of urban renewal was the Mesquite and Las Cruces community's disappointment in local leaders. Many elected officials cycled in and out of the city management during the urban renewal years but those officials followed what was laid out for them by their predecessors. The wealthy businessmen and bankers who had clear financial interests in the projects. By first destroying residents homes, continuing to not meet the needs of the community and seemingly wasting tax payer money, Las Crucens trust in the City of Las Cruces as a public institution was diminished. Through my conversations with numerous community members, they recall the conversations with neighbors and friends meeting in resolana discussing the disappointment and anger they felt toward the local decision-makers at the time. Residents who tried to fight for their property or for important community spaces were met with strong resistance from the city. The distrust residents felt for the city government spurred on two programs born from the community looking inward to solve their problems since they did not see the city council doing so.

Outcomes

Between the 1970's and 1990's the perception of the Mesquite Historic District was that it was a poor, dangerous and drug ridden place. This was a designed perception criminalizing young brown and black people during a time when the war on drugs created legal ways to further racialize communities. In the 1990's a program was established by a group of neighbors from the Mesquite Historic District and the Las Cruces Police Department (LCPD) called the Weed and Seed Program. The program's principal function was to "weed" out the bad, and "seed" in the good. Weeding out crime, negative perceptions and drugs while working with law enforcement to seed in the good, such as police-community partnerships, community mutual aid and beautification of the neighborhood. The Weed and Seed program was very successful and fostered the first community policing initiative in Las Cruces which has served as a model to this day.

In an oral history I conducted with Las Cruces City Councilor and Mayor Pro Tempore, Kassandra Gandara, she described the Weed and Seed program and her early involvement.

> "The Weed and Seed Program was a collaborative effort with the federal government, the justice system, and the city. The city had received a million dollar grant, essentially, that was called the Weed and Seed Program. It was housed under the LCPD, Las Cruces Police Department and the department started to work on building relationships with community. The community residents and the community partners, they used all the different branches of police, sheriff, Army, Navy, you know, the reserves, folks like that, that would

> build, you know, come, and provide mentoring to the youth and the children there. And they had nice programming for children. It was where I think a lot of the beautification efforts started to occur there in the Mesquite Historic District, because at one time it there was, heavily lots of crime, gangs, lots of drugs in that area, and the committee was feeling very hopeless and helpless about what they were seeing. When you talk to folks who live there all their lives, there's a lot of pride in the area, but they were very concerned about what was going on. And so that program really, essentially helped lift up that area into what you see today" (Gandara 2022).

The Weed and Seed Program was a very successful program as Las Cruces first community policing initiative. The officers involved truly immersed themselves in the community, built relationships and tackled the problems the community was facing. Stevens, who moved into the Mesquite Historic District in the early 1990's remembered the impact of having a community policing program.

> "Yeah, he (police officer) was wonderful. He was here in the late nineties when we were first starting the restoration of the studio, and he rode around on his bike. This buff, sweet cop. He knew everyone, he knew the idiosyncrasies of the troubled child down the road"(Stevens 2023).

The officers involved in the program left a lasting impact and as Oliver Louise explained in our interview,

> "well, the Weed and Seed program was, a federal program started back then, and it was to weed out the bad element and bring in the good element. It was a program between the federal government and the City of Las Cruces. And the Federal government gave them funding for about five years to weed out the neighborhood's bad element, and seed in something positive…so we had community policing at that time"(Oliver Louise 2022).

The Weed and Seed program is a notable example of the community and city government coming together to rebuild trust and cooperation. This is one of the early programs that showed the city beginning to value the downtown and Mesquite community input into planning that directly effects them. After urban renewal and the distrust and anger that developed this shift towards including community members was a large step forward between the city leaders and residents of Mesquite.

In the 1990's and 2000's, a group of motivated residents started organizing to rebuild and preserve their downtown spaces and places of solidarity, to bring life back to the once dynamic heart of the city. Many women in the neighborhood started the collective organizing after discussing on the streets and in each other's homes in resolana, the problems the area was facing. As Councilor Gandara so aptly acknowledged, there is a deep sense of querencia amongst the residents, this is where the efforts towards empowerment, preservation and beautification developed. Las Esperanza's, the neighborhood association for the Mesquite District was established to preserve their neighborhood, bring more services to residents, and continue to work with the city government on projects.

Las Esperanzas Neighborhood Association grew out of the Weed and Seed program in many ways. Founded by a group of women from the Mesquite Historic District, they aimed to create a strong network of community members to continue addressing criminal activity, beautification efforts and establish the neighborhood local Historic District overlay zone. Sylvia Camunez was the second president of Las Esperanzas. She oversaw and took on some of the largest initiatives of the group. During her time as president, Camunez wrote the ordinance establishing Mesquite as a historic district overlay zone. By doing so they formed a preservation commission and worked on many projects including the community garden, signage of the designated area, streetlight posts reminiscent of the original lampposts of the neighborhood, creating a fund for residents to restore the historic homes and supported the continuation of the Weed and Seed Program. Camunez and the other commission members worked with the city government to gain recognition and respect for their community. Mesquite had the image of a dangerous and violent barrio, between the Weed and Seed program and Las Esperanzas work, the neighborhood would not be what it is today. Now the neighborhood association is working with the city to try to retrieve the former economic vibrancy and honor the original culture of the neighborhood.

Urban renewal ushered in crime and drugs by not investing into communities and making transportation to jobs more difficult. Then urban renewal came in to "save" the neighborhood from the problems created by city planners, developers and local officials. Destruction and trauma caused by urban radiated through the Mesquite Historic District. There are still many lasting effects from the legacy of urban renewal on the physical urbanscape of downtown as well as in the community. Urban renewal both inspired and

forced collective organizing of residents of Mesquite. A strong community identity had already existed in the neighborhood but after urban renewal left residents disempowered, they decided to organize and empower themselves. Residents banded together against the legacy of urban renewal through partnership with the City of Las Cruces, LCPD and by forming their own community association, Las Esperanzas.

4. Analyzing Urban Renewal and its Legacy in the Last Twenty Years 2000-2023

In the last twenty years the downtown community and the City of Las Cruces have come together to support redevelopment through partnerships. This is a reaction to urban renewal's impact on the downtown Main Street corridor and the Mesquite Historic District. The following sections analyze the current Downtown Master Plan, the important role of Las Esperanzas and the Arts and Cultural District Plan.

Downtown Master Plan

The greatest amount of research and spatial changes in downtown Las Cruces have occurred in the last two and a half decades. This progress was mostly due to the city's rededication to bringing life back to the area with well researched project plans. This was an acknowledgement of the fad planning that proved in a local context that one-size-fits-all city planning does not work. There were many agencies hired by the city to re-envision and plan downtown, all the agencies in the last three decades have been from the southwest region. Project plans from the last two decades that were created to correct the disastrous past planning efforts include, the 2004 Las Cruces Downtown Revitalization Plan developed by design consultants Sites Southwest which aimed to

open Main Street up as a thoroughfare rather than a pedestrian mall. The 2005 San Antonio-based Urban Development Services plan designed to rebuild the retail base but also helped examine zoning and made suggestions to help with long term revitalization plans. Also in 2005, the city worked with BBC Research and Consulting and Housing Solutions to analyze the potential for designating downtown Las Cruces as a Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA). Their study concluded that the downtown area met the states definition of a "blighted area." In 2006 the MRA designation was implemented in partnership with the City of Las Cruces, Las Cruces Downtown (non-profit) and New Mexico MainStreet Program.

The 2008 New Directions project created by the Design Planning Assistance Center at the University of New Mexico to help design a more aesthetic Main Street strip that would promote economic growth. The Design Planning Assistance Center researched opportunities for potential and what they considered to be the aspects of downtown limiting potential before setting out their plans. They stated that buildings around downtown "reflect the unique blend of cultures and activities found within the city. Or at least it did" (Design Planning Assistance Center 2007). This tinge of sarcasm points to the attitude many planners have had towards downtown corridors. They explained that the Art-Deco era theatre (The Rio Grande Theatre), historic brick buildings and pueblo style buildings are vacant and the "drab facades," create a challenge to city officials and property owners. They state that they were contracted to devise design principles for building facades for commercial and possible residential developments. Their defined study area was the pedestrian Main Street mall, between Las Cruces and Griggs Avenues, Water and Church Street. They clarified the downtown area will experience significant

changes in the 5 years after the plan was published, as the new car accessible road design was being constructed, the building of the six story U.S. Federal Courthouse (shown in Figures 20 and 21) and the new City Hall located at the north and eastern side of the downtown corridor. They believed designing new facades would be another method to rebuilding and revitalizing the area (Design Planning Assistance Center 2007). Their overarching goal was to establish "The Main Street Plaza Overlay Zone, a large district for planning purposes that includes the Main Street mall, contains an 'eclectic' assortment of uses from shopping, residential, government, civic and public space, and historic interest. The new master plan for Las Cruces Main Street addresses this mixed usage and suggests ways to re-establish downtown Las Cruces as a cohesive and vibrant zone" (Design Planning Assistance Center 2007). Smaller plans and studies have also been conducted including the 2008 Walker Parking Study, the 2011 Downtown Revitalization Ad Hoc Committee Recommendations and the 2014 Downtown Charrette Report.

All the plans and studies summarized above influenced the current 2016 Downtown Master Plan. Some of the key stakeholders in the Downtown Master Plan include the Downtown Las Cruces Partnership which is a public-private partnership that aims to combine the efforts of the organizations Main Street America, Main Street Downtown Las Cruces, the Dona Ana Arts Council and the City of Las Cruces to "support the growth of a safe, vibrant, diverse, and walkable downtown community… to invigorate residential and business redevelopment through good planning and responsible, targeted investments. Our continuing collaboration is essential to promote downtown Las Cruces as a premier destination in the region" (Partnership staff 2022). In

this statement the partners are simultaneously acknowledging the past failures and trying to convey a newer more responsible attitude toward redeveloping downtown. The city has strategically decided to collaborate in the current redevelopment of downtown because of past failures and incorporation of grassroots efforts by citizens to make these projects beneficial for all Mesquite and Las Cruces residents. There is a large focus on celebrating the cultural heritage, local art, and economic roots of Las Cruces in the Downtown Master plan.

The Downtown Master Plan was created to be a comprehensive planning document by the City of Las Cruces, City Council, Las Cruces Community Development department, community groups and non-profit organizations. “This plan sets the policy to ramp up the effort by concentrating the development focus in the short term on sections of the Downtown that are the best candidates for incubating a critical mass of walkable, mixed-use development that inspires broader private sector investment and public-private partnerships in the long term”(Placemakers, LLC et al. 2016). The plan has three high priority goals, “1. begin eliminating barriers that inhibit connectivity between the Downtown and the Mesquite and Alameda Depot neighborhoods. 2. support the soon-to-be-completed Plaza with new development and redevelopment, adding restaurants, residences and other active uses that enliven street life. 3. create a heightened sense of arrival in the Downtown by leveraging the appeal and stature of the historic Hotel Amador and Doña Ana County Court House”(Placemakers, LLC et al. 2016). Though these priorities aim to primarily foster investment and economic growth of downtown, they do incorporate historical social, economic and cultural uses of the downtown area. During urban renewal many barriers were created between the downtown Main Street

corridor and the Mesquite Historic District including busy streets, parking lots and a space mostly accessible from the North and South ends of the corridor. This legacy of barriers continues as in the last 15 years the Federal Court House was built in between Campo Street and Mesquite Street, which created a large barrier to on the ground flow between downtown and Mesquite. Creating a walkable synergistic flow between downtown and the Mesquite Historic District is a big priority for City Councilor Gandara as she mentioned in our oral history interview,

> "specifically speaking to the Mesquite Historic District, so it feels that they are a part of the historic districts and that we do all that we can to ensure that there is this free flowing, walking space, walking area, from the Mesquite Historic District into the downtown, from the downtown into the Mesquite Historic District and that people feel that synergy in being able to do that and do that in a free and safe way. So there is some designs occurring to reduce barriers and I think when that happens, it will be more pedestrian and bicyclists friendly and it'll slow down that traffic enough for people to feel that they can walk into the areas… so we do a lot events in Klein Park, one specific one that I'm very proud of that I help sponsor every year is the (Zoot Suit) Pachanga that we do there that started off with… the Mesquite Historic Preservation Society. Main Street to Monuments is another one that the city has gotten involved with and help sponsor and all those activities right bring people into the district but also assist in getting folks who live in the Mesquite Historic District out into Klein Park because in the past Klein Park was sort of the hub of where things happen. They used to have movies and boxing I understand and music, because of Pachanga it has created

that space for people to be able to come back and feel that sense of community. So it's a combination of having those kinds of events that are spearheaded by folks who live in the area and also folks who feel so prideful in the area. So obviously that contains folks that may have moved in and come back or may not be from this area but love to come in" (Gandara 2022).

FIGURE 20 US FEDERAL COURTHOUSE PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

FIGURE 21 FORMER LAS CRUCES CITY HALL SOUTH OF US FEDERAL COURTHOUSE ON CAMPO STREET BETWEEN MAIN STREET CORRIDOR AND THE MESQUITE HISTORIC DISTRICT PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

The way the Downtown Master plan aims to achieve the synergy and inclusivity Councilor Gandara talks about is by creating more sidewalks that are more clearly marked for drivers, creating streets that slow down traffic and by creating more callecitas. Callecitas are small alley-like streets for pedestrians and water drainage. “A number of streets that were closed in the 1960’s still serves as pedestrian passages. But they are largely impervious, are subject to flooding, and have minimal landscaping. These callecitas include portions of Court, Hadley, May and Organ”(Placemakers, LLC et al. 2016). The city plans on making these callecitas more attractive to pedestrians, cyclists, and low traffic motorists as a way to create shared spaces. Shared Space is a “connectivity solution that began in northern Europe and has moved to many cities throughout the U.S. is for low volume streets where pedestrian, cyclists and cars all have

equal priority. There are no curbs, no sidewalks, and no lane markings”(Placemakers, LLC et al. 2016). This vision directly addresses urban renewal’s effect on the built environment and how the plan has found a creative solution that fosters walkability and connectivity. Councilor Gandara sees these paths as being conducive to fostering community by getting more residents of Mesquite involved with events and getting the greater Las Cruces population visiting downtown to more easily access the Mesquite area and Klein Park, shown in Figure 22. The name callecita, implies a connection to the city’s cultural and linguistic connection to Spanish and Mexican roots as well as implies that the city is "marketing diversity" in a way that does not change the social structure in that city.

Figure 22 KLEIN PARK PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

In addressing walkability, the city has conducted numerous studies to understand the preferences of the current targeted groups the city wants to attracted downtown for recreation and housing which are millennials and retirees who want to live a walkable, mixed-use area (Placemakers, LLC et al. 2016). "Downtown has a score of 75 which is defined as 'Very Walkable.' However, this does not consider the condition of sidewalks, facades, or availability of shade. Every plan or report produced since the 1994 R/UDAT report has recommended the inclusion of additional shade and it is an important recommendation from this plan as well"(Placemakers, LLC et al. 2016). Considering Las Cruces in a dry desert environment, the urban landscape experiences sweltering temperatures in the summer months and warm temperatures during the fall and spring, shaded walkways are necessary for the health of the community. In all the oral history interviews I conducted, walkability between the Mesquite Historic District and downtown as well as efforts to make walking areas safer were universally supported.

The Downtown Farmers and Craft Market is a staple event that has occurred for decades and single handily has kept people coming back to downtown through the hard years of urban renewal to present. The weekly market, which takes place on Wednesday and Saturday mornings, gathers farmers selling their locally grown produce, artists selling their crafts and food trucks feeding the crowds. The market has historically been located on the Main Street corridor, starting when it was a closed off walking mall and now the throughfare is blocked temporarily for vendors to set up along the entire block. It is a gathering of community, artistry and food for families, friends, and tourists. The Farmers and Craft market is the premier and for many years, the only large public community event with a long history in Las Cruces. All the oral history interviewees I

spoke with discussed the market as well as the majority of those that I spoke to in the community while conducting research. This event has truly kept the breath downtown even when it was no longer the heart of the city. This event is querencia for many people, over many years as this is where people gather, shop, socialize and find resolana to discuss important matters facing the community. Las Crucens I have talked to as well as myself take pride in this event as it showcases the artistic talents and community of las Cruces. "The Farmers and Crafts Market of Las Cruces brings Downtown alive with a community vibe every Saturday. Streets flood with people, music, food, art, and crafts, filling seven blocks of Downtown's Main Street with 300 vendors. Soon to celebrate its 45th anniversary in 2016, the market was named 'Number One Large Farmers Market in the Nation' in America's Farmland Trust's 2011 prestigious nationwide poll" (Placemakers, LLC et al. 2016). The Farmers and Craft Market has received recognition for the continued support of the creative economy, community, and businesses downtown. With the construction of the Las Cruces Plaza and new residents moving to Las Cruces, the market has grown significantly in the last 5 to 10 years. Without generations of Las Crucens supporting this weekly event, there is the potential downtown redevelopment would not have been possible.

Reestablishing retail base and workforce in downtown was given a lot of consideration in the Downtown Master Plan. "Furthermore, attracting a critical mass of retailers and restaurants Downtown can reestablish the historic commercial, social and civic functions to the core of Las Cruces…. Dating back to the 1970s and earlier, downtown commerce has suffered in the name of suburban growth and regionally scaled shopping centers. In an effort to reverse this trend, Las Cruces, like many cities,

converted Main Street into a pedestrian mall separating cars from people. Although well intentioned, pedestrian malls have proved to be a failure in most cases, leaving many downtowns charged to reinvent the commercial core once again…. With nearly 18,500 nearby students at New Mexico State University and a burgeoning retirement population, Downtown Las Cruces is in position to cultivate a refined identity for the next generation and to revive commerce in the historic core"(Placemakers, LLC et al. 2016). This quote addresses many aspects of the plan including an acknowledgement of urban renewals disastrous legacy on downtown's retail and commercial base, the need to attract more businesses downtown as it is being developed again, creating a comfortable environment for consumers and reaching out to the base of possible employees at the surrounding educational institutions. Though the Plan states this is they want to bring back the historical commercial, social and civic function to downtown, the kinds of businesses being drawn to the area are not meant to support the adjacent neighborhood. The Mesquite Historic District is still in a food desert and does not have close accessibility to essential services. This is important to take a critical lens to look at who the Downtown Master Plan is serving. Attaching businesses and Las Cruces residents to downtown and Mesquite is important to rebuilding the core of the city but if the vision does not address issues facing current residents, taxpayer dollars and trust in local institutions will continue to be misappropriated.

In a similar vein the city wants to build more housing in the area to attract people downtown. New housing in the Mesquite Historic District and surrounding downtown lots is being planned by the city and developers. In the Master Plan the city states, "it has support from the adjacent neighbors, and it is crucial to economic development"

(Placemakers, LLC et al. 2016). This is a strong statement to say the neighborhood of Mesquite supports further housing. From the conversations I had with residents they do support housing efforts in Mesquite, but they felt the focus should be on the already existing structures within the Mesquite Historic District as they fall within the historical designation and preservation efforts should come with restoration. In one oral history the interviewee specifically mentioned that they do not want more low-income housing in Mesquite. This directly addresses the city's plan to combat gentrification before the socio-spatial process takes over in Mesquite by building low-income apartment buildings in Mesquite. This would provide housing for those with low incomes, keep the price of houses lower in the district and maximize space by building upward. To the city's credit they did incorporate much of the community's input into the Downtown Master Plan, but housing is perhaps an example of conflicting motivations.

Many hours of community input meetings were held by the city and city planners in developing the Downtown Master Plan. "Market studies and design options were tested by meetings with Downtown landowners, developers, and neighbors from Mesquite and Alameda-Depot. Central to that discussion was the need to consider both historic neighborhoods as a part of the Downtown whole. Neighbors provided critique and ideas of missing pieces and hidden assets, and this helped shape the physical design as well as the recommended actions of this Plan." In this statement the city is crediting the well-organized and active Mesquite coalition of neighbors in an attempt to not repeat mistakes of urban renewal. This is the synergy City Councilor Gandara discussed in our interview. The city has seen how creating a free flowing and inclusive area with the Mesquite Historic District as well as the Alameda-Depot Historic District, is the way to

move towards a vibrant downtown area. The Las Cruces City Council and economic development department are made up of people who are aware of the ills of the past and are using this plan as a way of spinning the past mistakes as learning opportunities and incorporating more community input to right those wrongs. This is a positive change from city leadership. The Downtown Master Plan characterizes Mesquite as a "real place with thriving families, some economic struggles, many hip, renovated historic properties, barking dogs, and corner stores. The homes are economical, close to the street, and most show evidence of care and pride. It's a place that works and is loved by those that live there. It wasn't always this way. The demolition of much of the city center proved a hard blow to Mesquite, which struggled with neglect and gang violence in the aftermath of Urban Renewal"(Placemakers, LLC et al. 2016). This summarization of Mesquite paints it as a neighborhood that is modest and improving after troubled years. Though I agree with the summarization, the strategic effort to promote the city's past failures as opportunities for growth does diminish responsibility of the institution from the generational impact on residents. Creating opportunities for the city to acknowledge the destruction for the residents without putting the negative effects of urban renewal onto the Mesquite community would help as relationships are still being mended.

Las Esperanzas

Las Esperanzas neighborhood association has been the anchor to the Mesquite Historic District's community for over two decades and their advocacy for the neighborhood has been vast and extends past historical preservation of the district. "The district continues to maintain a strong sense of community especially with help from the group Las Esperanzas. Las Esperanzas is a heavily active neighborhood association for

the Historic District. The activities they participate in involve historic preservation, hosting events, supporting the merchants, fundraising, and working with the city to create policy to revitalize and strengthen their community" (Morales 2016). As Morales states, Las Esperanzas maintains the sense of community in Mesquite by supporting many aspects of the social, cultural, and economic vitality of the historical townsite.

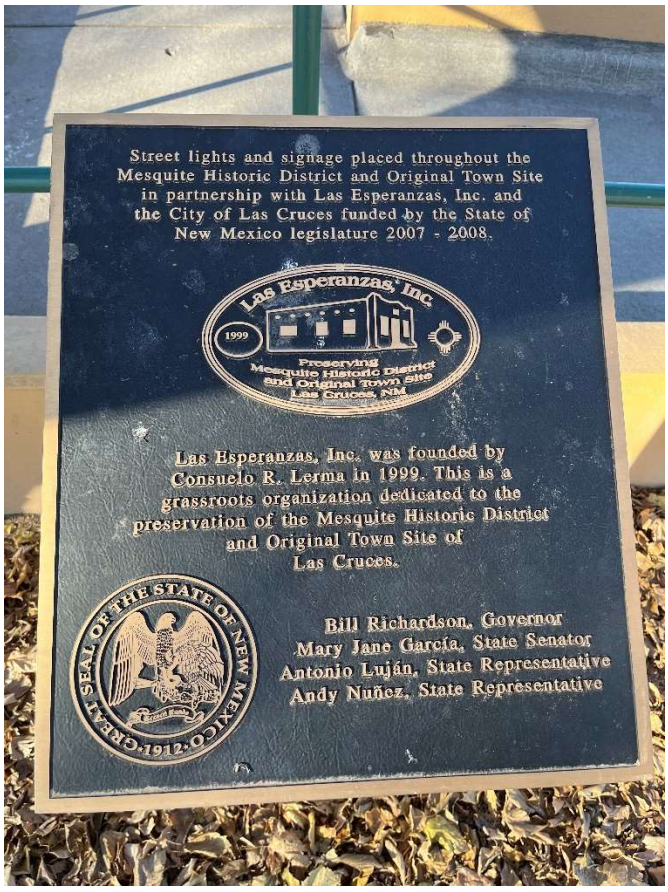

FIGURE 23 PLAQUE IN KLEIN PARK HONORING LAS ESPERANZAS PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

Since the early 2000's and efforts by the group more businesses have come back to the neighborhood including restaurants, coffee shops, galleries, craft stores and mechanic shops. The group formed in 1999 and Sylvia Camunez became the second President in 2003. During our oral history interview Camunez recalled the early days of

the organization and Oliver Louise discussed how they claimed their political power within the community by fighting for the actions they needed to be accomplished for their residents.

> “So when I became president, I said that the first thing we were going to work on was an ordinance to preserve the neighborhood and protect it”(Camunez 2022).

Camunez along with the other members of Las Esperanzas achieved this goal of establishing the overlay zones, Sec. 38-49.1. - NMO—North Mesquite Neighborhood Overlay Zone District and Sec. 38-49.2. - SMO—South Mesquite Overlay District (Morales 2016), which gave much political power back to the Mesquite neighborhood. Oliver Louise explains,

> “you know the Mesquite neighborhood is the most intact area of (extant adobe homes) its kind from Brownsville, Texas to the coast of California. It's a neighborhood with buildings that are in all these studies. And so it's really historically an important place and it's still a neighborhood. So Las Esperanzas is powerful, in looking at what's happening in development. In the neighborhood because we have an ordinance you (the city) can't do certain things. You can't tear down certain things, you can't build things and the city leaders, now that it's in community development, in economic development, they believe in historic preservation. So you have, because Las Esperanzas is strong in the neighborhood, it says no, you will not do this. Where before, if Sylvia or the other leaders said something, we would storm city Hall and they would not even think of doing anything. That power is there. It could be in a flash if something comes up”(Oliver Louise 2022).

This community power that Las Esperanzas fought and worked for is the reason why they were so influential in the Downtown Master Plan and the Arts and Cultural District Plan.

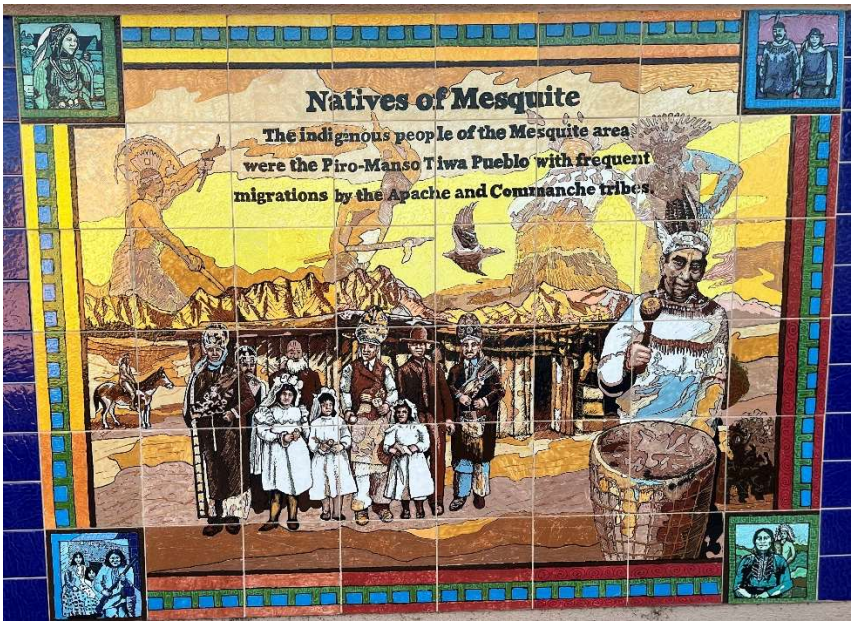

FIGURE 24 TILE ART MOSAIC TIMELINE AND HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN LAS CRUCES AND THE MESQUITE HISTORIC DISTRICT CREATED BY LAS ESPERANZAS SHOWING THE PIRO-MANSO-TIWA TRIBES ORIGINAL PRESENCE PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

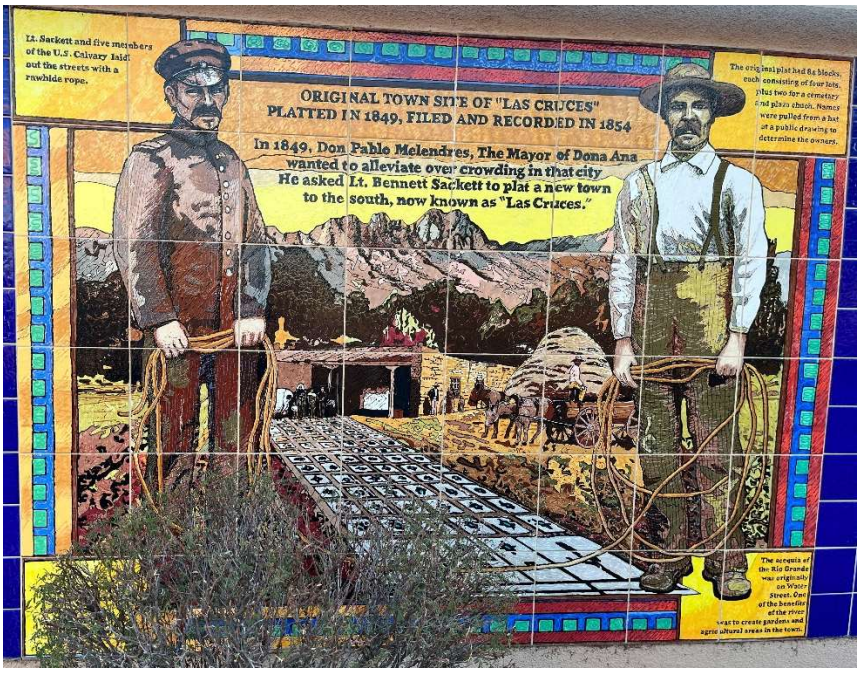

FIGURE 25 TILE ART MOSAIC TIMELINE AND HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN LAS CRUCES AND THE MESQUITE HISTORIC DISTRICT CREATED BY LAS ESPERANZAS SHOWING THE SETTLERS OF THE FIRST PLOTS OF MESQUITE AND LAS CRUCES PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

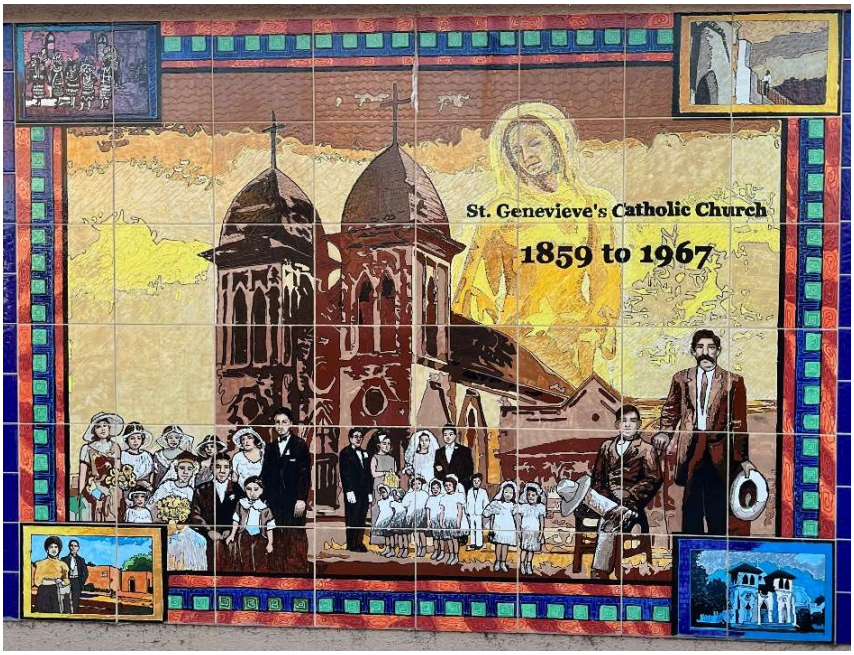

FIGURE 26 TILE ART MOSAIC TIMELINE AND HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN LAS CRUCES AND THE MESQUITE HISTORIC DISTRICT CREATED BY LAS ESPERANZAS SHOWING HONORING THE ORIGINAL ST. GENEVIEVE'S CHURCH PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

FIGURE 27 TILE ART MOSAIC TIMELINE AND HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN LAS CRUCES AND THE MESQUITE HISTORIC DISTRICT CREATED BY LAS ESPERANZAS SHOWING LIFE IN MESQUITE IN THE 1920'S PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

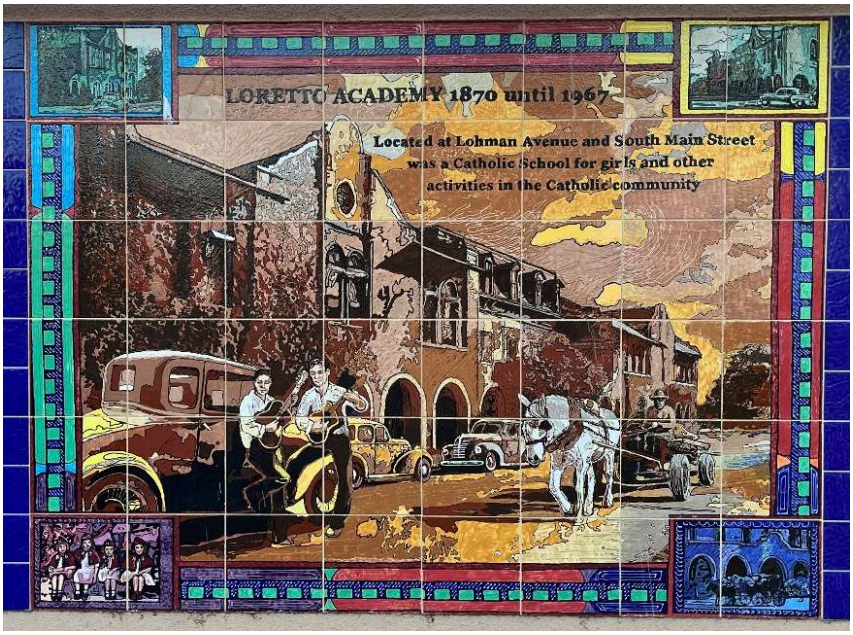

FIGURE 28 TILE ART MOSAIC TIMELINE AND HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN LAS CRUCES AND THE MESQUITE HISTORIC DISTRICT CREATED BY LAS ESPERANZAS SHOWING THE LORETTO ACADEMY WHICH SERVED THE COMMUNITY FROM 1870 TO 1967 PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

FIGURE 29 TILE ART MOSAIC TIMELINE AND HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN LAS CRUCES AND THE MESQUITE HISTORIC DISTRICT CREATED BY LAS ESPERANZAS SHOWING THE ETHNIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF MESQUITE PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

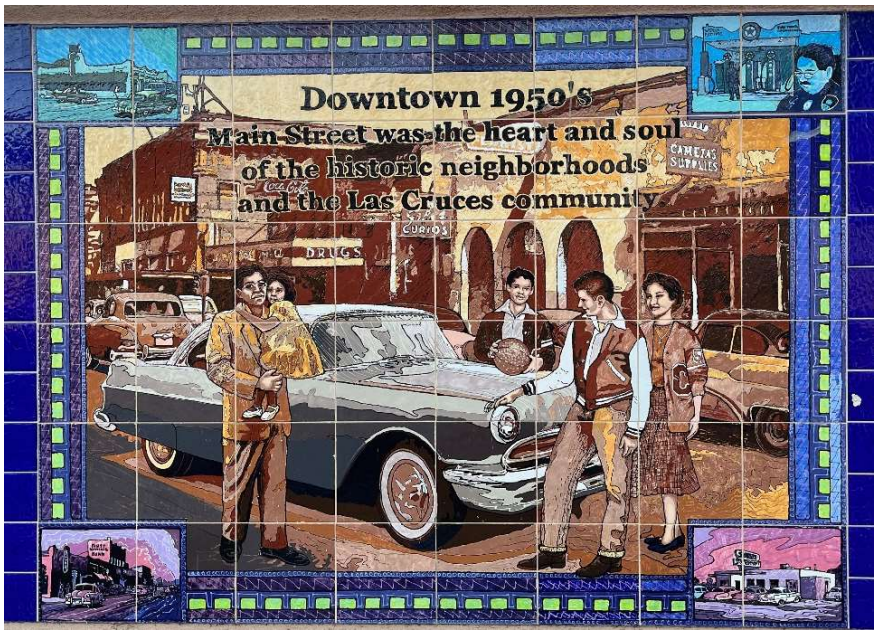

FIGURE 30 TILE ART MOSAIC TIMELINE AND HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN LAS CRUCES AND THE MESQUITE HISTORIC DISTRICT CREATED BY LAS ESPERANZAS SHOWING DOWNTOWN LAS CRUCES WAS VIBRANT IN THE 1950'S PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

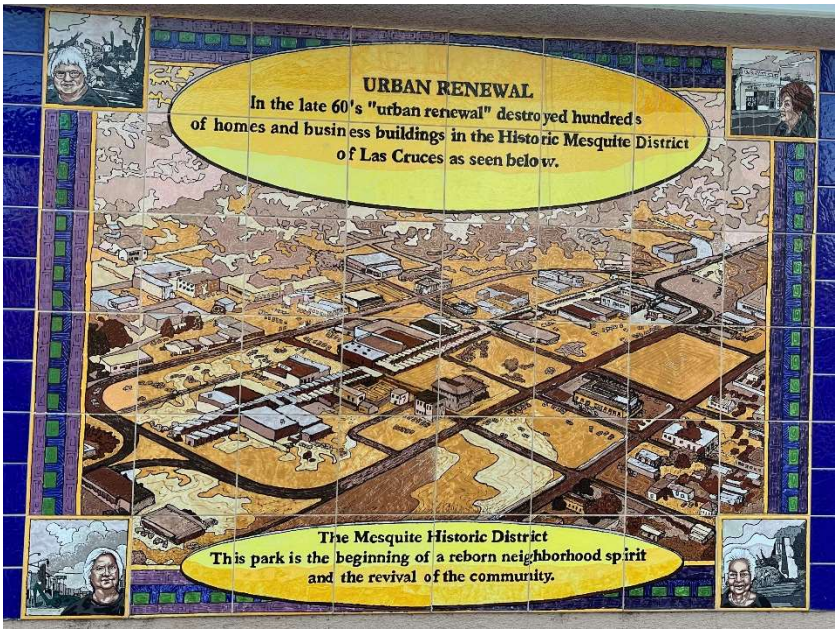

FIGURE 31 TILE ART MOSAIC TIMELINE AND HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN LAS CRUCES AND THE MESQUITE HISTORIC DISTRICT CREATED BY LAS ESPERANZAS SHOWING THE DESTRUCTION OF URBAN RENEWAL PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

Arts and Cultural District Plan

The Arts and Cultural District Plan was published in 2018. This plan was supported by local artists, non-profit groups, and local leaders. The plan is unique and aims to create an environment of cultural, artistic, and collective economic benefit to enrich the downtown area and make Las Cruces a cultural destination. The plan incorporates many important aspects of a thriving cultural district with actionable strategies. Oral history interviewee, Irene Oliver Louise was one of the key authors of the plan and she discussed with me how the idea for a district came to be, the purpose and their vision. The plan won an international award a year after being published showcasing the quality of the plan. Many of the oral history interviewees I spoke to support the Arts and Cultural District Plan and believe it will be very beneficial for the Mesquite Historic District.

FIGURE 32 STREET ART IN MESQUITE HISTORIC DISTRICT PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

The Arts and Cultural District plan is multifaceted and takes many angles at creating a district that is animated and showcases multigenerational culture local to Las Cruces. The main role of an arts and cultural district is to “bring citizens out from their homes and into a vibrant social space to interact and bond with their families and neighbors; and the community’s young talent is showcased and recognized as part of the cultural landscape”(Hume et al. 2018). The role of arts and cultural districts was developed by a statewide committee, and Las Cruces with redevelopment of downtown has started leaning into state "arts and culture." New Mexico has long been known as a culture and arts destination specifically in Santa Fe and Taos. This is a new movement for southern New Mexico which has supported local art in the past and in recent years with events like the First Friday Art Ramble, exhibits at New Mexico State University, the Renaissance Arts Faire, etc. but this plan is a large support to the creative economy of southern New Mexico. The plan has four main goals, “1. make the ACD the new, exciting and ever-changing center of the public’s participation in arts and cultural activity

in the Mesilla Valley. 2. Grow the creative economy and tourism for the benefit of the entire community. 3. Create a unique identity by showcasing the unique confluence of Border Art and Culture that arises from Las Cruces' place and history in New Mexico and the international border region. 4. Create sustainability for Las Cruces' downtown core and the Mesquite Street Historic District as a place to live, work, shop, and spend leisure time "(Hume et al. 2018). These goals are ambitious but incorporate art, history, tradition and local context. The authors of the plan want to create a cultural hub, support the creative economy and tourism industry, foster community identity through borderland art and culture using placemaking knowledge and history, and draw on downtown and the Mesquite Historic District as the locality for this ecosystem.

The vision statement for the Arts and Cultural District is "a vibrant, inspirational, diverse, and asset-rich cultural environment with collective economic and quality of life benefits"(Hume et al. 2018), the authors want this vision to be realized with a innovative focus on Las Cruces 1848 historic townsite as a new center for Borderland art and culture. The plan explains this will be achieved through "creative placemaking". Using creative placemaking as a tool for revitalization is one of the main facets of the plan. To the authors creative placemaking comes from "collaboration and partnerships, sharing of financial resources and artistic resources, coalescing engaging activities, and building on existing cultural assets"(Hume et al. 2018). Placemaking can take on many different forms and the way this plan incorporates it is by drawing on the historic townsite and borderland culture to create a kind of reminiscent querencia. Looking at how the past and present of our area is unique and the art, architecture and surroundings can create a distinctive place in Las Cruces. The plan also calls on the aspects of community as

querencia. Collaboration, sharing of resources and engagement can all be places and spaces where community finds querencia. By including placemaking into the plan the authors skillfully incorporate sustainability of the plan. If people do not feel connected to or included in these built gathering spaces and events then there will not be support from the community and without long-term developed support the plan will not work. This sustainability in their plan is also encouraged by using a broad description of culture which includes science, sports, foods, and drinks. This ensures no aspect of culture is left out or discouraged. There is sustainability of the plan and the authors also wanted sustainability of the downtown area by creating "Las Cruces' downtown core and original townsite as a place to live, work, shop, and spend leisure time"(Hume et al. 2018) for locals and new residents. Creating this multi-use area where people live, work and enjoy their time directly supports the Las Cruces Downtown Master Plan which looked to encourage downtown lifestyles.

Irene Oliver Louise has been a pillar in the artistic and civic community in Las Cruces for generations. Oliver Louise is a Chicana artist, actor, playwright, poet, and art educator. I met Irene in 2018 right after the Arts and Cultural District Plan had been adopted. I interviewed her on a local radio station. During the interview we discussed the plan and her efforts to support arts and culture by taking a multigenerational approach with this plan. During our first interview I was blown away by her passion for art, civic organizing, and education. She received her undergraduate and master's degrees in theatre and journalism. From this value of education Oliver Louise combined her love of theatre with her passion for Chicana/o activism. She moved to Albuquerque and found querencia in La Compania de Teatro de Alburquerque. The theatre company was founded

by Oliver Louise in 1981 and she continued with the company for many years as the artistic director. This was the first professional bilingual theatre company in New Mexico. The group toured throughout New Mexico, the United States and internationally.

After many years of successful directing, producing, and writing career with her theatre company, Oliver Louise moved back to Las Cruces and took on her biggest project yet, the Court Youth Center. The historic Court Junior High School was a rundown building Oliver Louise renovated and developed into The Court Youth Center. The name came from the street the building was located on, Court Street in the Historic Alameda District in downtown Las Cruces. Oliver Louise developed the Court Youth Center into a successful school arts program implementing a positive youth development philosophy early in its conception, based on four art forms, performing, literary, culinary and visual arts. More than 25 years later, Court Youth Center is now called the Alma d'arte Charter High School. This is Las Cruces' only arts school which has been very successful in fostering student's artistic talents and teaches them how to create a career in the arts economy.

Oliver Louise's deep connection and passion for art and community perfectly positioned her to be a voice for and co-author of the Arts and Cultural District Plan. In our oral history interview she explained to me how the idea came to be,

> "I think we started talking about the arts and cultural district about 2010… (I) start making things happen, talking about place, talking about placemaking. I brought in a consultant that talked about placemaking. I brought in a bunch of people to the Court Youth Center and we had focus groups…. And I sponsored them through this grant. And I brought in 30, 40 people to talk about how do we

> make things happen in Las Cruces. Nothing to do with the city. Nobody was paying for anything. I just knew it had to be done. And we started lobbying and getting money around downtown" (Oliver Louise 2022).

Oliver Louise explains that the Arts and Cultural District plan did not start with local government or a planning agency but rather with a group of motivated artists, cultural experts, and community leaders. This was truly a grassroots effort where individuals like Oliver Louise used their own resources, such as the Court Youth Center, to start the process before getting funding from the City of Las Cruces.

During our interview I asked Oliver Louise,

> "So when you were envisioning the arts and cultural district, were you thinking about Mexican American culture? Were you thinking about Latino culture or a mix of cultures? What kinds of cultural preservation were you thinking of in the plan?"

Her response,

> "Well, what both Sabrina and I believe in is that you have to start with who you are. That you always start with the authentic, what you are. So we started with the original town site. So what was in the original town site? Where was it located? And in an arts and cultural district, it really is just a walkable area and they're kind of small. But we got to include the Mesquite Street because that was part of the original town site. So they included a larger area than most traditional arts and cultural districts in the state. So we started with that to premises. We thought about arts and culture, we thought about the original town site and we thought

about the borderland. We are in the border and we have to give preference, we cannot be Santa Fe, we are not Santa Fe. We are the border and we are Mexican American and we have to acknowledge that connection to the border, and so that was key"(Oliver Louise 2022).

In this quote Oliver Louise explains three aspects of their original ideas for the plan that became key parts to the adopted plan. Firstly, placemaking and centering the plan around the original townsite. Secondly, making the connection to the borderland as a unique and culturally rich area. Lastly, Southern New Mexico has its own distinct culture, history and traditions than Northern New Mexico. Oliver Louise and the authors of this plan did not intend on replicating another city's plan, rather they started authentically with Las Crucens.

"We had a series of focus groups. I mean, we interviewed 300 people. When we wrote the report, 300 people. We had two large community focus groups and focus groups that went from anywhere from one person, two people to fifty"(Oliver Louise 2022).

They had rounds of focus groups and held meetings with groups to be sure they were capturing the wants and needs of Las Crucens in their plan.

In 2019 the Las Cruces Arts and Cultural District Plan won an international award from the Creative Tourism Network (CTN), an association based in Barcelona, Spain for the "Best Strategy for Creative Tourism Development" award on behalf of the city, LCACD and the Downtown Las Cruces Partnership (DLCP).

> "We wrote it and it received an international award. Tourism Network out of Barcelona, Spain. They give international awards. It is the only one who's ever received an award in the United States"(Oliver Louise 2022).

This award was a big success for Oliver Louise and all that worked on the plan. Oliver Louise credits their out-of-the-box thinking, place-based approach and sample travel itineraries for their achievement.

In essence the new plans started incorporating many of the aspects Jacobs prescribes for a dynamic and organic downtown space; prominent focal points, embracing individuality, capitalizing on "climate and topography, or accidents of growth", a combination of activities and sense of place. They started listening to the people which is fundamental to Jacob's theory of a happening downtown. "Downtown has had the capability of providing something for everybody only because it has been created by everybody. So it should be in the future; planners and architects have a vital contribution to make, but the citizen has a more vital one" (Jacobs 1958). Jacobs' framework and theories of urban renewal from the 1950's played out on the landscape in Las Cruces, New Mexico. She predicted the failure of one-size-fits-all projects and their disastrous lingering effects while also creating a prescription for a more spontaneous human experience that would remedy the problems. By embracing individuality and the people, Las Cruces is following Jacobs's ideas and creating a thriving downtown.

After the Las Cruces city plaza was built in the center of Main Street and road construction was completed in 2016, downtown Las Cruces started to thrive again. Many small businesses moved into the storefronts, large community events were held in the plaza and people started to spend time on Main Street again. This began to happen with

the implementation of the Downtown Master Plan and the Arts and Cultural District Plan. Though serving different functions, both plans incorporate aspects of designing an organic city center. Individuality and people became more central to the designs. This is shown by the new plaza built and used as a place of solidarity and gathering, a new tax increment development district (TIDD) supporting small business, inclusion of residents input in planning and mixed-use neighborhood and commercial spaces. Downtown Las Cruces is growing more holistically from the community now after decades of planners attempting to force an ideal on the space which failed continuously.

The City of Las Cruces is re-envisioning the Historic townsite as key to redevelopment in the Downtown Master Plan and the Arts and Cultural District Plan. These actions both acknowledge the past mistakes of the city from urban renewal while moving the city forward with rededication to community involvement and honoring the original social and economic structure of downtown and the Mesquite Historic District.

5. Conclusion

Summary

Las Cruces has grown from the original townsite known as the Mesquite Historic District. Prior to urban renewal the district was a dynamic mix-used neighborhood filled with adobe family compounds, restaurants, cottage industry, small livestock and mom-and-pop stores (Morales 2016). Placed on the state registry for historic places in 1980 and the national registry in 1985 (Morales 2016) the Mesquite Historic District now has city recognized zones situated between Madrid, Colorado, Campo, and Solano streets in downtown Las Cruces. Mesquite is only half of its original size due to the destruction of

major urban renewal projects in the 1960's and 1970's (Wolberg 2011), the projects failed, displaced generational families, and destroyed history in the district. After years of this destruction the city is now attempting to right wrongs by leaning into community identity, preservation, and cultural cultivation of the original townsite. The community identity was altered by the changes in urban form, city run programs and acceptance of the historical designation. The purpose of this study was to identify the consequences of urban renewal on the downtown Las Cruces area and to highlight how following the needs and wants of the community has led to positive planning results.

Approaching this project using testimonio as my methodology of valuing the lived experiences, stories, and knowledge of people of color as told from their perspective. I used oral history interviews as my primary method for collecting and documenting the connection between interviewees to their homes, neighborhood, and spaces. I used archival documents of city council meeting minutes and current project plans to provide context for the changes by the city government. This research was informed by literature urban renewal, identity, and placemaking. Concepts that had yet to be considered in academic literature in downtown Las Cruces.

This research is situated in academic literature uniting concepts of social, spatial, and economic processes of urban renewal, identity, and place. By illuminating and uplifting the voices of the people who live in and have close ties to the Mesquite neighborhood, this work contributes to the literature on urban renewal, ethnic studies, and critical city planning studies. Lydia Otero and Brandi Thompson Summers took holistic approaches to community work and a critical lens to urban renewal in their works La Calle and Black in Place; this project took a similar approach to looking at a community

that has had a great impact on the development of New Mexico's second largest city. Urban renewal caused major spatial changes to the downtown Las Cruces area; streets were widened, traffic patterns changed, Main Street was turned into a walking mall and many parking lots were put in. Urban renewal has a long history of destruction in the US and Las Cruces as exemplified by discussions with oral history interviews. Physical places were destroyed, such as St. Genevieve's church, generational family homes and businesses in the Mesquite neighborhood and along the Main Street downtown corridor. Communal, cultural, and spiritual spaces were also destroyed and stolen from residents. On the individual and community scale, the people lost places of querencia; places of safety, comfort and belonging. This affected the community as they lost a large part of their community identity and strength. The City of Las Cruces received Federal funding for urban renewal projects in an attempt to foster more business downtown. Instead, the changes hollowed out downtown and cause the existing businesses to shut down or move to other parts of the city. Due to the financial hardships caused by small businesses collapsing, many Mesquite residents found themselves without jobs and struggling. This led to an increase in crime and drug use in the area. Leading with love and compassion women from the neighborhood banded together to save the neighborhood they love by partnering with the city. They started the Weed and Seed program to address crime in the neighborhood, formed committees to work on improvement projects and wrote the ordinance to establish the local overlay zone. Hispanos organizing around land rights and city planning has been well documented in literature especially in the southwest region. The story of Las Esperanzas has not been brought to the academic space as this study does. The neighborhood of Mesquite was disenfranchised and taken advantage of. Rather

than let the destruction of urban renewal take their community, the residents banded together and brought life back to their spaces, finding strength in barrio urbanism.

Though many residents do not see the area as being gentrified they acknowledge the potential of gentrification to take over. Mesquite is in very close proximity to downtown, which is vibrant and thriving again, new residents are moving in and trendy businesses are buying houses and turning them into commercial spaces. Las Esperanzas and many residents do also support beautification efforts. With the combination of these factors there is a very real potential for gentrification, so it is important and relevant that city leaders, community leaders and residents are looking at this process and ways to possibly prevent it. There are many well documented spatial and social processes that have occurred and are currently taking place in Mesquite and downtown Las Cruces. Las Cruces is an excellent example of a small city effected by urban renewal, with a complex ethnic and social fabric that has fought for more just development plans that will serve residents.

The downtown Main Street corridor was the CBD of Las Cruces from the late 1800's to the mid 1900's, which evolved from the economic activities of the original townsite of Mesquite. Main Street offered residents all the stores, services, restaurants, and bars needed to sustain the small population at the time. In Mesquite there were small stores, groceries, bakeries, cottage industries, and small livestock raised by residents following practices passed down by the generations of families who lived in the neighborhood. Resolana could be found in Mesquite by all members of the community outside on the streets or inside their homes. Main Street was also the social and community center. St. Genevieve's Catholic Church and Holy Cross School were the

heart of downtown. The young and old would gather along Main Street, coming and going from shopping, work, or school. There was an economic and social harmony between Mesquite and the Main Street corridor. Urban renewal projects funded by the Federal government began in the 1960's in Las Cruces after city leaders jumped at the opportunity to rejuvenate the downtown. The Las Cruces city council and the urban development agency exercised harmful power by seizing land from residents of the Mesquite neighborhood to build alleyways, parking lots, and widen streets, tearing down generational family compounds. They employed typical planning fads by closing off Main Street to traffic, building a canopied walking mall and one-way roads surrounding it. Business elites had significant sway and in a devastating move, the dioses sold St. Genevieve's Catholic Church to Bank of the West and thus the "heart" of Las Cruces was destroyed. Destruction of the Mesquite neighborhood and St. Genevieve's Church was damaging to the community then and still is one of the worst traumas to happen to the community. Many still feel the impacts of the communities querencia being ripped away from them for money. Urban renewal left a hallowed out shell of the former economic and social center of Las Cruces and at the same time as trying to revitalize downtown the city started investing in an alternative CBD.

Urban renewal altered downtown, the Main Street corridor and the Mesquite Historic District spatially and socially. While the legacy of urban renewal produced largely negative consequences for the community, there were some minor benefits. The largest spatial consequences came from closing off Main Street and building the walking mall. This caused business that were mostly local own, to close down. This left Main Street hallowed out and small business was wiped from downtown. The Western half of

the Mesquite neighborhood was destroyed by urban renewal projects. This caused many families to be displaced and were not even compensated for their property. This erased history, memories, and querencia. The residents of Mesquite were left disempowered after urban renewal destroyed their economic structure and faced social repercussions of their in the neighborhood with drugs and crime. The unexpected benefits that came from urban renewal occurred years later and came from leaders within the Mesquite community. The Weed and Seed Program was the first community policing program in Las Cruces. This program formed real and lasting relationship between law enforcement and residents of Mesquite and was successful for city and neighborhood. Las Esperanzas neighborhood association was formed by a group of women in Mesquite who did not like what had come of their beloved neighborhood after urban renewal and gained political power through historical preservation, community events and policy work. Urban renewal inspired and forced collective empowerment of Mesquite residents and strong identity of neighborhood. Residents banded together against the legacy of urban renewal which left them disempowered.

In the last twenty years the downtown community and the City of Las Cruces have come together to support redevelopment through partnerships. This is a reaction to urban renewal's impact on the downtown Main Street corridor and the Mesquite Historic District. This can be seen in the Downtown Master Plan, the important role of Las Esperanzas and the Arts and Cultural District Plan.

The City of Las Cruces is re-envisioning the Historic townsite as key to redevelopment in the Downtown Master Plan and the Arts and Cultural District Plan. These actions both acknowledge the past mistakes of the city from urban renewal while

moving the city forward with rededication to community involvement and honoring the original social and economic structure of downtown and the Mesquite Historic District. By embracing community, culture and uniqueness, collective identity will be honored in the heart of the city, not erasing the destruction of urban renewal but creating a new sense of place for all Las Crucens.

I began this study questioning how community identity and sense of place has been impacted by the legacy of urban renewal in downtown Las Cruces with particular focus on the Mesquite Historic District. My research has shown the legacy of urban renewal is multifaceted and effected the downtown Main Street corridor and the Mesquite Historic District in different but linked ways. Community identity was impacted by urban renewal as many of the primary gathering spaces and generational family homes were destroyed. The primary example being St. Genevieve's Catholic Church which was sold to a wealthy banker by the diocese. The church and adjoining school were demolished, and a new bank and parking lot were built in its place. This left a hole in the Catholic community as a place of physical and spiritual querencia was lost. This left the Las Cruces community feeling disempowered and longing for the sense of querencia and resolana found at the former church. Many generational family homes were seized through eminent domain, often without compensation, demolished and the land used for parking lots, alleyways and road expansion to create the ideal downtown outdoor walking mall that came with early urban renewal projects. The querencia, community and sense of place within the neighborhood of Mesquite was lost from urban renewal; Mesquite residents lost the homes their family built with their own hands with help from neighbors, the businesses families poured their saving into that provided a place for resolana in the

neighborhood, and ecosystem that kept the original townsite in harmony. This disenfranchisement caused problems for the neighborhood after urban renewal. As many residents lost their homes, jobs and place in a local economy, the overall wealth of the neighborhood declined both monetarily and socially. They were left to find work outside of the neighborhood and downtown and when they couldn't, that led to crime and drug use. In the decades between the late 1970's and the early 1990's, the perception and characterization of Mesquite is that it is a dangerous and drug ridden area. This characterization was in some part true, but it was caused by very real responses to the hallowing out of the economy and community by city urban renewal that Mesquite residents had relied on. In a partnership with the Mesquite residents, LCPD and a federal grant, the Weed and Seed program was implemented in Mesquite as the first community policing program in Las Cruces. The program was a big success which continues to be in conversations around policing today. A group of motivated and concerned women from the neighborhood decided to organize around the issues the neighborhood was facing and formed Las Esperanzas neighborhood association. This was a direct response by the community to the disempowerment by the city that came from urban renewal. Las Esperanzas founder, Sylvia Camunez also credits the Weed and Seed program for inspiring the group to work with the city to accomplish their goals after the program had a positive response. As a reaction to urban renewal, community organizations like Las Esperanzas have taken on the task of community organizing around issues directly affecting them. This empowerment comes from years of their community being taken advantage of, displacement and negative characterization by the city. Grassroot organizing led to significant power for the Mesquite District within city government.

Community identity for the Mesquite residents went through many changes. In the early 1960's residents still maintained a strong connection to their neighborhood and neighbors through the social and economic fabric of the original townsite which had accessible gathering spaces and closeknit business relations. After urban renewal, community identity was fractured by the spatial degradation of gathering spaces and displacement of families. When the Main Street corridor started to struggle from disinvestment and businesses leaving, residents who worked on Main Street were left without jobs and marginalized within the Mesquite neighborhood. After organizing Las Esperanzas, the local historic district designation, and an increase in attention to neighborhood wellbeing, community identity began to be strengthened once again. In the last twenty years from the early 2000's, the Mesquite Historic District has a strong sense of identity and place. This can be seen by the increase in community gathering events, wayfinding signs around the district, public art displays showing the neighborhood's history and increased pride in restoring the historic homes. In the last few years pride in community identity can also be seen by the leaders publicly speaking about the neighborhood's history and importance of the original townsite's legacy. These leaders include Irene Oliver Louise who co-wrote the Arts and Cultural District plan, Diego Medina who speaks on the Piro-Manso-Tiwa tribe's history in Las Cruces and the Mesquite Historic District, and the honoring of Clara Belle Williams home in the district, shown in Figure 34. As a response to past mistakes the City of Las Cruces is acknowledging the destruction of urban renewal and has made great efforts to include community input into current downtown redevelopment. This push for inclusion in current redevelopment also includes viewing the Mesquite Historic

District and historic buildings as assets in development and incorporating preservation as key to development.

FIGURE 33 SIGN IN FRONT OF FORMER HOME OF CLARA BELLE WILLIAMS PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

The following policy recommendations support my conclusions as many are built off past programs that were positive for the downtown community and honor the community where it is presently. These are all recommendations made by current community members I interviewed for this project. These policy recommendations would strengthen the sense of community identity by looking at problems they are facing and giving attention to real struggles that can be fixed through intervention. Many of these recommendations use restoration and preservation to pay tribute to the original culture and identity of the townsite. By looking at the functions and ways of life of the

neighborhood pre-renewal, we can find inspiration for how to build a sustainable and inclusive downtown once again.

Policy Recommendations

The following conclusions are policy recommendations made primarily by oral history interviewees for this project. Their insights capture a snapshot into issues they see in their community and were eager to share. While sitting down with interviewees they made clear policy recommendations were necessary to conclude this study since there are ongoing problems.

Community Policing

Community policing is an essential topic right now in the face of excessive force by police on black and brown communities. This is no different in Las Cruces. The community of Mesquite already knows community policing has worked for them in the past with the Weed and Seed Program in the 1990's. There is a call to bring it back after many violent incidents in the neighborhood involving police. In our oral history interview Dr. Jack Wright and Rachel Stevens discussed a recent incident involving an old women shot by police in her home, the need for community policing again and looking to NMSU for possible recruiting.

> "I think, would be solved with neighborhood policing, somebody who walks the beat. Who knows the neighborhood" (Wright 2023).

> "Yes, in terms of a kind of community officer presence. Because, you know, lately with policing it's just like the grandmother was shot by a cop. You know what I'm talking about. I'm afraid, I'm afraid to call the police. But yeah, It's just

horrible. And I am on a kind of an email lists for when crimes happen in the neighborhood”(Stevens 2023).

“With the C. J. Program at the University, maybe a kid who went to Las Cruces high, or comes from the neighborhood, could become law enforcement in the neighborhood, and would have the credibility of having a like a Sanchez. You know that something like that would go a long way in de-escalating. Yeah, a peace officer, not a police officer. A kind of a social worker. Somebody who carries a gun because just in case but that isn't their first response is to pull the weapon. That's exactly what we need to do again (Weed and Seed Program) down here, isn’t it? It's because there are people in the neighborhood who fear the police, but they sometimes they need protection because there are bad guys out there. So if you can't call the cops and something's happening, the whole thing escalates…but getting a police force that people trust. A lot of problems get solved without confrontations, and the kid who's manic, depressive, or whatever they recognize it, and they don't tase them or shoot them, or schizophrenic or on fentanyl. They need rehab not have got a bullet in the head, you know. So it's kind of my thoughts, I love the neighborhood. I love the mix”(Wright 2023).

Community policing would provide both protection and equity in a neighborhood that has been systematically taken advantage of and persecuted. It would be in the best interest of the police department as this would help build their relationship with the community after numerous events that have caused investigations and could lower the amount of resources used in the area by concentrating on the systemic issues. The community wants to go back to this form of policing in their neighborhood because the

trust built during the Weed and Seed Program has been damaged by conflict with police in the past 20 years.

Grocery Stores

As examined in the discussion section, the Mesquite Historic District is in a food desert. City leaders are aware of this and are looking for ways to bring in a grocery store. This need must be met immediately as the aging population of the district and low economic level of many residents puts them in a particularly vulnerable situation without access to a quality grocery store. This is further exaggerated by the poor public transportation system in Las Cruces. The city needs to take action now and in the mean time make efforts to meet this need by working with property owners with spaces available for a grocery store. Finding investors and space to meet this essential need of residents should be a priority for city leaders.

Creative Industries

The idea for supporting the creative economy with a Creative Industries Division in the New Mexico Economic Development is one of the best ways many community members and local leaders see to supporting the Arts and Cultural District and downtown Las Cruces. In an interview on KTAL LP 101.5 Las Cruces local radio, I conducted with Senator Jeff Steinborn he discussed the bill he co-authored, HB8 Creative Industries Division in EDD, which would establish this division. This has long been a goal for Senator Steinborn as he has been a supporter of the creative economy and sees that it would boost the economy and help combat "brain-drain," as many young people leave the state to find jobs in the creative industries.

This is one of Oliver Louise's main projects as well. She helped state lawmakers draft the legislation. Oliver Louise's goal has always been to support art and artists, but she says the true struggle has been getting recognition for their profession within capitalist structures of the economy that doesn't value creativity of artistic products in the same way. With the establishment of the Creative Industries Division, artists and art can begin to be valued in a state that markets art and culture for tourism. She wants to support cultural tourism while giving the artists a valued livelihood.

There has been strong critique of the tourism built on arts and culture in New Mexico. Oliver Louise's vision in working on this legislation was to not recreate the pseudo artistic identities that Santa Fe and Taos have acquired but to nurture a real arts economy downtown and in the Mesquite Historic District. "Before we use the common land, we need to return to the past and mine that rapidly disappearing knowledge, to understand our privileges and responsibilities. As nuevomexicanos, today we have had almost nothing to say about our region's character and identity, yet we are the ones who have defined that character and identity. Since the 1940's, the region's 'pseudo identity' as exemplified by Taos and Santa Fe, has come from tourists and immigrants- the so-called arts community" (Arellano 1997). Irene wants to take back the power and let the local arts define the character and identity of the state's economy.

Camunez and Oliver Louise are working with non-profit organizations and local leaders to find creative ways to incorporate housing and workspaces downtown and in the Mesquite Historic District. This idea would connect the area back to it's functional economic and social roots. When Camunez and Oliver Louise were growing up much of the Mesquite neighborhood lived and worked in the same space, they want to bring this.

> “I see downtown as a mixture of creative businesses, boutiques, bars, restaurants of gathering places that just allows excitement and energy and fun to happen… one really big thing, if it happens is Dona Ana Arts Council is going to have a meeting at the end of the month on live workspace apartments. So there's one in El Paso in downtown, and it's done by a company out of Minnesota called Artspace. And they create living workspaces for artists. They have shops at the bottom. Your studio is there in your house. It's an incredible, I first saw it in Utah in the eighties, and I always had this idea, and that was really one of the things I put in there in the book, that we need artists live workspace so Dona Arts Council is taking that on as a major component and making it happen in the city. When that happens, it's just going to be another thing like the film studio. So success, follows success and that seems to be happening downtown. That kind of is going back to the roots of this neighborhood. People living and working”(Oliver Louise 2022).

Oliver Louise’s live-in workspaces is not a new concept but would allow for more creative industry downtown while providing more housing which aligns with both the Arts and Cultural District Plan and the Downtown Master Plan.

Camunez ideas are similar but call more on the social and economic history of the Mesquite Historic District.

> “My dream is to have the whole neighborhood as it was when we were young. They had businesses and homes. Live workspace, that's cottage industry”(Camunez 2022).

Camunez would like to see the neighborhood go back to it's roots by utilizing these live-in workspaces which used to be called cottage industry, where people would sell goods from their homes or live in their stores. This business set up is convenient and would allow for more small businesses in the Mesquite Historic District as well as pay homage to these types of business from pre-urban renewal.

Housing and Restoration

> "My background is geography, as you know. But before that I was in land use planning. I was a professor at NMSU for 27 years, teaching in part land use, planning, land, conservation, cultural geography, New Mexico, many things, but before that I have been a land use planner in Montana, dealing with development issues and housing, and so forth. And it occurred to me, I worked with a program that still exists. It's through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).It is called the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG), and what we did at that point was because we were small towns in a small county. I applied for Grants for zero interest or very low interest loans for working class people who couldn't get loans otherwise, or just couldn't afford it to fix up the houses, not to tear them down. But if they needed a roof or wider doors for somebody in a wheelchair or a new heater, whatever it was. Those grants did a tremendous amount of good, and I know that the city of Las Cruces is under HUD is considered an entitlement city because it's big enough. They can get a chunk of this Community Development Block Grant money every year. So my big thing has always been for the Mesquite District to earmark some of that money with the intention of doing what Rachel (Stevens) did in the Alvarez house. Let's take

these old houses instead of thinking of tearing them down, which is a ridiculous waste of history, and it's so disrespectful for people that built the neighborhood just because they don't have money. It's insulting to say, ‘well, this place is no good.’ People built it up. They put their love and they lived there, they grew families there. I think it would be a wonderful use of that program to work with historic preservation and put these homes back together in a way that people can afford so that it isn't about gentrification, because I’m with Rachel. I don't think that neighborhood is gentrifying. I think the local people need an infusion of money to do work on their homes. And I also, you know, I think that would be a splendid project for the city to focus on”(Wright 2023).

Dr. Wright suggests that the city should utilize HUD funding through the CDBG and earmark some of the funds for restoration of homes in the Mesquite Historic District. This would infuse money into the neighborhood for restoration of generational family homes to preserve their history. This idea has the potential to completely reinvigorate the neighborhood over a few years and would help those are struggling financially who are living in homes that have fallen into disrepair fix their homes.

“There is also another issue in the neighborhood that is confusing to me as someone whose lived here for a number of years, but I’m still sort of not from the district at all, there are a lot of vacant houses, and it seems like there are families that they can't decide what to do with the home to either fix it or sell it or rent it. And so it sits. That's something for Las Esperanzas, or a person from the neighborhood, a neighbor in the community. If there were funds available to sensitively keep these houses restore these houses in in a way that honored the

history. That was the first that was Las Cruces, It’s the birthplace of the city and now people are turning their back on it. Or, as you said, Annie, they're tearing out the heart of it with the church and as much as I like the plaza and the redevelopment and all it has a ring that's just commercial business. There doesn't have the same sense as Little Toad Creek (Figure 35) on a good day. That can be kind of a community bar but it seems, with the all the money spent in the downtown redevelopment, to ignore the community that could support it in significant ways is a real missed opportunity”(Wright 2023).

FIGURE 34 IMAGE OF LITTLE TOAD CREEK BREWERY AND DISTILLERY ON MAIN STREET PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

Dr. Wright is imploring the city and community to come together to use funds through HUD to restore and honor the homes in the Mesquite Historic District. His blueprint is clear, there needs to be larger scale effort to put preservation and restoration as a priority to honor the original townsite and to work towards healing as a community.

He acknowledges the progress made through development downtown, but the community also needs support.

FIGURE 35 HOME IN MESQUITE HISTORIC DISTRICT THAT HAS BEEN RESTORED PHOTO BY SAVANNAH QUINTANA-EDDINS

Leadership

The Las Cruces community and residents of the Mesquite Historic District must continue organizing to elect city officials that incorporate community input into development plans. As shown through Las Esperanzas ability to organize and gain influence in government it is important that neighborhood associations focus on internal issues. Finding pathways in the development department to integrate community input at all stages of planning can promote non-exploitative ways of incorporating culture into planning.

The city and local leaders have made great progress in the last two decades incorporating community and residents into the redevelopment plans. There is still much work to be done to meet the needs of the community. The above policy recommendations can assist in meeting these needs.

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